The Effects of Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) on Grammar Teaching

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ABSTRACT: *Grammar Translation Method or GTM, which greatly supports students for grammar-based written tests, is the priority way of grammar teaching in Vietnam. That's why many students are gradually lacking communication abilities. In the light of Communicative Language Teaching approach or CLT, grammar is now taught in more interesting ways. Lately, many studies have found that teaching and learning grammar in communicative contexts helps students gain better level of language proficiency especially more fluent and accurate speaking skill. Therefore, this paper aims to evaluate the impact of CLT in grammar instruction for first year English majored students at Dong Nai Technology University. In addition, how students respond to the lessons instructed by CLT method is also fully described in the paper. The results show that CLT approach brings many benefits for EFL students. Moreover, students gain strong motivation and positive attitude through the lessons with CLT.*

Keywords: *English grammar, teaching and learning, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*

I.   INTRODUCTION

English is considered as the most popular language around the world. In the globalization, there is a high demand for students to enhance their English competency. Finding the significant role of English, in many countries including Vietnam, the number of people learning English increases every year. However, according to Tran (2018) despite of too much effort, the application of many new teaching methods and approaches as well as foreign teachers' support, students don't have much improvement. She points out that the English proficiency of the majority of university students and graduates are quite disappointing. They do not appear to be confident with their English. Many of them cannot communicate in a simple English interaction.

From my experience as a university lecturer, I see that for a long time, students at my university encounter many difficulties in English speaking skills specially using correct grammar structures, tenses or forms and lacking vocabulary. Moreover, students tend to use mother tongue even in English speaking class. These problems result in bad communication skill.

Learning or mastering a language means a balance combination of both accuracy and fluency; linguistic as well as communicative competence (Amed, 2013). Obviously, grammar is a significant feature that we cannot neglect when studying English. Therefore, I believe that all the principles of CLT are practical for students to develop both communication skill and grammatical competence. Many researchers have studied how effective CLT is in helping students acquire grammar and other language skills. My research examines the answers of the following research questions (1) Does CLT enhance grammatical competence of students? (2) What are students' attitudes toward grammar lessons with CLT?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar exists in every language. Its role is very important in helping learners to speak English more correctly. Harmer (1987) claims that students will be able to speak disjointed items of language for separate functions if they lack some understanding of grammar. The expression of functional language is only possible through the use of

the grammar of the language. Likewise, if a person knows a million English words, but he doesn't know how to put them together, then he cannot speak English (Brumfit, 2000). Needless to say, grammar is one of the fundamental keys when learning a language. The teaching of grammar can foster students' learning in various ways. According to Hedge (2000) it helps students understand how the language works. It can provide information about the communicative use of language structures by contextualizing them in spoken and written form; it can give information implicitly through exposure to examples or explicitly through instruction on the stylistic variation of language form.

With the hope to bring students' better learning outcomes, there are so many changes in grammar teaching approaches. Comparing to traditional grammar teaching method, the application of CLT fills the gap between students' language grammar capability and speaking fluency. According to Richards (2006), CLT grows apart from traditional methods of teaching that focus on grammar mastery through planned and structured activities that include memorizing dialogues, role plays, and project work. In addition, Larsen-Freeman (2000) claims that CLT is the most used and well-known approach to help students communicate effectively. One of the advantages is that students learn the target language through listening to other members in group activities. Students learn more vocabulary items and grammatical patterns and enjoy increased motivation levels in group or pair work activities rather than in a teacher-centered classroom (Richards, 2006). Similarly, Berlin (2005) points out that CLT covers not only students' emotions but also physical reaction and motivation to learn. Gardner (1985) defines motivation as consisting of effort, plus desire to achieve the goal of learning, plus favorable attitude towards learning the language. Therefore, CLT is affirmed to be helpful to stimulate students' interest, promote their self-confidence and enhance their tactics for better communication ability.

The main goals of CLT are creating opportunities for learners to use the target language effectively for everyday communication needs; giving learners the ability to express their opinions explicitly without being afraid of judgment; and removing their fears to allow them to speak effectively in public (Hiep, 2007). As a matter of fact, both teachers and learners play vital roles in the procedure of applying CLT. In other words, learners cooperate with others instead of depending on the teacher's instructions. According to Richards & Rodgers (2001), learners feel more comfortable listening to their peers in pair or group tasks. Learners can learn best through listening to their classmates making mistakes and correcting themselves. Simultaneously, teachers are the monitors and facilitators throughout students' learning process.

