



Collaborative learning techniques to improve the english grammar competence

Técnicas de aprendizaje colaborativo para mejorar la competencia gramática en inglés

Técnicas de aprendizagem colaborativas para melhorar a competência gramática inglesa

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Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación fue mejorar la competencia gramatical del inglés mediante el uso de técnicas de aprendizaje colaborativo entre estudiantes de octavo año "C" en la Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla. Los métodos utilizados en este trabajo de investigación fueron los métodos científicos, descriptivos, estadísticos y analítico-sintéticos. Los instrumentos utilizados para recopilar datos sobre la actitud y el rendimiento de los estudiantes fueron hojas de observación, notas de campo, pruebas y cuestionarios. Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que los estudiantes lograron una mejora satisfactoria en relación con su competencia gramatical en inglés. En conclusión, el uso de técnicas de aprendizaje colaborativo permitió a los estudiantes desarrollar sus habilidades individuales y de equipo, mejorar su relación, aprender a ser más dinámicos y realizar las actividades de clase de manera efectiva.

Palabras claves: Técnicas de aprendizaje colaborativo; competencia gramatical en inglés; habilidades grupales.

Abstract

The objective of this research was to improve the English grammatical competence by using collaborative learning techniques among students of eighth year "C" at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla. The methods used in this research work were the scientific, descriptive, statistical and analytical-synthetic methods. The instruments used to collect data regarding students' attitude and performance were observation sheets, field notes, tests, and questionnaires. The results obtained showed that students achieved a satisfactory improvement in relation to their English grammatical competence. In conclusion, the use of collaborative learning techniques allowed students to develop their individual and team skills, enhance their relationship, learn to be more dynamic, and fulfill class activities effectively.

Keywords: Collaborative learning techniques; english grammatical competence; group skills.

Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa foi melhorar a competência gramatical do inglês, utilizando técnicas de aprendizagem colaborativa entre estudantes do oitavo ano "C" da Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla. Os métodos utilizados neste trabalho de pesquisa foram os métodos científico, descritivo, estatístico e analítico-sintético. Os instrumentos utilizados para coletar dados sobre a

atitude e o desempenho dos alunos foram folhas de observação, anotações de campo, testes e questionários. Os resultados obtidos mostraram que os alunos obtiveram uma melhora satisfatória em relação à sua competência gramatical em inglês. Em conclusão, o uso de técnicas de aprendizagem colaborativa permitiu que os alunos desenvolvessem suas habilidades individuais e em equipe, aprimorassem seu relacionamento, aprendessem a ser mais dinâmicos e realizassem atividades de classe de maneira eficaz.

Palavras-chave: Técnicas de aprendizagem colaborativa; competência gramatical em inglês; habilidades de grupo.

Introducción

Grammatical competence is the ability to master the grammatical aspects of a language such as grammar, lexis, syntax, semantics, and morphology. Therefore, the problem with grammar arises when people do not have knowledge about it or do not understand grammatical structures to create written texts. This problem is evidenced in the students of eighth year “C” at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, who are not able to make declarative and interrogative sentences. They present difficulties formulating imperatives to give directions and warnings, and they also get confused forming the singular or plural of nouns in sentences.

Collaborative Learning Techniques were chosen as a good option to improve students’ grammatical competence, considering their importance in the development of interpersonal and teamwork skills by participating in task-oriented learning groups. With these techniques, students were able to develop the tasks easily, understand the contents taught, brainstorm ideas and create well-structured sentences.

The objectives of this research work were met satisfactorily: the first one was achieved by searching for the most suitable theoretical information about collaborative learning techniques to improve the English grammatical competence; the second was accomplished with the pre-test results, the third was attained with the design of the intervention plan through eight lesson plans; the fourth was fulfilled through the application of Collaborative Learning Techniques, and finally, the fifth objective was reached with the results of the post-test.

This research-based journal article shows the following parts: the Title, the Abstract, the Keywords, the Introduction, the Objectives of the Research, the Theoretical References, the

Methodology, the Synthesis of Results, the Conclusions, the Recommendations, and the Bibliography.

