

“The Impact of Explicit Grammar Instruction on EFL Learners’ Oral Communication Skills”

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A case study for two schools in WNS & Khs

ABSTRACT :

This study aims at investigating the impact of explicit grammar instruction on EFL learner’s oral communication skills; it also aims at discovering the least minimum amount of English language that EFL learners are exposed to, due to this explicit way of grammar instruction – which is-(A case study for the 3rd form Sudanese secondary schools students at WNS & KHs).The researcher follows the descriptive analytical approach; the population of the study are Sudanese secondary schools English teachers and the third form Sudanese secondary schools Ss, mainly third form (Ss), and the sample of the study is (100) secondary schools Sudanese students, and (60) English language teachers at Sudanese secondary schools, and the tools whereby the researcher collects the data are:

- (1) Teachers’ questionnaire (appendix A)
- (2) Learners’ questionnaire (appendix B)
- (3) Structured interview (appendix C)
- (4) Observation schedule (appendix D)

This study includes five chapters which are: Chapter (1) is “Framework of the study”. Chapter (2) is “literature review and previous studies”. Chapter (3) is “Methodology”. Chapter (4) is “Presentation and analysis of data of the research”. Chapter (5) is Summary results, recommendations and suggestions for the further research”.The findings of this study shows that explicit grammar instruction has a negative effect on EFL learners’ oral communication skills, and it also exposes them to the least minimum amount of language to acquire.The study ends up with a list of a set of recommendations; hopefully that the policy makers could care for and take decisions about. The study also suggests some topics for further studies

Key words: *White Nile State - Khartoum State -Explicit Grammar EFL learners*

المستخلص :

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر تدريس القواعد الإيضاحية في اللغة الإنجليزية على مهارات القدرات التخاطبية لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وأيضاً هدفت الدراسة إلى اكتشاف أن هؤلاء الطلاب يتعرضون لقدر يسير من اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بسبب هذا الأسلوب من التدريس، والتي هي دراسة حالة لطلاب المرحلة الثانوية بمدارس

النيل الأبيض والخرطوم، اتبع الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. مجتمع الدراسة يتكون من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس الثانوية ومعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية، عينة الدراسة تتألف من (100) طالب من المرحلة الثانوية و(60) معلم من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بنفس المرحلة.

والأدوات التي استخدمها الباحث لجمع المعلومات هي:

- 1- استبانة للمعلمين (معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بالمرحلة الثانوية) في الملحق (أ).
- 2- استبانة للطلاب (طلاب الصف الثالث بولايي النيل الأبيض والخرطوم) في الملحق (ب).
- 3- أسئلة مقابلة منظمة- في الملحق (ج).
- 4- جدول ملاحظة - في الملحق (د).

اشتملت هذه الدراسة على خمسة فصول هي:

- 1- الفصل الأول: الإطار النظري للدراسة، 2- الفصل الثاني: استرجاع ما ذكر في الدراسة والدراسات السابقة، 3- الفصل الثالث: الطريقة التي اتبعت في البحث، 4- الفصل الرابع: عرض وتحليل بيانات البحث، 5- الفصل الخامس: ملخص النتائج والتوصيات ومقترحات لدراسات وبحوث أعمق.

أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن طريقة تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية الإيضاحية لها أثر سالب على القدرات التخاطبية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وبسبب هذا الأسلوب من التدريس يتعرض الطلاب إلى نذر يسير من هذه اللغة كيما يكتسبونها.

تضمنت الدراسة في صفحاتها الأخيرة عدد من التوصيات واقتُرحت بعض الموضوعات لبحوث أخرى.

كلمات مفتاحية: ولاية النيل الأبيض - ولاية الخرطوم - القواعد الإيضاحية .

INTRODUCTION :

Nowadays, the most important aspect of language learning is how to express your ideas fluently in the target language, in order to be understood by native speakers. To reach this aim, foreign language learners should know how to use different words and phrases in sentences. In other words, they should be familiarized with the grammatical points in the target language which have been overlooked in the recent years. Grammar learning and speaking are two significant poles in foreign language acquisition. It seems they are really related activities, but various opinions are expressed about the underlying relation between these two components of language learning. Some

indicate a positive relationship between grammar learning and ability to speak a foreign language, whereas this research sees contrary to that; particularly explicit grammar instruction is verified to minimize the chances of being exposed to the target language and thus it's at the expense of the oral communication skills, as it is proved in the research.

