



The Impact of Teaching Grammatical Structures on Writing Ability of Iranian Students

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Abstract

Since the beginning of language studies, second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have been searching for effective ways of improving learners' language skills. With this in mind this study aimed to examine the effect of teaching grammatical structures on developing writing ability of Chabahar high school students. The research identified some effective strategies in improving writing ability of students. Twenty subjects were assigned in one group and were pretested/ post tested on the writing section. To obtain information on the effect of this model, some grammatical structures including conjunctions, adjective clause, adverb clause and noun clause were taught to learners. The topic of composition was to describe their town. The items which were considered to rate were length and rate in subordinate conjunctions, transitive adverbs, coordinate conjunctions, connectors in composition. The results showed that teaching grammatical structures affects writing ability and there was a meaningful improvement compared with the beginning of the research.

Keywords: concept, language skills, language style, writing strategies, sentence combining

1. Introduction

Writing is the principle vehicle of cultural transmission. A society's language comes to be equated with its written form and grammar is based on the analysis of written texts. Many students need to write in English for academic purposes. Writing is the commonest way of the examining the students' performance in the target language and often success in examinations requires an ability to write. The students' writing provides a useful evidence of success or failure and it is through writing and speaking that teacher can find the problems and confusions of the learners. For learners writing is a means for developing ideas. (Celce –Murcia, 2001). It may also be a means of personal discovery or creativity. In language teaching the term writing is used to refer to two different processes. First familiarizing learners with mechanics and components of writing. By mechanics we mean handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The components of writing are grammar, syntax and vocabulary. At the initial levels of writing the learners are helped to produce meaningful sentences. Second helping students produce written texts for a particular audience. (Celce-Murcia, 2001). In recent decades teaching of writing in second and foreign language classes has undergone great changes. The form –focused techniques that were in line with Audio-lingual principles have given way to process approaches that concentrate on the creation of text. The learners' needs have been specified, and particular emphasis was giving to writing as social activity. Teachers have revised their techniques of teaching writing during the prewriting, writing and post writing. In pre writing the teachers are advised to choose or help learners to choose topics that are both interesting and motivating and have a communicative purpose. In the actual writing phase, the writers are expected to make a plan or an outline, to write and rewrite, and to make as many revisions as they deem necessary. And in post writing the purpose is to evaluate the students' writing. This can be done by teacher or by the learner's peers. The teacher assumes the role of an advisor and allows the students to act as critics and generators of ideas. (Chastain, 2000). Research strongly suggests that the most beneficial way of helping students improve their command of grammar in writing is to use students' writing as the basis for helping students improve their grammar. When students revise and edit their writing, teachers can provide grammar instruction that guides students in their attempts to correct problems in sentence structure. Integrating grammar instruction into the revising and editing process helps students make immediate applications, thus allowing them to see the relevance of grammar to their own writing. (Gower, R., Phillips, D., & Walters, S. 2005). Grammar choices affect writing style. Sentence combining is an effective method for helping students to develop fluency in their writing style. Students can explore syntactic devices by comparing their sentences with sentences from other writers. They also discover the decisions writers make in revising for style and effect

Teachers can design their own sentence-combining activities by using short sentences from student writing or other appropriate sources. Teachers can then ask different students to combine orally the short sentences in a variety of way. Collaborating with classmates helps students improve their own grammar skills and also understand the importance of grammar as a tool for effective communication. As teachers integrate grammar instruction with writing instruction, they should use the grammar terms that make sense to the students. (David Nunan, 2006). By incorporating grammar terms naturally into the processes of revising, editing, and proofreading, teachers help students understand and apply grammar purposefully to their own writing.

By closely observing students' writing processes and carefully reading their work, teachers can see which aspects of language structure students have problem and help them learn these concepts through instruction and practice. It is also important for students to discover that grammar, spelling, and punctuation are useful not only in the context of fixing problems or mistakes; they can be studied effectively in a workshop context in which students work together to expand their repertoire of syntactic and verbal styles. When students connect the study of grammar and language patterns to the wider purposes of communication, they are considerably more likely to incorporate such study into their working knowledge.

