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The Role of Social Grammar Learning Strategies in Improving University Non-Departmental Students' Grammar Performance

A B S T R A C T

Teaching the rules of English grammar at the level of university for the non-departmental students should be an ease task because the students learn English from the primary schools to secondary schools. This study aims to reveal the role of Social Grammar Learning Strategies (hence GLSs) in improving second grade male and female students' grammar performance at the Department of Arabic, College of Arts, Mustansiriya University during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024. The researcher suggested using teaching strategies that students were not exposed to in studying grammar during the primary and secondary stages for the purpose of developing the level of grammar. A proposed Social Grammar Learning Strategies based on the Imitation, Feedback, Joint attention, and Scaffolding strategies and pre-posttests were used to collect the data. The results revealed that the female students' performance was higher than the male students, and there was a statistical significance difference between the students of the experimental group and the students of the control group in the post-test achievement in grammar and for the favorite of students of experimental group. The study conclude that GLSs have positive effect on the non-departmental students' grammar performance, and learning via strategies that are familiar with the students' social life are very significant and consider lifelong learning.

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دور الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعية في تعلم قواعد اللغة في تحسين الأداء اللغوي لدى طلاب الجامعات غير المتخصصين

اروى حارث حسن/ كلية الآداب، الجامعة المستنصرية

الخلاصة:

يجب أن تكون عملية تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية لطلبة الجامعة غير المتخصصين مهمة سهلة نظرًا لأن الطلاب يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية من المرحلة الابتدائية إلى المرحلة الثانوية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن دور استراتيجيات تعلم القواعد الاجتماعية (والتي سيتم الإشارة إليها لاحقًا بالـ GLSS) في تحسين أداء الطلاب الذكور والإناث في الصف الثاني في قسم اللغة العربية بكلية الآداب في الجامعة المستنصرية خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني من العام الدراسي ٢٠٢٣-٢٠٢٤. اقترحت الباحثة استعمال استراتيجيات تدريس لم يستعملها الطلبة في دراسة القواعد خلال المراحل الابتدائية والثانوية في دراسة مادة القواعد. تم استعمال استراتيجيات تعلم القواعد الاجتماعية المقترحة المستندة إلى المحاكاة، والتغذية الراجعة، والتركيز المشترك، واستراتيجيات الدعم، بالإضافة إلى اختبارات قبلية وبعديّة لجمع البيانات. كشفت النتائج أن أداء الطالبات كان أعلى من الطلاب، وكان هناك فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية في الأداء بين المجموعة التجريبية والضابطة وكانت النتائج لصالح المجموعة التجريبية. خلصت الدراسة إلى أن استراتيجيات تعلم القواعد الاجتماعية لها تأثير إيجابي على أداء الطلاب غير المتخصصين في دراسة قواعد اللغة الانجليزية، وأن التعلم من خلال استراتيجيات تتماشى مع الحياة الاجتماعية للطلبة يعد أمرًا مهمًا للغاية ويعد تعلمًا مدى الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات تعلم القواعد الاجتماعية، المحاكاة، والتغذية الراجعة، والتركيز المشترك، واستراتيجيات الدعم.

Introduction

The Book that all the students study at the departments of English is "A University Grammar of English" by Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum published in 1973. The book consists of 14 chapters. These chapters are being taught during four years. it is hoped that students at the fourth grade master the grammatical structure and language patterns. Studying the content of Quirk's book by explaining the grammar rules and solve the exercises are not sufficient to master language system and can communicate fluently. Teaching the content needs to use variety of strategies that make learning the grammar rules for long time (Salman, et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem

In Iraq, the education system include teaching English language at the primary and secondary levels, the English language subject is compulsory at the public schools and the privet schools too. The English textbooks are based on Communicative Language Teaching approach with integration of technology. In spite of this fact, the students at the level of university, who are not at the departments of English, level in English language is ranged between low and medium (Hashim, 2022). The researcher has realized this fact at the Department of Arabic, and as an attempt to develop students' grammar level, she reviewed the literature and found that some recent studies suggested to conduct studies on using teaching strategies that can improve students' grammar level (Alnoori, 2019; Kanaan, et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2023). In order to use the most suitable grammar teaching strategies, the literature review has been reviewed. The researcher realized that using teaching strategies that exist in the students' life are the most significant way to develop students' grammatical performance (Salman, et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2023, and Al Lami, et al., 2024). Based on the recent literature review, the researcher selected Social Grammar Learning Strategies as an attempt to develop male and female students' grammatical performances.

The Aims

This study aims to:

- 1- Reveal the role of social grammar learning strategies in improving students' grammar performance at the Department of Arabic.
- 2- Reveal the difference between the male and female students' grammar performance due to social grammar learning strategies.

The Hypotheses

To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses have been set:

1. There is a significance difference at the level of ($\alpha=0.05$) between the students' grammar performance of the experimental group and the control group due to the teaching methods.
2. There is a significance difference at the level of ($\alpha=0.05$) between the male and the female grammar performance in the experimental group due to the social grammar learning strategies?

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will highlight the importance of social learning strategies in stimulating interaction between students as they reduce students' anxiety in learning grammar, and learning with these social strategies leads to long-term learning of English grammar and the possibility of retrieving it at any time as education is based on social learning. These strategies integrate students with real life, as students use strategies that students practice in their daily lives such as summarizing, acting, simulation, etc.

Limits Of the Study

The generalization of the outcomes of the study is limited to:

- 1- Place: The study was conducted at the Department of Arabic, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University.
- 2- Duration: The Study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024.
- 3- Participants: the participants were 89 male and female students from 2nd grade.

Literature Review

Teaching English language skills are compulsory at the Iraqi universities from the 1st to the 4th levels. The teaching is focused on the language skills, function, and techniques. Teaching grammar is the core, in addition, the students learn the 4 skills and the function of the English language (Kadhim, 2019; and Salman, et al., 2022).

English is taught as a foreign language in all Iraqi educational institutions, just like in the rest of the world. English language curricula are constantly updated according to changes in teaching methods (Jameel & Mahmood, 2023). The latest update was after the spread of the Corona pandemic and the health crisis that followed it and the transformation of education in the world to distance education. The latest update to English language curricula in Iraqi schools was to integrate technology with Communicative language Teaching Approach (CLTA) (Alnoori, 2019). All the English versions were based on one true, that is "activity based method helps to make a grammar lesson engaging, meaningful and joyful" (ibid: 9).

The basis of every language in the world is the grammar that organizes the language, so it is called the language system. Any person, whether a native speaker or a learner of the language, must master the grammar in order to communicate correctly. Grammar can be acquired by learning it from society or through educational institutions (Salman and Hazem, 2022).

Ellis (2008) stated that there are two main obstacles faced when the learners learn the rules of the English grammar, the first one is the challenge in understanding of a specific grammatical aspect, and the second obstacle is the challenge that the learners face when assimilating a grammatical feature so they be able to use it easily and unconsciously when they communicate with others in English.

It is not possible to speak or write a text correctly, organized and logically without knowing the grammar. Learning grammar can be boring for many students, so all teachers must be aware of updating grammar teaching strategies. When students master grammar, they will be able to use it efficiently and communicate with others, whether through writing or conversation (Kumar et al., 2015). The diversity of English language teaching strategies for foreign students includes Iraqi students to a large extent. Students in Iraq are in dire need of exposure to several types of English language learning strategies, as the primary stage focuses on oral skills in learning English, while in the intermediate stage, the focus is on writing skills to a great extent due to the nature of the subject and the curriculum, and at the university level, the focus is on listening and writing to a great extent, so mastering grammar is very important at the university level (Salman, et al., 2022).

