IMPLEMENTATION OF GRAMMAR GAMES IN TEACHING PASSIVE VOICE TO THE 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article examines and discusses the results of action research conducted to improve passive voice mastery of 9th grade students via contextual grammar teaching and games. The complexity of passive voice construction causes students' difficulties while mastering the grammar item. In the course of lessons, the researcher aimed to eliminate students' errors and difficulties by providing appropriate activities. Thus, the action research was devoted to developing students' knowledge on passives and increasing their motivation to learn English grammar. Passive voice is useful all language skills since language learners must know important participants, i.e. understand how to use the performer of the action, the object, and whether it is obligatory to mention the performer of the action in the sentences. The researcher used observation and experiment methods to collect and analyze data. The students' passive voice mastery was improved as the results of the study confirm moderate progress from 60 % (pre-test) to 73% in cycle 1 and 85% in cycle 2. According to the teacher's observation, implementation of grammar games raised students' interest and motivation to learning the grammar item.

Keywords: passive voice, teaching grammar, grammar games, teaching English, grammatical errors, contextual grammar, school students.

Introduction

The number of the youth studying English is increasing rapidly in Uzbekistan. Most of the teenagers learn foreign language so as to be admitted to reputable universities by passing entrance exams or obtaining a language certificate. Regardless of what the purpose of language learning is, one should have profound knowledge of the grammar and know how to apply grammatical structures in speech in order to become fluent speaker. Thus, it is of huge importance to develop methodological foundations for teaching grammar.

As English differs from our native language in expression and content plan, some grammar concepts including passive voice can cause a lot of difficulties in learning. Passive voice has been one of the challenging topics in teaching English grammar. Because the construction of passives requires pupils to master more basic grammar rules firstly so as to comprehend passive tense forms. One of the reasons for

misunderstanding and misusing the passives is their complex structure and partly coincidence with other grammar constructions. Therefore, it imposes huge responsibility on English teachers to choose an effective approach and appropriate materials for conducting grammar-oriented lessons.

The following action research was conducted with the 9th grade students having been attending the researcher's English course. The students' main purpose is to develop grammar skills in order to pass entrance exams successfully. While teaching grammar there have been various problems related to the content, context of lessons and students' behavior which required the teacher to come up with new ways out. But this research report is dedicated to solving the issues encountered in the process of teaching and learning passive voice structure.

During the teaching experience several types of errors have been noticed when the students used passive voice. Some of them tended to omit auxiliary verb "to be" while others used incorrect form of main verb. Despite the fact that pupils are exposed to the form of the verb "to be" almost in their earliest English classes, they face difficulties in using this verb in further stages of their study. Because the verb "to be" is special having more forms than any other verb. Another crucial problem is that the students became tired and bored during the lesson because of the complexity of this grammar topic.

The present action research aims to improve passive voice mastery of school pupils by teaching this grammar topic in context and implementing games. Since presenting grammatical concept in isolation, without providing content, is not regarded beneficial and practical by many instructors, teaching grammar in context was chosen as an approach to conduct action research. Teaching and learning grammar is usually regarded as a boring process by many educators and students. But there are different engaging activities or techniques such as grammar games which can activate learners physically and help them practice grammar structures simultaneously.

Literature Review

Passive Voice. In English grammar, voice refers to the active and passive use of a verb. The active voice is used to make a direct statement about an action where the executor of the action is the subject of the sentence, such as in '*My grandfather planted this tree*'. However, passive voice is used when an indirect statement is made about some action, e.g., '*This tree was planted by my grandfather*'. The subject of the sentence is the receiver while the original executor of the action is the object of the sentence preceded by the preposition by. In other words, the subject does the acting in an active sentence while the subject is acted upon, or neglected in a passive sentence.

Difficulties in learning passive voice. A huge number of literatures are available on how to teach grammar and improve language accuracy, what aspects of grammar should be taught to students of different ages, but few researches are specifically

conducted to facilitate acquisition of passive voice by school students. Some researchers such as Agustini (2017), Parrot (2010) investigate students' difficulties in learning passives which can help find the root of problems and solve them. Because the form of passive constructions is quite complex, Parrot (2010) states that there are two main difficulties in learning and constructing passive voice: the difficulty in using the verb "to be" (auxiliary verb) and confusing the past tense form and the past participle. In many investigations conducted in EFL and ESL context we can notice that many learners, while using passive voice of simple present tense, had difficulty in determining subject in passive voice, difficulty in choosing correct auxiliary verb and using past participle form.