Objectives

General

To improve the English grammatical competence by using collaborative learning techniques among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

Specific

To research the theoretical and methodological references about collaborative learning techniques so as to improve the English grammatical competence among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

To diagnose the issues that limit the English grammatical competence among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

To design an intervention plan based on collaborative learning techniques in order to improve the English grammatical competence among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

To apply the most suitable collaborative learning techniques in order to improve the English grammatical competence among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

To validate the results obtained after the application of collaborative learning techniques in order to improve the English grammatical competence among students of eighth year “C” of Basic Education, afternoon session at Unidad Educativa Marieta de Veintimilla, in the city of Loja during the 2018-2019 school year.

Collaborative learning techniques

Collaborative learning

Collaborative Learning is “an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task or create a product” (Albastroiu, I & Felea, M., 2013). Collaborative work is sometimes distinguished than the cooperative learning because all the learners work collaboratively on the same task rather than divide the tasks in the group. In the collaborative environment learners are challenged to come up with smart ideas to solve a problem considering different perspectives.

Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a natural act of humans. (Laal & Laal, 2012) considers that learners in the collaborative learning environment work in small groups by helping each other, by engaging in discussions, by taking the responsibility of their own learning and by exchanging and searching ideas to accomplish a task. Collaborative learning techniques differ widely from teacher centered approach where the teacher talks most of the time. In CL students make some effort, think critically, work mutually for understanding a problem, state possible solutions and select the best choice to solve the problem together. “Collaboration works better when members of the group rely on one another’s’ contributions, and are all equally invest in the group objective” (Brand, 2018).

It is important to mention that when teachers apply collaborative strategies into the teaching learning process, they can include variety which benefits the students’ learning. Students have opportunities to gain critical thinking skills by listening and debating about new topics, higher level thinking and communication skills in questions and answers, independent learning strategies, positive interdependence, ideas clarification and understanding, teamwork skills and ability to improve decision-making process to choose the best solution to a problem and they also develop skills for categorizing and organizing grammar structure. Collaboration is encouraged when teacher give specific roles to students through questions and their peers have to answer them. They are getting involved in building up mutual learning, supporting each other.

Even though the benefits of collaborative learning are countless, there should be certain conditions that help to fulfill the goal. These are:

The training of teachers

Select the appropriate collaborative technique

Small classes

Affinity or group-friendly

Teacher willingness to design collaborative lessons

Into the group in which collaborative learning is developed there must be certain elements that help them to succeed: positive interdependence, social skills, individual accountability, group evaluation and face to face interaction.

Collaborative learning techniques

Collaborative Learning Techniques (CoLTs) resemble recipes in which teachers give only directions; like cooks, they must provide students with actual ingredients (learning tasks), that learners need to handle (Barkley, Cross, & Howell, 2014). In other words, teachers will use these techniques as guidelines, as starting points that allow them to be creative in such a way they are able to adapt the CoLTs according to students' needs. These techniques allow students to develop their individual and group skills, laboring together and sharing the work equitably in order to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Learning Cell Technique or Peer to peer Learning is a reciprocal technique used in collaborative learning environments in which students individually develop questions about class topics taught, to then work with a partner, alternating asking and answering each other's questions (Barkley, et al., 2014). The purpose of this CoLT is to engage students in thinking about the subject content, to teach them to generate thought-provoking questions, and to help them to check their understanding. Thus, when students exchange questions and answers, they feel motivated and able to discuss them, to test their ability to understand, to correct each other, and to put into practice grammar learned. This CoLT is ideal to teach grammar because the teacher has to teach students how to write good questions by following the correct grammatical structures.

Learning Cell technique helps students feel motivated to work in pairs, interact with each other and persuade themselves. It also encourages practice in students' interpersonal skills such as giving feedback in non-threatening ways and teaching them patiently; and interacting without shyness. According to Barkley, et al. (2014), "students learn to question, explain, admit confusion, and reveal misconceptions—something that they are more likely to do with a peer

than with the instructor". The teacher circulates among the pairs or small groups to give feedback, answer questions, discourage distractions and keep the students on the topic" (Savage, 2016).

