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THE EFFECT OF CONSTRUCTING AND ANALYZING MODEL IN ENHANCING TERTIARY EFL LEARNERS' GRAMMAR AND WRITING ABILITY

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Abstract

This research aimed at examining the effect of Constructive and Analyzing Model on learners' grammar mastery and writing ability at the university EFL context. The study also attempted to seek the light on how they perceived about the implementation of the model in learning grammar integrated with writing activities. A quasi-experimental with pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design was employed, involving 49 university learners. Cloze-grammar tests and questionnaire were used to collect the data. Before administered, the instruments were tried out

in a pilot class to establish validity and reliability. The experiment group was engaged in CAM activities following five major phases, such as text observation, form/function and discourse connection, grammar exploration, peer and reflective feedback, and comprehension check and clarification, meanwhile the control group received no treatment and was taught by using an ordinary method. The independent sample t-test was performed using SPSS 25 to investigate the difference of grammar mean score between these two groups in terms of S-V agreement and tenses. The results revealed that the Sig. (2-tailed) values of the experiment group and the control group were .015 and .586 respectively, and the significance value between the groups was .039. The findings showed that there was a significant difference on the grammar score between the experimental group and the control group. It revealed CAM could assist learners not only to understand grammar lesson more easily but also to make a use of their grammatical knowledge in writing more accurately. Furthermore, most of the participants perceived positively towards the implementation of CAM in learning grammar. Since the implementation of CAM is effective in grammar class, ELT practitioners are suggested to apply this model on other skills in different areas.

Keywords

Constructive and Analyzing Model, Grammar Mastery, S-V Agreement, Tenses, Writing, Perception, EFL University Context

1. Introduction

The extent to which grammar instruction should be explicitly taught in EFL classrooms has been widely recognized and received support from various research findings over the past two decades (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2002; Norris & Ortega, 2000). It takes an important role to facilitate learners to acquire the target language, and this can be achieved either using input-based or output-based instructions. While the former is commonly carried out by explaining the target forms and various structured tasks to increase retention, the latter is conducted through such explicit explanation of target forms followed with various communicative output-based activities.

VanPatten (2004) compared these two teaching paradigms and found that the input-based instruction affected more in terms of grammar form comprehension and production as a compared to the output-based one. While incorporating input-based instruction is undeniably necessary for grammar learning, however, the role of output process cannot be neglected as

learners can ‘notice the gap between their linguistic resources and the target language system’ and this fundamentally fosters language acquisition (Swain, 2005). This ultimately means that both paradigms are equally important, and engaging learners in such input-output process simultaneously will benefit them from understanding grammatical patterns and its usage, i.e., in writing.

Due to the needs of equipping learners with communicative skills, most grammar teaching has set the objectives to assist learners not only to understand forms of language but also be able to use their grammatical knowledge accurately for communicative purposes. Consequently, there is a high demand to involve learners in such situation where they can get an adequate input of language forms and make a use of them in communication context. Hence, this study is not intended to compare the influence of input-based or output-based instructions on grammar mastery, whereas it mainly attempts to propose a technique, so-called constructing and analysing model (henceforth, CAM) to help tertiary EFL learners to comprehend and produce target forms during and after the grammar instructions.

CAM is a pedagogical methodology which centres on its belief that the grammar instruction might only gain an optimum result if the process is centered on students’ activities with contextual and communication modes of learning (Nunan, 1998). This mode of instruction engages learners in such communal activities where they are given a huge of opportunities to interact and explore grammatical knowledge in various communication contexts, i.e., writing in order that they can understand variety of language forms and know when and how to use it. Several research findings showed that structural-based teaching alone failed to help learners to make use of their grammatical knowledge into a real-life communication (i.e., Bartolata & Meneses, 2016). Accordingly, both functional theories and communicative modes of grammar teaching should be performed in the classroom to ensure the assimilation process happened. Teaching grammar using this model aims at not only assisting learners to understand grammar or structure but also guiding them on how to use their grammatical knowledge to interpret, negotiate, and express meaning for communicative purposes, particularly in writing.

