



Investigation Integration of Active Learning Strategies to Improve English Grammar Instructions in Selected Secondary Schools in Dowa District.

Frank Malamula¹, Prof. Victor Mwila²

¹*Department Of Education, Administration And Management, Dmi-St.Eugene University*

²*Phd Lecturer Dmi St Eugene University, P.O.Box 330081-Chibombo-Zambia.*

ABSTRACT

The study used active learning strategies to transform English grammar instruction in selected secondary schools in the Dowa district. This research sought to address constant problems of English grammar teaching along learner apathy [Brown, 2009], as well as limited understanding because of lack of prior knowledge [Krashen, 2003], problems with target language comprehension [Ellis, 2008], and learner shyness in participating in role-plays [Harmer, 2015]. The study employed a mixed method, which brought together qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. A total of 21 English teachers from 7 selected secondary schools comprised the sample. Data were collected by using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings indicated that the use of active learning strategies to improve English grammar such as storytelling, role playing, group discussion, and problem-solving activities significantly improved the learner's engagement, motivation, and understanding of English grammar concepts. They also reflected that active learning strategies were an answer to the non-participation of students, helped a deeper understanding by developing the previous knowledge, made the comprehension of the target language easier, and encouraged students in role-play activities. This study thus suggests that active learning strategies should be incorporated into English grammar lessons for enhanced student learning. Its findings were not only noteworthy in terms of their relevance to English teaching and learning but also added to the growing body of research on active learning strategies in language instruction. [Hinkel, 2006; Nation and Newton, 1997.]

INTRODUCTION

Malawi is a small landlocked country in the southeastern part of Africa with a rapidly growing population of nearly 21 million people. The population is mainly made of children and young people. Malawi is among the poorest countries in the world, with 70 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Dowa is one of the districts in central Malawi. The economy of Malawi is fundamentally agriculture based, with around 80 percent of the population depending on agriculture for their sustenance. This beautiful country has more than one language, but its official language is English and the national language is Chichewa, [Kamwendo, 2016]. It must be noted that English language instruction plays a vital role in Malawi's education system, as it is the primary medium of instruction. English is also the official language used in government offices, business education and international communication, [Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2013]. However English grammar instruction has been identified as a challenging area for both teachers and students in secondary schools, [Kadzamira, 2006].

Actually if the message is relayed the right way in grammar, it becomes easier to understand purpose and meaning in communication. Otherwise it would count for the English language to be the biggest edge not only with an employer but also in known markets around the globe. The researcher believes that high English proficiency is based on a lot of grammatical knowledge. Most of primary schools are public including those with management of the government and religious institutions, [Robertson et al, 2017]. Secondary education commences when children are 14 years old and lasts for 4 years. Curriculum and assessment reform started in 2009 and is directed towards an outcome-based education and learner-centered methodologies for secondary schools. Though budget constrained, the curriculum and implementation started in 2015, [Robertson, et al 2017].

Research has shown that learners in Malawi have difficulties regarding the grammar of English due to numerous factors such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and ineffective teaching methods [Mchazime, 2011]. On the other hand the Malawi government Education Sector Plan [ESIP] has emphasized the need to improve the quality of education, including English language instruction [MoE, 2018].

A concerted effort on improving English language teaching to the learners in Malawi hasn't led to rosy results, quite the contrary, they continue to do badly in English grammar [Malawi National Examination Board, 2020]. This has been attributed to the common use of traditional approaches steeped in teacher-centered pedagogy and rote memorization, [Brown, 2009; Ellis, 2008]. Effectively, the traditional methods have resulted in lack of engagement,

motivation, and participation of students in English grammar lessons [Harmer, 2015]. Furthermore, because of limited use of interactive and communicative teaching methods, students are unable to apply the grammatical concepts in real-life situations [Krashen, 2003].

Recently, there has been renewal interest on the use of active learning strategies to stimulate business English teaching [Hinkle, 2006; Nation and Newton, 1997]. Therefore, problem-solving activities and similar active learning strategies should be relevant in promoting learner engagement, motivation, and participation in language learning. But little has been done in the domain of research into active learning strategies in English grammar instruction of Malawi secondary schools. It is this research objective in this regard that has sought to institute inquiry into the integration of active learning strategies in a real course-it-in secondary schools in the Dowa district to improve English grammar.