Statement of the Problem:

English is taught in the Sudan as a compulsory subject in general education. Students are totally dependent on the five or six hours per week of language input provided through formal classroom instruction. Besides limited exposure to

the language, this makes the students lack the power of speaking. The teaching of grammarians' grammar has contributed a lot to the weakness in spoken skills; to the extent that it leaves the learners stumble when they express themselves, in oral communication sessions. The teaching of grammar seems to be the one that is most directly related to the deterioration of the spoken skills. It usually takes the form of giving rules, facts and explanations couched in meta-linguistic terms. It is the purpose of this study to explore that EFL learners find difficulties in using English for communication. When engaged in authentic communicative situations, they often lack some of the vocabulary or language items they need to get their meaning across. As a result, they cannot keep the interaction going for an extended period of time. This fact is very noticeable in our secondary schools students because the formal instruction which exposes them to the isolated rules, facts and explanation of grammatical terms, instead of the pure, authentic, real and genuine language to be acquired, for the purpose of communication. There have been a lot of complaints made about the weakness of secondary school graduates in spoken English who join the universities. Tutors always point accusing fingers to the methods teachers adopted at secondary schools in teaching English, particularly grammar, which is taught explicitly to prepare the Ss to compete successfully at the certificate

examinations, regardless of the effects that it leaves on the learners oral communication abilities.

Significance of the Study:

This study is considered significant since it does not encourage the explicit way of teaching grammar, so that students can acquire grammar in an implicit, natural, and in real situation in which students can think in the language and can show more enthusiasm in communication sessions, and in expressing themselves in oral communication forums.

The aims of this research:

This study aims at investigating the following:

- * The impact of explicit grammar instruction on EFL learner's oral communication skills; it also aims at discovering
- * the least minimum amount of English language that EFL learners are exposed to, due to this explicit way of grammar instruction.

Questions of the Study:

To investigate the effects of explicit grammar instruction in handicapping the learners' communication skills, and the amount of language the EFL learners exposed to, the study raises the following questions:

- (1) Does the instruction of explicit grammar has a negative impact on EFL learners' oral communication skills?
- (2) Does explicit grammar instruction minimize EFL learners' exposure to concrete language that he uses to communicate with?

Hypotheses of the Study:

The research then hypothesizes the following:

(1) Instruction of explicit grammar has a negative impact on EFL learners' oral communication skills (It detains their oral communication abilities).

(2) Explicit English grammar instruction minimizes EFL learners' exposure to the target language that the learners use to communicate.

Methodology of the Study:

The research follows the descriptive analytical approaches. The populations of the study are the students of the third form in Sudanese secondary schools and the teachers of English at the same states (WNS & Khs).

* The subject and the sample of the study are (100) students from WNS and Khs and (60) teachers of English language at the same states, beside 20 practitioners and experts in the field of ELT as interviewees.

The tools whereby the research collects the data are:

(1) Teachers' questionnaire:

* For secondary school teachers of English.

* It contains 30 (items) statements.

- The first (15) to treat the 1st domain:

(Explicit grammar instruction and EFL learners' oral communication)

- The other (15) items treat the 2nd domain:

(Explicit grammar instruction minimizes EFL learners' exposure to the language)

(2) Learners' questionnaire:

* For the 3rd form Sudanese secondary schools students.

* It also includes 30 statements:

- divided into these same methods to treat the same mentioned domains.

(3) Structured interview:

- Composed of 24 direct questions and statements (to agree or disagree with).

- This interview is held with old practitioners and experts in the field teaching (grammar in particular) (20 of them).

- Again it's divided into two sections, each section is composed of (12) questions and statements, to treat the 1st domain mentioned above, and the remaining (12) items to treat the 2nd domain.

- Three of these (20) interviewees are skyped from the Gulf-countries the idea behind skyping, is to get different contacts of different teachers in different environments in the field of EFL learning.

(4) Observation schedule:

= In which the researcher attended classes on / about grammar which are instructed in un-patterned sequence between being implicitly or explicitly instructed, and the researcher jot down his observations.

Validity of the instruments:

The four instruments were handed over to referees and arbitrators for judgment.