Theoretically, the basic principle of CAM is basing on the context-based approach where learners learn grammar in an integrated way with language skills. Systematic grammar practice through writing sentences will help learners to improve the accuracy of grammar usage and the quality of their writing (Hillocks & Smith, 1991). Substantially, this mode of teaching is suitable to apply in grammar class, particularly at EFL university level, since this model offers a wide

chance for learners to construct their own knowledge in grammar (Aljohani, 2017; Ashton-Hay, 2006; Mvududu & Thiel-Burgess, 2012). They work together to analyze the target forms, give and process feedback with their peers, and apply their grammar knowledge in writing to deepen their understanding.

Substantially, learners benefit from learning grammar in a context using CAM. Firstly, since this model provides both input-based and output-based activities, there would be a more meaningful process and productive results in learning grammar. Grammar might not be presented as a discrete course which has no direct link or rational correlation with other subjects that can result in difficulties and frustration to understand and use it. However, they will have more comprehensive insight on when and how to use grammar properly. Besides, group work discussion and peer review might become most essential part in the process of learning grammar through this model.

Indeed, the process of learning grammar will be more interactive as individuals will engage themselves in such collaborative process to discuss their writing together focusing on the accuracy of the target forms, give and learn from each other feedback, and revise errors they make in writing. When they work collaboratively to analyze errors in the target forms, this obviously provides opportunity to enhance their listening and speaking skills (Hull, 2018), as well as shape reasoning and critical thinking skills. Moreover, this can create a communicative interaction in the classroom where learners can learn and practice their grammar in such free-risk environment. Such classroom atmosphere might be of great importance as it psychologically can reduce barriers which most of them might encounter, such as learning anxiety, reluctance, boredom and other negative behaviors. Thus, it will also shape their mindset and motivation in learning grammar (Ocampo, 2017).

However, teachers might encounter challenges when implementing CAM in grammar class. Since traditionally grammar has been presented explicitly in the form of lecturing with excessive drilling activities and memorization of target forms (Al-Mekhafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Hinkel, 2004), they might get difficulties in managing and arranging the class because of some factors; for instance, learners' negative attitude towards this model as they are more likely keen on receiving information and pretend to be reluctant and passive in joining the class. Besides, regardless of their proficiency levels, most EFL learners might not be sufficiently equipped with analytical and critical thinking skills. As a result, they might have big problems when they are required to be more independent in learning, i.e., constructing their own knowledge related to

target forms and analyzing errors in their own or other written works. However, this activity is important to assist students to improve their noticing skills – the ability to observe the existing gaps prior the mistakes they make with the correct targeted form from the feedback they receive (Mufanti, 2016; Mufanti & Susilo, 2017).

Notwithstanding, the problems above are natural as acquiring grammatical rules need considerable time, effort, and process. While the failure of traditional grammar teaching is true as indicated by the lack of grammar mastery and the ability to use it in communication among learners, CAM might serve as a potential way to uncover these problems. Given this, grammar instruction will be well-arranged to help them observe critically a model text, encourage them to construct their own knowledge related to the target forms, and connect it into writing context to understand the function, facilitate classroom interaction where they can work in small group, peer, or even individual work, as well as provide reflective feedback. Thus, it is obvious that the implementation of CAM might successfully help learners not only to understand target forms but also to be able to use the knowledge into various communicative context.

Although the implementation of CAM receives adequate supports from both theoretical and practical bases, it needs to be empirically approved. Therefore, this research attempts to investigate the effect of this instructional mode on learners' grammar mastery at EFL university level. In particular, this present study aims to answer two questions as follows.

