

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN THE TEACHING OF CONDITIONAL CLAUSES

Jonathan Tanihardjo¹, Rex Stardy²

Universitas Bunda Mulia, Indonesia

¹ jtanihardjo@bundamulia.ac.id, ² rexstardy@yahoo.com

Abstract

In the past, when it came to teaching grammar, it had been a common practice that teachers were the ones to more actively engage in the teaching and learning process and students only needed to pay attention to the lecture. Teachers believed it worked more effectively than other methods, since they would give many examples necessary and provide comprehensive explanation on the targeted grammar rules. However, grammar is one of the language components that are often considered challenging and relatively trivial in language learning, and for that reason, language learners are often reluctant to learn the rule of a language inside and out. Up until now, teachers have been trying to find ways or methods that might work to make learning more effective, one of which is small group discussion, where learners are expected to get more involved in a discussion, increase student participation, promote critical thinking, and so on. The participants of this study were the students of the English Department who were taking the English Grammar class. The participants were divided into 2 groups, where the first group serves as a control group and the second as an experimental group. Pre- and post-tests about the application of conditional clauses were administered to both groups to find out and measure the effectiveness of each method: lecture and group discussion methods. The results show both methods worked in boosting the students' understanding and scores. However, lecture method worked more effectively in this study. The study also shows that getting students to actively involve in the teaching-learning process when they are not ready will not produce favourable results, as there are possible reasons that hinder the process.

Keywords: Effectiveness; Small Group Discussions; Lecture; Conditional Sentences

INTRODUCTION

One of the language elements that learners consider the most complex is grammar, and for that reason many of them focus more on what they believe more important, that is vocabulary. As a matter of fact, grammar has an important role to keep away misunderstanding towards the intended meaning. Grammar is crucial, and on that account, and it should be the focus of language teaching (Gewerhr, 1998). Teaching grammar has always been a matter in question which is discussed among language teachers. As a result, methods to teaching grammar are still in an argumentation. It has been a common practice in Indonesia that the English grammar rules have been the primary focus of English teaching. However, many students perceive that they are hard to fathom and have less significance, and thus students are hesitant to learn the grammar rules inside out. In Indonesia, when it comes to grammar rules teaching, most teachers frequently make use of lecture teaching method, where they are more active and control the whole-teaching learning process, and students listen to the lectures. Michael (2001) affirms that lecturing is one of the oldest forms of teaching among so many teaching-learning methods, and is deemed efficient means of transferring knowledge and concepts. However, it presents many challenges to both teachers and learners, as such method only encourages passive learning and fails to motivate students. Similarly, Paul (1990) stated that teachers rarely gave students

opportunities to work together in small groups to plan, establish goals, develop different ways of attaining these goals. Also, the stress was on recollection and not on problem solving. He further claimed that the lecture model of instruction will lead students to failure to learn how to collect, examine, produce, or evaluate information. Becoming conscious of the fact that it is hard to elucidate grammar rules to students, teachers have been continuously attempting to devise effective ways to teach grammar, and make the teaching-learning situation more interesting and interactive. Discussion, another method of teaching, was devised to get students to more actively engage to the teaching-learning process. The students are expected to have active and meaningful learning which ensure understanding and applying concepts rather than memorizing only, which is rote learning. Discussion method is a forum for open-ended, collaborative exchange of ideas among a teacher and students or among students to get the students to think, learn, solve problems, and get better understanding. In this method, participants express multiple points of view, give response to others' ideas, and reflect on their own ideas in an effort to build improve knowledge, comprehension, or interpretation of the matter. In English grammar, conditional sentences are one of the most challenging grammar rules, and thus this study attempts to find a solution to a problem formulated: "How effective is the group discussion method compared to the lecture method in the teaching of grammar, more specifically, the conditional sentences?". To put it differently, this study is aimed to determine if there is any significant difference between lecture and group discussions methods in promoting better understanding of the conditional sentences.

Rahman, et al. (2011) asserts that in a group discussion method, two or more students are involved to express, provide, elucidate and argue their knowledge, skills, and opinions. Moreover, discussion is a strategy that makes use of the interaction of lecturer and students, and among students as the way to meet the learning objectives (Jacobsen, Eggen & Kauchak, 2009). In a group discussion method, there are three steps to follow, namely: (1) introduction, where a teacher address one topic in each of all groups as the opening of discussion, (2) investigation, where students have to discuss and explore topics, explain their thoughts, and take a position, and (3) closing: where students give a summary of the main points in the discussion.

METHOD

The participants involved in this study are 33 third semester students of the English Department of Bunda Mulia University who are taking the English Grammar 3 class. The students are divided into 2 groups: Control and Experimental; The control group adopted lecture method in the teaching of conditional sentences, while the experimental group utilized group discussions. To measure students' understanding of particular grammar rules, the researcher made use of pre- and post-tests, each of which included ten questions about mixed conditional sentences. The tests were in the form of multiple choices questions, where students were to decide which if conditional sentences suited the situations or facts provided. Before the treatment to both groups was given, the pre-test was initially administered to get a picture of their knowledge of conditional sentences. Next, the researcher gave the treatment to the control group and experimental group. The treatment given to the control group was providing them with comprehensive explanations along with examples of mixed conditional sentences. On the other hand, the treatment received by the small discussion groups made up of 4-6 students as the experimental group, was presenting them the forms and functions and having those rules analyzed. Once the whole treatment was finished, the post-test was then administered to both groups to see if there had been any difference in scores between the pre- and post-tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

To seek the answer to the problem about the effectiveness of the two methods of teaching, the researcher used SPSS to see which of the two teaching methods worked more effectively and showed significant difference in test score between the control and experimental groups.

