Evaluating the efficiency of a pattern integration approach in grammar teaching: Towards a revisited grammar teaching paradigm

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Abstract

The presentation-practice-production (PPP) pattern situated itself as a traditional pattern that affected grammar teaching over the history of ELT. This paper investigates the efficiency of integrating various patterns of activity sequencing in grammar teaching in promoting the grammatical accuracy at the written sentence level among 34 third year EFL students at the English Language and Literature Department at Mohamed Lamine Dabaghine Sétif 2 University, Algeria. The one-group pretest posttest design was followed to investigate the role of integrating the PPP, the focus on form, and the Engage-Study-Activate patterns in promoting grammatical accuracy level in terms of recognition, recall, and composition using a designed grammar test. The scores of the students were analyzed quantitatively to determine how the integration of patterns influenced their performance on the tests. Significant differences were found in the scores of the subjects on the grammar test at the end of the pre-experiment. The obtained results revealed a growth in the grammatical accuracy level of the subjects per test section and through the entire test at the end of the pre-experiment. These results confirm the efficiency of integrating various patterns of activity sequencing in grammar teaching in promoting grammatical accuracy at written sentence level. It is recommended that the integration of patterns of activity sequencing as used in this study, and other patterns in the literature should be integrated in order to further examine the effective role of integration.

Keywords: integration; patterns of activity sequencing; grammatical accuracy; the PPP; the focus on form; the Engage-Study-Activate

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1. Introduction

Grammar and its importance have constituted the backbone of many language teaching methodologies over the history of language teaching. Language form was the target of both teaching and research, and finding the best ways to deliver knowledge to language learners about language forms produced many patterns. According to Rutherford (1987), grammar is "a necessary component of any language teaching programme" (p. 9). The importance of grammar in language teaching is recognized through the role it was assigned in various teaching methodologies. Moreover, grammar is prominent in teaching English as a second and foreign language because learners need a good knowledge of grammar to promote their overall knowledge of the language. However, the debate among linguists and educationalists was not related to where grammar should be located in a language teaching programme; rather the focus was on how to teach grammar. The progress in language teaching approaches and methods through the years did not resolve the issue of the best grammar teaching method (Ellis, 2006). After decades of language teaching, Nunan (1991) confirms that "it has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all" (p. 228). This statement shapes the practice in language teaching which obviously builds on testing different methods for their efficiency in supporting the overall process of language teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

Until the 1970s, grammatical structures and lexical units' memorization constituted the norm in language teaching approaches with the belief that this will enable learners to communicate and use the language effectively. The grammar-translation method has dominated grammar teaching practices for decades and the main practice was to learn about grammar rules through deductive instruction, memorization of the rules and then application to similar situations (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2002). The mere focus on declarative knowledge acquisition and the teacher centeredness in the traditional grammar translation methodology were the main points of criticism that led teachers and researchers alike to search for alternatives.

During the 1970s, the shift from the focus on language form to language use announced the birth of the communicative approach. The main focus in this approach is on the mastery of communication and verbal interaction rules which will automatically lead to the mastery of form. Communicative language teaching provided the needed alternative since language was no more viewed as a system of rules only, but also as a resource for meaning generation. Grammar in this respect was no longer considered as a restrictive system of rules to respect for accurate language use or "a linguistic straitjacket" as Larsen-Freeman (2002, p. 103) puts it.

Contemporary language teaching approaches use a mixture of both practices no matter which approach is dominant. In a structure-focused approach, grammar is the focus of instruction, but it is taught through communicative tasks. The initial concern in the grammatical structure is extended to include its communicative purposes. In a communication-oriented approach, the development of communication skills becomes the main task through providing learners with content for understanding and then performance in other communicative tasks. Form in this approach is not neglected but brought in to clarify ambiguous grammar points through specific activities.

Along the development of language teaching approaches and building on their basic tenets, numerous grammar teaching methodologies emerged. The PPP pattern of activity sequencing presents the traditional approach that has been used in many foreign language course books, and is still valid today (Sanchez, 2013). This pattern was also the motivation that issued many patterns of grammar teaching in response to its negative

effects in the language classroom such as the focus on form, the input processing, and the engage-study-activate (ESA) patterns. As Larsen-Freeman (2009, p. 523) points out, "perhaps the most widely practiced traditional approach to grammatical instruction has been portrayed as the three Ps – present, practice, produce". Generations of students were instructed grammatically using the steps of this approach. A typical grammar lesson under this approach will focus on a single objective which is the learning of a given language structure. The methodology to follow in order to achieve this objective is the PPP pattern, in which the teacher presents the target structure with its rules and examples of use, then the learners practice the presented structure through a specific set of activities, and finally produce the practiced structure in correct language. In this methodology, Newby (2006) explained that the focus is more on developing declarative knowledge explicitly to support learning the target grammatical rules. The first step of presentation signifies the declarative knowledge level since it presents the target rules to the learners. According to Dekeyser (1998), procedural knowledge is activated through continuous practice as provided in the second stage of the method. Once the learners become unconsciously using the target rule, they use it automatically in their production and "proceduralization is achieved by engaging in the target behavior –or procedure- …" Doughty and Williams (1998, p. 49).