- Do the group of learners taught by using CAM have better grammar mastery than those taught by using an ordinary method?
- How do learners perceive of the implementation of CAM in learning grammar?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed quasi-experimental with pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design. The design was chosen under consideration that the study aimed to examine the effect of CAM on learners' grammar mastery (Wiersma, 1991). Two groups of learners were assigned into an experimental group and a control group. While the former group received the treatment in the form of teaching grammar using CAM, the later received no treatment – ordinary method was employed by implicitly teaching the rules and manipulating models of sentence structures followed with drilling activities. Two variables were involved – the

independent variable was the method used in teaching grammar (CAM and the ordinary method), and the dependent ones were the groups' grammar mastery and writing ability.

2.2 Participants

The study was conducted at one of State Islamic Institutes basing in East Java, Indonesia, involving two intact classes consisted of 49 learners. These two groups were randomly selected among three existing classes after the result of homogeneity test was established. The respondents were 19 years old in average and they shared similar demographical information in terms of culture, religion, and education background. All of them were native speakers of Indonesian (national language) and Javanese (local language).

2.3 Instruments

The instruments used in this present study were test and non-test. The grammar test was used to get the data about the respondents' grammar mastery before and after the treatments. It took the form of a cloze test that consisted of 20 items and was administered (pre-test and post-test) to measure the participants' knowledge of subject-verb (S-V) agreement and tenses. They were required to finish off the test in 50 minutes, and each correct item was scored 1 (the maximum score gotten was 20).

Meanwhile, the non-test instrument was in the form of questionnaires which were given twice during and after the treatments for the purpose of gaining data on how the respondents perceived of the implementation of CAM in learning grammar. A paper-based questionnaire was distributed to the respondents which covered four main aspects: understanding grammar lesson, applying grammar knowledge into written communication, developing other language skills, and increasing self-confidence and motivation. A 5-Likert-scale was used to elicit their responses ranging from totally agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or totally disagree with the questions. The data gained was collated and calculated, and then responses were converted into a percentage to be presented in the form of a cart for analysis.

Before administering the instruments, they were tried out to the other class (the pilot class) that was excluded as samples ($N=24$) to establish the validity and reliability. The study employed Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient to measure the validity of the instruments performed with SPSS 25. With the significant level of 5%, it was found that r_{table} was 0.432. Given this, the items of grammar test and questionnaire were said valid if the values of r_{count} were higher than those of r_{table} . The results of the validity test revealed 21 out of 25 items of grammar test were declared valid. Meanwhile, there were 22 out of 25 items of the

questionnaire considered valid. The items declared invalid were dropped out and excluded from the reliability test. For the sake of this study, each instrument would use 20 items.

Moreover, Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the reliability. Based on the statistical calculation, it revealed the values of the instruments (grammar test and questionnaire) were .887 and .914 respectively. Both values were higher than 0.6 which meant that those instruments were reliable.

2.4 Procedures

The experiment covered a period of ten weeks including two tests and eight teaching-learning grammar sessions. The experiment group was engaged in CAM activities following five major phases, such as text observation, form/function and discourse connection, grammar exploration, peer and reflective feedback, and comprehension check and clarification.

Firstly, an authentic text was given and the participants were assigned to observe the model text, particularly focusing on the S-V agreement and tenses. In pairs, they were required to analyze the sentence structure and share the results with other pairs to deepen their understanding of the interconnection between the language form and function they learned – a brief clarification and explanation given to build a better understanding. Furthermore, in the exploration stage, each participant was assigned to write a short paragraph based on the selected topics and guided instructions. Prior to the written works they produced, in addition, they were paired and asked to review each other's work and provide feedback on errors in writing by circling, underlining, or using codes (a short training on giving feedback was given in advance). To strengthen and make the peer review process more meaningful, a reflective form of feedback was provided by selecting samples of the participants' written works and having in-class discussion. Lastly, comprehension check was done by asking and digging their understanding related to the grammar lesson they learned – if it was needed, clarification was provided. The participants were assigned to revise their writing based on the feedback they received.

3. Results

3.1 Assumption Test for Parametric Statistic

The initial step of data analyses was to perform normality and homogeneity tests on the results of pre-test and post-test to ensure that the research object fulfilled the statistical testing criteria. The normality test was carried out using Shapiro-Wilk and the homogeneity test used Levene test.