They ascertained the face validity of the instruments. The referees and arbitrators

who were experts in the field of curricula & instruction made some observations and modifications on some

of the items. The questionnaires were passed to experts in the field of

linguistics and applied linguistics as well. They modified some of the

questionnaires' statements and gave some directions which on its turn help

greatly in presenting and producing the required questionnaires for the study.

The other instruments i.e. the interview questions and observations schedule were also handed over to practitioners of good expertise in the field of English language teaching (ELT). They examined the two instruments and suggested some amendments which were done on the spot.

Reliability of the instruments:

(a) Teachers' Questionnaire:

In order to assure the reliability of the questionnaires the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha. Where eight (8) pieces of the questionnaire (the teachers' version) – were chosen and processed using Cronbach's Alpha equation. The final results showed that the teachers' questionnaire was reliable. After that data were entered, computed, and processed. The following tables reflect the reliability:

The teachers' questionnaire:

		No. of Items
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	
.820	.793	30

Reliability = .820: which shows that this questionnaire (T. version) is more reliable; the figure shown above (.820), reflects the highest standard of reliability of this questionnaire.

(b) The learners' questionnaire:

For the reliability of the learners' version of questionnaire the researcher carried a

pilot study on a sample of secondary school students mainly (5) students and their responses were entered and computerized using cronbach's Alpha equation and the result shows higher reliability:

The learners' questionnaire:

		No. of Items
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	
.873	.806	30

Reliability = .873: This reflects that this questionnaire (learners' version) is more reliable since it peaks at .873 which is the highest reliability for the items of this questionnaire.

Procedure of Data Collection:

The researcher himself administrated both questionnaires to the target subjects. The teachers' version of the questionnaire is distributed and collected after having it been ticked. Whereas that of the learners' is administered in the researcher's presence as well as their classroom teacher's presence, so as to

ease for them any language difficulty just in case it appears in the questionnaires items. As for the other instruments, i.e. the structured interview and the observation schedule, the researcher consulted practitioners and interviewed them face to face and through skype as well and jot down their responses and treated them for analysis and description. For the observation sheet the researcher attended various and varied classes on grammar instructed in unpatterned order either implicitly or explicitly and made his notes and notices

concerning the accuracy versus fluency-oriented approaches.

Analysis of data and presentation of the results:

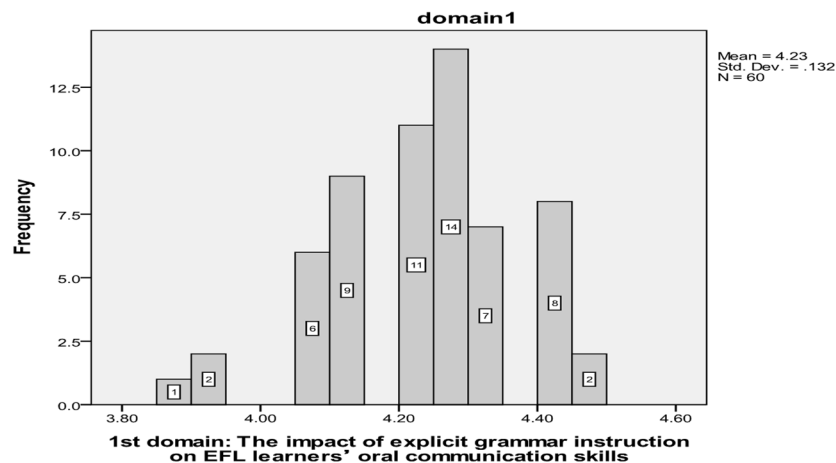
The research used the Statistical Package of the social sciences (SPSS) to find out the Arithmetic mean and the standard deviation (accurate and minute in measuring data).

For items gradation the researcher used Likert Scale Quintet.

This is for the two questionnaires. For the interview and the observation schedule the researcher drew charts. The result of the teachers’ questionnaire for

the 1st domain reflects that explicit grammar instruction affects negatively the oral communication skills of the Sudanese secondary school students. Since it grades between “Highest” and “weak”. The “highest” Arithmetic mean reaches (4.5500) with standard deviation of (.74618), and the “weak” Arithmetic mean reaches (1.0169) with a standard deviation of (.13019), and most of the statements in this domain indicate the highest level. The value of the general Arithmetic mean for the whole domain reaches (4.2261).