The claims that implicit grammar teaching instruction is insufficient and the need to raise awareness about the importance of language form led to the focus on form approach. Long (1991) proposed this approach to function under the umbrella of a communicative or a meaning-based approach, such as task-based or content-based language teaching. Long (1996) defines this focus on form instruction as drawing "… students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-46). This approach emerges from the degree of similarity believed to exist between first and second language acquisition in terms of exposure to comprehensible input. Moreover, the attention span of students can be limited due to the focus on some grammatical items and not others and the focus on form interferes to help in noticing the unnoticed or missed structures (Schmidt, 1990). Norris and Ortega (2000) have carried a research analyzing the focus on form approach, and concluded that the following criteria distinguish this approach from other grammar teaching approaches:

> *a) designing tasks to promote learner engagement with meaning prior to form; b) seeking to attain and document task essentialness or naturalness of the L2 forms; c) seeking to ensure that instruction is unobtrusive; d) documenting learner mental processes ('noticing').* (p. 438)

In this respect, Long and Robinson (1998) argue that students' understanding of some grammatical forms becomes the responsibility of both teachers and their peers. Students have to be exposed to real-life input, and if they face difficulties in learning grammatical aspects, teachers and their peers have to provide the necessary explanations and examples of use. This focus on form can be managed in different ways as Larsen-Freeman (2009) explained. For instance, Sharwood Smith (1993) proposed input enhancement through visual aids in order to make some grammatical features more salient for instruction. Another way to fit the requirements of the focus on form approach is the input flooding. This technique of flooding meaningful input works through making the target grammatical structure more frequent in the provided input which offers the target structure more opportunities to be noticed. Over-flooding may lead to priming in which the students produce the target structure, directly.

The ESA pattern was proposed by Harmer (1998) and focuses on involving the learners emotionally in order to create effective learning. This pattern consists of three stages which must be present at the time of application with possible permission to modify the order of the stages. Harmer (2001) further claims out that the three stages are present in every lesson. The Engagement stage shapes the whole pattern and differentiates it from other patterns. The teacher according to Harmer (1998) has to "arouse the students' interest [and] their emotions" (p. 25). The engagement of the learners actively in the lesson through creating interest via emotional stimulation requires the use of specific materials such as dramatic stories or songs and anecdotes. The study stage consists of driving the attention of learners to linguistic forms. This phase in the sequence as Harmer (1996) explained is equivalent to the practice stage of the PPP pattern. The teacher draws the focus of learners to the target form

through explanations while the learners practice the form in activities. The activate stage is the final stage in which learners use the language to communicate their ideas and feelings freely. Hence, learners use the appropriate language to meet the requirements of the situation. The teacher has to encourage the learners to use their knowledge of the language element introduced at the study phase for both receptive and productive situations.

The differences outlined in the methodologies of the PPP, the focus on form, and the ESA patterns provide rich and varied opportunities to teach grammar. Hence, integrating these patterns in a curriculum for grammar teaching in which each lesson is designed following the guidelines of each pattern is the main incentive underlying this study. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

➢   To what extent does the integration of various PAS promote GA at written sentence level?

Based on this stated research question, the present research seeks to test the following alternative research hypothesis:

➢   H1: The integration of the PPP pattern, the focus on form pattern, and the ESA pattern in teaching grammar may promote GA at the written sentence level.

3.   Method

The poor grammatical accuracy (GA) at written sentence level among third year undergraduate students of English as a foreign language (EFL) at the English Language and Literature Department at University Sétif 2, Algeria, is the main problem under investigation in the current study. The aim of this paper then is to investigate the efficiency of integrating the PPP, the focus on form, and the ESA patterns through a pre-experimental design in promoting GA at written sentence level. The integration of the PPP, the focus on form, and the ESA patterns was accomplished through 12 weeks of instruction of one hour and a half sessions per week for each pattern as stated in the table 1 below:

Table 1

Distribution of the Integrated Pattern on the Pre-experiment Weeks

Lessons per pattern	Weeks	Time for Treatment
PPP	3, 4, 7, 10	6 hours
Focus on Form	1, 6, 9, 12	6 hours
ESA	2, 5, 8, 11	6 hours

This integration was not fulfilled through integrating the target patterns in developing the same lessons, but through structuring each lesson using the principles of each of the patterns subject to integration under sequential presentation of the lessons. This method of integration permits to evaluate the overall role of integrating the various patterns which is the main concern of the present research. The rationale for selecting the abovementioned three patterns is their variety in terms of activity sequencing stages. They were also chosen based on the theoretical underpinnings of each pattern as well as their stated advantages in the literature.