Table 1: Result of Normality Test

Groups		Shapiro-Wilk					
		Pre-test			Post test		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Value	Experiment group	.971	25	.677	.962	25	.480
	Control group	.963	24	.505	.943	24	.192

Table 1 depicts the statistical calculation of normality test using SPSS 25. The result showed that the significant values of the experiment and control groups were respectively .677 and .505 in the pre-test, and .480 and .192 in the post-test. The values were higher than .05, and this meant that the data from both groups had a normal distribution.

Table 2: Result of Homogeneity Test

		Levene Statistic		Sig.	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Value	Based on Mean	.391	1.904	.535	.174
	Based on Median	.438	1.847	.512	.181
	Based on trimmed mean	.425	1.903	.518	.174

Table 2 provides the result of statistical calculation of homogeneity test. It was found that the significant values within two groups in pre-test and post-test were .535 and .174 respectively. Both values were higher than .05 which meant that the two groups were homogenous.

3.2 Independent Sample t-test

The independent sample t-test was conducted after the normality and homogeneity tests indicated that the data had normal distribution and homogenous. The hypotheses of this study were as follows.

- Ho: There was no a significant difference of the grammar mean score between the experiment group and the control group.
- Ha: There was a significant difference of the grammar mean score between the experiment group and the control group.

Table 3: Independent t-test of Experiment Group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	.211	.648	-2.54	48	.015	-1.400	.55209	-2.510	-.2899
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.54	47.52	.015	-1.400	.55209	-2.510	-.2896

Table 3 presents the data about the result of independent samples t-test in the experiment group using SPSS 25. It revealed that the significance value (2-tailed) was .015. Since the value was lower than 0.05, this meant that null hypothesis was rejected, and alternative hypothesis was accepted. In other words, there was a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-test in the experimental group.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test of Control Group

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	1.904	.174	-.548	46	.586	-.3333	.6084	-1.558	.8913
	Equal variances not assumed			-.548	43.9	.587	-.3333	.6084	-1.559	.8929

Table 4 illustrates the result of the t-test performed by using SPSS 25 in the control group. It was found that the significance value (2-tailed) was .586 and this value was higher than

.05. This meant that there was no a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-test in the control group.

The result of independent sample t-test between the groups is presented in Table 5 as follows.

Table 5: Independent Sample t-test between the Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	1.599	.212	2.119	47	.039	1.270	.59936	.064	2.475
	Equal variances not assumed			2.109	43.91	.041	1.270	.60217	.056	2.483

As shown in Table 5, the significance value was .039. This value was below .05 indicating that null hypothesis was accepted, and alternative hypothesis was rejected. This ultimately meant that there was no a significant difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-test in the experimental group.

3.3 Learners' perception towards CAM

Learners' perception towards the implementation of CAM in grammar class was the other concern in this study. The result might give a clear picture of the perceived impact of this model on their grammar and writing abilities in accord to their personal lenses. The results of the questionnaire are presented in Figure 1 and 2.

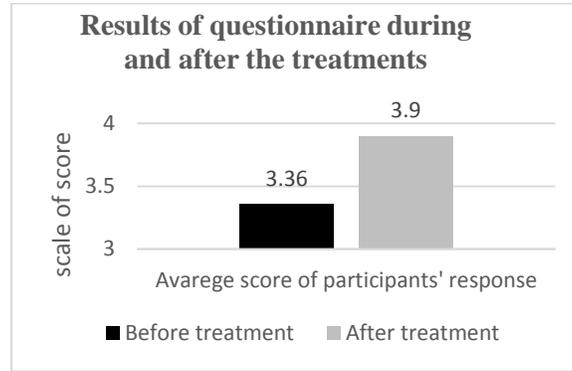


Figure 1: Perceived Impact on the Implementation of CAM

Figure 1 highlights the results of questionnaires before and after the participants were given the treatments. The result showed that there was a gradual increase in the respondents' perception of learning through CAM during and after the treatments. It was recorded that the mean score went up from 3.36 to 3.9 or it increased as many as 0.54 points. The increased score was likely sufficient to justify that most respondents perceived positively on the implementation of CAM in learning grammar.

