

Exploring Students' Cooperative Learning Combined with Silent Way Teaching Approach As Part of Learner-centered Methodology Using Communication Practice in Enabling the First-Year Degree Students at an IT university to acquire English Fundamental Grammar Knowledge

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Abstract

This study explored the results of the silent way teaching approach based on a structural syllabus with students' cooperative learning strategy by communication practice as part of the use of learner-centered methodology in teaching fundamental English grammar to the first-year degree students in the second semester at an IT university. It also aimed to observe how students' cooperative learning strategy accompanied with inquiry-based tasks have resulted in students' grammar ability and what caused such outcome. This study was conducted through observing, informal talking to students to identify their problems and analyzing the students' test results. The data examined was the grammar test scores of all first-year students at the university. The test was an isolated grammar problems measuring only what had been inquired and taught. The data were analyzed by tabulating the students' test scores, counting the percentage of students who scored at, above or below the university's standardized scale score and the percentage of the students who got high subscore level for the test questions exactly like those taught using the direct instruction and drilling pattern during the class. Based on the students' low score level, it has been concluded the use of silent way teaching approach in the learner-centered methodology emphasizing students' orally communicating what they had inquired resulted in their weakness of using the grammar itself even in an isolated way. The weakness relied on their little motivation to self-drilling themselves using the grammar on related worksheets throughout their process of cooperative learning.

Keywords: *learning strategy, teaching approach, methodology, practice, test score*

Introduction

Nowadays no longer did the view that a language learning process as a solely process of rule prevail. Noam Chomsky in Larsen-Freeman (2012:29) noted in "*Verbal Behaviour*" the language acquisition could not take place through habit formation as it was too complicated to be learned in such a manner, especially given the brief time. The learners are seen as active agents involving in a process of "creative construction" with meaning made clear through various techniques and language being presented in all of its communicative richness and act out as the major bearers of responsibility for how much learning takes place. Thus, the language-learning process in classrooms has become more student-to-student interaction with minimal prompting from the instructor.

Having realized that language learning has turned into a cognitive process seen to be natural, the lecturer in an IT university in the second semester this year has shifted the focus of her grammar teaching approach to the first-year students to the learners' more active role. In this role, the lecturer has applied the "Silent Way" methodology whereas the students have been directed to employ cooperative learning strategy during their grammar learning process. They grouped to solve inquiry-based grammar tasks, which was as Beckman and Klinghammer noted

in “*Shaping the Way We Teach English*” (2006:143) a process of asking questions in an open-ended way to explore new knowledge domains, and proved their comprehension on the task by presentation. The activation of new grammar teaching approach and learning strategy to the students this semester aims to boost their motivation in acquiring grammar topics often considered boring and confusing, raising a hope that they can augment their last semester’s English average score, which was less than 60.

The new methodology were specifically applied to the students’ process of acquiring grammar knowledge as it was the only part of their English learning process still involving much pattern practice and guided instructions. During the first semester, to achieve grammatical competence as part of language knowledge acquisition, the students were drilled by pattern practice. Despite already student-centered learning strategy to do various grammar exercises both off and in classes, the students were not put on the spot to speak the target language. As the students were still deemed as the beginners whose insecurities could have an adverse effect on a new language acquisition, the methodology was expected to help develop their comprehension and ability to grammatically correctly and properly apply certain sentence patterns.

Their English score in the last semester was still yet in average. They have done common grammatical mistakes in writing tasks while it is essential that they acquire it at least at intermediate level, for they will need it to produce an ITP TOEFL score of minimum 515 before graduating and to use in their English final project. Those became the lecturer’s self-feedback to apply the silent way teaching approach in classrooms. Built by Caleb Gattegno in 1972 (Larsen-Freeman, 2012:33), the approach views learning as a gradual process involving imperfect performance at the beginning and contains a basic tenet “the subordination of teaching to learning.” In this approach, the teacher gives students what they only need, assists them to develop their own “inner criteria,” and by remaining silent much of the time, the teacher tries to help students become self-reliant and increasingly independent of the teacher. In that connection, the lecturer interfered in the presentation and discussion time only if they were irrelevant, in the presentation review and in the discussion on the grammar-related pattern exercises.