This learning technique encourages students to be more willing to volunteer answers, increases accuracy in asking and answering questions, helps in word sentence order, develops communication skills, and assures learners to stay focused throughout the whole class activity; and obviously it is the best technique to teach grammar in EFL classroom. On the other hand, teachers also feel more relaxed because

Affinity Grouping is a teaching technique that involves brainstorming and group organization of ideas. This technique allows students to generate ideas about a topic and write each item on a slip of paper. The task of students is sorting those slips of paper into categories in order to create coherent sentences. Furthermore, this technique can help students unpack a complicated issue and build groupings from the separate pieces, resulting in building group consensus (Barkley, et al. 2014).

This CoLT is useful for learners since it allows them to express their ideas and thoughts through a brainstorming. Students improve their relationship, everyone takes responsibility in the group, they trust in their abilities and collaborates to build a more complicated idea because it includes all the group ideas and thoughts. It was used to teach grammar in declarative sentences and subject and verb agreement. Initially students struggle to generate ideas about the topic but the more frequently it was applied, the better outcomes were obtained. Affinity grouping collaborative teaching technique not only improved students' skills in brainstorming ideas, sorting categories and classifying subcategories in grammar but, it also encouraged students accepting their roles and responsibilities in the task building and kept them engaged in the task.

There can be an effective variation in the application of this technique, when students have to make difficult decisions and they need to reach a group consensus. For instance, if they have to decide a research topic they can be asked to brainstorm ideas about the topic, write them on a slip of paper and then sort them into categories. The groups can review each other's categories and make suggestions for any reorganization and completing the idea or topic.

Word Webs is another teaching technique where a central word, phrase, or question is placed in the middle of a shapes such as circles, boxes triangles etc., and then drawing arrows or line with

the related concepts. According to (Vanderbilt, 2020) this technique is useful to generate a list of related ideas and then organize them in a graph by:

defining connections, demonstrating hierarchies, generating ideas through support and examples- and, when juxtaposing earlier and later concept maps, working out individualizer frameworks of understanding, building and argument, forming more complex syntheses of ideas and showing changes in thinking. identifying relationships and concept connections.

This technique is helpful to summarize information and remember key facts and ideas. In this study Word Webs were used to teach imperatives where students connected the verb with the action. Students were motivated to complete the task by making word webs in different ways. It was also useful to teach declarative sentences about daily routines where students completed the phrases meanwhile formed word maps and stayed engaged with the activity. Therefore, word webs are useful to teach grammar more efficiently rather than through simple patterns. They are visually attractive due to, the different shapes and connections that learners make. At the same time learners become creative and skillful at drawing while learning.

Methodology

The research methodology was the action research model which started by identifying the problem with students who have difficulties learning grammar. Then, an intervention plan was designed by using the scientific method in searching some collaborative learning techniques which were: learning in cell or pair work technique, affinity grouping and word webs to develop grammar competence. The descriptive method was used to describe what happened in the classroom, participants' actions and progress in learning. The statistical method was necessary to process the information and to represent the quantitative data into tables, and statistics data into figures. The analytic-synthetic method helped to analyze all the information that was found throughout the research instruments as well as to make the interpretation of the processed data, get a logical analysis of the data and draw up the respective conclusions and recommendations. The research techniques were basically a pre and posttest for the quantitative data and an observation guide and field notes to pick up the qualitative data.

