

Attending to the Grammatical Errors of Students using Constructive Teaching and Learning Activities

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Abstract

This study was a classroom-based action research. In this study, constructive teaching and learning activities were used to help learners improve on their grammar and usage with a focus on how to help them internalize subject verb agreement rules. The purpose of the research was to assist learners to improve upon their performance in grammar and usage. This action research aims to explore how constructive teaching and learning activities which are learner-centered activities can help learners to overcome their subject verb agreement errors and to improve on their English grammar and usage. Seventy eight (78) Level 100 (first year) students from the Faculty of Science, University of Education, Winneba took part in the study. The study started with a pre-test in grammar and usage. This was followed by two focus group discussions. The students were then taken through the intervention designed by the instructor. Constructivists' activities were used to guide the students to correct errors in their sentences. After the intervention, the students were interviewed about their impressions. There was a post-test at the end of the intervention. The outcome of the study showed an improvement in students' performance in grammar and usage.

Keywords: action research, constructivist approach, grammar and usage, grammatical errors, learner-centered activities

1. Introduction

The English language has its grammar governed by rules. Speakers of the language have to make concerted effort to learn how words are put together to form sentences to enable them to effectively communicate in the language. In Ghana, because English is learnt as a second language (ESL), English grammar is taught in schools, colleges and the universities for students at the various levels of the academic ladder to be able to communicate effectively; especially in written English. This is because all other subjects are taught in English and answers to questions in the various subjects are written in English.

The role of English grammar in one's progress in academic work cannot be ignored. The teaching of English grammar in schools, colleges and the universities is essential. This is because for learners to be able to construct well formed sentences, they need to understand the basic rules that govern sentence construction in the language. This would enable them write the language in a manner that conforms to standard written English. Inadequate knowledge of English grammar or poor language proficiency affects the performance of students in their various disciplines and for that matter their academic progress. Ferris (1999) points out that ESL students' linguistic errors are bother-some and affect their overall evaluation of student papers.

As a country that uses English as its official language, the educational institutions, teachers and other stakeholders such as parents have made much effort to curtail the preponderance of grammatical errors in the spoken and especially the written English of students. One of such efforts is the teaching of grammar and usage especially subject verb agreement rules in the country's tertiary institutions such as colleges, polytechnics and universities. Quagie (2011) argues that much more effort needs to be directed towards the teaching and learning of English grammar in the universities to improve on the current situation where students' essays, scripts and End of Semester Examination scripts are inundated with various kinds of errors in sentence construction.

To address students' writing needs at the tertiary level in the country, all students who get enrolled are expected to offer a course that is designed to help them improve on their language and study skills. This course is titled Communication Skills in most of the country's universities. In the first year when students come to the university as fresh men and women, they are taught reading skills, writing skills and English grammar and usage to enable them refine their language and study skills. The aim of teaching students these skills is to enable them write essays with minimal grammatical errors throughout their study at the university. Unfortunately, it appears that the teaching of English grammar rules does not make students write essays with minimal grammatical errors. Moreover the performance of students in the grammar and usage section of the Communication Skills End of Semester Examinations shows that most students are not able to apply the English grammar rules that they are taught to choose the appropriate verbs to complete given sentences.

Students' inability to apply the grammar rules that they are taught in writing their essays was diagnosed. Series of written exercises were planned for students. As the scripts were marked, the common errors in the sentences of students were taken note of. The End of Semester Examination scripts of students were examined and it was observed that the scripts were inundated with grammatical errors especially subject verb agreement

errors. In spite of the fact that students have studied English for over ten years at the elementary and high schools before they get enrolled at the tertiary level, most of them still write ill-formed sentences and they are not able to perform well in grammar and usage exercises. Even, at the university, after they have been taught subject verb agreement rules, they are still not able to write without committing subject verb agreement errors in their writings. The grammatical errors in the English of students at the university level range from subject-verb agreement errors, errors in tenses, challenges with the use of prepositions, errors in the use of pronouns etc. Of these errors, subject-verb agreement errors are very common in the writing of students.

Some examples of subject-verb agreement errors found in the writings of students include the following sentences: *Each of the isotopes have their own atomic number* instead of 'Each of the isotopes has its own atomic number'. *The invention of mobile phones have made communication easier* instead of 'The invention of mobile phones has made communication easier'. *Students' notes is used as record for future reference* instead of 'Students' notes are used as record for future reference'. *The country's unemployment figures continues to rise to the disappointment of many experts.* Instead of 'The country's unemployment figures continue to rise to the disappointment of many experts.' *Diseases such as cholera is a threat to the life of mankind* instead of 'Diseases such as cholera are a threat to the life of mankind'. *Ensuring equity in the distribution of education, health and water facilities have been essential to development* instead of 'Ensuring equity in the distribution of education, health and water facilities has been essential to development'.