Also, the lecturer directed the students to employ cooperative learning strategy in a communicative way when acquiring grammar knowledge. Beckman and Klinghammer in “*Shaping the way We Teach English: Successful Practices Around the World*” (2006:39) explained cooperative learning as a specific kind of collaborative learning in which students work together in small groups on a structured activity. They are individually accountable for their work, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed. In other words, the activation of the cooperative learning strategy is by student groups to solve inquiry-based grammar tasks.

The grammar knowledge newly inquired cooperatively was shared by communication. As noted by Adrian Palmer in “*Communication Practice vs. Pattern Practice*” (2012:25, 27), students find pleasure in producing a response not only linguistically acceptable but also conveys information personally relevant to themselves and other people when they use communication-practice drills instead of a mere pattern practice in learning a language. He further argued the learning by pattern practice only functions as immediate confirmation and evaluation of correctness (2012:31). In contrast, the communication practice ideally directs the learners to recall the grammar they have inquired and discussed and use the vocabulary and grammar patterns from past lessons. From that standpoint, the lecturer had tried to create grammar-learning atmosphere without pressure and boredom for the students having to absorb it by boosting an interactive environment on a discussed grammar topic rather than drilling individuals for patterns of exercises. The lecturer assumed, after the students were introduced the cognitive skills imperative for comprehending the learnt grammar topics, they would develop themselves into independent, strategic learner for being able to apply the grammar in the real situation by building their metacognition or as defined by Opp-Beckman and Klinghammer (2006:73), by self-regulating to finally possess the expected competency.

Thus, the problem of this research was to explore if combining between structural syllabus-based silent way teaching approach and students’ communication practice along with

cooperative learning strategy in completing inquiry-based grammar tasks would improve the students' grammar competency. Specifically, the purpose of the research was to analyze the following problems: (1) How have the first-year degree students progressed their grammatical competence after they have employed cooperative learning strategy and solved inquiry-based tasks collaboratively which they presented and discussed with their classmates and lecturer? (2) What did the students' grammar test results indicate after the students had been directed in a less-guided instruction classes while suggested to build metacognitive skill in their learning process? (3) What is more suitable learning and teaching strategy instruction proposed by the lecturer after self-reflecting the results of the fuse between cooperative learning strategy and silent way teaching methodology?

The setting of this research was in an IT university. The population of the research was all of the first-year students at the university previously taking English 1 in the last semester. The students were divided into 5 groups as follows:

Table 1. The number of the first-year students employing cooperative learning strategy

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Total students
Σstudents	30	28	29	26	24	137

The students by class were observed every week for 6-time cycles or about one and a half month. Each observation was for almost 2 hours. Based on h/her prior English score, the more advanced English knowledge-possessed student was matched with the weaker one in a group. This match was to encourage the weaker to be more diligent in improving his or her English ability besides to strengthen the collaboration among all students in a class. The grammar topics, sequenced from the simplest to the most complex were informed to each group at the first meeting. Also, typical basic information covered in their task like formulas of sentence patterns, rules of usage, functions, example sentences and dummy exercises were shared. Then, pair by pair was given 3 or 4 days to inquire, identify and collect important information on the assigned grammar topic.

The author used qualitative method by observing the students' presentations and explanations to answers upon discussions to analyze the results of their cooperative learning strategy manifested in inquiry grammar tasks and communicative practice. To confirm her observation, the author also analyzed the students' grammatical proficiency by quantitatively analyzing their grammar test scores conducted after 6-time grammar class. Harrison (1989) in Napitupulu (2010:320) said the proficiency test aimed to assess a student's ability to apply the materials s/he has learnt into real context. For the reason, the students were given an objective grammar test composed of fill-up, word identification, correction and sentence structure problems.

The analysis of quantitative data collected was as follows: (1) sorting the test per objective of question according to the university's test blue print: knowledge, comprehension and application. (2) subscore the students' correct answers-to-grammar questions per objective. (3) sequencing the students' sub-scores per objective by group, university's score ranges and grades. After categorized into the standard score ranges and grades, the sub-scores of students from five different groups were summed up within objective. The total sums counted per objective of grammar question were compared with each other to find out which test component the students proved to perform the best. Then, the causes of the finding were linked to the observation results. Finally, the author drew a conclusion on the students' general level of grammar knowledge acquisition achieved by their employing cooperative learning strategy in communicative way combined with the lecturer's silent way teaching approach.