Figure (1): Teachers’ questionnaire



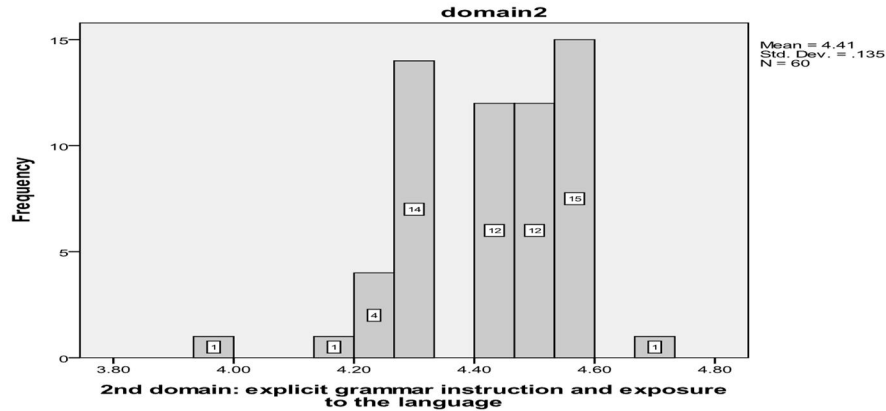
Example: (*of the analysis*)
 Statements No. (2) and (12) come first, with a degree of approval highest, which are (2) “The rules of grammar don’t help improving language fluency” and (12) “Explicit grammar instruction is not that effective in offering opportunities for successful communications” – which suggests that explicit teaching of grammar will not help EFL learners oral communication skills, they just recite the rules and learn them by heart for their own sake, they just grip on the rules

without making use of them in communication.
 As for the 2nd domain in the teachers’ questionnaire. The analysis shows that explicit instruction of grammar exposes the EFL learners to the least minimum amount of the target language as it appears in the teachers responses to the items of the questionnaire. The degree of approval is shown as highest. The weakest arithmetic mean in this table reaches (4.2167) with standard deviation of (.58488) whereas the highest arithmetic mean indicates (4.6167) with

standard deviation of (.52373). The value of the general arithmetic mean for the whole domain reaches (4.4089)

which indicate the highest degree of approval from the respondents.

Figure (2): Teachers' questionnaire



Example (2): (of the analysis) Statement No. (7) Which says “Extensive use of explicit grammar rules is harmful because it restricts the Ss exposure to the language and the opportunities to practice English”. This statement comes first in the herarchical order as for the responding of the respondents, with a degree of approval ‘highest’ with the Arithmetic mean (4.6167), and standard deviation of

(.52373). This reflects that the more we practice explicit grammar rules, the least exposure to the target language is received by the EFL learners. Thus explicit grammar instruction at secondary schools is always at the expense of acquiring a language since the learners resort to the memorization of the rules for their own sake and just to apply them in examinations.

Thus the results of both domains agree with the hypotheses stated by the research, and then they are verified as true.

*** The learners' questionnaire:**

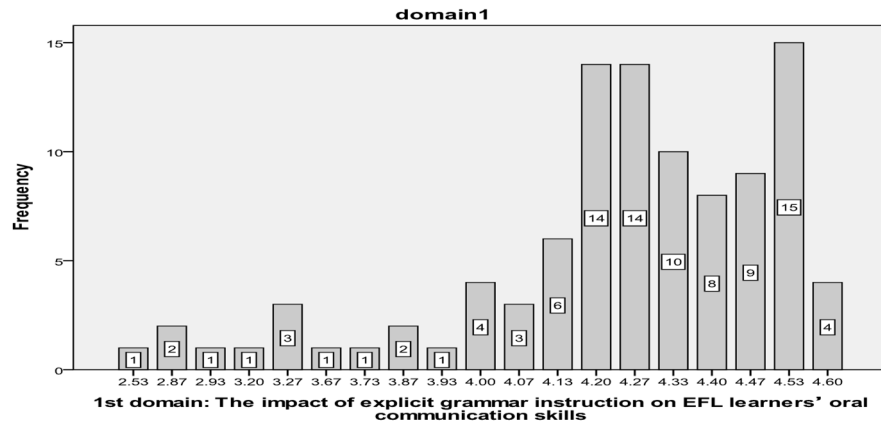
- It is typical to the teachers' one. The results show and verify that the hypotheses as true in both domains: that is to say:

In domain (1):

The table grades between “moderate” and “highest. The moderate arithmetic mean reaches (3.8700) with standard deviation of (1.06983) and the highest

arithmetic mean reaches (4.7900) with a standard deviation of (.477168), the vast majority of the statements in this domain indicate the highest value. The value of the general arithmetic mean for the whole domain scores (4.1993) meeting a standard deviation of (.40319). Which is “high” according to Likert scale Quintet?