It seems enough practical work has not been done by the learners to internalize the grammar rules learnt in the lecture room. Some researchers in second language acquisition (for example Krashen 1982) have argued that explicit knowledge of grammar produces only a superficial and transient form of knowledge which does not become implicit knowledge and is therefore of little value for the actual use of language. This may account for students' inability to write well formed sentences after being taught subject verb agreement rules. However, other researchers like DeKeyser (1998) have pointed out that explicit knowledge of grammar is converted into implicit knowledge if learners are given the chance to practice what they are taught through a lot of communicative activities. If this is the case, then there is the need for students to be taken through practical exercises and open discussions on the subject verb agreement rules to help them internalize the rules for them to be able to perform well in their grammar and usage exercises and write essays with minimal grammatical errors.

Through focus group discussions with selected students, it was realized that teaching grammar rules explicitly indeed produces transient knowledge that the students are not able to apply the rules that they are taught when they are writing. Some students indicated that they do understand the subject verb agreement rules when the rules are taught in the lecture halls but they are not able to apply the rules when they are writing. This shows that students are not able to internalize the grammar rules that they are taught. They are therefore not able to apply the rules in their sentence constructions. Moreover, some students are not conscious of the correctness of the sentences they construct.

In this study, constructive teaching and learning activities were used to help learners improve on their grammar and usage; especially subject verb agreement rules. The instructor avoided direct instruction and the students were led through questions and activities to discover discuss, appreciate and verbalize the discovery of the subject verb agreement rules and other issues concerning grammar and usage. The purpose of the research was to assist learners to improve upon their performance in grammar and usage.

This action research aims to explore how constructive teaching and learning activities which are learner-centered activities can help learners to overcome their subject verb agreement errors and to improve on their English grammar and usage.

1.1. Literature Review

The teaching of grammar occupies a central part in the teaching and learning of a language. The spoken and written forms of every language have to conform to the word order rules of the language in question. Richard and Rogers (1995) point out that children entering grammar schools between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries in England were given a vigorous introduction to Latin grammar. According to them, the decline of Latin brought modern languages including English into the curriculum of Europe schools in the eighteenth century and they were also taught using the same basic procedure. Stern (2001) points out that the teaching of English started with the teaching of grammar rules. The teaching of grammar therefore occupies a central part in the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language. The teaching of grammar therefore forms the main focus of teaching English. For example, Flores (2010:99) points out that "language teaching in the Philippine secondary education is synonymous to grammar" and "it is a common observation that in the elementary and secondary levels of the Philippine educational system, the teaching of grammar is the bulk of the instruction, if not the focus".

The importance of teaching grammar in schools and colleges has been emphasized by many language teachers. Angeli-Carter (1998) observes that grammar is central to the teaching and learning of languages and points out that one needs to grasp the grammar of the target language in order to be able to speak and write it

correctly. Le Tourneau (2001) states that one's knowledge of grammar is most helpful at the stages of revising and editing sentences because grammar is concerned with the units of sentences. Long (2007) argues that subject-verb agreement is a relevant grammatical skill for effective communication and standard written English. Quagie (2011) emphasizes the importance of teaching English grammar in schools and colleges and points out that there is the need to intensify the teaching of English grammar in schools and colleges.

The importance of teaching ESL learners English grammar cannot be underestimated. What is contended is the approach to the teaching of grammar among SLA researchers. There are numerous models and different approaches that teachers adopt in teaching grammar. Apart from the various models that are now available to teachers, the oldest approach used in teaching grammar is Traditional Grammar Teaching (TGT) which follows the PPP model (Present-Practice-Produce). Batstone and Ellis (2009:194) stated some of the models now available for teaching grammar as "Scrivener's (1994) ARC model (Authentic Use-Restricted Use-Clarification), Harmer's (1998) ESA model (Engage-Study-Activate) and Van Patten's (1996) Processing Instruction." The contention in teaching grammar is over the approach that best facilitates or enhances ESL learners' ability to communicate effectively through their spoken and written English.

The easy and popular approach to grammar instruction is to resort to the teaching of English grammar rules. This is the approach most teachers use. This is known as the traditional method of teaching English grammar. There have been some criticisms against the traditional method of teaching English grammar. In particular, Brown (1994) states that the traditional method of teaching grammar does virtually nothing to enhance a student's communicative ability in language learning. Flores (2010) in a study conducted observes that "the traditional method of teaching English grammar does not provide adequate grammatical instruction because students either listen to or provide a definition for a particular grammatical point being discussed." Ellis (2006:102) states clearly that:

Although there is now a clear conviction that a traditional approach to teaching grammar based on explicit explanations and drill-like practice is unlikely to result in the acquisition of the implicit knowledge needed for fluent and accurate communication, there continues to be disagreement regarding what should replace this.