2. Literature Review

Writing is exploration of ideas. Writing usually begins with encouraging the feeling to communicate some information, knowledge and feeling. In the writing process, the words should be put on the paper and the most appropriate forms, based on what one wants to say should be expressed. Writing and working with language to put our ideas down is a valuable aid to whole learning process. Writing helps us to learn at least in two ways. First writing strengthens vocabulary and grammatical structures and second when in the process of writing we try to express ideas we often discover something new to write or find a new way for expressing ideas. (Brown, 2007). In second language writing, grammar acts as a resource in shaping effective communication. The focus on the form is an integral part in writing development. The role of grammar in writing (explicit explanations of grammatical rules) is a controversial issue. Grammar is the sound, structure, and meaning system of language. All languages have grammar and each language has its own grammar. People who speak the same language are able to communicate that language because they intuitively know the grammar system of language that is, the rules of meaning. Many researchers have investigated the impact of teaching grammatical rules in improving student's writing ability. Krashen (1982, cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001) as a second language teacher, believes that form-focused instruction is unnecessary and this may thwarts acquisition process in learners. Doughty and Williams (1998, cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001) report that instruction should not be only meaning focused; learners should develop some linguistic features through writing process. Richard Andrews and Carol Torgerson (2004) report is focus on different aspects of teaching grammar to improve the quality of writing in English. Their research shows that one effective way is to teach sentence-combining. The other study done by Bateman and Zidonis (1996, cited in Richard Andrews and Carol Torgerson, 2004). This research investigates the effect of teaching generative grammar in writing of students. The results of their research showed that there was increase in scores for well-formed sentences in experimental group than in the control group.

O'Hars (1973, cited in Richard Andrews and Carol Torgerson, 2004) is also investigates the effect of sentence combining on written composition. The aim of this study was to test whether sentence combining and grammar practice would affect students writing in an experiment at the seventh grade level in eighth month period. Results from this study found that the experimental group showed growth in writing ability.

2.1 Research question and hypothesis

Q: Does teaching grammar affect on the writing ability of students?

H: Integrating grammar instruction into the revising and editing process helps students make immediate applications, thus allowing them to see the relevance of grammar to their own writing.

3. Methodology

This study is an experimental study. To carry out this experiment, because of limited number of subjects and other limitations, a quasi-experimental design was selected. The present research is quantitative one; it demands numerical analysis, so that data gathered from a serious of instruments and procedures can be validated the effect of teaching grammar on writing of students.

3.1 Participants

Twenty female students, studying in Beshart high school in Chababar city participated in the study. They were grade 3 and between 16-17 years old. Their mother tongue was Persian and they were selected randomly.

3.2 Instrumentation

Two general types of instruments will be employed in this study for the purpose of data collection: testing materials and instructional materials.

A grammar test extracted from khate Sefid book will be administrated to the students to ensure that they are homogeneous in terms of knowing grammar structures. There will be twenty test and each test is given one score. For writing paragraph will be used from TEEP attribute writing scales (Weir, 1993). The researcher will use Grammar in use (Murky Raymond, 1998) for teaching grammatical structures to students. The grammatical structures that are selected will be simple past, present past, conjunctions, adjective clause, adverb clause and noun clause.

3.3 Procedure

3.3.1 Pretest

The students will be assigned to write sample paragraph, to examine the current writing's ability of them. In pre-test the students are given a topic (describe your town) and they will begin to write about this topic.

3.3.2 Treatment

There is one group of students. They will be taught some structures from Grammar in use. They will be received 90 minutes of classroom instruction once a week for one month. The study is designed to see the effect of teaching grammatical structures on writing ability of students.

3.3.3 Posttest

Finally the group will be post-tested by the same paragraph writing and same topic will be given to them to measure the effect of treatment on them. The way of scoring will be objective. The goal of objective scoring is to quantify selected aspects of writing. The items which are considered to rate are length and rate in subordinate conjunctions, transitive adverbs, coordinate conjunctions, connectors in composition. The study uses from TEEP attribute writing scales which is shown in the following table.

1. *Relevance and adequacy of content*

0 the answer bears almost no relation to the task itself

1 answer of limited relevance to the task. Possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition

2 for the most part answers the task set, though there may be some gap or redundant information.

3 relevant and adequate answer to the task set

2. *Compositional organization*

0 no apparent organization of content

1 very little organization of content. Underlying structure not sufficiently apparent

2 some organizational skills in evidence, but not adequately controlled.