Figure (3): Learners' questionnaire



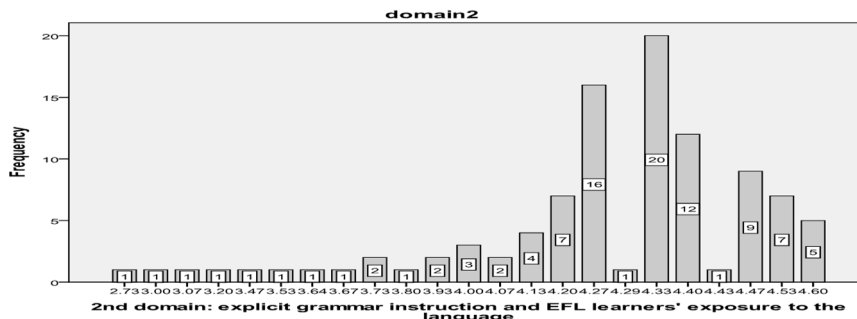
Example (of the analysis)

Statement No. (5) comes (1st) in the herarchical order of the table above, with a degree of approval 'highest' with the Arithmetic mean of (4.7900) and standard deviation (.47768). The statement says: "Many learners are reluctant to speak because they are afraid of getting things wrong". Thus a high percentage of the learners couldn't express themselves freely since committing mistakes usually stands in the way between them and speaking the language. (English language) with a considerable fluency, this is all because of the effect of grammar, and thinking back of grammar and its rules, which always stems from explicit instruction of this grammar, thus the EFL learners always appear reluctant to express themselves in communicative situations.

In domain (2)

It also proves and verifies the truth of the 2nd hypothesis "grammar instruction and the EFL learners' exposure to the language". As reflected by the responses of the 3rd form Ss of secondary schools in both WNS and Khs, the degree of approval is shown as "highest". The weakest arithmetic mean in this table is (4.0700) – which is "high" in Likert Scale, with standard deviation of (1.03724), whereas the "highest" arithmetic mean indicates (4.4800) with standard deviation (.99980). The value of the general arithmetic mean for the whole domain points to (4.2289) which indicates the "highest" degree of approval among the respondents to agree with hypothesis.

Figure (4): Learners' questionnaire



Example: (*of the analysis*)

Statement No. (16) which says: "Acquiring a language properly doesn't need explicit grammar instruction, but more exposure to the target language itself". This statement comes first in the herarchical order according to the responses of the Ss, with a degree of approval 'highest', with the Arithmetic mean (4.4800) and standard deviation (.99980). This shows that we can acquire the target language smoothly

without explicit explanation to its grammar; explicit grammar instruction limits the exposure to the necessary terms for explaining grammar, but doesn't expose the EFL learners to the authentic language that they should absorb and acquire, so relay EFL learners to acquire the target language they need to be exposed to abundant amount of language

Explicit grammar instruction exposes EFL learner to the minimum amount of the target language.

Structured interview:

In this structured interview, 20 well experienced teachers and practitioners were interviewed, three of them were interviewed through Skype since they are working abroad (Saudi Arabia and Gulf Countries). They were interviewed so as to get their views on the teaching of grammar and its impact on both EFL learners' oral communication skills and their exposure to the target language, as concerns the two domains of the study. The first question is: "of the two methods (deductive and inductive) which one do you follow in teaching grammar classes?" And why? Responding to this question 16 out of 20 responded that they follow the inductive approach and justified this by saying this approach furnishes a ground for authentic real language to their learners

which helps them in improving their oral communication skills. So the percentage of the teachers and the practitioners who say they follow the inductive approach reaches (80%) and those who answered in following the deductive approach were scoring (20%) and they justified their answers as saying "They prepare their students for the big examinations (the final examinations) so they don't want to bother themselves with taking the burden of creating situations, both imaginary and concrete to teach grammar instead they should concentrate on the explanation of the grammar rules, they teach and simply apply them into exercises, as a sort of help, so that they (learners) easily pass their exams. Then explicit grammar affects negatively EFL learners' oral communication skills.