The criticisms against traditional grammar imply that there is the need to change the traditional approach of teaching English grammar rules as the means of teaching grammar. Some researchers have even argued that teaching students English grammar rules rather leads to the situation where students are confused because there are many rules for them to learn. For example, Truscott (1996, 1999) has argued strongly that in ESL writing, when learners are given feedback in the form of correcting their errors, grammar correction does not help them to write better, it rather turns out to be harmful.

The inadequacy of the traditional method of teaching English grammar calls for a shift from the mere teaching of grammar rules to an approach that adequately addresses the grammar needs of learners. In the words of Flores (2010: 106) "the challenge to reflect the changing philosophies about language learning and teaching in the way grammar is taught in the classrooms could never have been more pressing than today". As noted earlier, the importance of grammar instruction in ESL is acknowledged by many ESL researchers. What is left unresolved is the approach to be adopted. It is therefore acknowledged that the explicit teaching of grammar rules is of some value to the learner to acquire implicit knowledge for fluent and accurate communication. What researchers and practitioners need to delve into is how and what makes the explicit teaching of grammar rules beneficial to learners.

For us to investigate how and what could make explicit knowledge become implicit knowledge, let us examine the different points of view with regards to explicit grammar instruction. Ellis (2006) identifies three separate points of view with regards to explicit grammar instruction. These are the noninterface point of view, the interface point of view and the weak interface point of view.

The noninterface point of view is strongly argued by Krashen (1982). The implication of this position to the teaching of grammar is that there is no need to teach learners of a language grammar rules with the expectation that the grammar rules will let the learners speak fluently or write accurately. Ferris (2010:198) points out that "although some scholars concluded long ago that grammar instruction (Hartwell, 1985; Krashen, 1982, 1984) has limited and perhaps nonexistent value", most teachers and researchers in ESL continue to believe in explicit grammar instruction. The question that one may ask is why do language teachers still believe in explicit grammar instruction? Teachers still believe in explicit grammar instruction because it does work. There is evidence that shows that the explicit teaching of grammar rules becomes implicit knowledge and results in the improvement of the learners' use of language.

The interface point of view maintains that explicit grammar instruction is converted into implicit knowledge when students are given the opportunity to practice the grammar rules that they have been taught. This argument has been advanced by DeKeyser (1998) who has argued that "explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge if learners have the opportunity for plentiful communicative practice."

The weak interface position argued by Ellis (1993) and reiterated in Ellis (2006:97) maintains that

“explicit knowledge can convert into implicit knowledge if the learner is ready to acquire the targeted feature and that this conversion occurs by priming a number of key acquisitional processes in particular noticing and noticing the gap” proposed by Schmidt (1990).

The interface point of view and the weak interface point of view are similar and in effect the same in two senses. In the first sense the two positions agree that explicit knowledge of grammar can convert into explicit knowledge and for that matter explicit teaching of grammar is of value to the learner. For this reason both points of view agree that there should be explicit grammar instruction to help students who are learning English as a second language to communicate effectively either through their spoken English or written English.

The second sense in which the two points of view are similar is that they both provide the conditions under which knowledge gained through explicit grammar instruction can become implicit knowledge. To put the arguments advanced by the interface and the weak interface points of view together, we can conclude that knowledge gained through explicit grammar instruction can become implicit knowledge when learners are ready to acquire the structures being taught and are given enough room to practice what they are taught.

The realization that knowledge gained through explicit grammar instruction can convert into implicit knowledge as a result of exposure to practice and noticing shows that if learners are given the opportunity to participate in activities and practice what they are taught, it may lead to an improvement in learners’ knowledge of English grammar. This is where the constructivists’ activities used in the teaching of grammar need to be considered in the grammar classroom. The constructivists’ approach to grammar instruction employs teaching and learning activities that engage learners and make teaching learner-centered. If the constructivists’ method is used in teaching explicit knowledge of grammar, it is likely to help learners improve on their implicit knowledge of grammar. This approach therefore needs to be considered in teaching explicit knowledge of grammar.

The foundation of the constructivists’ approach to teaching is rooted in the belief that acquisition of knowledge occurs when learners are given ample opportunity to interact and construct meaning for themselves. By giving learners the opportunity to engage in series of activities and practice exercises the constructivists approach to teaching tend to foster critical thinking and make learners independent in their thinking.