3.1 Research Design

In order to test the above stated research hypothesis, a pre-experimental design was followed in which the one-group pretest posttest design was used (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Nunan, 1992). The main reason for selecting this design is the theme of the study which reports on the value of a teaching methodology that integrates various PAS in teaching grammar. Besides, only one group at third year level, which is the population under study, had volunteered for the pre-experiment on GA. The reason behind this one group volunteering was the full timetable of third year level which imposed severe limitations on the population's willingness to volunteer for the study since the treatment sessions on GA were set up extra to the study schedule. Administrative approval was obtained to schedule the sessions of the pre-experiment after obtaining the consent

of the subjects to participate in the study. This one group pretest post-test design was used with 34 third year EFL students who were selected based on their consent, frequent availability and convenience as imposed by administrative division of the groups.

The little possibility to infer cause and effect in the pretest-posttest design was reduced because grammar was not taught at third year level which supports the effect of the grammar treatment on the GA level of the subjects. This implies that the interference of instruction on grammar other than the treatment provided in the pre-experiment as a confounding factor was minimized. Further, because the individual variables of the subjects (n= 34) in the pre-experiment can threaten the internal validity of the results on GA, controlling these variables was fundamental to neutralize their potential effect on the pre-experiment results.

In order to control the potential effects of individual variables and to ensure homogeneity in the characteristics of the subjects before introducing the treatment on grammar, information on personal and academic covariates were collected from the subjects at the beginning of the pre-experimental study using technical cards. The personal data focused on the aspects of gender and learning preferences only while age and nationality were not considered as personal variables that may affect the results because the subjects from both study groups had the same age range (21-23) and belonged to the same nationality. Academic variables included years of English study, high school study stream, grammar level perception, and time spent in learning grammar outside the classroom.

3.2 Research Instrument

The GA level of the subjects was tested at the beginning and at the end of the pre-experiment using a designed grammar test. The Sentence Structure Knowledge Test (SSKT) was used in order to test the participants' GA level in terms of recognition, recall, and composition of grammatically accurate sentences. Because accuracy of written sentences in the context of this study stands for grammatically error-free sentences at the level of writing accurate sentences that have no sentence structure problems firstly, and at the level of combining grammatical items secondly, the test focused on 8 grammatical errors. These errors included lack of subject-verb agreement, misplaced modifiers, unclear pronoun reference, faulty parallelism, faulty subordination, faulty coordination, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments. The first and second sections of the test included 8 items following the number of grammatical errors treated in the context of this study. In both sections, the sentences corresponded to a specific grammatical error. The third section consisted of 4 items in respect to the four sentence types in English requiring the students to compose a simple sentence, a compound sentence following three instructions, a complex sentence following two instructions, and a compound-complex sentence.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The pre- and post- SSKT were administered to the 34 subjects after stating the purpose of the test and instructions for answering. Although the students were requested to complete the tests within 60 minutes time, extra time was provided for answering the tests. The test answering time ranged between 30 and 60 minutes. Significantly, the subjects revealed a high interest in accomplishing the test answering task and the tests were collected upon completion with no missing data.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The quantitative data resultant from the pretests and the posttests were analysed statistically using the SPSS 22.0 (2014) version. The dependent sample t-test was used to compare the means of the subjects on the SSKT per section and through the entire test before and after the pre-experiment. Any significant differences in the scores of the subjects at the end of the pre-experiment on the SSKT would confirm the role of the integrated patterns in enhancing GA at written sentence level.

4. Results

The SSKT was administered to the 34 subjects before and after the pre-experiment in order to examine any significant differences in their reported scores on the SSKT at the end of the pre-experiment in response to the provided treatment of integrated PAS in grammar teaching. The comparison between the scores was statistically accomplished using the paired samples t-test since the comparison was done at the level of the same group.

