

Article Critique of:

“The Effect of Call-Based Tasks on EFL Learners’ Grammar Learning”

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Summary

In this article, titled “The Effect of Call-Based Tasks on EFL Learners’ Grammar Learning” by Jalal ed-din- Alian, English language learners were assigned two different types of grammar tasks, depending on which group the students were in. One task was the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and the other task was a written questions task. The reason for the two different types of tasks is to determine whether or not having motivating tasks can have a positive effect on grammar learning. As stated in the introduction of the article, the literature states that tasks are classroom activities that promote language use and have clear expected outcomes for the students. However, many of these tasks are now being conducted through technological means. It is stated that Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is intended to link to people’s lives, jobs, and hopes while also promoting critical thinking, authenticity, and motivation through animated objects. This section of the article also discusses how there is a clear relationship between the four areas of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Therefore, advancing in one area, will affect advancement in other areas. However, grammar lessons tend to be boring to students, which makes it difficult for students to advance in grammar, and then affects other areas such as accuracy and fluency.

This study in particular was conducted with two groups. The experimental group was the CALL task group and the control group was the group with the written questions task. Each group was made up of 30 junior-high, male, native speakers of Persian with intermediate level of English language proficiency. The students in each group were randomly assigned to their groups and in two different classrooms. The CALL group completed their assignments at home with their computers and sent the completed assignments back through email or delivered through a CD. The other group completed a pre-test and a post-test, each containing 40 multiple

choice questions. This study was conducted in 15 sessions, which was sufficient time to teach students the grammatical rules of the course. Prior to the experiment, researchers offered participants a general explanation of the study, as well as an explanation of the importance of grammar in order to foster the motivation of students. The teaching of grammar to students was done in the following steps: First, various examples of the grammatical rule being used were provided, without an explanation. Second, students tried to understand the grammatical rule being presented in the various examples. Third, students shared their understanding of the grammatical rules in front of the classroom. Last, the researcher gave each group some assignments based on the type of task their group is experimenting with. However, both groups were divided into subgroups, in which each subgroup had a different task to complete. At the end of the 15 weeks, the participants completed a posttest. The data collected demonstrated that students in the CALL group performed better than students in the written task group. The CALL group not only was helpful to student learning, but it was also helpful in achieving student engagement and motivation. Photocopied written tasks on the other hand, did not engage the students nor show the growth in learning that the students in the CALL group did.

Critique

As stated in the introduction, the world is advancing, and so should education. A chalkboard and textbooks are no longer the only materials available in education to help student learning anymore. If phones, cars and homes are getting more advanced by the minute, why shouldn't education? Technology already plays a huge role in various aspects of an individual's life, and it is time we allow it to play a role the educational aspect as well. Not only that, but we do not need a study to tell us that just about any student would much rather learn through the use

of technology, rather than through pencil and paper. That being said, I think this experiment did a nice job in viewing the effects that technology can have on student learning of grammar. I think in the future, it would be interesting to follow up with this experiment by having the instruction of grammar taught more with technology. In this experiment, the technology piece was used more for the homework assignments assigned after the grammar instruction had been provided. Therefore, it would be interesting to see the effects of technology on student learning when used in technology as well. For example, students could watch grammar videos, listen to grammar songs, participate in online grammar activities as a class, etc. This would increase student motivation not only at home, but also in the classroom. Students are also more likely to truly learn the material in the classroom if they are engaged in the lesson, which will help them better complete their assignments at home.

Response

Overall, this experiment was done in a very careful and well-organized manner. I like that the students were chosen at random. I also see the value in making the instruction of grammar in the classroom the same among both groups, although in the future I think the study would benefit from doing the portion of the experiment differently. I would have the written task group continue their instruction in the classroom as done so in this experiment. However, with the CALL group, I would have instruction include more technology in the classroom as well. Student could complete activities on the Smart Board or their tablets, students could watch grammar videos and listen to grammar songs. My students would much rather listen to a Brain Pop Jr. video than to me sometimes. IN fact, at the beginning of most lessons, the first thing they ask is if they will be watching a Brain Pop Jr. video. In my own classroom, I have seen this

experiment in action. Our Math curriculum comes with an online component. After instruction, students can complete the workbook pages for that lesson, or complete an online lesson which corresponds with the work that would have been done in the workbook pages, except that it is far more visual, interactive and engaging. My students would much rather complete the online version of the assignment! I believe the same could be done with grammar. Students are being motivated in and outside of the classroom, while also truly internalizing the lessons in the classroom because they are being actively involved in the learning process.

References

Alian, J. E., Khodabandeh, F., & Soleimani, H. (2018). The Effect of Call-Based Tasks on EFL Learners' Grammar Learning. *Teaching English with Technology, 18*, 54–68.