Globally learning a language is a synonymous with explicitly learning it' [Eisenman, 2013]. Grammar concerns the rules according to which words and sentences are formed [Zarifi, 2013]. Active learning also translates into student-centered lessons. Active learning thus is among the most effective learning strategies that encourage learners to be maximally positive toward the education situation and can be used to teach a diverse range of skills in the English language curriculum, such as learning proper grammar. About this, this study expects valuable theoretical and practical significance to all the important stakeholders, such as textbook developers, teachers, students, and supervisors, in maximizing application of contexts associated with EFL benefits.

LITERATURE REVIEW

How active learning strategies can be frustrating in the English grammar teaching setting will now follow. It is not the first concern, as the review of past research mainly entails how active learning strategies have fostered student engagement, motivation, and accomplishment in English grammar and also considers the balance between the opportunities and barriers of active learning strategies in English grammar instruction in Senga, Kafumphe, Nanthomba, Mbalame, Kaungwe, Kambulu, and Mndunje secondary schools.

Active learning as defined by Prince in 2004 suggests all forms of instructional methods that help engage students into the learning process with meaningful [relevant, and authentic] learning activities in which students also think about what they are doing [metacognition] Kamega and Croker [2017] defined active learning as a multidimensional concept comprising six themes: active, interactive, cognitively engaging, emotionally involving, individualized learning and independent learning. The idea of active learning includes varied processes that involve participating students in learning activities, such as writing, reading, group discussions, or problem solving, which foster the analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content [Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan].

The articles by Bonwell, James Eison, and others from the professional education community familiar with active learning research extol its virtues. Namely, active learning holds more interest and motivation than traditional teaching methods. It allows more constructive and student-centered learning. This in turn fosters interest and motivation and promotes academic achievements. It enables students to reflect on the topic. Students also develop important collaboration skills through pair and group activities. Moreover, students tend to hold a more positive attitude toward active learning.

Nonetheless, there is enough empirical evidence indicating that conventional types of teaching on their own assist in little in achieving deep learning and mastery in English grammar based on rote memorization and dominant drilling. The last two decades, however, have witnessed heightened interest in the application of active learning strategies for the enhancement of language instruction [Bonwell & Eison, 1999].

On the contrary active learning strategies are teaching methods in which learners are engaged in the learning process, encouraging active participation, collaboration and solving [Johnson & Johnson, 1999]. These kinds of strategies were intended to ensure deeper learning, criticality and creativity and showed significant improvements in outcomes of learning a language. It was found that active learning methodologies can particularly be very effective for English grammar instruction since these methods offer students chances to practice and use the grammar rules in their real-life contexts. Classic. Some typical active learning activities used in language learning include: Grammar games and puzzles; Group discussions and debates on grammar topics; Role plays and simulations; storytelling; Problem solving; think-pair share and peer teaching, [Oxford, 1990].

Active learning strategies have been revealed to be effective for language learners. This includes an improved command of the language, increased critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. It goes farther to include increased learner commitment and motivation. It includes more effective retention and recall of language structures and vocabulary, [Oxford, 1990]. Amidst their merits, active learning strategies have their challenges, which English teachers have to encounter while practicing them. Such challenges include: Time and Resource limitations; large classes with diverse learning needs; limited teacher knowledge, training, and experience in active learning methods, [Freeman, 1996].

Definitions of Some Uncommon Terms

The present study of investigating the integration of active learning strategies for enhancing the teaching of English grammar in selected secondary schools in Dowa district has some terms that need to be defined.

Active Learning

'Active learning means students are engaging in activities that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the material being studied rather than simply listening to a lecture or reading a text. Thus, learners are involved in constructing their own knowledge, which then promotes deeper understanding, retention, and application of that learning' [Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p 2].

Experiential Learning

'Experiential learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' [Kolb, 1984, p 38].

Social Constructivist Theory

'Social constructivist theory states that learning is a social process wherein learners engage with others and the environment in a manner that constitutes instruction' [Vygotsky, 1978, p.88].

Flipped classroom

The flipped classroom is simply a pedagogical approach where the traditional lecture and homework elements are reversed' [Bergmann & Sam's, 2012, p.13].

