

Research Design and Methods for the Application of Communicative Activities into Teaching Grammar for EFL Learners

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Abstract – Grammar has always been considered as an important area of teaching foreign languages in Vietnam. Mastering grammar knowledge will contribute to improve the outcomes of English learning process in terms of exam results. Also, it will help students enhance skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, many language teachers tend to apply various new approaches in teaching English grammar, but how to teach grammar effectively is still a controversial issue that needs to be studied more. The paper aims to frame the research design and methods of using communicative activities in teaching grammar for first year English-majored students at Dong Nai Technology University. Thanks to the findings of this study, teachers are able to plan an action research to evaluate the effectiveness of using communicative activities in grammar instruction. Simultaneously, students' attitudes towards communicative activities in the English classroom are also investigated. As a result, teachers can adopt a more efficient technique to achieve better results in grammar teaching.

Keywords – English Grammar, Research Design, Methodology Review, Communicative Activities, Teaching And Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, English is considered as the most popular language in the business world. In the globalization, English is obviously the most common language. Finding the significant role of English, in many countries including Vietnam, the number of people learning English increases every year. More and more people think knowing English is the key to a successful life. However, learning English is not easy at all. For a long time, in Vietnam, grammar translation method, which is known as teacher-centered approach is the priority way of grammar teaching especially in public schools. Moreover, students in Vietnam are expecting to get high mark in written tests which are mainly grammar-based tests. That's why many students become more passive in their learning process and they are gradually lacking communicative abilities.

In fact, grammar plays an important role in teaching and learning English. It is beneficial for students to be better at using English fluently and accurately as well as improving all English skills as they are proficient in grammar. Nevertheless, grammar is considered as a very boring subject to most of the students because of a large number of rules and tiring exercises. Luckily, thanks to the non-stop development of teaching methodology in education, grammar can be taught in a variety ways. We can not only ask student to learn by heart grammar rules and do tiresome grammatical exercises but also apply communicative activities in teaching grammar so that this boring subject become more interesting to most students. Many researchers have studied how effective communicative activities are in helping students acquire grammar and other language skills. In terms of language teaching, how

efficient instructing grammar is still makes many researchers wonder and attempt to investigate the most appropriate methodology. Thus, this work provides methodology reviews in other researches as well as proposes the research method so that the writer is able to successfully solve the problem of instructing grammar for 25 first year English-majored students by examining these following questions

Research questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of communicative activities in instructing grammar lesson?
2. What are students' attitudes towards communicative activities in the classroom?

II. METHODOLOGY REVIEW

It is crucial to have a clear understanding of research paradigm. In the book "*Action Research*" (Hinchey, 2008, pp. 19-49), he stated about two opposing paradigms in educational research consisting of positivist and interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm. After finishing this chapter, I found that positivist and interpretivist paradigm have both advantages and disadvantages. Indeed, quantitative and qualitative methods are included in these two paradigms. To start with, it is significant to have a general view of methods which are linked to qualitative and quantitative research method. First of all, quantitative method is known as a method dealt with numbers and measurement. This idea is reinforced by Hinchey (2008) when he stated that quantitative method tries to identify mathematical correlation but not the causes of the problem. Also, measurement is applied to a variety of cases based on rules so that the researcher can prove the predetermined assumption. Golafshni (2003) pointed out that information as well as reasons for a particular action is the key features in quantitative research. Also, all data should be quantified based on figures. Moreover, data need to be calculated by mathematical formulas. Garbarino and Holland (2009) noticed that the results of quantitative research should be stated through variables, value, or hypothesis, etc in order to show distinguishes and averages between groups. In conclusion, quantitative research aims to expose a prediction so that we can clarify causal explanations for the problem under the form of numbers. Through mathematical formulas then, numbers can be counted so that we can determine theories and assumption. According to Hohmann (2006), some methods are mainly applied in quantitative study are questionnaires, econometrics, and experiments.

On the other hand, qualitative method is defined in different perspectives. It does not present data through statistical terms. As a matter of fact, it seeks understanding of the multiple realities that exist in the real context (Hinchey, 2008). This means that researchers try to handle collected data based on the form known as "textual form" (Garbarino & Holland, 2009, p.7). Also, Bogdan & Bilken (2002) clarified that this method consists of five characteristics. In specific, researchers observe behavior studied in a certain setting and idea. After that, they could find out the location and the way of a certain action. Next, they also can figure out how an action takes play under a particular situation. After observation, the information collected is processed based on videotapes, pictures, recordings, etc. Other features such as body languages or gestures are especially focused so that we can have a diversity of data. Qualitative research is long-term process. Besides these facts, it is an inductive method. This means that numbers are not used to prove an idea or assumption like the previous research method. In contrast, when finishing the data analysis procedure, researchers conclude inductive outcomes. In conclusion, qualitative methods are used to interpret and understand actors' opinions in a specific educational context. From this characteristic, researchers collect and describe information and knowledge but not measure numbers. In fact, researchers play the role as insiders. This means they take part in partially or personally during the procedure. Bogdan & Bilken (2002) showed some essential qualitative methods which are interviews, observation, and focus groups

To sum up, despite the fact that there are differences between quantitative and qualitative methodology, researchers can be advised not to use only one research method at one time. According to Hinchey (2008) researchers can apply three methods in their studies. This is known as triangulation in order to help researchers ward off ambiguity. Furthermore, Garbarino & Holland (2009) clarified that by combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods researchers could predict more accurately and stratify ideas appropriately. For these reasons, I would like to use mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) to apply in my research. It is expected that this combination would help answer the questions mentioned earlier in this paper.

