THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP WORK IN TEACHING GRAMMAR FOR STUDENTS IN ACCOUNTING CLASS 1 AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Grammar is considered one of the most challenging aspect in acquiring and learning a language. The teacher’s aim in teaching grammar is to teach the structures of a language systematically and help the students obtain grammatical structures accurately. In Vietnam, English grammar is usually focused on because Vietnamese students think that they can use English when they know grammar rules well. It is really important when students are ready to use English to express themselves through context in their real life in either speaking or writing. The ability to work in a group is known as one of the most important skills of all students. The effectiveness of group work can be found among students. It is very important when the teacher gives task to the groups, and chooses the groups’ leaders. It is understandable that the leaders is responsible for the task of the groups so he/she must divide the work into individuals; in that situation, in group students have to work independently, they are able to control the pace of their work to keep up with other members in the group to complete their task and ensure their group’s work is able to be done correctly and on time. The primary aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using group work in teaching grammar to the first year non-English major students in Accounting class 1 at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA). The teachers’ and students’ opinions were collected through questionnaires and the results of this study demonstrated that using the group work in teaching grammar can bring the effectiveness to the students’ results. Data were gathered by means of questionnaires and collected from 42 the first-year non-English major students in Accounting class 1 at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) during the first term of the school years 2020-2021. The study can help raise awareness of curriculum designers and teachers about the effect of group work use in the language classroom.

Keyword: Effectiveness, grammar, group work, individual, challenging

1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar is the major essential element of any language which help learners know how to form sentences, paragraph and then long essays, stories or even articals etc. In most schools, colleges and universities in Vietnam, grammar is taught as a separate entity. It is not easy to teach grammar of a foreign language to students so teachers always try to find out the most effective ways to teach their students to help them remember how to apply grammar rules in different situations. Every learner wants to learn grammar because they think they can not acquire a language if they do not know grammar structures. There are many different methods applied to teaching and learning grammar and most of them help teacher much during teaching process.

Group work encourages individual to show his/her abilities effectively. The virtual thing of the group work is trusting others to complete tasks because when students work in teams, all the members have to show their responsibility to their work or take on his/her task to complete the group work. We all know that group work can achieve some positive aspects. Students all feel equal when they participate in a team. They can develop their social skills. It really helps them much to know other better when they work together. Students know that when they work in groups, they can share information, materials etc. According to Slavin, group learning should have positive effects on student achievement as long as positive interdependence and individual accountability are included in the group.
processes. Similar effects have been reported for all grade levels, all academic subjects and all types of schools (Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995; Slavin, 1995). Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) was established in 2004. There are different majors such as accounting, business administration, finance and banking. The English learning background is different among the students at TUEBA, they are all non-English major undergraduates. Most of them have learnt English for 7 years whereas some of them only learnt for 3 years and some others from the remoted mountainous areas, who have never learnt English before. Our challenge was presenting new way to teach and learn grammar to students who had to work in groups, prepared powerpoint and presented in fornt of the class, to other groups to share their knowledge about the grammar points that related to the topics in their text book. In this paper, researchers applied the group work to teaching grammar for the 42 first-year non-English major students in Accounting class 1 at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA) during the first term of the school years 2020-2021. This research was carried out to find proper answers to the questions: 1. What are the benifits and difficulties of students and teachers in learning and teaching grammar when using group work? 2. Is there any effect of group work use on learning grammar?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is very difficult when learning grammar because it is a complex, multifaceted, and lengthy process and no single pedagogical approach can claim priority in teaching (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). Approaches to teaching grammar need to acknowledge that learners have different learning style preferences when it comes to the learning of grammar. Some students like explanations and are uncomfortable when they do not have a clear understanding of something. They like to find logical relationships, rules, and structure. Others are more tolerant of ambiguity and do not feel the need for detailed explanations. Without some understanding of Grammar, students would not be able to do anything more than utter separate items of language for separate functions. The expression of functional language is only possible through the use of the Grammar of the language. (Harmer, 1991).