In detail, Figure 2 presents data about the results of questionnaire per indicators.

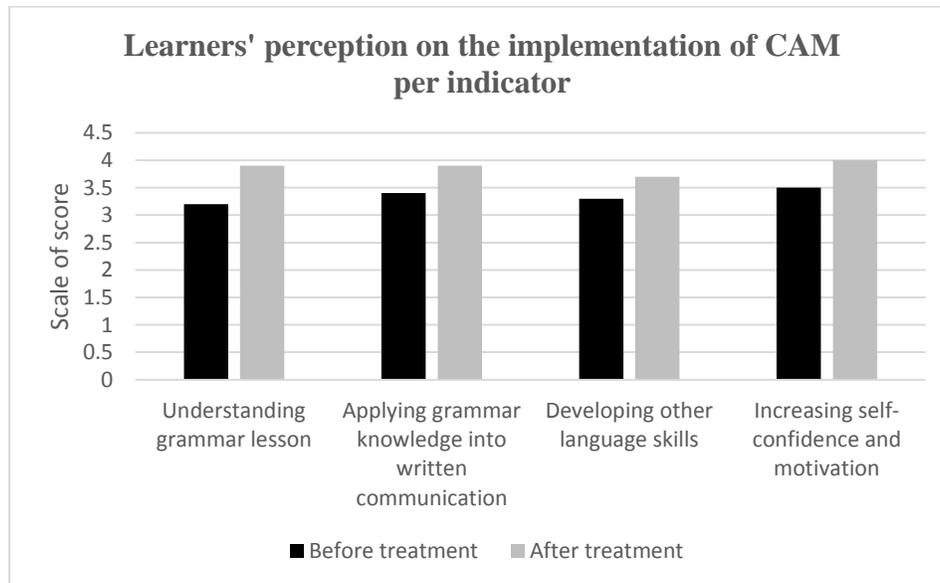


Figure 2: Perceived Impact on the Implementation of CAM per Indicator

As described in Figure 2, on the average, all perceptual indicators increased after the treatment given. The four aspects being questioned in this study, such as grammar comprehension, application of grammar knowledge, other related skills development, increased steadily from 3.2, 3.4, 3.3, and 3.5 during the treatment to 3.9, 3.9, 3.7 and 4 consecutively. The

respondents recorded that CAM could assist them to comprehend the grammar lesson more easily as compared to the ordinary method they had before. It was believed that they were better able to implement their grammar knowledge in writing, improve other skills, and motivate themselves to learn grammar. Overall, learners perceived positively on the implementation of CAM in learning grammar.

4. Discussion

The present study was carried out to examine the effect of using CAM on learners' grammar mastery and find out their perception towards learning grammar using this model. It was hypothesized that the group of learners who were engaged in grammar instruction using CAM had a better score than those who did not. The major findings supported the hypothesis.

Most significantly, it revealed that the experiment group outperformed the control group in terms of S-V agreement and tenses. It was evident that there was a significant difference between the results of grammar tests (pre-test and post-test) in the experiment group, and the results of post-tests between the experimental group and the control group. Meanwhile, the result of post-test in the control group proved in reverse. One possible reason why learners taught using CAM demonstrated a higher degree of grammar mastery might be because they benefitted from the contextualized-grammar activities where they had huge opportunities to learn and practice their grammar knowledge in a sort of communicative interaction (Nunan, 1998).

Another possible explanation why learners who learned grammar using CAM had a better score in grammar was that they had more chances to construct their own knowledge on the targeted forms and analyze the connection between the forms and functions of language, particularly in writing context. As a result, this group was better able to not only understand the grammar but also apply their grammar knowledge in communication skills as compared to those who were taught using the ordinary method. On the contrary, the control group relied more on memorizing activities with excessive use of exercises. These modes of instruction were considered far from being effective, and most of students found it difficult to enhance their grammar. The finding revealed that the mere use of drilling activities gave fewer impacts on learners' understanding of target forms nor their ability to use their grammar knowledge in the context of written communication.