The history of the emerged of the Grammar Learning strategies is begun when Oxford in 1990 introduced the language learning strategies which were the umbrella of the Grammar learning strategies. The framework of the Grammar Learning Strategies were introduced by Oxford et al. in 2007. In 2018, Pawlak recognized that Oxford et al. (2007) framework was incomplete, therefore, he introduced a new categorization for the grammar learning strategies and named "Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory", this calcification divided into "cognitive, social strategies, metacognitive, and affective. This is the origin of the first emerged of the social grammar learning strategies (Mohamad, et al., 2023).

Social grammar learning strategies elicit its name from its nature, that a learner learn grammar in a social context, this is done by engaging the learner with others, and using language in an authentic contexts (Jameel & Suleiman, 2023). Expose to real situations help students to develop their communication skills by comprehending the rules and the structures of the English grammar

from contacting with others in real situations (Zakaria, et al., 2019). This fact is supported by a study of Juniar and Carissa (2020) who revealed that social strategies were implemented by the learners when they learn the rules and the structures of the English grammar. It can be inferred that when the learners interact with peers and the teachers in real context they learn English grammar best. Learning in social context provide students with natural and authentic feedback.

The social strategy is based on the Bloom's affective domain. The affective domain is integrated in all the education aspects, it is related to the learners' moods, feelings, anxiety levels, receiving social feedback. This fact proves that social strategies are used when the students search for help from peers or teacher understand or to get clarification from the social life, from an authentic context (Cabraja, 2023).

Previous Studies

Zulkarnaen (2021) investigated the kind of grammar learning strategies that the EFL university students' use during distance learning. The Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory questionnaires by Pawlak (2018) and an interviews were used to collect the data of the study. The results revealed that the participants use cognitive grammar learning strategy more than the other grammar learning strategies, the social grammar learning strategy was ranked the second, while the metacognitive grammar learning strategy cam in the last rank.

Cabraja (2023) investigated the relationship between EFL learners' achievement and the choice of grammar learning strategies in general and due to gender variable. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. the results revealed that there is a significant difference only between the students' achievement and the use of visual grammar learning strategies, while there was no significant difference between the students' achievements and other learning strategies such

as social grammar learning strategy, metacognitive strategy, memory strategies, and cognitive strategy. also, the female students used grammar learning strategies higher than the male students.

Mohamad, et al. (2023) investigated the grammar learning strategies adopted by EFL university students. the participants were 80 EFL university students. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results revealed that the note taking strategy has a significant effect on students' grammar achievement, and the Social strategies were the most common used strategies.

Yuliana, et al. (2023) investigated the EFL university students' preference for Grammar Learning Strategies and also the differences between the male and female students' preference . the participants were 70 EFL university students. Pawlak's Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory questionnaire was used to collect the data of the study. The results revealed that the students' preferences of using Grammar Learning Strategy at a medium level. Also, it was found that the male students preferred social grammar learning strategies, while the female students preferred the cognitive grammar learning strategy.

Methodology

The population of the study is all the students at the Department of Arabic, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University. The participants were 89 male and female students from 2nd grade at the Department of Arabic. The participants were divided into two groups, namely the experimental group and control group. The participants were distributed randomly by using students name list, Students with odd sequences were assigned to the experimental group, while students with even sequences were assigned to the control group. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1: Distribution of the participants

Groups	Male	Female	Total
Experimental	8	30	38
Control	8	30	38
Pilot Student	7	6	11
Total	23	66	89

The Design of The Study

The study is a semi experimental design, the students of the experimental group were taught grammar by using social grammar learning strategy, while the students of the control group were taught grammar by using the prescribed method (modern lecture). Table 2 shows the design of the study.

Table 2: The design of the study

Group	Independent variable	Pretest	Posttest
Ex.G.	Social Grammar Learning Strategy	Pretest	Posttest
CG.	Prescribed Teaching Method	Pretest	Posttest

1. The participants in the experimental and the control groups were chosen randomly.
2. The independent variable (social grammar learning strategy) was taught to the students in the experimental group only.
3. Applying the pretest and the posttest to both groups.