As mentioned above, the movement of grammar teaching aims to assist students to master the target language with both grammar and speaking proficiency. If teachers focus on teaching grammar exclusively, students cannot perform well in oral communication. Through CLT, students enhance fluency and accuracy, use the four skills interchangeably since they exist together in the real world, and generate and discover grammatical rules (Shorouq Ali, & Anas, 2019). It is true that CLT creates more communication opportunities in real-life context. "The Communicative Language Teaching stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use English for communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching" (Howatt, 1984). Teachers raise the value of this approach because of students' significant progress in term of language learning. With CLT, teachers implement a new way of grammar instruction; which uses different communication contexts in teaching grammar-rules.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Description of Classroom Research

Dong Nai Technology University is located in the center of Bien Hoa City, Vietnam. It has good teaching and learning facilities inside and outside the classroom such as LCD, projectors, speakers, moveable tables and chairs, and free Wi-Fi in the campus. Maintaining small class size is the aim of our university. The number of students in class is just around 30 that enables teacher to reach all students in class. The study is applied at two pre-intermediate level grammar classes with 60 first year English-majored students who take grammar class three periods every week within eight weeks. All the lessons are designed based on the textbook "Macmillan Grammar in context" (Macmillan Publisher Limited, 2008) and other reference materials collected from other books or internet. The duration of the

research is eight weeks (from September 9th to October 28th). In the first week, teacher prepares the research plan and all the necessary consent forms from the Dean of the faculty and Rector of the school. Then, seven 40-minute experimental lessons are implemented during seven weeks. The goal of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of CLT especially what benefits it brings on grammar teaching as well as how students react to the application of CLT in the classroom.

Methods of Data Collection

All data are collected from sources of pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire in the innovation stage

Pre-test and post-test: For the present study, pre-test was used in the first week of the experiment. It was carried out to show the similar grammatical competence of the two classes. Post-test was carried out in the last week. This test helped me to evaluate the changes between two classes after the measurement. Both of the tests were designed in the same format and grammatical items including 40 multiple choice questions. The duration of the tests was 45 minutes.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was used at the end of the experiment. This questionnaire had the participants respond to the questions which descend the meaning respectively from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree It helped me to examine and capture participants' attitude, reaction and opinion toward teaching method they received during 8 weeks.

Methods of Data Analysis

All the data were described and analyzed so that the reader knew how the experiment worked. First, the results of pre-test and post-test were calculated by the help of SPSS software. Then, I evaluated the differences in participants' performance based on the means, standard deviations of the tests scores.

With the collected data from questionnaire, I used Microsoft Excel software to insert and analyze the data. Firstly, I inputted all the data so that this software calculated the answers of the respondents. Next, the results were shown by percentages, pie charts, bar graphs, and tables. After analysis stage, I figured out participants' attitude toward the new approach.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result of pre-test and post-test

The results from pre-test of Control and Experimental Classes in term of grammar understanding were shown clearly in Table 1. For the Control class, the mean score of the test was 5.72 compared with 5.90 of the Experimental class. Thus, it is clear that there was no considerable difference of grammatical knowledge between two classes before the treatment.

The purpose of teaching grammar in most schools is for passing the written test at the end of each semester. As a result, most students aware that learning grammar is for getting good mark but not good oral communication skill. Indeed, students are prepared with too much grammatical knowledge from early learning. However, a large number of students still get average scores in pre-grammar test. A possible explanation can be that students tend to learn by heart the grammar rules and forms, so if they do not use them frequently, they might forget.

Group	Pre-test		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control class	30	5.72	1.33
Experimental class	30	5.90	1.36

Table 1: Pre- test result

After the experiment, we can see that the number of students getting high marks in Control class was higher than the pre-test; and with the Experimental group, the score of the post-test was also higher than the pre-test. When comparing the mean score of both pre and post-test, there were noticeable changes. The mean score of

Control class was 7.08 and 7.18 for Experimental class. This was summarized in the following table.