Table (9)
Descriptive analysis for question (1)

Respondents	Answers	Percentage
16	yes	80%
4	No	20%
	Yes / No	

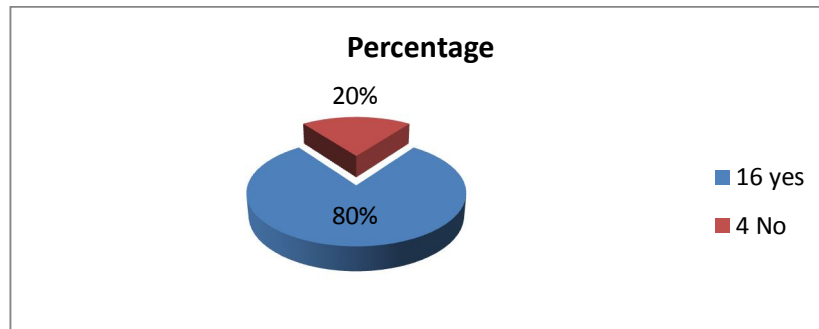


Figure (5) Descriptive analysis for question (1)

In question (1) which says: “Explicit grammar provides the rules and explanations to grammatical terms, so it doesn’t expose the learners to ample language to acquire. What do you say? 18 of respondents who make a percentage of (90%) answered ‘yes’ whereas one respondent making a percentage of (5%) answered ‘No’ and the remaining one who makes the percentage of (5%) answered ‘yes’ and

‘No’. So from this percentage of those who answered ‘yes’, we see that explicit grammar instruction deprived EFL learners from being exposed to the target language since the focus of the instruction is concentrated on the memorization of the isolated rules of grammar. The figure and the table below represent the percentages of the respondents.

Table (21) Descriptive analysis for question (1)

Respondents	Answers	Percentage
18	yes	90%
1	No	5%
1	Yes & No	5%

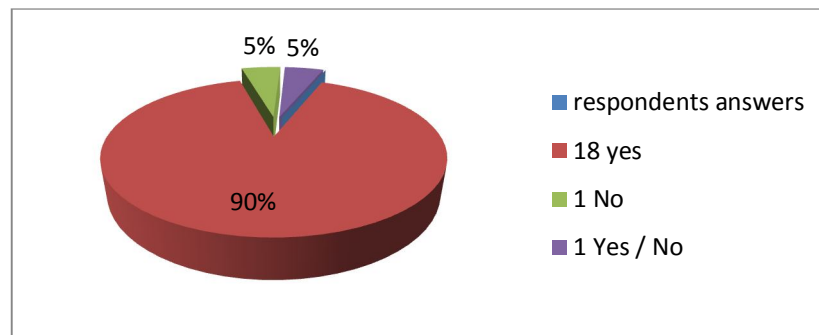


Figure (17) Descriptive Analysis for question (1)

Thus according to the feedback drawn from the structured interview, that explicit grammar instruction handicaps EFL learners oral communication skills and exposes them to a minimum amount of language. So the result of the interview proved that the two stated hypotheses are true.

routine. The researcher attended the classes himself and registered both the students' behavior as well as that of the teacher, and observed the correlation between the method adopted and the learners' fluency. From the entire classes attended, one observes that the method the teacher adopts in grammar instruction has an impact on the EFL learners' oral communication skills and the amount of language that those learners are expected to be exposed to i.e. explicit grammar instruction affects negatively EFL learners' oral communication skills and minimizes the amount of language that the learners are exposed to. Contrary to the implicit method of instruction, which on its turn furnishes the learners with ample amount of language to absorb and acquire, and not to orbit about the language.

Example: (*of the analysis*)

In class three (3) at WNS, which aimed at teaching "clause of purpose" – (*so that, in order that, + and, lest*) – the method taken by the teacher is the inductive method (implicit method). The number of Ss in the class is (60), the number of the participants is (36) which represent a percentage of (60%). The number of the Ss who use the language fluently is (30) representing (50%) and those who are accurate is (6) making (10%) of the total numbers of students. There is a correlation between the

method of instruction and the previous class which adopted the same method, in that Ss use the language with fluency in oral practice; this is all due to the language acquired and exposed to via the inductive method.