Instrument

An instructional social grammar teaching based programme was prepared to train the students of the experimental group. A pretest and posttest were also prepared to collect the data.

The instructional programme consisted of 13 lessons, each lesson was 30 minutes. The researcher used Google meet platform to teach the students of the experimental group. The lessons' times were at 7:30 p.m. following are the lessons plan content:

The first lesson was introduction

The aim was to introduce the social grammar learning strategy to the students.

The second lesson was about Imitation Strategy.

The aim was to enable students to use the English sentence structure by following a native model to imitate the words, and the sound of the sentences.

The third lesson was about Feedback Strategy

The aim was to enable students to receive feedback from the teacher or the peers and correct their errors and re-produce the sentence correctly.

The forth lesson was about Joint Attention Strategy

The aim was to enable students to learn from others. To learn from others the rules of the English language need from the students to focus and pay attention to others.

The sixth lesson was about Scaffolding Strategy

The aim is to enable students to break down the sentences into smaller unit, also to enable students to ask for assistance when they need.

Each strategy took two lessons, and the last lesson was designated for a summative evaluation.

A grammar pretest and post achievement test were prepared based on students textbook (A University Grammar of English by Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum published in 1973).

Students' Scores in the Pretest

The pre-test is conducted to the students of the two groups. The mean scores of the experimental group is (44.46) and with standard deviation is (10.89), while the mean scores of the control group is (49.56) and the standard deviation is (8.64). The result reveals that there is no significant differences between the two groups since the calculated t-value is (0.79) which is less than the tabulated value (2.00), at the degree of freedom (36), and at (0.05) level of significance. Table 3 shows the result.

Table 3: The Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and T-Test Values of the Two Groups in the Pretest

Groups	No	Mean	SD.	T-Values		DF	Level of Sig.
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	38	44.46	10.89	0.79	2.00	36	0.05
CG.	38	49.56	8.64				

The Validity and the Reliability of the Instruments

In order to calculate the face validity of the instructional programme and the posttest, they have been distributed to a jury of specialists in the field of linguistics, applied linguistics, and teaching methods. All the jury members recommendations and modifications have been taken in consideration.

The Pilot Administration of the Posttest

In order to ensure the suitability and usability of the posttest, it has been given to a sample of 11 students who were excluded from the participants of the study. After administering the pilot test, it was found that:

1. The instructions and the questions are clear.
2. The time required to answer the test ranges between 50-60 minutes.

Test Reliability

The reliability of the posttest was calculated via the Alpha- Cronbach Formula, the reliability coefficient has been found to be (0.87) which is considered a high reliability and it is acceptable since it is above (0.50).

The Results

To achieve the aims and verify the hypotheses, the data has been analysed statistically.

Results Related to the First Hypothesis

To verify the first hypothesis "There is a significance difference at the level of ($\alpha=0.05$) between the students' grammar performance of the experimental group and the control group due to the teaching methods", means scores, standard deviations, t-values of the two groups in the achievement test were calculated. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: The Means Scores, Standard Deviations, and T-Values of The Two Groups in the posttest

Group	No. of Students	Means Scores	SD	T-Values		DF	Level of Significance
				Calculated	Tabulated		
EG.	38	56.51	8.59	3.46	2.00	36	0.05
CG.	38	49.98	6.58				

Table 4 shows that the mean score of the experimental group is 56.51 with standard deviation 8.59, while the mean score of the control group is 46.98 with standard deviation 6.58, the t-values show that the Calculated t-value is (3.46), while the tabulated t-value is (2.00) at the degree of freedom (36) and level of significance (0.05). This indicated that there is a significant difference between the students' achievement of both group for the favorit of the experimental group. Thus, the first hypothesis is accepted.