2.1. The methods and strategies for teaching grammar

There are many different techniques applied to teach grammar. Research and discussions on grammar teaching have recently focused on three options - "focus-on-form S," "focus-on-meaning," and “focus-on- form” (Long, 1991:45-46). In focus-on-form S instruction, language is divided into isolated linguistic units and taught in a sequential manner through explicit explanations of grammar rules and immediate correction of errors (Long, 2000). Classes follow a typical sequence of "presentation of a grammatical structure, its practice in controlled exercises, and the provision of opportunities for production-PPP" (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2002:420). The underlying logic of this approach is that the explicit knowledge about grammar rules will turn into implicit knowledge with enough practice (De Keyser, 1998). Students often develop a good understanding of grammatical knowledge through traditional teaching methods that focus on grammar as a somewhat isolated collection of rules – rules that exist independently of their use in the production of authentic written or spoken language. They may have spent many hours practicing the rules for correct sentence formation but lack the ability to use grammar as a resource in communication. However, in order to develop grammar as a communicative resource it needs to be taught and assessed as a component of communicative ability and performance – particularly in relation to the productive skills of writing and speaking.

The methods and strategies for teaching grammar have swung far and wide throughout our educational history, but study after study has shown that regardless of the method, or ferocity with which the topic was taught, there has been little to no significant difference in achievement (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham, McKown, Kühara, & Harris, 2012; Hillocks, 1984; Zuidema& Fink, 2012).

2.2. Benefits of group work

Group work can help students develop a host of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; Mannix & Neale, 2005). Positive group
experiences, moreover, have been shown to contribute to student learning, retention and overall college success (Astin, 1997; Tinto, 1998; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006).

Group work is known as an important role in teaching routine, it not only helps effectively to act out some particular communicative task but also produce friendly atmosphere among teacher and students in specific group. In the class, group work can be always the best option for the teacher and student because students can take part in the most time base on the given tasks divided into groups.

The main purpose of group work is to encourage fluency in language. In language classes, group work is considered as an important strategy that enables students to discuss issues or to engage in joint activities with other students in a less threatening environment (Harmer, 1991). Obviously in EFL classrooms, grouping is said to be an effective method of teaching for several reasons; for instance, it maximises the time that students can speak the target language. In addition, it minimises the time that students spend listening to other students interacting with the teacher; furthermore, it avoids the anxiety that hinders some language learners from speaking and interacting with the teacher in front of the whole class; and it gives the teacher more opportunities to discuss with students the structure of the task (Foster, 1998). Groups may allow students to be more independent, because they are encouraged to teach others and also to learn from others. In contrast, in teacher-fronted situations, students may be more dependent because the teacher is doing most of the talking. Several researchers (Brown, 2001; Foster, 1998; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1998; Harmer, 1991) have claimed that GW is efficient in language classrooms because it gives learners the opportunity to practise English with their group members. Furthermore, group work maximises the benefits for students in the classroom. Specifically, it can be used to improve oral activities for language learners, to complete tasks that need discussion among learners, to share reading and listening activities, and to write cooperatively with other learners. It also has the great advantage of allowing different groups of students to perform different tasks and activities according to their ability (Harmer, 1991).

2.3. Possible Roles on Teams

According to Eric Fourier (2011), assigning group roles can be a beneficial strategy for successful group work design for a number of reasons:

- Group roles offer an opportunity for high quality, focused interactions between group participants. Participants are more likely to stay on task and pay closer attention to the task at hand when their roles in the collaboration are clear and distinct.

- Group roles provide all students with a clear avenue for participation. Students are less likely to feel left out or unengaged when they have a particular duty that they are responsible for completing. Along the same lines, assigning group roles reduces the likelihood of one individual completing the task for the whole group, or “taking over,” to the detriment of others’ learning.

- Group roles encourage individual accountability. Group members are more likely to hold each other accountable for not completing work if a particular task is assigned to them.

- Group roles allow students to strengthen their communicative skills, especially in areas that they are less confident in volunteering for.

- Group roles can help disrupt stereotypical and gendered role assignments, which can be common in group learning. By assigning roles during group work, and by asking students to alternate these roles at different points in the semester, students can work past gendered assumptions about themselves and their groupmates.

Student teams often function most effectively when members have designated roles. These can be instructor-determined or established by the groups themselves, e.g., by giving teams a list such as the one below and asking them to decide on and delegate appropriate roles within their group.