Constructivism as an approach to teaching is based on the extensive study of Piaget (1977) about the cognitive development of children through various stages of their growth and development. Towney Fosnot (1989) in his description of constructivism highlighted four principles. First, “learning, in an important way, depends on what we already know” Second, “new ideas occur as we adapt and change our old ideas” The third principle is that “learning involves inventing ideas rather than mechanically accumulating facts” Finally, “meaningful learning occurs through rethinking old ideas and coming to new conclusions about new ideas which conflict with our ideas.” A constructivist classroom that is likely to produce good results should therefore utilize what learners already know and try to build on their previous knowledge by giving them the opportunity to notice what they already know and drawing their attention to new information. This is likely to help learners adapt to new idea and consequently change their old ideas. If we apply this to the teaching of grammar rules, it means that the teacher or the instructor has to provide learners with activities and experiences that would make learners manipulate the grammar rules, pose questions, make predictions on the basis of how the rules operate and draw conclusions for themselves.

A constructivist classroom is a learner-centered classroom. From the perspective of constructivists, the learner is seen as a meaning maker. For this reason, teacher-centered approaches to teaching are not used. In place of teacher-centered approaches, learner-centered approaches are used. In learner-centered approaches, the emphasis is on the processes that learners use to grasp the meaning of the concepts being taught. Applebee (1993) points out that the subject of English should not be treated as a subject matter that learners have to memorize. Rather, the subject of English from the constructivists’ approach is treated as a body of knowledge that the learner has to construct through experiences and the social interactions that occur in the classroom. The constructivists’ learner-centered approach tends to focus more on the learner learning more than the teacher teaching.

The learner-centered approach used by constructivists makes use of learners working in small groups to discover solutions or answers to questions or challenges that confront them in the learning process. Yager (1991) maintains that the constructivists approach poses a question to the learners and they work together in small groups to arrive at solutions. From the point of view of Lindfors (1984) we learn by working to solve problems. So, how teaching is done should be a reflection of how learners learn.

As pointed out above, the constructivists’ approach is a learner-centered approach to teaching. Because constructivists believe that the learner should be the focus of classroom activities, constructivist classrooms are organized in such a way that learners are given series of activities to interact with one another and ask questions, make reflections, and arrive at solutions. The aim of this approach to teaching is to create a classroom environment that is democratic enough to provide an atmosphere where learners can feel free to question what they do not understand and learn from peers as well as from the teacher. The constructivist classroom is a kind of classroom where teachers create a kind of learning environment for the learners to question their own

assumptions as well as that of their peers and the teacher. Lester and Onore (1990) call for a complete rethinking of teaching approaches and argue for a change in classrooms arrangements to reflect how learning takes place.

The constructivists' approach to the teaching of grammar does not isolate periods or hours devoted to grammar. On the contrary, constructivists' approach treats grammar within the context of what learners write. Grammar is taught by using learners' own pieces of writing as the basis for the teaching and learning of grammar issues in the classroom. This helps learners to see how the teaching of grammar can help them improve on their writing. Addressing grammar issues, then, does not become a separate project isolated from the writing experience. It is another stage in the evolutionary process of writing. The constructivists' approach of teaching grammar makes use of series of stages such as mini-lessons, grammar journals, one-on-one conferences and peer group activities.

Some studies have found out that constructivists' approach to the teaching of grammar has led to significant improvement in the performance of learners. Khlid and Azeem (2012) in a study compared the teaching of grammar based on the constructivists' approach to a teaching method that followed the traditional approach and found out that learners who were taught using the constructivists' approach performed better on a test that was administered. In their study, there were two groups of learners whose performances were found to be equal regarding their achievement scores in English before the study but after the study their performance was found to be different. They therefore attributed the significant difference in their performance to the different teaching approaches used. Blyth (1997) used the constructivists' approach to help apprentice teachers to perceive aspectual correlations of English and concluded that the constructivists' approach facilitated innovation in teaching grammar.

2. Method

This study was a classroom-based action research. It was initiated by the instructor. The project began with a pre-test in grammar and usage. This was followed by two focus group discussions. The students were then taken through the intervention designed by the instructor. After the intervention, the students were interviewed about their impressions. There was a post-test at the end of the intervention.

2.1. Participants

Seventy eight (78) Level 100 (first year) students from the Faculty of Science, University of Education, Winneba took part in the study. Most of the students did not perform well in the grammar and usage section of a pre-test quiz that was organized for them.

Students whose performance fell below 30% in the grammar and usage section were selected for focus group discussions. Two focus group discussions were conducted to find out the difficulties of these students in sentence construction with particular reference to subject-verb agreement errors. A total of 23 students scored below 30% in the grammar and usage section. Two separate focus group discussions were held. The instructor met 12 of the students and had a focus group discussion with them and met the other 11 later for another focus group discussion. The discussions were held to let students voice what their difficulties were in grammar and usage.

