



Effectiveness of using picture description technique for grammar: An experimental study

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Abstract

Learning and teaching grammar seem to be a challenge for most of the English as Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and teachers. There is a need to use creative and innovative techniques to teach grammar and tense. This study was conducted with the aim of exploring the effectiveness of using picture description technique to teach grammar and in particular the present continuous sentence pattern. This study was a descriptive survey research and mixed methods were applied in data collection. In this study, 25 students of Grade 10 and 10 ESL teachers of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur were randomly selected as sample population. The data collection instruments were an interview and a questionnaire. According to the opinions survey among the students and teachers, majority of the students express their lack of interest in learning grammar since interesting and creative games and techniques are not used in grammar lessons, and they accepted that the use of picture description technique can improve their ability of constructing sentence pattern and understanding the use of present continuous tense. Further, according to the findings of the questionnaire, majority of the teachers accepted that many English teachers do not use any techniques to teach grammar and tense, and the use of picture description technique can improve students' proper understanding of present continuous tense. In general, in teaching and learning English, both teachers and students encounter various difficulties such as lack of teaching materials, students' lack of interest, students' insufficient basic knowledge in English, lack of facilities to apply different techniques and games, over-crowded classroom, use of deductive method to teach grammar and tense and teaching tense with less use of interesting games and techniques. This problem can be overcome and students' proper understanding of present continuous tense can be improved when the suggested recommendations in this study are implemented.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, Grammar, Picture Description Technique, Present Continuous Tense

1. Introduction

Human language is vital to widen diplomacy affairs with any other language, which means that languages consist of meaning. The tool of communication either written or orally for socialization is taken place by language. Similarly, as concerning English language, English language has been the global language and it has been the language of administration, law, business, education, religion etc., in most of the countries around the globe. English language is spoken as first language (L1), second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) by over two billion people around the world. (Wikipedia). As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, English is spoken as a second language, and it is taught as a main or optional subject in the Sri Lankan educational context. In English language, there are various components: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing mechanism etc. Each and every component is significant in human verbal communication. In particular, grammar and grammatical accuracy has been very important for both speaking and writing.

However, developing grammatical accuracy has been a huge challenge among most of the ESL and EFL learners around the world. Traditionally grammar has been concerned almost exclusively with analyze at the level of the sentences, thus grammar is description of the rules that govern how language sentences are formed.

Learning the rule of grammar is important for ESL/EFL learners since English language is not the first language. Learners have to learn grammar using either deductive method or inductive method. It is a formal process. In grammar, tense is the primary component which shows time of action in sentence. When the learners possess lack of knowledge in tense, they will be unable to communicate either orally or written.

Accordingly, Martin tense is part of grammar which has to be learnt, tense is form of verb that shows the time of the action, those are present, past and future (pp. 427). With regard to aspect of tense, Halik et al (2020) ^[6] defines that tense is a significant component in English grammar which helps the learners to construct grammatically correct sentence according to time. There are three tenses and four aspects for each tense, namely: simple, progressive, perfect and perfect continuous.

In spite of it, both the learners and teachers encounter difficulties in learning tense and aspects due to various factors. One of the primary factors is learners' lack of interest in learning grammar. Learning grammar section as well as teaching grammar section seems boring for most of the ESL/EFL teachers and students. Although students are good at tense and aspects, they are unable to use them in speaking or writing. This seems another problem among the learners. In a similar study, Halik et al (2020) ^[6] indicate that the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners confront difficulties in using appropriate tense in their writing and speaking according to the context. When the tense and aspects are taught using different techniques and games, students are interested in learning grammar and tense which gives a great positive impact on learners' improvement in communicative competence.

According to Sri Lankan context, English is taught as a main subject from grade 3 to 13 at schools. Tense is introduced in textbook from grade 6. Present continuous tense is introduced in grade 6. However, the students do not reach the expected learning outcomes. They show a lack of interest in learning grammar and English. As a result, teaching grammar and tense seems difficult for ESL teachers at the school educational context. Based on the problems observed among the teachers and students, this current study was carried out with the aim of using the technique of picture description to improve the ability of constructing sentences in present continuous tense among the grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur.