Metacognitive Strategies

'Metacognitive strategies are thinking strategies that involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning' [Flavell, 1979, p. 906].

FACTS HIGHLIGHTED

- Demographic Features of the participants from the 7 selected secondary schools.
- Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the various active teaching-learning strategies deemed workable.
- The English grammar achievement of the student before active learning strategies were put into place.
- The English grammar achievement of the student after active learning strategies were put into place.
- Recommendations made for the improvement of English grammar teaching by using several active learning strategies.

DATA ANALYSIS

1. Assess the impact of active learning

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Teachers: Sample size	21	100%
Actual Participants of teachers	17	81%
Learners, total sample size 40 per class	280	100%
Schools visited	7	100%

1.1.1.1 Table showing Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the 7 schools visited

The research was conducted involving a sample of 21 secondary school teachers with 17 of the participants being part of the study. These were all secondary schools in District Dowa that were specifically chosen for this study from Central East Education Division comprising of 5 district Dowa, Nkhotakota, Salima, Ntchisi, and Kasungu. Each school had an approximate average of 40 learners in the class that partook in this study. For all the learners, there were about 280 of them in the study. Therefore, the study was aimed at analyzing the effect of active learning strategies on students' English grammar achievement and the views of teachers toward such strategies.

Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of active learning strategies.

Senga Secondary school

Active learning strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	n= number
Group discussions	4.2	0.8	17
Role plays	4.0	0.9	17
Problem solving activities	4.5	0.7	17
Peer review and Feedback	4.3	0.8	17

Table 1.1.1.2: Teachers perceptions of the effectiveness of active learning strategies

a. Mean values indicate the average rating scores given by teachers at Senga for every active learning strategy, rated from 1-5 [where 1 indicates not effective and 5 indicates very effective].

b. The standard deviation [SD] values are the extent of variation in the ratings given by teachers for each one of the active learning strategies like group discussions, role plays, problem-solving, and peer review and feedback.

c. The n value stands for the number of teachers who were involved in the study [17].

Teacher's opinions towards effectiveness were had in employing active learning techniques in developing learners' English grammar achievement positively. Problem-solving activity rated the top strategy [M=4.5, SD=0.7].

Next were peer review and feedback [M=4.2, SD=0.8] and followed by role plays [M=4.0, SD=0.9], [Field, A [2013].

Teachers who joined effectiveness of active learning strategies were more motivated to teach and more enthusiastic about their work leading to the generation of a better classroom environment. If such teachers viewed active learning strategies as efficient, they should be encouraged to promote by way of adoptions across the school for thereby benefiting the entire teaching-learning approaches.

Correlative linkage between active learning strategies and learner achievement

The correlative linkage examined between active learning strategies and learner achievement under investigation by the researcher has significance for various reasons. In the schools visited and mentioned, active learning certainly took place, leading to a learner achievement reported at the sites. Based on which active learning strategies were said to lead to better learning outcomes, [Cohen, 1988].

In addition to that, the correlated linkage provides additional evidence of the effectiveness of active learning in improving English grammar instruction and, thereby, informing instructional design decisions for teachers and educators.

Active learning increases student engagement and motivation, leading to a "spirit of learning" with a positive environment, which is also conducive to academic achievement, [Field, 2013; Kvale, 2007].

Kafumphe Secondary school

MEASURE	PRE-TEST [n=40]	VALUE [%]
Grammar Accuracy	22	40%
Grammar Usage	14	35%

Table 1.1.1.3 Students' English Grammar Achievement Pre- Implementation of active learning strategies,

Kafumphe Secondary school

MEASURE	POST-TEST [n=40]	VALUE [%]
Grammar Accuracy	36	90%
Grammar Usage	30	75 %

Table 1.1.1.4 Students' English Grammar Achievement Post—Implementation of active learning strategies,

It demonstrates the learners' status in grammar accuracy and grammar usage before and after the respective tests. In a classroom with 40 learners, grammar accuracy pre-test denotes 22 students. This translates to 40%. Out of 40 learners at the pre-test level, 14 percent learners were for grammar usage, translating to 35 percent.