Results Related to the Second Hypothesis

To verify the second hypothesis "There is a significance difference at the level of ($\alpha=0.05$) between the male and the female grammar performance in the experimental group due to the social grammar learning strategies", means scores, standard deviations, and mean gain were calculated. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5: means scores, standard deviations, and mean gain

Gender	No. of Students	Means Scores	SD	mean gain
Male	8	61.05	13.89	13.65
Female	30	65.61	13.54	12.29

Table 5 shows that the males mean achievement score is 61.05 with a standard deviation of 13.89, while for the females mean achievement score is 65.61 with standard deviations 13.54. This indicated that the female achievement in the posttest is higher than the male students. This means that the second hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of the Results

The results revealed that the students who learn English grammar via social grammar learning strategy have scored higher in the achievement test than the students who learned grammar via the prescribed method. This indicate that the social grammar learning strategies have influenced students' knowledge in grammar. Based on the students' scores in the achievement test, it is inferred that the imitation strategy, feedback strategy, joint attention strategy, and scaffolding strategy have improved the students comprehending of the English grammar rules.

The results proved that the imitation strategy helped the students to pronounce the sounds of the word correctly, native like, with confidence, also helped students to form the structure of sentence correctly by imitating readymade sentence. this is done when the students exposed to variety of situations that construct good knowledge. By imitating sentence, the learners learn how to form the structure of English sentences. This leads to autonomy in learning English rule grammar.

In addition, when the students trained to receive feedback from the teachers and the peers, they understand correctly the correct use of tenses. The types of feedback are vary from written to oral, but the aim is the same that enable the students to use the rules of the English grammar correctly. Also, the results revealed that when the students share learning with peers or the teacher, the interaction enhance their learning. Furthermore, baking down the unit of the sentence has positive effect on students' grammar rules and sentence structure comprehension.

These results are consistent with the results of studies of Zulkarnaen (2021), Mohamad, et al. (2023), and Yuliana, et al. (2023) who found that the grammar learning strategies have positive effect on students' grammar achievement and specially the social grammar learning strategy has influenced students' long life grammar learning due to the features of this strategy that have close relation to students' social life. And as provided by Chomsky,(cited in Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 2014) who stated that learning in real life context, that means integrating learning with the students' social life will last forever (long life learning).

While the results are inconsistent with the results of the study of Cabraja (2023) who found that there was no significant difference in using social grammar learning strategy in developing students' grammar achievement.

Also, the results revealed that the female students' achievement was higher than the male students' achievement. This fact may be due to the feature of the social grammar learning strategy which was more close to the female social life due to the female nature in the life. What is meant by this is that females tend to learn cooperatively and interact more in discussions and education between peers. Also, the nature of females is to focus on details. One of the characteristics of the strategy is that students learn English grammar through detailed explanation and dividing the sentence into small units. This result is inconsistent with the results of the study of Mulugeta & Bayaou (2019) who found that the female students who learn grammar rules via Metacognitive Strategies have achieved higher score than the male students who study grammar rules via the social grammar learning strategy. Also, Yuliana, et al. (2023) found that the male students preferred social grammar learning strategy than the female students.

The results are consistent with the studies of Zhou (2017) and Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh (2020), and Jameel (2021) who found that the female students' achievements were higher than the male students' achievement who learn grammar via social grammar learning strategy. Also, Fitri, et al. (2023) found that the female students achievement in grammar was higher than the male students achievement due to the female interest to support their grammatical knowledge and can be able to understand the English grammar rules.

Conclusion

The results proved that the social grammar learning strategies have positive effect on non-departmental students' grammar achievement. Also, the female students interactions were higher than the male students. the use of the social grammar learning strategies sub-strategies such as imitation strategy, feedback strategy, joint attention strategy, and scaffolding strategy have significant effect on students' grammar achievement.

It is recommended to use the sub-strategies of the social grammar learning strategies in teaching English grammar rules for the students at the non-departmental and also at the English departments due to the positive effect that improve students' grammar performance and competence.

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