4.1 Before the Pre-experiment

At the beginning of the pre-experiment, the SSKT scores were analysed in order to measure the subjects' level of recognizing grammatical errors in sentences, recall of grammar rules for accurate sentence writing, and composition of grammatically accurate sentences in respect to the provided test instructions and following the three sections of the test. The results are stated in table 2 below:

Table 2

Mean scores* of the Subjects on the Sentence Structure Knowledge Test before the Quasi-experiment

Level	N	Min.	Max.	Total Score	Mean	SD
Recognition	34	1	7	133	4.29	1.57
Recall	34	2	5	141	4.54	1.58
Composition	34	1	6	147	4.74	1.67
Total	34	4	19	421	13.57	4.82

Note. *Out of 23 items.

As shown in table 2 above, the scores of the subjects on the SSKT differed between the three levels of the test. At the recognition level, the students achieved a mean score (M= 9.24, SD= 1.57) indicating a total number of 133 correct answers out of 248. This score is weak because a significant 115 score was missing and confirms that the students had difficulties to recognize the stated problems in the sentences on the test. At the recall level, the obtained mean score was (M= 4.54, SD= 1.58) which represented 141 correct answers out of 248. Accordingly, a significant number of scores (107) was missing. This weak score proves that the subjects had difficulties at recalling the rules for accurate sentence writing in order to rewrite the sentences in the second section of the test. At the composition level, the mean score (M= 4.74, SD= 1.67) was consistent with 147 correct answers out of 248. The subjects missed 101 score at this stage which implies that they had difficulties at writing grammatically accurate sentences. Emphatically, most of the scores at the composition level were obtained at the level of simple sentence and compound sentences. The subjects had main difficulties in writing complex and compound-complex sentences. Throughout the entire test, the mean score (M= 13.57, SD= 4.82) signified 421 correct answers out of 744. Overall, 323 scores were missing which is a significant score to achieve. This result confirms that overall the students have difficulties in recognizing, recalling, and composing grammatically accurate sentences.

4.2 After the Pre-experiment

At the end of the pre-experiment, the scores of the subjects on the SSKT were gathered in order to examine any significant differences in their GA at written sentence structure level based on the test sections. The results are displayed in table 3 below:

Table 3

Mean scores* of the Subjects on the Sentence Structure Knowledge Test after the Quasi-experiment

Level	N	Min.	Max.	Sum	Mean	SD
Recognition	34	4	8	196	6,32	1.37
Recall	34	4	7	212	6,83	1.95
Composition	34	1	7	170	5.48	1.15
Total	34	10	22	578	18.63	4..47

Note. *Out of 23 items.

The mean scores on the SSKT after the quasi-experiment suggest significant differences in the GA of the subjects at the recognition, recall, composition, and through the entire test. At the recognition level, the resultant mean score (M= 6.32, SD= 1.37) indicates that there was an increase in the number of recognized sentence structure problems. There was a difference of 63 correct answers on the recognition section of the test at the end of the quasi-experiment. At the recall level, the subjects reported a mean score (M= 6.83, SD= 1.95) which was consistent with 212 correct answers. The increase in the correct answers was estimated to be 71 correct answers after the quasi-experiment. This implies that the subjects have improved at the recall level through being able to use grammar rules to re-write the sentences on the SSKT accurately. At the composition stage, the obtained mean score (M= 5.51, SD= 2.06) correlated with 170 accurate structured sentences. An increase of 23 accurately written sentences was obtained after the quasi-experiment. Throughout the entire test, the subjects had reported a mean score (M= 15.16, SD= 3.11) which was related to 578 recognized, recalled, and composed sentences. Overall, a growth of 157 correct answers was the difference in the scores between the beginning and the end of the quasi-experiment. This indicates that there was a growth in the overall GA in the structure of the subjects' written sentences.

4.3 Paired Samples t-test Results

The scores on the SSKT obtained before and after the pre-experiment were compared in order to examine any significant differences statistically. The paired samples t-test was used to achieve this end in practice. The results of the comparison are demonstrated in table 4 below:

Table 4

Paired Samples T-test Results of the Subjects on the SSKT before and after the Quasi-experiment

Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Recognition	2.03	1.81	6.23	33	.00*
Recall	2.29	2.74	4.64	33	.00*
Composition	0.74	1.96	2.10	33	.05*
Total	4.67	3.39	7.66	33	.00*

Note. *Significant at .05 level.