Here are some possible group roles, which several researchers (Barkley (2005); Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., and Smith, K. (1991); Millis, B. J., and Cottell, P. G., Jr. (1998); Smith, K. A. (1996); Bonwell, C. C. (Eds.)) have found
### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Subject of the study

This research took place at Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration (TUEBA). The research focused on the effects of using group work in teaching grammar for non-English major students in Accounting class 1. 42 students who are in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021 at TUEBA were chosen for the study. Their ages are 18-21 years old, of whom the number of males are 19 and females are 23. They have different attitudes and preferences towards learning grammar and working in group in particular.

#### 3.2. Data collection instruments

Content validated questionnaires were used to investigate the research questions. The instrument is probably the most common data collection technique used. Students were asked to rate a list of benefits and difficulties of group work. These questions helped the researchers to decide whether the group work help much in teaching and learning grammar. By identifying the main benefits and difficulties of group work through the students’ answers in the questionnaire, the researcher investigated the learners’ answers in greater detail in the second question of the research. In this study, quantitative and qualitative methods were exploited. Definitely, these methods are different significantly. The studied has carried out with the quantitative method by collecting data from questionnaires, on 42 first year non-English major students in Accounting class 1 at TUEBA. 16 teachers of English in English Department of Thai Nguyen University of Economics & Business Administration were also asked to complete the questionnaire.

#### 3.3. Data collection procedure

In this study, questionnaires were designed and delivered to all students in Accounting class 1 with the help of their teachers. The students were clearly explained the purpose of the research before they fulfilled the questions. They were also encouraged to ask the researchers for any explanation. The students were instructed to take as much time as they needed to complete it. After that, data from responses of the students and teachers in the questionnaires were sorted and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group roles</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Moderates team discussion, keeps the group on task, and distributes work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorder</td>
<td>Takes notes summarizing team discussions and decisions, and keeps all necessary records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter</td>
<td>Serves as group spokesperson to the class or instructor, summarizing the group’s activities and/or conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper</td>
<td>Keeps the group aware of time constraints and deadlines and makes sure meetings start on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil’s Advocate</td>
<td>Raises counter-arguments and (constructive) objections, introduces alternative explanations and solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonizer</td>
<td>Strives to create a harmonious and positive team atmosphere and reach consensus (while allowing a full expression of ideas.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizer</td>
<td>Makes sure group focuses on most important issues and does not get caught up in details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explorer</td>
<td>Seeks to uncover new potential in situations and people (fellow team members but also clients) and explore new areas of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovator</td>
<td>Encourages imagination and contributes new and alternative perspectives and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checker</td>
<td>Checks to make sure all group members understand the concepts and the group's conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runner</td>
<td>Gets needed materials and is the liaison between groups and between their group and the instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildcard</td>
<td>Assumes the role of any missing member and fills in wherever needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Some possible group roles
analyzed to get the answers to the research questions. After that, all data was synthesized and analyzed. Questionnaire was very useful collection tool because researchers could reach many participants in a short time and it didn't cost much.

3.4. Data analysis

All the data was described and analyzed so that the reader knew what, where, when and in which way something occurred. With the collected data from questionnaires, Microsoft Excel 2010 program was used to insert and analyze the data. Firstly, all the data were inputted so that this software calculated the answers of the respondents. Then, the result was shown by percentages, pie charts, bar graphs, tables and so forth. After analysis stage, students’ attitude toward grammar lessons using group work was figured out. It helped the researcher to find out the answers for the two research questions.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Students’ ideas of the importance of grammar

From the answers of students through questionnaire, most of the students agree that grammar is one element they have to master, some students (9.5%) strongly agree that grammar plays a vital role when learning English while 0% of the students disagree with this idea. They might think that they can not learn English better without mastering the grammar structure. 2.5% of the students think it is neutral. To sum up, students realize how essential grammar is in English learning process.

4.2. Students’ opinion of using group work in learning Grammar

After 5 months of using group work in learning Grammar, the students were asked to fill the questionnaire about the use of group work and most of them had positive view on the group work. After grammar lessons, 16.6% of the answer strongly agree. They found that they were very confident when presenting grammar structures in front of their classmates; 76% students agreed they became more active and creative through group work, while 5% of the students answer neutral. Only 2.4% of the answer disagree. These figures confirm that the use of group work help students much and they involve much in learning new grammar structures. The data are shown as following:

![Chart 2: Students’ opinion of using group work in learning Grammar](image)