1.1 Problem Statement

Tense is the significant component in grammar. Insufficient rule of tense in English grammar will lead the ESL/EFL learners find difficulties in developing their grammatical accuracy and other productive skills. In spite of the importance, learners show their lack of interest in learning tense since deductive method of grammar teaching is applied in classroom according to school context. Although English grammar is introduced step by step in the textbook, they fail to realize the value of English. As a result, the teachers too encounter challenges in teaching grammar and tense. In particular, it was observed in classroom teaching among the selected grade 10 students that most of the students are poor in constructing sentences in present continuous tense. They are unaware of the rule of sentence pattern. This problem was observed in not only constructing present continuous tense

but also in other aspects. However, the use of picture description can develop the ability of constructing sentences in present continuous tense with a proper structure.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are addressed in this study.

- To investigate the difficulties and challenges encountered by ESL learners and teachers in Mutur Education Zone, Trincomalee District in learning and teaching tense
- To experiment whether the use of picture description technique improves the ability of constructing simple sentences in present continuous tense
- To suggest necessary remedies and recommendations to improve the ability of constructing sentences and teaching tense using different techniques

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the problem and findings in classroom teaching/learning process, the following questions are formulated in this study. They are as follow:

- Do most of the grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur find difficulties in constructing simple sentences in present continuous tense?
- Do ESL teachers at the selected schools in Mutur Education Zone, Trincomalee District face difficulties in teaching present continuous tense?
- Does the use of picture description technique help the teachers to make the students to construct simple sentences in present continuous tense?
- Does the use of picture description technique help the students improve the ability of constructing simple sentences in present continuous tense?

2. Literature Review

This section presents the review of other relevant secondary sources.

2.1 Grammar and Tense

As reviewing secondary sources with regard to English grammar and tense, there are a number of relevant studies which had been previously conducted. Traditionally grammar has been concerned almost exclusively with analyze at the level of the sentences. Therefore, grammar is description of the rules that govern how language sentences are formed. Further, Naser (1984) states that grammar is the study and practice of the rules by which word change their form and are combined into sentences. As stated above, grammar consists of the rule and structure, to master in grammar, the learners have to learn the rule of grammar. Further, According to Murphy (2004) ^[5], grammar is the study of language structure. It is the study of rules to talk and write in certain language. (Murphy, 2004) ^[5],

2.2 Present Continuous Tense

Since this study was based on present continuous tense, other relevant studies were reviewed to discuss the current study. Accordingly, a study was conducted on the use of present continues tense Thomson & Martinet (2001) ^[8] explain the use of present continuous tense as: 1. the event and action happening now, 2. for action and event happening about this time but not necessary at the moment of speaking, 3. present continuous tense expresses an activity that is in progress at the moment of speaking, it began in the recent past, is

continuing at the present and will probably end at some point in the future, 4. Present continuous tense also means for definite arrangement in the near future (the most usual way expressing one's immediate plan).

2.3 Teaching Present Continuous Tense Using Picture Description

Although there are many techniques of teaching present continuous tense, the picture description technique has been the best technique to teach present continuous tense since the primary use of it shows the present action that is happening at the time of speaking. Murphy (2004) ^[5] explains that we use present continuous tense for actions and happenings that have started but not finished. Moreover, it helps the teachers to explain the structure and pattern of present continuous tense easily. In this sense, as reviewing other relevant studies, Tahir (2008) ^[7] conducted a similar study titled "The use of series picture as a technique to improve students' mastery simple present continuous tense of SMP Al-Hilal". In this study, Tahir (2008) ^[7] try to use series of pictures in order to make the student to be interested in learning English, especially in simple present continuous tense. In this research, Tahir (2008) ^[7] use EGRA method which is a technique uses the real object to teach present continuous tense. EGRA is a method to teach structure communicatively, it was developed by a teacher at secondary school and high school in Indonesia, it is based on presentation, practiced and communication.