Discussion

The components of the grammar test analyzed in this research were isolated per objective of the IT university's test blueprint covering knowledge, comprehension and application as follows in table 2:

Table 2. Test Components by Objective and Types of Question

No	Types of question	Objectives of question		
		Know. (42%)	Compr. (20%)	Appl. (38%)
1	FILL UP			
a	Choosing correct and proper articles	16%	-	-
b	Choosing appropriate prepositions	10%	-	-
c	Changing singular forms into plural ones	10%	-	-
d	Forming correct and proper verbs in active/passive form	6%		
e	Choosing suitable subordinating conjunctions	-	10%	-
2	IDENTIFY NOUN FORMS	-	10%	-
3	STRUCTURING SENTENCES			
a.	Formulate active causative forms	-	-	9%
b	Formulate passive causative forms	-	-	9%
c	Formulate passive voice forms	-	-	20%

After the number of students and its proportion of all students were counted separately by objective for each score range, the findings were as follows:

Table 3. The number of students per class subscored at each score range for knowledge questions

Group	≥79.5 (A)	72-<79.5 (AB)	64.5-<72 (B)	49.5-<64.5 (C)	34-<49.5 (D)	<34 (E)
Group 1	4	4	8	10	3	1
Group 2	3	7	9	7	2	-
Group 3	6	7	2	6	5	3
Group 4	1	5	9	6	4	1
Group 5	3	3	5	10	3	-
Subtotal 1	17	26	33	39	17	5
Subtotal 2	76			61		

Table 3 showed the subtotal of students whose sub-scores for knowledge questions were at A, AB and B grade range or between good-to-excellent level was 76 students or 55.5% of all. Meanwhile, only 5 students or 3.65 % failed in solving the knowledge questions whereas 39 or 28.5 % of all students demonstrated average grammar competency or sub-scored at C, and 17 students or 12.41 % percent of the whole sub-scored at grade D or below the average. Such number of students subscored within A-to-B grade range in answering knowledge questions is not surprising as the knowledge-type of problems merely demand the students' basic cognitive skill, their memory capacity without having to practice the grammar-related exercises as much as they should do for successfully doing applied-grammar problems.

Meanwhile, as seen in table 4 below, though 10 % of the total comprehensive questions on the test were actually exactly similar to those practiced and discussed in the class, only 52

students or 37.96 % of all whose sub-score reflected the “good to excellent” result or sub scored within A, AB and B grade. Most of the students, 85 persons or 62.05% of the total demonstrated they only acquired “average-to-failure” level marked by their sub-scores within grade C to E when they had to solve grammar problems not only requiring their memorization skill but also comprehension of the context of question sentences.

Table 4. The number of students per class subscored at each score range for comprehension questions

Group	≥ 79.5 (A)	72-<79.5 (AB)	64.5-<72 (B)	49.5-<64.5 (C)	34-<49.5 (D)	<34 (E)
Group 1	2	-	7	15	4	2
Group 2	6	1	7	9	5	-
Group 3	5	4	4	9	4	3
Group 4	1	1	6	10	6	2
Group 5	1	3	4	13	3	-
Subtotal 1	15	9	28	56	22	7
Subtotal 2	52			85		

Apparently, if the data is connected to the result of the author’s observation in the class, it indicates a sign of contrast. During the observations, the author learnt most of the students in each class could provide grammatically correct reasons for their answers on that day’s discussed grammar topic exercises. In other words, it indicated not only did they know the topic, but also comprehended it, yet their score on the comprehensive components of that grammar test denoted they had not truly learned the grammar knowledge comprehensively. Usually, it was due to their failure to recall other grammatical rules from the past lessons being a hint to help them answer the questions. For example, one of the comprehensive questions on the grammar test was as follows:

“(Scientist) (C/U) say that the river is threatened by pollution”.