The concern of the instructor was to assist the students to improve on their performance, so all the 78 students were involved in the action research. The whole group was involved because of two reasons. The first reason was that the instructor did not want to create any negative impression by forming a less ability group and a high ability group. The second reason was that the students whose performance was above 30% were included so that those whose performance was below 30% could learn from them. Moreover, students who scored above 30% also committed grammatical errors.

2.2. Intervention activities

The intervention activities used included writing exercises, correction of errors in sentences, group work and class discussions using the constructive teaching approach where all the activities were learner-centered. The students were given writing exercises in the form of writing a paragraph on given topic sentences in each lesson during the intervention period. The writing exercises enabled the instructor to be exposed to the grammatical errors in the sentence construction of the students. The grammatical errors identified were noted and the scripts given out to the students during the next lesson for them to be part of correcting the errors in their own sentences. Some of the striking grammatical errors identified were highlighted and discussed to enable students to take note of the correct form of the sentences in order to avoid the errors when they are writing. The errors were reproduced as 'worksheets' for students to correct. The correction of errors went on alongside with the discussion of why particular sentence constructions constitute errors on the basis of subject-verb agreement rules, tenses, pronoun references and correct use of prepositions. Also, students were asked to keep Grammar Journals (a notebook that contains sentences with grammatical errors) for them to re-write these sentences correcting them in several different ways. The details of the activities carried out during the intervention period are

described below.

2.2.1. Mini-lessons

Mini-lessons are “teaching moments” inspired by students’ work. Students were given topic sentences for them to develop into paragraphs as their writing exercises. Sentences with grammatical errors in them were selected from students’ work and used to promote discussion about the stylistic choices students make. By doing this the students were active in the discussion of their own sentences as well as the sentences of their colleagues. These lessons gave students the opportunity to engage in editing and revision of sentences. After marking a set of students’ work, the instructor selected problematic sentences from students’ essays and created a ‘worksheet’ of 10-20 student sentences. The goal of the exercise was to have students work on 5 sentences each class day, during the “mini-lessons” period. During the first 10-20 minutes of class, students worked on sentences individually or in groups; then the instructor invited students to share their revisions with the entire class. Because the strategy emphasizes stylistic choices as well as “right/wrong” answers, class discussions centered on the range of stylistic and grammatical choices students had made and how those choices improved or failed to improve the original problematic sentence. The discussions occurred as an outgrowth students’ work.

2.2.2. Grammar Journals

During the intervention period students kept grammar journals. A grammar journal is a notebook used to record sentences that contain errors. The sentences written in the grammar journals were obtained from students’ work submitted to the instructor. The instructor tried to guide students to identify their errors. This was done by placing an asterisk against the sentence in which the error occurred. The errors were not corrected by the instructor. After the students had identified the error, they copied the sentences that contain the errors into their journals. The task of the students was for them to correct the sentences. The students were encouraged to write the sentences they had to correct in different ways making use of different stylistic options. The students who did not have much grammar problems were also encouraged to use the grammar journals to try several stylistic option of expressing the same idea. They were encouraged to exploit other ways of expressing what they had written by rearranging sentences they had created in various ways to create emphasis or change the feel or mood of a piece they had written.

Grammar journals were collected every week after a piece of writing had been marked and returned to students. This was considered an effective approach for the students since it provided them with immediate feedback and reinforced the concept of revision as an integral part of the writing process. The grammar journals were brought to conferencing sessions and grammatical issues that had become problematic for the students were discussed.

2.2.3. Peer Groups

Some of the mini-lessons were conducted as group activities. The group activities gave students the chance to “talk out” the rationale for the grammatical choices they had made. This strategy provided students the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their peers about their writing. The students were entreated to work on the problematic sentences selected from their essays. Students in each group worked together to correct the legitimate problem with the sentences. This approach reinforced the concept of learning communities. The instructor’s role as a teacher diminished as students learnt from each other; then the instructor invited groups to share their revisions with the entire class.

2.2.4. One-on-One Conferences

Apart from classroom activities in the form of mini-lessons, group activities and class conference discussions, one-on-one conferences were also used to address some of the grammatical problems of students. During one-on-one conferences, the instructor required students to bring their grammar journals to discuss some of the editing choices they made and to monitor students’ progress in identifying and correcting grammatical errors identified as problematic in their work.

2.3. Data Collection

Two focus group discussions, a pre-test, two quizzes, interviews and a post-test were used to collect data for this study. Quantitative data came from the quizzes, the pretest and the post test and qualitative data came from the interviews and the focus group discussions.

2.3.1. Focus Group Discussion

Two separate focus group discussions were held at the diagnostic stage. The purpose of the discussions was to establish the reasons for the students’ poor performance in the grammar and usage section of the pre-test that was administered. The focus group discussions were held to find out the difficulties of learners in English grammar as well as what they think can be done to help them to overcome their difficulties. This information was needed to help plan the intervention activities.