Teaching grammar in context. In most classes where grammar is taught in traditional way, language instruction focuses on teaching grammar at the sentence level. Sentence-level grammar refers to parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, and word order. But according to current teaching approaches, it is important to include grammar in context. A number of researchers such as Nunan (1998), Harmer (1991), Thornbury (1999), Anderson (2005) investigated contextual grammar teaching and gave recommendations to teachers in their scientific works. According to many researchers this approach does not involve presentation of a grammatical item in certain examples or to be able to choose the right form in a grammar exercise, but it demonstrates how a language item works within a conversation or piece of writing. Thornbury (1999, p.69) states: "Language is context-sensitive. This means that, in the absence of context, it is very difficult to recover the intended meaning of a single word or phrase". A grammar lesson may start with a context with the target grammar item. However, a lesson that uses context may start with the rule, examples and then later focus on the grammar item in context.

Teaching grammar in context will give learners an opportunity to understand how language works and this will improve their communication skills. As Harmer (1991, p.57) claims: "Students need to get an idea of how the new language is used by native speakers and the best way of doing this is to present language in context".

Grammar games. Games are an excellent way of both communicative grammar practice and incorporating interactivity into lessons as they allow pupils the opportunity to practice and develop language skills in an enjoyable and low-stress manner. According to Haldfield (1999): "A game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term." Thus, by implementing game in teaching, teacher can make lessons more meaningful and useful for understanding the language. In the literature four reasons to teach grammar through games are mentioned:

1) By using games in teaching grammar, students not only gain knowledge but also can apply and use what they learn. So, games are regarded as communicative activities.

2) Learning games usually contain repetition, which make the language easier and understandable

3) Games motivate students and involve cooperation and competition in the classroom.

4) Learning a new language requires a great effort from students. Games facilitate the matter because they are amusing and challenging (Vernon, 2008).

Research questions

The following research questions were formulated based on the theoretical basis and the aim of the study:

1. How do grammar games affect the mastery of passive voice by 9th grade students?

2. To what extent grammar games increase pupils' motivation to learn passive voice?

Research Methodology

The action research was conducted in an extracurricular environment with the 9th grade students during the English grammar course. The number of research participants are 4. As students had difficulties while mastering passive voice structure the teacher presented grammar in context providing short news report and article in cycle 1; and implemented several grammar games in the practice stage of lesson in cycle 2. The research was carried out within two classes and covered the passive forms of 4 tenses – Present and Past Simple, Present and Past Perfect.

The students' mastery of passive voice was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative research methods such as experiment and observation. In the experiment the researcher utilized pre-test and post-tests so as to know to what extent the treatment was effective and beneficial. Observation method enabled the researcher to detect the errors made by students and to conclude whether the approach, techniques could improve students' grammar skills and boost their motivation.

Action research project took place at teacher's home in a specially designed room for teaching. While implementing games different objects from the classroom were used in order to provide meaningful context for practicing passive voice.

The researcher followed the action research cycle proposed by Kemmis and Mc. Taggart (2000). According to this spiral model planning, acting, observation and reflection stages were applied and carefully studied. The researcher carried out two cycles of action research with revised plan.

Planning. During this stage the researcher determined problem, reviewed literature, created lesson plans and tests to measure students' performance.

Acting. The process includes implementation of lesson plans in practice and conducting lessons according to the pre-determined methods as well as aims.

Observation. In this stage the researcher organized tests complying the requirements of experiment and observed students' participation during the lessons.

Reflection. After the tests results had been converted into tables and charts, researcher made conclusion regarding to the solution of problem and how effective the treatment was (approach, techniques), referring to the results students showed. Cycle 2 also encompasses the same stages but with revised plan for teaching passive voice.

Findings and Discussion

Since the main problem was the difficulties students face and errors detected in the written and oral production of students in using passive voice, we administered pre-test which included several multiple-choice questions and grammatical transformation tasks. After the analysis of pre-test results common errors of pupils were identified and analyzed (Table 1).

Table 1. Students' errors in pre-test

№	Type of error	The example of errors from the test
1.	Omission of 'to be'	A: Ben *repaired* my computer. P: My computer *repaired* by Ben.
2.	Using incorrect form of the main verb	A: My sister *makes* amazing cookies. P: Amazing cookies *are makes* by …
3.	Confusing past simple and past participle forms of verbs	A: They *grow* strawberries every year. P: Strawberries *were grew* every year.
4.	Incorrect declension of pronouns after 'by'	A: *They* grow strawberries every year. P: Strawberries are grown *by they/us*…

The action research had 2 cycles. In the first cycle the teacher tested the effectiveness of teaching grammar in context in order to provide better understanding of the grammar topic and prevent errors from fossilization, i.e. the process in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot easily be corrected in language learning. The researcher tried to choose one of the contemporary methods in teaching grammar that worked well in many teaching contexts.