Another finding confirmed the positive connection between engaging learners in such grammar instruction embedded in language skills. The result revealed that learning grammar in

the context of writing helped them improve their written productions in terms of its accuracy and quality. The result added the study conducted by Hillocks and Smith (1991) in which learning grammar integrated with the writing activity could increase both their comprehension about the targeted forms as well as their accuracy in writing. It was almost certain that CAM benefitted learners from understanding S-V agreement and tenses through writing process where they could apply their grammar knowledge into a piece of writing, give or receive feedback from peers, negotiate meaning and revise their writing to improve the accuracy and quality of their writing.

Although learners might benefit from peer review, it was necessary that they needed to be trained very well on how to positively discuss each other's work as well as receive or provide feedback. In doing so, therefore, they had a positive interdependence to learn from each other and prove their grammar. Interestingly, in addition, teacher's clarification played a vital role to ascertain what they had learned or understood, as well as enhanced their awareness of their further learning. Thus, the systematic process of learning grammar which integrated both input-based and output-based instructions (Swain 1995, 2005) was proven to become an effective way to improve learners' grammar mastery.

Moreover, the results revealed that learners perceived positively towards the implementation of CAM in learning grammar at the university level. The main finding revealed that, in general CAM could assist them to comprehend the targeted forms more easily as compared to the ordinary method applied in regular class. The reason behind this assumption was that the model provides a wide opportunity for them to learn grammar in a context (writing) where they could construct their own understanding by analyzing the interconnection between the targeted form and its function to develop more comprehensive understanding. This aspect was not promoted in the class where traditional method was used as it placed the grammar learning separated from the process of learning (Calkins, 1980; DiStefano and Killion, 1984; Harris, 1962; Hillocks, 1986; Weaver (1998).

Furthermore, the result also indicated that CAM could help learners improve not only their grammatical knowledge but also their communication skills, particularly writing, and other related skills, such as high order thinking, analysis, and collaborative skills. Most responded recorded that they benefitted from the use of CAM in learning grammar in terms of enhancing motivation and self-confidence in learning grammar. The use of CAM, as the finding showed, could help them manage their anxiety, unawareness, boredom, and reluctance.

5. Conclusion

The findings support the hypothesis that CAM significantly impacts on the development of learners' grammar mastery at university context. The group who received the treatment using this model could outperform in grammar test in terms of S-V agreement and tenses as compared to those who learned grammar using the ordinary method. The study suggests that students would better retain grammatical patterns if they have wide opportunities to engage themselves in any contextual activities where they get adequate grammatical inputs and make a use of their knowledge, i.e., in writing process by processing the received feedback in pairs or groups. This mode of teaching enables them to construct their own understanding on the targeted forms they are learning and shape their noticing skills to uncover any grammatical problems (Mufanti & Susilo, 2017). The study adds to the research literature that teaching grammar through a context (Nunan, 1998) can help them not only to comprehend the targeted forms more easily but also to increase their ability to use any grammatical knowledge in written works.

Moreover, most learners perceive positively on the implementation of CAM in learning grammar. All perceptual aspects investigated in this study – understanding grammar material, applying grammar knowledge in writing, developing other skills, and improving self-confidence and motivation in learning grammar—are positively recorded by learners. The findings demonstrate that this model is better able to engage learners in such input-output process where they can comprehend and uptake the targeted forms more easily, as suggested by Hillocks & Smith (1991).

However, the results of this study might not be able to be generalized to all university context as some limitations found in this study. It was recognized that the treatment was not highly controlled as some aspects might also influence the findings, such as the peer review training during the experiment. Besides, it excluded a delay test to know in greater detail the impact of the model on learners' grammar mastery in longer terms. A further investigation related to this issue regarding with these limitations is essential to conduct to clarify some of the findings.

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