2.3.2. Pre-test and Post-test

A pre-test quiz was conducted for all Level 100 students offering the Communication Skills course. This quiz exposed the difficulties of the students in grammar and usage. This test was conducted before the intervention

was implemented. After carrying out the intervention, a post-test exercise was conducted and the result compared with the pre-test performance to see whether the intervention worked or not.

2.3.3. Quizzes

Two quizzes were conducted during the intervention period. They were conducted to monitor students' performance to determine whether the intervention was creating a positive impact on the students.

2.3.4. Interviews

Ten students were selected from the two focus groups and interviewed after the intervention. They were interviewed to find out their impressions about the intervention activities; to find out their views and the impact that the intervention activities have had on them.

2.4. Presentation of Data

Data collected from the pre-test, the two quizzes and the post-test were presented in the form of tables and bar graphs showing the performance of students before, during and after the intervention. Data collected from the focus group discussions were presented showing the difficulties of students in grammar and usage. Data collected from the interviews were presented showing the impressions about the intervention activities and the impact of the activities on the performance of students in grammar and usage.

3. Results

The students who took part in the focus group discussions disclosed that they were most of the times confused over the grammar rules and were unable to decide which rule to apply in specific contexts. They all viewed the learning of grammar as a difficult task. They indicated that their aim was to try hard to get scores that will enable them pass the Communication Skills paper as a university required course. They all thought that learners had to undergo the learning of grammar at the university so that when they complete school they will be able to speak and write Standard English. All of them express a strong belief that the learning of grammar is useful to their writing and general academic performance.

The students who were interviewed indicated that the intervention was of great help to them in improving their understanding of grammar. After the introduction of the constructive teaching and learning activities, some students said they began to enjoy the grammar lessons. Some students indicated that they were always in great expectation of the kind of activities they were taken through during the intervention period. They looked forward to having the lessons again. Some students expressed their satisfaction about the changes that have taken place in their sentence construction and writing as a whole as a result of the activities that they were taken through during the intervention period.