4.3. Students’ understanding of the lesson

The data in the table 2 shows students’ understanding the lessons. Obviously, students can understand and use English grammar in real contexts by studying through groups, but it does not at the same rate. In fact, 12% of students strongly agree that there are more chances for them to use the grammar point in real life situations while 74% of the students agree that they are able to apply the grammar structure directly when they take part in the groups. 5% cannot use the learnt grammar structures in their learning and the number of students answer neutral is 12%. This means that most of students recognize the purpose of using group work is not only for creating excitement but also for providing students opportunity to understand the lessons better than when working alone in classroom. The data are shown as following:
The neutral roles interact work. classmates English of chart explore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s opinion</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Students’ understanding of the lesson

4.4. Students’ interaction in grammar lessons through group work

The important finding the researchers want to explore is the students’ interaction in grammar lessons through group work. As can be seen in the chart 3, the frequency of interaction among students through group work is highlighted. 14% of the students strongly agree that they use more English in their communication with their classmates than learning grammar without group work. 73% of the students agree they are able to interact with other students and take different roles in group work. 7% of students say it is neutral and 6% of students disagree with this idea. The data are interpreted as following

Chart 3: Students’ interaction in grammar lessons through group work

4.5. Benefits and difficulties when using group work in teaching and learning grammar

The researchers created the questionnaires to find out the benefits and difficulties which teachers and students had to cope when using group work in the classroom. Via the information collected from the questionnaire, the results are illustrated very clearly. 81% of students thought that they can get higher grade when they take part in group work with their friends, only 2,3% disagree answer. 81,7% of them felt equal to other students and felt quite fair when working group. 53% of the students thought they would receive a fair reflection of the work they did and 60% of the agree answer for the equal amount of work of every member in the group. 62% of the students agreed to have chance to know other people when they were in groups. Through the mentioned percentage students prefer group work to individual with 72% agree answer. 57% of the students agreed that they could experience diversity of ideas and opinions when they took part in groups. 64% of students agreed they know more about the course materials through group work. Most of the students agreed that group work create equal environment learning to all of them. 56% of the students agreed group work increase their confidence. Most of them prefer working in small group about 4-5 members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>BENEFITS</th>
<th>Strong agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I will get a higher grade working in a group than working individually</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>4,7%</td>
<td>2,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Everyone in the group will have an equal opportunity to participate</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>81,7%</td>
<td>2,3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The grade that I receive will be a fair reflection of how much work I did</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is fair that everyone in the group receives the same grade</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Everyone in the group will do an equal amount of work</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>15,7%</td>
<td>2,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I really feel exciting when working in the group</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the group work can bring many benefits to the students, students still had unavoidable problems when they took part in the group work. The researchers tried to find out the most common difficulties that students had to cope when working in group. 62.7% of the students agreed that they lack of necessary vocabulary when presenting grammar issues in front of other groups. 57.3% agree answer of the students to the point they do not know how to present grammar structures. 43% of the students’ answer agreed that they do not know how to create an effective powerpoint presentation. For more details, students’ difficulties with grammar when working in group are clarified in the below chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Difficulties</th>
<th>Strong agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sometime I find time is too limited</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is difficult to give fair mark to the members of the group</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group work is unfair to hardworking students and lazy ones</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is difficult to manage conflict in the group</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is difficult to work/ control large group</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lack of motivation to weak students</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Teachers’ difficulties during group work lessons

In general, group work activities encourage most of the students positively to involve in grammar lessons which can be seen through their motivation when presenting grammar issues.
Students feel confident and they are able to communicate better at the end of the term. Although group work still has unavoided problems when students learn English grammar, a good sign is that after the group work applied students express their enjoyment as well as they think that group work is beneficial for applying grammar structures in their communication.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper clarified the strong points of using group work for the non-English major during the first term at Thai Nguyen University of Economics Business and Administration (TUEBA). The results from this evaluation expressed the positive influences of group work on students’ results. After five months using group work, students feel more confident to speak in front of class, excited present the grammar issues, show their different roles in group work. Based on the questionnaires, researchers found evidence-based judgments to the innovation. They have promoted the trend of adopting group work in teaching grammar for students at all ages from young learners to adults in any levels. The upcoming study of using group work in teaching grammar could be continuously investigated in different areas of Vietnam. Therefore, the collected information is more valid and reliable.

REFERENCES

Article/ Research Paper


Books