3. Methodology

This study was carried out with the aim of using the technique of picture description to improve the ability of constructing

sentences in present continuous tense. This study was a descriptive research and survey method was used. The sample size of this study was 60 grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur and 10 ESL teachers in the selected schools in Kinniya Education Zone. This sample was selected using random sampling technique for data collection. In this study, the secondary data were collected from research studies, books, journals, social media and other web pages. On the other hand, two instruments were used to collect the primary data. They were interview and questionnaire. The data collection method of this study was both qualitative and quantitative. Based on the problem of this study, the instruments were designed to collect opinions among the students and teachers regarding the difficulties in learning and teaching grammar and tense as well as the impact of using picture description technique to teach sentence pattern of present continues tense. Finally, the collected data was statistically analyzed for the findings of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the primary data collection.

4.1 Students' Response to the Interview Questions

This section presents the findings of the data analysis of interview. The interview consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. All 60 students responded to the interview questions. Before conducting the interview, clear instructions were given to each participant. The following Table (1) shows the participants' response to the questions in the interview. The response is given by percentage.

Table 1: (Students' response to the interview questions)

Interview questions	Students' response by percentage	
	Yes	No
1. Are you interested in learning English?	40%	60%
2. If so, do you like to learn grammar?	44%	66%
3. Do you have any ideas about tense?	32%	68%
4. Can you make sentences on your own in present continuous tense?	35%	65%
5. Does your English teacher use any interesting games or techniques to teach present continuous tense?	20%	80%
6. Do you think that use of describing picture technique can improve your ability of constructing present continuous tense sentence?	90%	10%
7. Will you like the lesson if your teacher uses the technique of picture description to teach present continuous tense?	100%	-

According to the findings of the students' response in the interview, most of the students are not interested in learning English and grammar. Moreover, they do not have basic knowledge in English and tense. It has been a huge challenge for most of the ESL teachers at school context. As a result of students' lack of interest and insufficient basic knowledge in English, the ESL teachers encounter difficulties in teaching English and grammar. Although they are grade 10 students, tense is introduced in grade 6. They should have prior knowledge about tense. According to the students' response, 65% of the students were unable to make sentences in present continuous tense.

Further, a large number of students (80%) responded that teachers do not use any interesting games or techniques to teach present continuous tense. Application of traditional teaching method with the less use of techniques and games will make the students bored in learning grammar and tense. In grammar lessons, most of the students like different games,

activities and techniques. Similarly, picture description technique is one of the best techniques to teach present continuous tense since the primary use of present continuous tense is an action happening at the moment. When the students were asked whether the use of picture description technique can improve the students' ability of constructing sentence pattern in present continuous tense, 90% of the students responded 'yes' and they will like the lesson when this technique is applied in classroom.

Therefore, based on the problem and aim of the existing study, students' response shows that the use of picture description technique can improve the students' ability of constructing sentence pattern in present continuous tense.

4.2 Teaching and Learning Grammar and Tense

This section presents the difficulties faced by students and teachers of English in teaching and learning grammar and tense. The difficulties in learning grammar and tense were

collected from students' perspective through the interview. The difficulties in teaching grammar and tense on the other hand were collected through the questionnaire. The following

Table (2) shows the difficulties in learning and teaching grammar and tense.

Table 2: (Difficulties in learning and teaching grammar and tense)

No	Difficulties in learning grammar and tense	Difficulties in teaching grammar and tense
1	Lack of basic knowledge in English	Lack of teaching materials
2	Use of deductive method to teach grammar and tense	Students' lack of interest
3	Teaching tense with less use of interesting games and techniques	Students' insufficient basic knowledge in English
4	Lack of interest and motivation	Lack of facilities to apply different techniques and games
5	Use of traditional teaching aids	Over-crowded classroom

As shown in the above table, due to lack of basic knowledge, interest and motivation in English and less use of interesting techniques and games, students faced difficulties in learning grammar and tense. Similarly, due to students' basic knowledge in English, lack of interest in learning English, over-crowded classroom, lack of teaching aids and facilities, the teachers faced difficulties in teaching grammar and tense. However, it is obvious that less use of techniques and lack of facilities to use different techniques leads to find difficulties in learning and teaching grammar and tense.