Throughout the research we administered 3 tests which are pre-test and post-test after each cycle. Each test consisted of 10 items and for each correct item 10 points were given. The number of items and maximum scores in tests can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Pre-test and Post-tests

№	Test	Number of items	Maximum scores
1	Multiple choice questions	5	50
2	Grammatical transformation	5	50
	Total	**10**	**100**

As the results of pre-test shows, the average score of students were 60 out of 100. Most of the scores were obtained on multiple-choice questions while on grammatical transformation tasks students made quite serious mistakes and converting active sentences into passive voice seemed difficult to learners. Even though the students had been taught passive voice structure in English classes at school their pre-test results were not as high as expected (Table 3). Thus, we decided to conduct lesson on passives as tests based on this construction can often occur on entrance exams.

Table 3. Results of the Pre-test and Post-test after each cycle

| №	Participants (initials)	Pre-test	Post-test Cycle 1	Post-test Cycle 2
1	SA	40	60	70
2	BA	50	70	80
3	KU	70	90	100
4	AD	60	70	90
	Sum	**240**	**290**	**340**
	Mean (average)	**60**	**72,5**	**85**

After the first lesson students' mastery of passives was improved gradually. Because during the lesson not only contexts (texts, reports) were used but also students completed gap-filling, transformation tasks and practiced making questions in passive voice. In production stage students were required to make a report about environmental events or accidents. In general, treatment i.e. the use of contextual grammar teaching was effective. We can see moderate increase in the students' post-test scores after cycle 1 (Table 3). However, as our observation shows students felt exhausted and bored because of the traditional written exercises which were focused mainly on form. Therefore, the next cycle of action research on the topic of passives has been administered.

In the cycle 2, grammar games were implemented while teaching present and past perfect passives. The teacher designed lesson plan on the topic which included different types of activities such as gap-filling, grammatical transformation, games as well as reading, analyzing news report. According to our observation it can be inferred

that students were enthusiastic and willing to participate actively when the teacher introduced them to the rules of the game. Students not only practiced grammar but also enjoyed the process. So, the games "Guess the country" and "Change the room" brought high results in terms of both language acquisition and motivation. Even post-test results confirm that the students' grammar skills in using the passive voice were significantly improved compared to pre-test and post-test of the first cycle (Table 3). The overall results obtained in the course of the experiment showed moderate progress in acquiring and using passive voice which can be seen in the diagram.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This action research helped us improve teaching by analyzing lessons, materials and approaches profoundly. It enabled to determine the problems which exist in the classes and find solutions to them. Specifically, after this action research there were
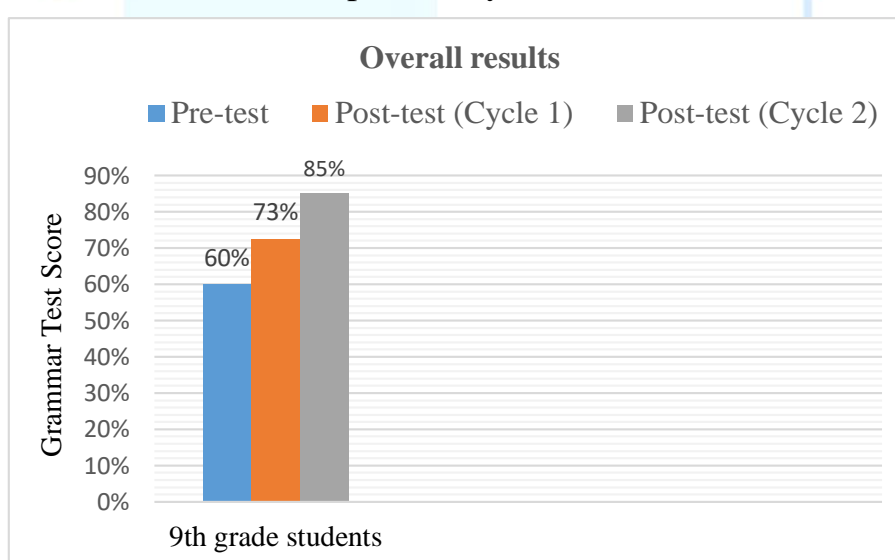
noticed positive changes in the students' learning as we have revised methodology and implemented some of the suggested techniques in grammar classes. In general, conducting action research provides clear insight into teaching, the problems encountered in the classroom and it leads to professional development of teachers.

Thanks to this action research project, we have learned different approaches to teaching grammar and analyzed their effectiveness in terms of students' progress. As the methods implemented during the research proved their effectiveness the researcher gives the following recommendations to English teachers who will have to teach grammar at least once in their career:

−   Teaching grammar in context facilitates learning any grammar item. So, it is better to use this approach while introducing new grammar concept.

−   As focusing on form during grammar lessons might generate boredom on the part of students, teachers had better apply at least one physically engaging or visually appealing grammar game so that to encourage students.

– Contextual grammar teaching and grammar games can be utilized together but in different stages of a lesson. Whenever they are used teacher should carefully plan the lessons and take into consideration age, level, needs, preferences and aims of learners.

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Internet resources

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