Group	Post-test		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control class	30	7.08	1.21
Experimental class	30	7.18	1.19

Table 2: Post-test result

This illustrates that grammar instruction with either GTM or CLT brought important improvement in students' grammatical knowledge. The application of both GTM and CLT methods emphasized on form with a variety of activities. Therefore, students took advantages of these activities to maximize their practice. Chart 1 below combined the data of two tables above. We can see that students' marks in the post-test were higher than the pre-test. This means that a big change happened in both Control and Experimental class after the experiment. Besides, Standard Deviation in the pre-test and post-test changed slightly, whereas Mean score is significantly higher. These data indicated the enhancement in students' grammatical knowledge within both groups.
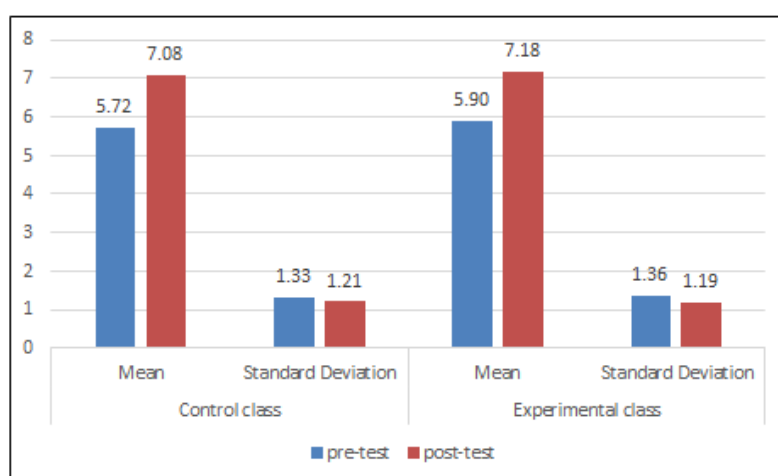

Chart 1: Results of pre-test and post-test score of Control and Experimental Class

In general, the collected data revealed that before the experiment, two classes had a slight and inconsiderable difference in grammar competences. However, after the experiment, they got much better result. Clearly, both GTM and CLT approach improved students' grammatical knowledge effectively.

Results from questionnaire

The majority of the students (66.7%) agreed that grammar is important when learning language in general and English in specific, especially 25% of the students showed their strong agreement. We can see that in the pie chart below only 8.3% of the answers presented disagreement. It is clear that there was no strong disagreement. These statistics indicated that students do not deny the importance of grammar in speaking accurately.
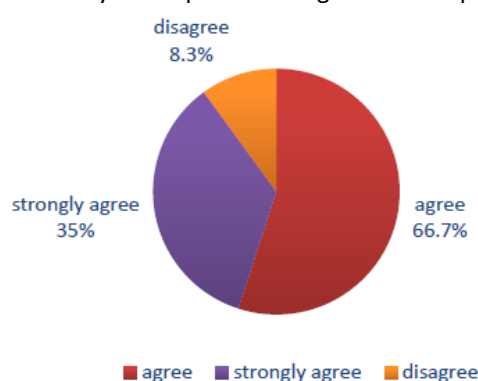
Chart 2: Students' opinions about the important of grammar

The bar graph below indicated that 33.3% of students strongly agreed and agreed (55%) with the idea "CLT provides more opportunities for communication". Most students agreed that CLT helped them practice speaking with their classmates especially in teamwork. On the other hand, there were 6.7% of students showed their disagreement and 5% of students strongly disagreed. Actually, a few students usually kept silent in class and they did not like communicative activities even playing games.
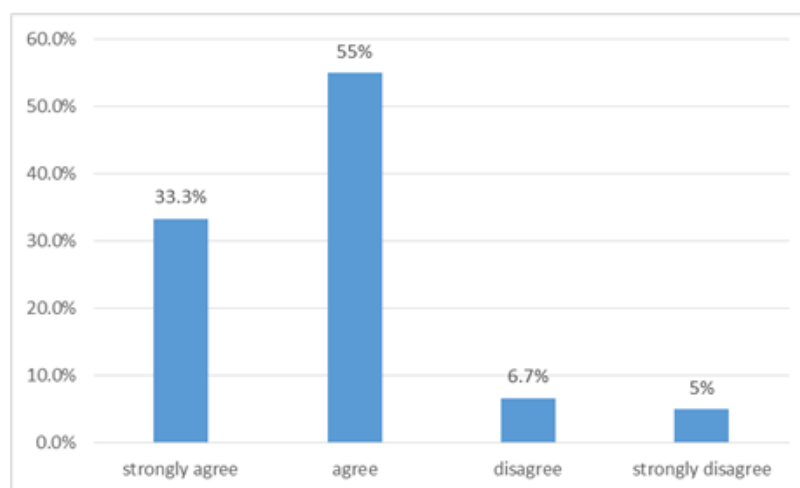