The test instruction required the students to choose if the noun in the following question was a countable (C) or uncountable (U) and rewrite its correct form. So, had the students been able to identify the sentence as a *Simple Present Tense* and comprehend its grammatical rule that the verb-predicate of the sentence had to be left in a bare infinitive if the subject of the sentence was a plural countable noun, the student would have correctly concluded the word “*Scientist*” as a plural countable noun. If “*Scientist*” had been an uncountable noun or a singular countable noun, the verb “*say*” in the sentence must have been written as “*says*”. In short, if the students had learned the grammar of the questions asked comprehensively, s/he no doubtly would have answered correctly.

Such inconsistency between the author’s observation on students’ grammar comprehension and their scores on typical questions demanding comprehension was also aroused by the lecturer’s class time limitation to ask each of them to back the answers to the grammar questions s/he was told to respond with that day’s discussed grammar theory-based explanation. Had the lecturer managed to do so, she could have created a pattern grammar learning process atmosphere in the class insisting the students to keep on reviewing the theory upon self-practicing the grammar topic-related exercises off class. Furthermore, though the lecturer always forbade the students to cooperate when they had to solve grammar pattern exercises in class, many remained to match each other’s answer. When they were asked to give the theory-based explanation for their answers to prove their comprehension, the confused students were often told by their mates. For the reason, the students looked as if they had comprehended the topic in the class whereas their test result proved the reverse. Lastly, the students still tended to be more result oriented than process oriented to finally acquire the

grammar knowledge comprehensively. The students were reluctant to self-regulate themselves in practicing the past lessons including the grammar they just learnt though the lecturer welcomed them to ask her any confusing question off class. It was due to the fact the exercises would not be included as their subscores later helping increase their English final score. They considered it worthless as they also had to struggle with any other assignment deemed more important to their total end score (GPA).

The last test component was a group of questions in which its objective was to assess the students' ability in applying their grammar knowledge acquisition by structuring sentences using their knowledge and comprehension of the grammar. One such test question example and instruction was as follows:

Direction: Reword the following sentences by using Passive Causative
We have asked the men to renovate the room.

To answer the question correctly, the students should comprehend the passive sentence concept different from that of active form, have knowledge of the verbs defined as causative and identify the typical tense used in the first sentence. The knowledge to enable them to put the causative verb into proper form and form the second verb in the genuine sentence into past participle (V3) which signified the sentence was changed into a causative-passive pattern. The students had to fuse all the knowledge and comprehension to restructure the sentence into a passive causative sentence. Thus, due to its level of complexity, the application questions were weighted most in score.

Table 5. The number of students per class subscoring at each score range for application questions

Group	≥79.5 (A)	72-<79.5 (AB)	64.5-<72 (B)	49.5-<64.5 (C)	34-<49.5 (D)	<34 (E)
Group 1	1	-	1	8	4	16
Group 2	3	-	2	2	10	11
Group 3	-	1	-	6	7	15
Group 4	-	1	2	7	5	11
Group 5	1	-	1	5	5	12
Subtotal 1	5	2	6	28	31	65
Subtotal 2	13			124		

Table 5 above showed 65 students or 47.44 % sub-scored within grade E or below 34 in score range if their grammar knowledge acquisition merely scored by their ability to apply the grammar. Actually, the end purpose of learning grammar at the university as put by Silalahi (2013:1) in *English 2 Syllabus* is to enable the students to apply correct grammatical rules in producing language including writing. Therefore, the data that almost 50 % of the students failing in applying the grammar while another 22.6 % also showed a below-average performance indicated the students have been not improved anything in their grammar acquisition despite the teaching method and learning strategy combined with type of assignments and classroom practices.

If the total scores of the 137 first year students were summed up and put in average as seen in table 6 below, it reached 50.4 point or still in an average level. To specify, in grammar competency alone, the table above showed 63 students or 45.98 % of total students were at <34-<49.5 score range or D to E grade range according to the university's standard while only 29 students or 21.17% could perform the good-to-excellent level. It means so far, the students have not managed to improve their level of grammar knowledge acquisition as the average number is still within grade C. Thus, the lecturer's directing the students to employ cooperative learning strategy and solving inquiry-based grammar tasks while her employing the cognitive code or

silent way teaching method and communication practice in class for the grammar learning process indicated to result in a weakness.