The post-test trials have been noted by the investigator to have changed a lot in the so much that in that same class of 40 learners, it was a post-test on grammar accuracy in which 36 students were involved, meaning 90. It was also 30 percent learners out of 40 learners at post-test on grammar usage which means that this test was given to 75 percent. Such improvement reflects greater achievement when teachers apply active learning strategies in their teaching. This forms the basis in which the research focused at how the English teachers in secondary schools prepare English grammar lessons so that learners own the learning process.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The learning and teaching of grammar in English at the secondary level can be impacted much by the conclusions of this research. The research indicates teachers' need for opportunities to continually learn and use active learning techniques in their classrooms, as results also highlight that active learning techniques enhance students' engagement, motivation, and participation in English grammar lessons. Furthermore, it could be inferred from the research that actual correlation exists between the use of active learning strategies and students' performance in English grammar. Thus, the outcomes tend to show that active learning strategies may result in making the classroom management more effective for individual teachers while emphasizing a more positive environment for every learner. To go on more, it also says that effective assessment methods have to be taken into consideration, such as project-based

assessments and peer review ones, to analyze student learning in the case of English grammar. Thus active learning strategy means that even parents can access their children's learning, thus tightening the school-community bond more. This study is thus a clarion call for schools to allocate resources more judiciously so that teachers would have the necessary support and materials to implement active learning strategies in their classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

On the basis of research findings, the following recommendations are made for practice: Schools should provide teachers with professional development opportunities to learn about and implement active learning strategies in their classrooms. Teachers should facilitate student-centered learning, encouraging active learning strategies through which students participate in their learning. Such methods of assessing students should be replaced with construction project-based assessments and peer review for understanding students' learning in English grammar. Schools encourage parents to initiate exposure in the mental activity of the child. Application of more effective that is project-based assessments and peer review assessments by teachers to measure student learning in English grammar. Resource allocation to schools is highly encouraged to support an effective and efficient way of getting teachers the different support materials for the application of active learning in their classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Based on the outcomes of the present study, the following proposals are recommended for future research:

1. Further research should be conducted to establish how active learning strategies enhance student learning in English grammar.
2. The possible effects of active learning strategies on other subjects and disciplines, such as mathematics and technology, should be studied in future researches.
3. Further research should also focus on the incorporation of technologies in active learning, with the aim of determining the effectiveness of digital tools and resources in motivating and enhancing learning among students.

Was based on the findings of the study and made recommendations for future research:

1. It needs more research in proving its function of active learning strategies in the achievement of students in English grammar.
2. The investigation on the influence of active learning strategies in the other subjects and disciplines like math and technology should be done in some of the following researches.
3. The other future researches are the ones concerned with the technology in active learning, particularly the effectiveness of digital tools and resources in creating student engagement and learning.

CONCLUSION

The study sought the integration of active learning strategies to improve English grammar instruction in selected secondary schools in the Dowa district.

Based on the findings of this study, English teachers are advised to avoid teacher-centered classes and promote student-centered classes by designing and implementing active learning tasks. These strategies when properly implemented are key to deriving optimal results in English grammar lessons. Thus, the greatest necessity of active-learning strategies in the teaching and learning of English grammar in secondary schools cannot be over-emphasized. The findings of the research indicated that group discussion, role play, and problem-solving activities are active learning strategies that significantly enhance learner outcomes in English grammar.

This has been revealed to show that active learning strategies do change the attitudes of students toward both English language and the active learning strategies themselves. Beyond that, active learning may also change the dynamic that fosters better conceptual understanding of the knowledge. For this reason, active learning strategies, in particular, ought to be the means by which teachers in various secondary schools accomplish their teaching from different dimensions.

This, however, happens in such a way because active learning strategies allow students to dominate the lesson and to have freedom over it. The students benefited so many skills in the study such as critical thinking skills, they were able to take part in role plays, and again involving themselves in problem-solving skills. Promoting active learning is not an easy task. The study has also shown that some secondary school teachers of English do not necessarily use active learning strategies in their respective institutions, so the investigator will encourage the teachers of English to keep on practicing. These active learning strategies are very beneficial for the learners. However, the researcher would like to suggest that future researchers explore the effectiveness of active learning strategies on different subjects rather than becoming myopic by concentrating on English only.

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