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Control_Prestest_Score	44.3750	16	25.55223	6.38806
	Control_Posttest_Score	66.8750	16	24.68974	6.17244
Pair 2	Experimental_Prestest_Score	50.0000	17	25.49510	6.18347
	Experimental_Posttest_Score	64.1176	17	26.23424	6.36274

The table above shows the means of the pre- and post- test scores from the control and experimental groups. The means of the pre- and post-test from the control group with lecture method are 44.375 and 66.875 respectively. Meanwhile, the means of the pre- and post-tests from the experimental group with group discussion are 50 and 64.117. The number of students from each group was 16 students in the control group and 17 in the experimental group. It also clearly shows that both methods worked in increasing the students' understanding and score: 22.5 points rise in the post-test for the control group, and 14.117 points increase for the experimental group.

Paired Samples Test									
	Paired Differences	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Control_Prestest_Score - Control_Posttest_Score	-22.50000	25.69047	6.42262	-36.18948	-8.81052	-3.503	15	.003
Pair 2	Experimental_Prestest_Score - Experimental_Posttest_Score	-14.11765	21.52290	5.22007	-25.18370	-3.05159	-2.704	16	.016

In order to examine the effectiveness of the two methods (lecture and group discussions), a paired sample t-test is employed

As shown in the Paired Sample Test of pair 1 (pre- and post-test of the control group), the t -value is 3.503. With the degree of freedom equals to 15, the t -value of 5% significance from the t -distribution table is 2.131, and that of 1% significance is 2.947. With $t = 3.503 > 2.131$ and $t = 3.503 > 2.946$, it shows that the null hypothesis is completely rejected, which means that there is a significant difference between the results of the pre- and post-tests for both statistical significance level. In other words, lecture as the teaching method used in the control group indeed works effectively in the teaching of conditional sentences. Furthermore, in pair 2 (pre- and post-test of the experimental group), the t -value is 2.704. With the degree of freedom equals to 16, the t -value of 5% significance from the t -distribution table is 2.120, and that of 1% significance is 2.921. With $t = 2.704 > 2.120$ and $t = 2.704 < 2.921$, it implies that the alternative hypothesis is only acceptable with 5% significance level, and rejected with 1% significance level. To put it differently, group discussion as the teaching method in the experimental group in the teaching of conditional sentences merely worked for a significance level of 0.05, but failed in the significance level of 0.01. The table of Paired Samples Statistics exhibits the means of both pre- and post-tests of the control group was 22.5 points and that of the experimental group was 14.117 points. Despite the fact that both methods succeeded in improving the students' scores, it clearly shows that lecture method worked better than group discussion method in the teaching of grammar rules, specifically mixed conditional sentences. When giving treatment to both groups, the researcher spotted that the students experienced difficulty understanding the difference and function of each type of mixed conditional sentences, specifically those from experimental group. The researcher first of all presented them with all the types of conditional sentences as well as examples. He then got the students to think, identify, analyze, present their points of view, and give responses to the ideas of others. In the process, the researcher also gave them trigger questions to stimulate discussions. However, it appeared that only some students took parts in the discussions, and many passively listened to others' ideas. The results of this study were quite surprising, as Tanihardjo (2016) in his study claimed that the deductive method, where the researcher gave a lecture was ineffective in the teaching of grammar compared to the inductive method, where students were encouraged to observe, think, and draw conclusions by themselves. This study, however, shows that the learning process with lecture method, in which students are only required to passively listen to the lecture works more effectively.

CONCLUSION

Paul (1990) stated that teachers should promote collaborative work in the learning process, and put the stress on problem solving, and not on recall. He also criticized the lecturer modal, as such model does not give students opportunity to gather, analyze, synthesize, or assess information. However, based on this study, the results show that getting the students to get more actively involved in the teaching and learning process did not work as expected. The possible reasons for such method not working well are that (1) the students might have limited vocabulary, so that they were not able to understand the topics they were discussing or speak their mind, and (2) they were shy, and afraid of making mistakes, so that they were reluctant to share their opinions. The researcher also concludes that having students get actively involved in the teaching-learning process when they are not ready will not produce favorable results. Furthermore, the results also manifest that one method which works for one situation does not always work in other situations. As a result, with different situations and distinctive characteristic of each student, teachers are always expected to find the most suitable teaching methods in every learning and teaching situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our students of the English Department at Bunda Mulia University for their contributions to our research. We are also grateful to Bunda Mulia University for the opportunity to conduct research there. Finally, we would like to thank our family and friends for their encouragement and support to the research process. Without their support, we would not have been able to complete this research.

REFERENCES

- Gewehr, W. (1998). *Aspects of Modern Language Teaching in Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Jacobsen, D. A., Eggen, P., & Kauchak, D. (2009). *Methods for Teaching: Promoting Student Learning in K-12 Classrooms*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Michael, J. (2001). The Claude Bernard Distinguished Lecture. In Pursuit of meaningful learning. *Advances in Physiology Education*, 145-158.
- Paul, R. C. (1990). *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*. Rohnert Park, California: Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, Sonoma State University.
- Rahman, F., Khalil, J. K., Jumani, N. B., Ajmal, M., Malik, S., & Sharif, M. (2011). Impact of Discussion Method on Students Performance. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(7), 84-94.
- Tanihardjo, J. (2016). Analysis of the Effectiveness of Deductive and Inductive Method in the Teaching of Participial Phrase: A Case Study. *Twelfth Conference on English Studies* (hal. 149-152). Jakarta: Atma Jaya Catholic University.