Table 6. The number of the first-year students scoring at each score range for the grammar test after 6 grammar practice class

Group	≥ 79.5 (A)	72-<79.5 (AB)	64.5-<72 (B)	49.5-<64.5 (C)	34-<49.5 (D)	<34 (E)
1	1	-	5	11	12	1
2	1	3	2	11	10	1
3	-	2	2	9	12	4
4	1	-	4	11	7	2
5	-	3	4	3	12	2
∑students	3	8	18	45	53	10
	29		45		63	

When the students were semi-interviewed why they performed unsatisfactorily in the grammar test, their general response was they felt they could have improved their ability to acquire the grammar knowledge had they been direct-instructed and guided to do more grammar exercises in pattern practice. They proposed the lecturer repeat the same technique as that in last semester in which the new grammar knowledge was primarily transferred to the students by comprehensive teaching approach focusing on the teacher's role in class with she was responsible for almost all of the learning process and by pattern drilling practice using the "stick and carrot" feedback. The students clarified they wanted the lecturer not only to give them grammar exercises as homework especially problems with applying the related grammar but also check, correct and mark their work individually as she did in last semester. They argued such strategy helped them more because they could learned from the lecturer's correction and feedback toward their errors on the worksheets.

That indicated the students have had lack of motivation to self-regulate themselves in creating their own learning schemata to improve necessary cognitive skills for comprehending and applying the grammar properly and correctly in real context at least in writing and structure expression problems. It suggested the lecturer interfere more in activating the students' process of learning grammar by using deductive technique in class teaching and drilling students to individually practice grammar patterns.

Still on the class observation basis, often only one of a pair considered to have cooperatively inquired important details on the grammar topic assigned to them dominated the presentation and the discussion in the grammar class. S/he took the most part in delivering presentation and elaborating his or her answers on questions asked because his or her partner was just silent or confused. Such pause could indicate the student might not actively engage in the inquiry process evoking him or her fail to understand the topic, which in result revealed from his or her lack ability to provide correct answers backed by the grammar theory-related explanation on questions asked. However, the author still treats this possibility as a hypothesis because she still needs more time in the future to research if there is a positive correlation between a student's inactive participation during the communicative grammar learning process in class and his/her ignorant attitude during cooperative learning process off class to complete the tasks presented in class. Also, she needs more time to collect data to prove if the students' demonstrating poor performance during the grammar presentation and discussion in class are the same ones who get low scores in the test grammar.

Conclusion

The use of silent way teaching method emphasizing more students' active involvement in inquiring necessary grammar topics through cooperative learning strategy and focusing on students' grammar knowledge acquisition by communication practice through presentations and

discussions was researched to produce unsatisfactory result in the first year students' level of grammar knowledge acquisition. The students by far have not managed to demonstrate significant progress in their grammar competency. If the questions in the grammar test the students took were subscored in an isolated way, the students were indicated to particularly have been weak in solving questions demanding their comprehension and application skills. The main reason was the students' unwillingness to develop their metacognition encompassing self-regulating in reviewing and drilling themselves with extra grammar exercises qualifying them to lastly acquire the grammar in a long term. Thus, the strategy and method actually often successfully applied in foreign language teaching should be further modified to really make it work in improving the students' grammar level.

Considering the students are required to make progress in their English oral communication using the grammar they learn, the application of students' cooperative learning strategy combined with the silent way method can be resumed as the communication drilling has proven to encourage the students to often try to speak in English. At least they have improved their pronunciation and can speak more fluently in some expressions. The students should be directed to allocate their time to find out example sentences of a grammar topic and do solving-problem tasks in group or individually. For example, they are in group assigned to write a paragraph or an essay or a role-play script mostly containing the day's grammar topic and the combination of other grammar topics taught in past lessons. Such sort of assignment can serve them to develop a habit of always recalling or reviewing the use of last grammar topics. Then they must present their writing in front of the class in brief. After that, they can discuss the content and the mechanic of the writing particularly on the grammar application with their audience. Any answer has to be backed with the theory on the related grammar. Thus, the students can practice a grammar topic authentically, so they will have comprehended it in a long term as they really have to understand the grammar to use it to form sentences.

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