Hence, this literature review is coming up with some studies which have methods related to the questions of my study. First of all, though questionnaire is widely used in doing researches, there are various ways to carry out this method. In a recent study, Wang (2010) pointed out that the application of questionnaire provided not only quantitative but also qualitative knowledge. In his paper, questionnaire is emphasized as a data collection tool in order to figure out teacher's attitude toward communicative language

games in language teaching. He used 150 primary English teachers in Taiwan as participants for his research. Each participant answered a list of 19 items. This questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale descending meaning from strongly agree to strongly disagree to survey teachers' opinions about using communicative games in conducting lessons. Noticeably, he set two more questions with choices to find out the frequency of using these game-like activities in teaching. After processing the answers of the large number of participants, he strongly hoped that communicative language activities or games can be used to create comfortable learning environment with supportive factors. Therefore, teacher knows how to select appropriate activities or games and conduct the English lessons effectively.

Another study conducted by Yolageldili & Arikan (2011) utilized questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data. In this research, there are fifteen primary EFL teachers voluntarily participated with the age from 24 to 54. All the participants had to answer 15 questions. These questions have the answers designed in five-point Likert type scale. This means that there are 5 options in each answer put in order from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It is used to explore the opinion about games in language teaching as well as the belief and habit of using game-like activities inside classroom. The findings were analyzed by a reknown spreadsheet application so that he can find out the frequencies and percentages of each question. Thanks to the examination of the result, he could figure out the participants' attitude to the impact of games on conducting grammar for young adults. Also, he could make a plan to deal with the problem of lacking communicative activities in English classroom based on the results. From these two articles, I think that questionnaire is my prior option to gain participants' thought, and feelings in a particular situation. Meanwhile, researchers have to focus on the number of participants. Researchers also have to pay much attention to research question, the duration as well as the areas needed to be discussed or clarified in order to decide the number of participants well.

Whether the only method in certain studies is using questionnaire, it could be combined with different approaches for investigating researchers' concern. For example, Khamkhien (2011) used both questionnaire and interview in her study to explore qualitative result and quantitative data. There are 327 students including 201 girls and 126 boys volunteered to take part in the present study. The researcher used self-created questionnaire which consist of 42 items and divide into 5 variables. The variables were students' attitudes towards English teachers, the English language, the classroom environment and instructional media, personality, and finally motivation to study English speaking skills. This questionnaire was created with a five Likert scale which required five options for each answer namely strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and finally strongly disagree. After that, participants need to choose one of these options to complete the questionnaire. At the same time, semi-structured interview was conducted by randomly interview 5 participants to review the validity and reliability of findings. After data analysis stage, the researcher could have a general look of Thai's students' oral development in English and suggest recommendation for solving the problem. It is true that using both questionnaire and interview can help researchers have deeper understanding of their topic of interest. Thus, it is a good idea to apply semi-structured interview and questionnaire because they are better ways to seek for students' perspectives toward the application of communicative activities in teaching grammar.

It is not obligatory for all researchers to apply many methods in their studies. Some authors investigated qualitative result by using documents and artifacts, Chung (2005) used documents in his research so that his study could be more authentic and reliable. In addition, documents are used to help me enhance deeper knowledge of the topic that I am exploring. In this article, he took Malaysian and Taiwanese textbooks into consideration. He claimed that these textbooks are designed with a large number of grammar rules and structures which do not reflect communicative purposes. In addition, he offered five methods which English teachers can use in their teaching in order to improve students' communicating skill when students are better at grammar structures and rules. Other article applying documents in doing research is derived from Ahmad (2009). According to him, learners' level, motivation, age, as well as group size could influence the use of communicative activities or games in language teaching. In the third article, Luu & Nguyen (2010) also examine other studies to get more advantages of using games in instructing grammar lessons in Vietnamese context so that they can prove that games are really useful for teaching language in general and teaching grammar in specific. Strictly to say, the mentioned articles gave useful information about what communicative games are especially appropriate for grammar lessons. However, the key factor we should bear in mind when applying documents is selecting relevant sources for our researches. In fact, document is a helpful tool to collect data. This method can obviously make researches become more trustworthy and valid.