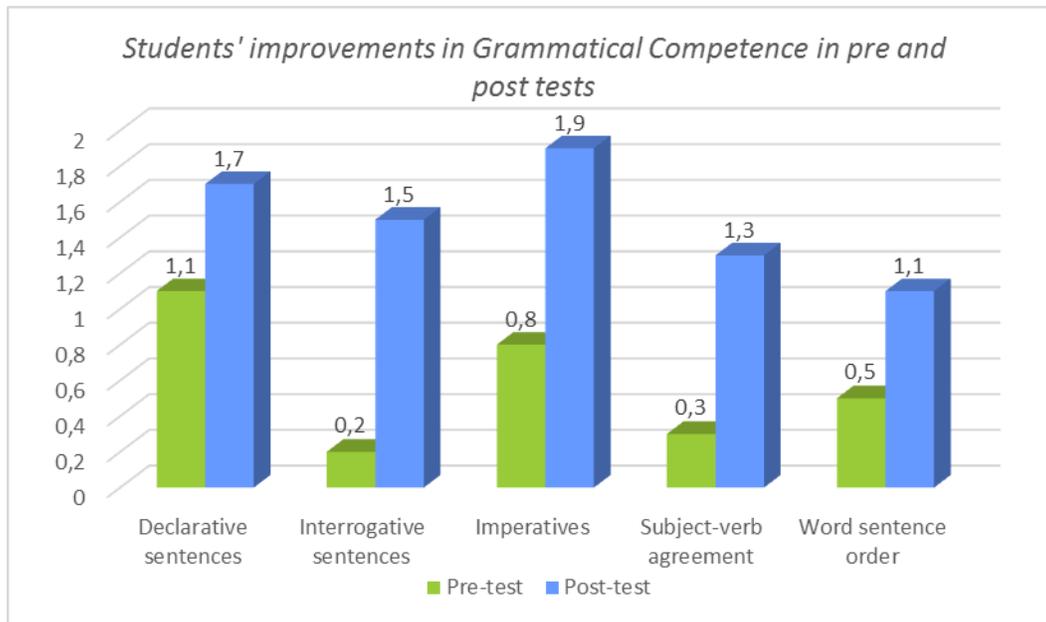
Results and discussion

The research was done with twenty-four students aged between 13 and 14 years old. They belonged to eight-year high school, where the researcher applied the collaborative teaching for an eight weeks period of time in order to improve the grammatical competence.

Table No. 1. Comparison of the Pre and Post-Test Means in Grammatical Competence

Aspects	Pre-test	Post-test
Declarative sentences	1.1	1.7
Interrogative sentences	0.2	1.5
Imperatives	0.8	1.9
Subject-verb agreement	0.3	1.3
Word sentence order	0.5	1.1
Mean	2.9	7.5

Figure No. 1



The results in the graph, reflect a satisfactory improvement that students achieved in the English grammatical competence, which is demonstrated with the mean scores obtained in the pre and post-test which was increased from 2.9/10 to 7.5/10. In fact, the application of the collaborative learning techniques which were, learning cell, affinity grouping and word webs show a satisfactory level in the enhancement in the English grammatical competence, specifically in

producing declarative sentences, yes/no and informative questions, imperatives, subject-verb agreement and word sentence order. Therefore, the study showed that students overcame their limitations, and they are able to understand and follow the grammatical structures as well as write and speak by using different types of sentences.

Conclusions

The application of collaborative learning techniques allowed students to overcome their difficulties in grammatical competence. They were able to express their ideas and thoughts in affirmative and negative form, create yes/no questions and information questions to talk about places in the city, people's routines, and give directions and warnings to get around the city following the grammatical patterns interactively. Therefore, collaborative learning techniques are an alternative that can avoid the boring way to teach grammar through patterns. They really support language active learning meanwhile students develop critical thinking and social skills.

Collaborative learning techniques such as, learning cell, affinity grouping and word webs are useful to encourage students to be creative, develop social skills, be organized in their activities and develop communicational skills. It also helps them to be motivated in the task development. Even though, it should be further researched about the application of collaborative learning techniques it is proved that they engage students more actively in their own learning,

Collaborative learning techniques also support teachers' work because their talking in class is limited and students' activities are more productive. Teachers have the opportunity to adopt a new methodological student-centered class through activities that help them being a scaffolder rather than a lecturer. Teachers also can design tasks which make students become active learners, cooperate with others, organized in their knowledge, make difficult decisions in consensus to solve problems and develop communicational skills.

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