Chart 3: Students' opinions about communication opportunities in lessons with CLT

In the following table, we can see that high percentage of students (85%) agreed and 10% of the students strongly agreed that communicative activities in grammar lessons instructed by CLT were helpful for their communication skill. In fact, teacher had planned these activities carefully so that students could apply grammar structures in real life context easily. Only 5% of them disagreed with the idea. In addition, most students (85%) agreed that CLT method supported them a lot when doing assigned tasks especially working in small group. Group work provides more opportunities for the students to use English which allows a greater quantity and richer variety of language practice (Phan, 2018). As a result, they completed the tasks quickly with their friends. However, the rest of the students (15%) did not show their interest with CLT method. They simply enjoyed doing written exercises. Specially, all students (including 45% of students strongly agreed and 55% agreed) thought that lessons with CLT were more exciting than the traditional method because of the games or game-like activities. In conclusion, CLT was beneficial for most students to develop language proficiency.

Lessons with CLT is….	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
helpful for communication skill	10%	85%	5%	0%
useful for complete assigned tasks when working in group	0%	85%	15%	0%
more exciting than traditional method	45%	55%	0%	0%

Table 3: Students' opinions on the application of CLT

To clarify students' attitudes toward CLT method, students were asked to respond to the question "You enjoy learning lessons with CLT". After calculation, a large proportion of the students loved the lessons. Particularly, over half of students (55%) showed their strong agreement; 35% of them expressed agreement. The number of students believed that CLT was not interesting was 10%. It was easy to recognize that most students had a positive attitude toward CLT.
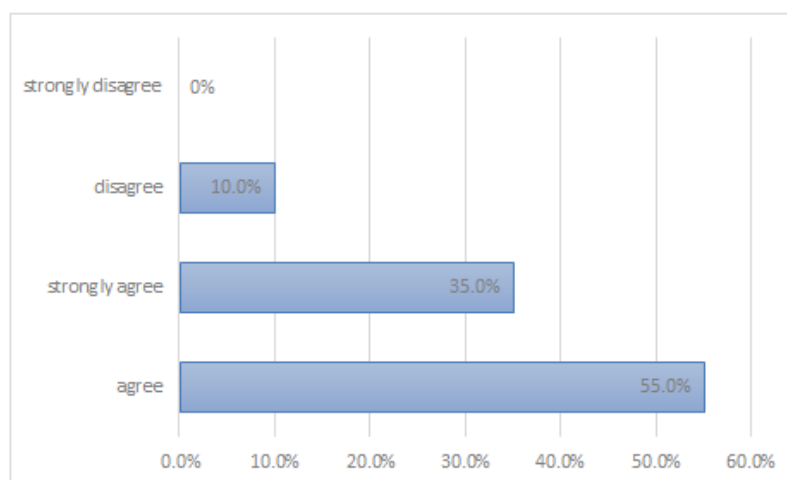
Chart 4: Students' attitudes toward CLT method

In short, the above findings implied that using CLT method in teaching grammar created good motivation for students to practice English. With greater motivation, students were able to achieve a higher level of autonomy (Liu, 2015). Meanwhile, students applied what they had studied in real life contexts and enhanced grammar competence as well as oral production.

V.   CONCLUSION

Grammar is important to improve students' language competence. However, spending too much time learning grammar rules make students bored. It is easy for students to lack confidence in communicating in English. This can put them under big pressure and they always get tired in grammar period. Therefore, it is high time to change the situation, so applying CLT could be a solution to create a more dynamic teaching and learning environment.

The application of communicative approach into Vietnamese contexts seems not to be new. This research clarifies the effects of CLT method on grammar teaching for English-majored freshmen at my university. With the combination of pre-test, post-test and questionnaire, researcher has enough reliable and valid evaluation to the innovation. Vitally important, appropriate communicative activities and teaching and learning strategies need to be investigated to help students overcome the obstacles in studying English grammar.

VI.   REFERENCES

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