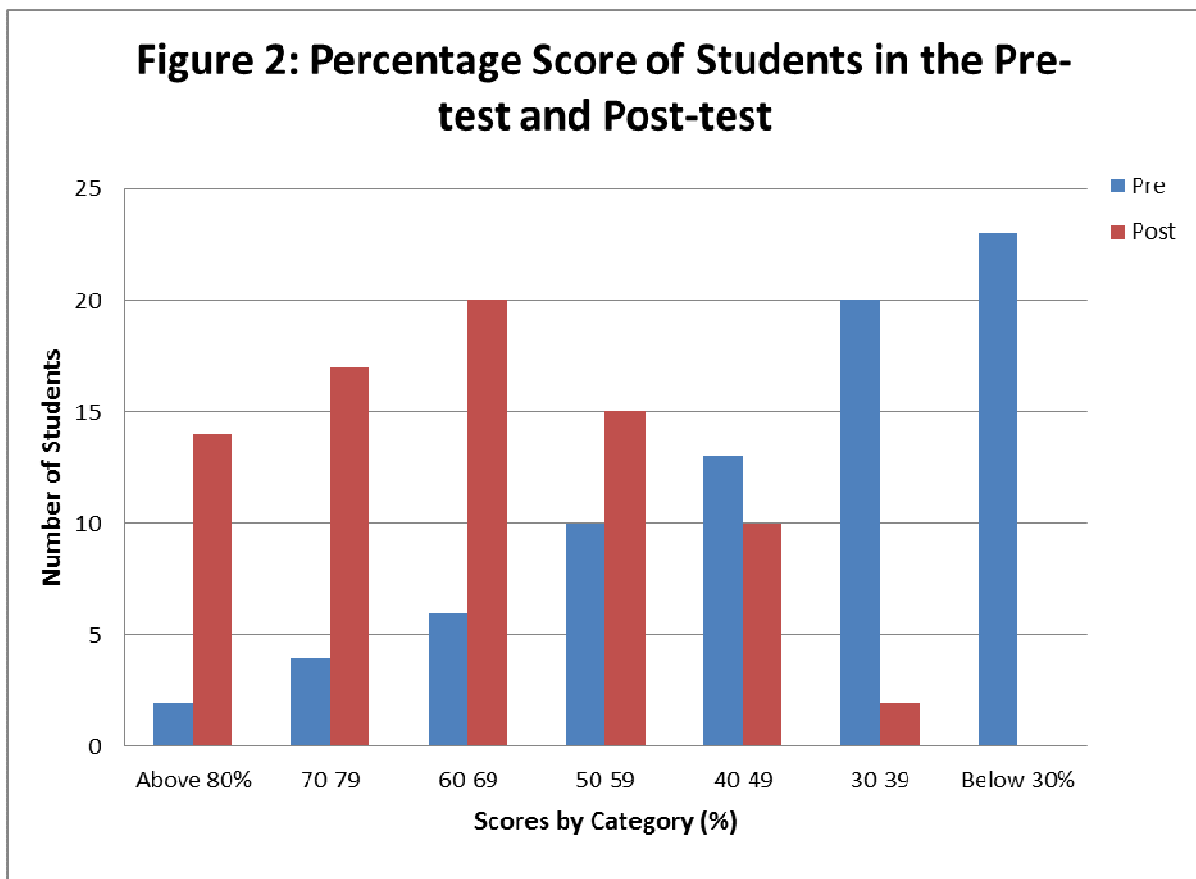
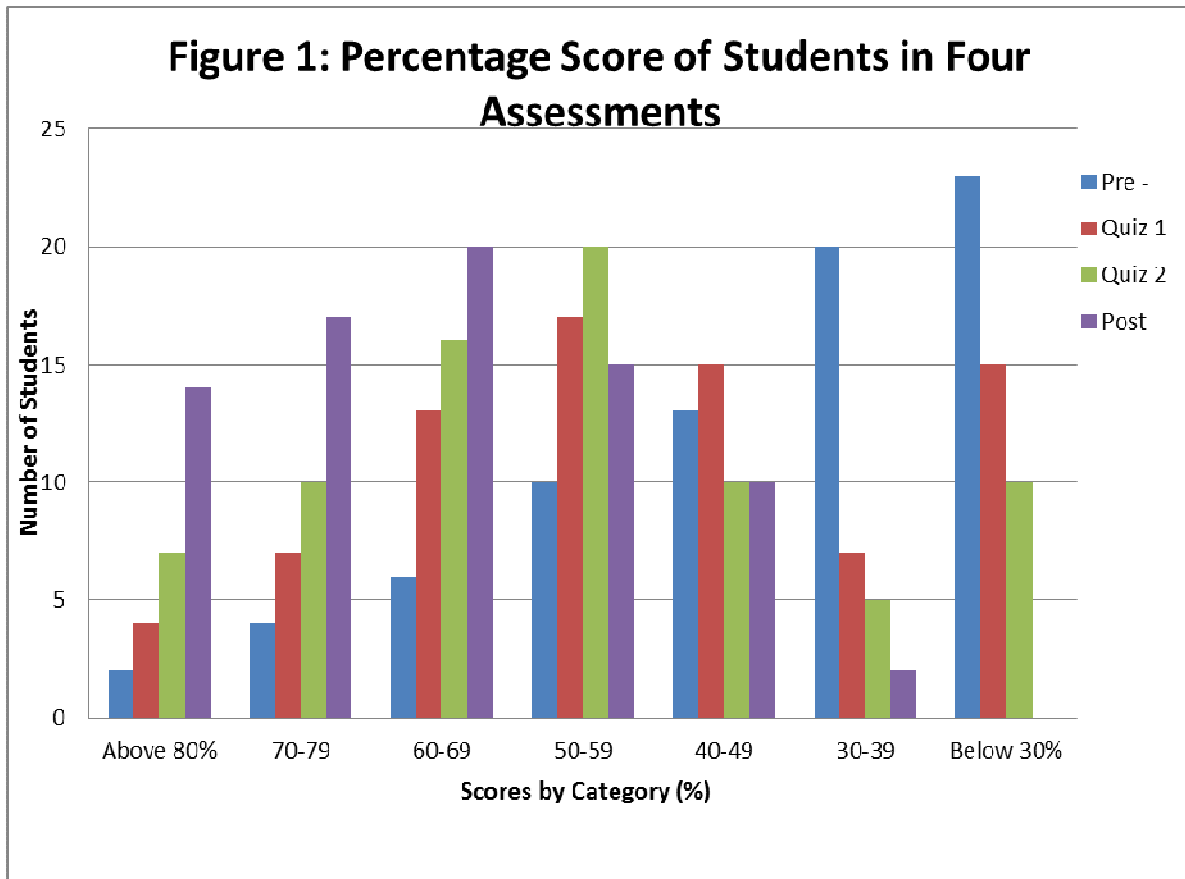
The scores of students showing their performance before, during and after the intervention were presented in table 1. Table 2 showed the performance of students in the pre-test and post-test. Figure 3 is a bar graph showing the performance of students before, during and after the intervention. The second bar graph, figure 4, showed a comparison of students performance in the pre-test and post-test.