3 overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organizational skills adequately controlled

3. *Cohesion*

0 cohesion almost totally absent. Writing so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended communication is virtually impossible

1 unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most the intended communication

2 for the most part satisfactory cohesion though occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of the communication are not always effective

3 satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication

4. *Adequacy of vocabulary for purpose*

0 vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication

1 frequent inadequacy in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriacies and/or repetition

2 some inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumrotation

3 almost no inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Only rare inappropriacies and/or circumrotation

5. *Grammar*

0 almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate

1 frequent grammatical inaccuracies

2 some grammatical inaccuracies

3 almost no grammatical inaccuracies

6. *Mechanical accuracy (punctuation)*

0 Ignorance of conventions of punctuation

1 low standard of accuracy in punctuation

2 some inaccuracy in punctuation

3 almost no inaccuracies in punctuation

7. *Mechanical accuracy*

0 almost all spelling inaccurate

1 low standard of accuracy in spelling

2 some inaccuracies in spelling

3 almost no inaccuracies in s

Paired sample t tests will be conducted to compare the writing ability mean scores from the subjects' performance on both the pretest and posttest. The paired sample tests will use to show whether the difference (if any at all) was significant.

4. Results and Discussion

Twenty subjects were assigned in one group and were pretested/posttested on the writing section (describing their town). Each subject was given one score for the pretest and one score for the posttest. Having collected the scores in the pretest, the researcher analyzed the data for writing skill employing paired sample t-test. The purpose of this analysis was to estimate the participants' writing ability before the study began. Table 4.1 shows the results for this analysis.

Table 4.1. results of t-test analysis for writing skill (pretest)

Test	N	M	SD	t
Pretest	20	12.75	2.84	.546

To investigate the effect of study treatment, the participants' writing ability was assessed in post test via t-test analysis.

Table 4.2. results of t-test analysis for writing skill (posttest)

Test	N	M	SD	t
Posttest	20	15.25	3.75	.86

As the results of table 4.2 show, there is a statistically difference [$t(40) = 0.86, p = .00$] between pre-test ($M=12.75$) and post-test ($M=15.25$) group with. This difference indicates that the participants in posttest outperformed than in pretest revealing the effect of teaching grammar.

The results demonstrate that the writing program developed for the group was effective enough to help subjects make significant progress in their writing ability ($P \leq .05$).

All in all, results obtained from this study indicate that teaching grammatical structures is effective in development of student's writing ability. Thus the results accepted hypothesis of study, which predicted there is significant difference in the progress of writing ability of students in regard to teaching grammar.

4.1 Discussion

This study was carried out to see if teaching grammatical structures has any significant effect on student's writing ability.

Based on the statistical operations and analyses followed in the preceding parts and in response to the research question addressed at the start of the study, it is probably reasonable to claim that teaching grammatical structures is effective in the development of writing ability of students.

From analyzing the data collected from this experiment, it may be worth mentioning that the results obtained from comparisons made between the mean writing ability scores of group on the pretest and posttest suggest significant improvements in the subjects writing ability.

Investigating and comparing and the effects of grammar on writing ability call for different manipulation of the variables which falls out of the scope of this study. Furthermore, this study investigated into the effects of grammar on writing ability of high school students. Therefore, it is quite possible for learners with higher level of writing ability to respond to other sets of treatment more positively, and in a manner unlike how they reacted in the present study. Thus, it is likely true that the findings of this study might not hold true for EFL students with different levels of writing ability.

5. Conclusion

As stated elaborately, writing has always been a difficult skill for students to master and for teachers to teach. One question is of central importance in discussions about teaching writing to EFL learners by means of teaching grammar. Does teaching writing have any effect on writing ability of high school students?

Thus in finding solution to the aforementioned question on the effect of the modality at issue, on students writing ability, the present study was designed to determine whether modality is effective or not. One group of students in Chabehar high school were formed in advance of the study in an attempt to compare the effects of this modality of writing instruction on the subjects writing ability. The subjects were administered for the pretest to be compared with the post test. For data analysis purposes and statistical operations used a series of correlated t test was done to answer the research question formulated in the study. Results obtained from the study revealed that all the subjects had achieved progress in their writing ability to certain various degrees as a result of instructional program. At the end of the study it turned out that the group progressed more. Thus it is possible to reasonably claim that teaching grammar can be by no means a reliable mean for the writing classroom. The present study seems to have significantly contributed to that teaching grammar can affect writing ability. The findings of this study are expected to help EFL teachers, methodologists, material designers to attempt the problem facing EFL writing instruction in the best way possible. It is recommended that future investigations with similar arrangements of the subjects be conducted in other contexts and on other populations with different levels of writing ability, age ranges, and gender aimed at identify the effect of grammar on writing ability. In order to validate the findings of this study, it is highly recommended that the study be reduplicated with larger populations of subjects.

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