4.3 Teachers' Response to the Questionnaire Questions

This section presents the findings of the data analysis of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. All the selected teachers responded to the questions. Before sending the questionnaire to the teachers through WhatsApp, they were clearly instructed. The following Table (3) shows the participants' response to the questions in the questionnaire. The response is given by percentage.

Table 3

Questions	Students' response by percentage	
	Yes	No
1. Do you think that teaching grammar and tense is difficult for you in school context?	76%	24%
2. Have you ever taught grammar using interesting games and techniques in classroom?	40%	60%
3. Do you use any techniques to teach tense?	50%	50%
4. Do you think that use of picture description technique can improve students' ability of constructing present continuous tense sentence?	100%	-
5. Do you use picture description technique to teach present continuous tense?	36%	64%
6. Will you apply this picture description technique to teach present continuous tense?	100%	

According to the response given by the teachers, the findings show that most of the teachers encounter difficulties and challenges in teaching grammar in school context. The primary factors for the difficulties are students' lack of interest and basic knowledge in English. Another factor is over-crowded classroom. As far as the school context is concerned, each class consists of over-crowded students. This is one of the reasons for the failure of English Language Teaching (ELT). Moreover, based on the aim of this study, all the teachers accepted that the use of picture description technique can improve the ability of constructing sentence pattern in present continuous tense. They are willing to apply this technique in the classroom to teach present continuous tense.

5. Conclusion

Tense has been a significant component in English grammar. Verb and tense seem important to grammatically construct sentences according to the context and develop the verbal communication of the ESL/EFL learners. In spite of it, most of the students show their lack of interest in learning grammar and tense. Their performance seems lower in grammar lessons in the classroom. As a consequence, the teachers encounter difficulties in teaching grammar and tense. The reason behind their lack of interest is the use of deductive teaching methods and traditional teaching aids. When different games and techniques are applied in the classroom, they may like the grammar lessons. Similarly, the current study aimed at using the picture

description technique to teach present continuous tense sentence pattern. As far as the picture description technique is concerned, it is the best technique to teach present continuous tense even though there are several techniques. Hence, this existing study was carried out to investigate the impact of using picture description as a technique to teach present continuous sentence pattern among secondary students. Since this study was a survey research, in this study, the opinions were collected from students' and teachers' perspective regarding the impact of using picture description technique.

According to the opinions collected among the teachers and students, the findings of the interview show that most of the students show lack of interest in learning grammar since interesting games and techniques are not used in grammar lessons. Moreover, they accept that the use of picture description technique can improve their ability of constructing sentence pattern in present continuous tense. They encounter difficulties in learning grammar and tense. The difficulties include: lack of basic knowledge in English, use of deductive method to teach grammar and tense, teaching tense with less use of interesting games and techniques, lack of interest and motivation and use of traditional teaching aids. Further, the findings of the questionnaire show that most of the teachers accept that teaching grammar is difficult. Most of the teachers do not use any techniques to teach grammar and tense. Moreover, they accept that the use of picture description technique can improve students' ability of constructing sentence pattern in

present continuous tense. They encounter difficulties in teaching grammar and tense which include: lack of teaching materials, students' lack of interest, students' insufficient basic knowledge in English, lack of facilities to apply different techniques and games and over-crowded classroom

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the followings can be recommended to overcome the issues in learning and teaching grammar and tense and students' ability of constructing sentence pattern can be improved using picture description technique. The recommendations are as follow:

- The ESL teacher at school context should use various interesting games and techniques to make the grammar lesson interesting.
- The ESL teacher should apply picture description technique to teach present continuous tense.
- Sufficient teaching/learning materials should be given by school management.
- The ESL curriculum designers should include a number of interesting techniques and games for tense lesson in the school textbook.

6. References

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