Figure 1

Percentage score of students	Number of students			
	Pre – intervention	Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Post test
Above 80%	2	4	7	14
70 -79	4	7	10	17
60 -69	6	13	16	20
50 -59	10	17	20	15
40 -49	13	15	10	10
30 -39	20	7	5	2
Blow 30%	23	15	10	0

Figure 2

% score of students	Number of students	
	Pre intervention	Post intervention
Above 80%	2	14
70 -79	4	17
60 -69	6	20
50 -59	10	15
40 -49	13	10
30 -39	20	2
Blow 30%	23	0



4. Discussion

From the tables above, students' performance in the pre-test shows that 56 students, representing 43.6% obtained scores below 50% but in the post intervention test, only 12 of the students representing 9.36% scored below 50%. Only two students representing 1.56% scored above 80% in the pre intervention test but in the post intervention test 14 students representing 10.92% scored above 80%. A comparison of students' performance in the pre intervention and the post intervention tests showed that the constructive teaching and learning activities had led to an improvement in students' performance in English grammar and usage. Students' score within the period of the intervention and their scores at the end of the intervention showed that they had made progress in their performance in grammar and usage. In the pre intervention test, 23 students scored below 30% but the first quiz during the intervention recorded 15 students scoring below 30%. This showed an improvement in the number of students who scored below 30%.

The second quiz recorded 10 students who scored below 30% but in the post intervention test none of the students scored below 30%. This trend shows that the more students are involved in the lesson the better their performance. Though 12 students representing 9.36% of the students scored below 50% in the post intervention test, on the whole, the intervention had resulted in the improvement of the performance of students in English grammar and usage.

The study tried to explore how constructive teaching and learning activities can be used to improve the performance of students in grammar and usage. The projection of the study was that constructivists' approach to grammar will help learners to improve on their performance in grammar and usage. The outcome of the study showed that constructivists' approach to grammar had contributed to an improvement in learners' performance in grammar and usage. The present study's objective was to guide students to lift up their performance in grammar and usage through constructivists' activities of teaching grammar. The intervention was student centered activities and feedback was provided every time a student needed help. Moreover, students with special problems were attended to during one-on-one conferences which were used to address some of the grammatical problems of students. One-on-one conferences enabled the instructor to monitor students' progress in identifying and correcting grammatical errors identified as problematic in students' work. This ensured improvement through post-test gains.

The result of this study reaffirms that student centered activities lead to improvement in the teaching and learning process. The main aim of the study was to find out if student centered activities in the teaching and learning of English grammar will help students to improve in their performance in grammar and usage. This shows that the involvement of students in the teaching and learning process as a whole facilitates learning. Apart from the scores of students in the pre-test and post-test which showed improvement in the performance of students, the students who were interviewed indicated that the approach had helped them build confidence in dealing with English grammar and usage issues. According to them they are now able to read critically to identify grammatical errors and correct such errors. Teachers should consider using constructive activities in the teaching of English grammar. The teaching of grammar by teaching grammar rules and expecting learners to apply these rules in the construction of their sentences does not seem to help learners internalize the grammar rules and to apply the rules when constructing sentences.

The result of this study shows that when learners are guided to correct the grammatical errors in their own work it helps them to internalize the rules better than the rote teaching of grammar rules. The present study contributes to existing literature on constructivists' approach to grammar instruction.

5. Conclusions

Learners' knowledge of English grammar affects their academic progress. Learners' low level of competence in English grammar has repercussions on school achievement and low school achievement also has repercussions on the life of the individual. Knowledge of English grammar and ability to apply the grammar rules in sentence construction facilitates their performance in other subjects. A good essay or script in any subject area should not be inundated with grammatical errors. It is obvious that learners at all levels of the educational ladder have difficulty writing essays or scripts with minimal or no grammatical errors. This is a big problem that confronts teachers; especially English teachers and language experts.

Teachers and language experts continue to devise classroom practices and activities that will help to improve the quality of language use of learners. The common approach that most language teachers adopt is to teach students English grammar rules. Unfortunately, this approach does not result in the ability of the learners to apply the grammar rules in the construction of sentences. Some language experts have even pointed out that this rather makes some learners to get confused as there are so many rules for them to learn. There is therefore the need to explore new methods of teaching English grammar particularly to learners who are learning English as a second language. There is the need to let learners engage in activities that would let them internalize the English grammar rules so that they would be able to apply them in the construction of sentences. Students' critical skills are sharpened as a result of correcting their own sentences and that of their peers because they must consider

why their sentences work or do not work effectively. The process of addressing grammar, then, becomes both critical and practicable to the students.

Constructive teaching and learning activities have been found to be effective in helping learners to discover new things for themselves. The use of constructive teaching and learning activities in this action research has helped the learners to discover some of the English grammar rules for themselves without being told what the rules are. This has enabled learners to improve on their performance in grammar and usage tests.

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