Example: (*of the analysis*)

The last lesson attended at (Khs), aims at teaching the prepositions (*on, in, at*). The method adopted was the Deductive Method (explicit instruction), in it the teacher explains the usage of these prepositions explicitly, comparing their usage in the mother tongue, and this comparison perplexed the Ss somewhat. The number of students is (50), those who continuously participated are (35), representing (70%) of the whole Ss, those who showed fluency are (10), representing (20%) of the whole number, and those who appeared accurate are (25) representing (50%) of the total number of the Ss in the classroom. This indicates that the method adopted in teaching the grammatical structure encourages accuracy over fluency, since it inclines to apply the rules accurately and neglects the reasonable fluency in oral communication. It also minimizes the amount of language the EFL learners are supposed to be exposed to, if the teacher uses a variety of contexts which include the new structure, instead of only focusing on the explanation of the rules themselves for their own sake.

From the behavior of both the teachers and the learners in their reaction to the methods applied in teaching (inductive & deductive), at both states (WNS & Khs), both hypotheses are verified as true. i.e. explicit grammar instruction impedes fluency and oral communication in general, on the other hand, it exposes EFL learners' to a little amount of language that presented by the teacher.

Findings of the Study:

The study comes up with the following results:

(1) Explicit grammar instruction affects negatively EFL learners' oral communication skills.

(2) It also exposes them (Ss) to the least possible amount of authentic genuine language.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher highly recommends that the following points should be given some sort of attention, both from the policy makers and the practitioners at schools as well. These points are:

(1) Secondary school teachers should find ways to introduce grammar in communicative activities to develop speaking and listening skills.

(2) Secondary school teachers must come to know this fact "that grammar is a means and not an end in itself". It should be invested for the purpose of communication and transmitting real messages.

(3) Teachers shouldn't limit their activities to the exercises in the Ss textbook, and they (teachers) forget about listening and speaking practice. English is about communication and not grammar rehearsal.

(4) Novice teachers - are advised - have to find friends (senior teachers) around

the professional community they are working in and don't be shy or embarrassed to ask for help from their senior teachers, in teaching grammatical structures. Sometimes the best ideas and solutions are just around the corner.

(5) Our Ss at secondary school, in particular, face a double challenge – first, they need more 'exposure' to the language to improve and develop their knowledge of English, and they also need more confidence to use English everyday in school. So. Don't insist on stuffing their heads with the set of rules driven from explicit grammar instruction.

(6) Secondary schools English teachers should create a kind of club. A club doesn't mean that it has to be (10) or (12) teachers, just maybe one or two neighboring schools and the teachers come together at least once a week and chat in English. They promote their English particularly its grammar, and then they can transfer all this to their classes.

Notice:

The study agrees with the following previous studies either completely or partially in one way or another.

(1) It agrees completely with the PH.D thesis "Exploring the role of explicit

knowledge in adult second language learning” of Karen Roehr (2004).

(2) It also agrees completely with the Ph.D. thesis “Does intensive explicit grammar make all the difference?” of Ernesto Marcaro (2006).

(3) It matches with the MA thesis “communication problems facing Arab learners of English: A personal perspective” of Abd-Allah Muzied Al Dugan (2003).

(4) It agrees partially with the study of Dawood Elfadil Abdelrhann Dawood (2012). In that the current methods and instruments which are used in secondary schools are not effective in teaching and developing English language, and also there are no classroom activities to motivate the Ss to communicate in English.

Suggestions for Further Research:

To plug any holes and gaps in the area of this study the researcher suggests the following topics to be areas for researching, they might serve as completion parts or at least their results might be sequel to this study. The topics are:

1. The value of explicit knowledge in facilitating the development of implicit knowledge?
2. The influence of the mother tongue on second language grammar acquisition and communication.
3. The learning of an FL should be the same as the acquisition of the native language.
4. Effective grammar had to be taught in a way that is compatible with the natural processes of acquisition.
5. The teaching of literature to recycle and consolidate old grammatical

structures and expose EFL learners to culture through English.

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