When finishing reading these articles, the writer has collected different findings that help improve students' knowledge in grammar. In addition, they illustrate the usefulness of communicative or game-like activities. In fact, researchers have the right to choose methods used in their works. Whereas some people tend to use quantitative method, some choose qualitative method and in

some cases they combined these methods to have the best research. Actually, these researchers applied questionnaire and several kinds of documents to clarify the findings. They also used semi-structure interview to find out information on participants' thinking. After considering some reviews on relevant studies, one quantitative and two qualitative methods are selected to fulfill the objectives of this paper consisting of questionnaire, semi- structured interview, documents and artifact.

III. DATA COLLECTION

• Participants and research site of the study

Participants play a significant role in any studies. Therefore, selecting participants is as important as choosing relevant research methods. Yolageldili & Arikan, (2011) demonstrated the vital role of choosing participants in studies. The researchers have to select participants carefully and focus on detail. This careful choice will support researchers in collecting information and processing the data more easily. In addition, participants' majors and language proficiency will be taken into account. However, these participants and their answers could not be chosen if they do not meet the requirements. From these points, the writer considered first year English- majored students at Dong Nai Technology University can be the appropriate participants for the research.

• Sources of data

As mentioned above, the writer applies one quantitative and two qualitative research methods as following in the research so that the findings can be more valid, credible and accurate.

Questionnaire:

Questionnaire is one of the most popular methods of collecting information because we are able to reach more people and it doesn't cost much. The questionnaire can help researchers avoid interviewer bias that can influence on the reliability of the collected data. In fact, there are 10 close-ended questions in the questionnaire. This questionnaire will require the participants to response to each question in a four- point Likert scale descending respectively from strongly agree, agree, and disagree to strongly disagree.

Semi-structured interview:

Semi- structured interview is going to be conducted in order to elicit the participants' attitudes towards communicative activities in grammar teaching. The collected information can strengthen some areas in the research questions. It also helps to consolidate the reliability of the information gathered from the questionnaire. The writer is not going to interview all participants. In fact, 5 participants will be chosen randomly to interview individually. The interview will be conducted in Vietnamese (students' mother tongue) so that students can express their opinions clearly. Each interviewee is going to answer 5 questions which are divided into themes so that the writer can analyze collected information easily. Approximately, each interview will last 15 minutes and it is recorded based on the consent of the participants.

Documents or artifacts:

In addition to questionnaire and interview, documents and artifacts are used. The writer intends to use structured text like journal articles and relevant studies. Moreover, the writer is going to collect students' work at the end of each period in order to know how well they can achieve when teacher apply communicative activities in teaching grammar. Also, at the end of each period, the teacher will spend 5 minutes delivering a piece of paper and asking the students to take note what they like and dislike about the activities used in that period so that these notes can later on help to contribute some information to the research. Therefore, teacher can justify which activities suit students' level and interest.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) is going to be applied in the study. Each method is useful and the combination of these two methods can explore the better answers for the research. Thanks to quantitative data, the writer is able to use questionnaire to figure out people's points of view. Hence, closed questions are used in the questionnaire to collect data about students' achievements, attitudes and feelings. Based on the collected statistics, teacher can work out how strongly they agree when teacher applies communicative activities in grammar classes. Moreover, Microsoft Excel program will be used to analyze the collected data. Firstly, all the numbers will be inserted so this software can calculate percentages and frequencies of certain answer. Then, through the percentage of the responses of each answer, the researcher can figure out students' improvements and attitudes toward using communicative activities in grammar teaching in comparison to the teaching period without these activities.

Qualitative data are analyzed differently; the writer will collect structured text related to the topic. To begin with, relevant documents will be selected as data sources used in the study. After that, the collected data are arranged in different groups to work

out the similarities and differences of each group. Finally, the writer can illustrate whether other researchers agree or disagree with using communicative activities in conducting grammar lessons. At the same time, the writer will collect students' work to clarify that to what extent they can better their grammar knowledge by communicative activities. Furthermore, 5 students are interviewed randomly in total 25 students taking part in the study. The interviewees will be asked to response to five questions about how they feel about the given activities (like or dislike), what activities they want to be applied in class. Once processing their answers, the writer can identify students' feeling and perspectives. Consequently, the writer can decide the activities which are suitable for the students and get useful experience of how to conduct grammar lessons using communicative activities.

V. CONCLUSION

Grammar is important to improve students' language competence. However, spending too much time learning grammar rules makes students bored. It is easy for students to lack confidence in communicating by English. As a matter of fact, Vietnamese examination pays too much attention to grammar structures. As a result, students are forced to learn the grammar rules in order to get high grades in exams. This can put learners under big pressure and they always get bored in grammar period. Therefore, it is high time to change the situation so applying communicative activities or game-like activities could be a solution to create a funny and exciting teaching and learning environment.

With the help of appropriate communicative activities especially communicative games, students can better their language acquisition. Definitely, using communicative games in teaching grammar can bring many benefits. Thus, many researches have been studied to find out good methods so that English teachers can apply to motivate their students in learning grammar rules efficiently. Mixed research method can conclude the good findings for my future research. Obviously, these findings are beneficial for learning and teaching contexts in Vietnam. Besides, English teachers are required to be flexible in designing communicative activities to provide better opportunities for students in acquiring language as well as enhancing communicative competence.

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