As could be drawn from table 4 above, there were significant differences statistically between the scores of the subjects on the SSKT before and after the quasi-experiment. At the recognition level, the mean difference score was (M= 2.03, SD= 1.81) was found to be highly significant as proved by the t-test value $t(33)= 6.23$ which was highly significant at $p= .00 < .05$. As a result, it was confirmed that there was an increase in the difficulties of recognizing grammatically accurate sentences among the subjects after the quasi-experiment. At the recall level, the mean difference score between the scores obtained at the beginning and at the end of the quasi-experiment was (M= 2.29, SD= 2.74). Statistically, this mean score was highly significant as confirmed through the t-test value $t(33)= 2.10$ which was highly significant at $p= .00< .05$. Consequently, it was proved that there was an increase in the subjects' ability to recall GA rules for guided sentence writing. Similar to the development at the recognition and recall levels, the subjects reported a significant growth at the composition level. In fact, the mean difference score (M= .77, SD= 2.70) was significant as confirmed through the t-test value $t(33)= 1.96$ which was significance at p= .05. Thus, composing grammatically accurate sentences improved although in less significant tones in comparison to the recognition and recall levels. Over the entire test, the resultant mean difference score (M= 4.67, SD= 3.39) was highly significant given that the obtained t-test value $t(33)= 7.66$ was highly significant at $p= .00< .05$. It was confirmed that the GA level of the subjects had increased at the end of the quasi-experiment.

5. Discussion

The comparison of the scores of the subjects on the SSKT to examine any statistical significant differences at the beginning and end of the quasi-experiment revealed that overall there was a development at the GA level.

Following the three levels of the SSKT, the students reported high significant results at the recognition and recall levels. This high significance proved that the subjects improved at the level of identifying the problems of accuracy in sentence structure after the quasi-experiment. Similarly, the high significant scores on the second level of recall confirmed that the participants progressed at using the grammatical rules to structure grammatically accurate sentences. The subjects had also reported a significant progress at the composition level. Throughout the entire test, the students revealed a high significant mean difference score confirming that there was an increase in the GA reported at written sentence level. In view of these results, the null hypothesis which states that the integration of various PAS in teaching grammar does not promote GA at the written sentence level is rejected.

Several studies have analyzed the effect of grammar instruction on writing quality (Morrow, 1984; Hartwell, 1985; Hillocks, 1986: Williamson, 1986). Likewise, the development of GA in writing has been investigated in different studies (Byrd & Reid, 1998; Hinkel, 2002, 2003; Zhou, 2009). The results of these studies support the importance of GA and the role of grammar instruction in promoting GA. In two studies conducted on the effect of grammar teaching on GK, Schulz (1996, 2001) concluded that learners perceive grammatical instruction as a main factor affecting GK. Bade (2008) confirmed also from the point of view of the learners that grammar should be given importance without being prioritized over other language aspects. In the same direction, the study of Farjami (2011) reported on the importance assigned to grammar and the high interest in learning grammar to enhance language proficiency among the students.

Research (Hinkel, 2009) has further concluded that different topics for writing can generate different forms and structures. The results of a study conducted on the effect of grammar teaching on GA (Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Freemana, Lockec, Low, Robinson, and Zhu, 2006) concluded, "the teaching of syntax (as part of a traditional or transformational/generative approach to teaching grammar) appears to have no influence on either the accuracy or quality of written language development for 5–16-year-olds" (p. 51). This implies that traditional grammar teaching in which the use of the PPP pattern is inherent does not support the development of GA in writing. Celce-Murcia (1991) confirms that "the importance of a reasonable degree of grammatical accuracy in academic or professional writing cannot be overstated" (p. 465). Although it cannot be overemphasized at the expense of other language components, Celce-Murcia (1991) emphasizes that grammar instruction is requisite to help the learners achieve their goals.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study provide pedagogical recommendations to teachers as main course designers. The process of conducting the research invites materials designers and teachers to examine the sequencing of the activities for consideration in syllabus and course designs. The main implication for EFL teachers is relevant to the role of integrating various patterns of activity sequencing in promoting GA at written sentence level. Since classroom instruction has an important role in fostering and creating learning opportunities, varied and rich grammar teaching contexts need to be used to meet this end in practice. The findings of this study confirmed that there were significant differences at the beginning and end of the pre-experiment in the GA of the subjects under the integration of various PAS to teach grammar. It is recommended, therefore, that teachers should use this method of integrating various PAS in teaching grammar to enhance GA. Exposing learners to different types of activities through using different sequencing patterns is further recommended since it provides different contexts to use a wide range of grammatical structures. The significant results obtained in this study in terms of promoting the GA of learners under the integration of various PAS in grammar teaching reinforces the claims on the important and efficient role of integration in language teaching.

The new direction for further research that emerges from the findings of this study arises from the necessity to undertake research on materials design in EFL teaching. As an applied filed, materials development in the EFL classroom research could generate new modes of instruction that could be beneficial to the EFL learner. Whether it targets specific areas of instruction or overall language proficiency, research on materials development could

enhance the quality of provided instruction, and within, the language levels of learners.

7. References

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