



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EVALUATION OF A LEARNING-TO-LEARN GRAMMAR MODULE FOR EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the evaluation of a learning-to-learn grammar module for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner in one of the private institutions of a higher learning. The objective of this study is to evaluate the learning-to-learn grammar module in terms of its usability, suitability and user-friendliness for EFL learners. The sample size consists of 20 EFL learners, studying the Advanced level. The learners were given a set of questionnaires to evaluate the grammar module. They evaluated the grammar module in terms of its usability, suitability and user-friendliness. The learning-to-learn grammar module has received a very good feedback from the learners ( $M = 3.5$  and  $3.6$ ). This indicates that the module has met the criteria of the suitability, usability and user-friendliness.

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INTRODUCTION

English language plays an important role in the development of Malaysia to cope with fast-changing developments in science and technology. English is the lingua franca in government and private schools, colleges and universities. Since Malaysia has opened her door for the international trades English has been given more importance and emphasis. According to Mohamed Amin Embi (2000), the government has indicated the usage of English as the medium of instruction for technical subjects in higher institutions. This is because the mastery of the language is an additional factor in excelling in their study. Language is an innate ability which is unique to the human species and it is made in the mind, and hence grammar is the mirror of the mind (Chomsky, 1965 as cited in Bourke, 2005). Without a proper grammar foundation, both the receiver and the communicator will have difficulties in understanding one another. Moreover, grammar allows us to choose how we present ourselves to the world, sometimes conforming to social norms yet all the while establishing our individual identities (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Savage *et al.* (2010) stated that to acquire a new language, learners firmly believe that knowledge of grammar is necessary as most learners have the mindset that a good understanding of grammar will facilitate them to communicate well and develop a promising career. Grammar is viewed as an essential element for communication to take place because it shows how language is used (Sadiq Abdulwahed Ahmed Ismail, 2010). Savage *et al.* (2010) claimed that though a skill in its own right, grammar can also be regarded as a necessary mastery skill that enables competence to develop in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar has gained its prominence in language teaching, particularly in EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, inasmuch that without a good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development will be severely constrained (Widodo, 2005).

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Literature review

Language learning strategies are important for a learner to mould their ability to learn a language. It is impossible that all language learners will have the same strategies to learn a language, but all of them apply a particular strategy to achieve their goal. Lessard-Clouston (1997) proposed that researchers of EFL/ESL can consider incorporating language learning strategy training in curriculum development and materials for regular EFL/ESL classes, especially for adult language learners. He further claimed that not many researchers have explored the development and use of materials for college and university students. Abdu Mohammed Al-Mekhlafi and Ramani Perur Nagaratnam (2011) stated that learners feel uncomfortable and sometimes are even terrified when the word grammar is mentioned in the classroom. They even claimed that to make a grammar lesson a non-threatening act, many educators have tried to make grammar an imaginative and useful activity within the English curriculum. Learners should be exposed to ways which they can employ in independent learning. As such, language learning strategies can play an important role for learners to gain interest in learning the language because it opens a new genre for learners. The purpose of this study is to help learners master the knowledge of grammar in a fun and interesting way through the Learning-to-Learn grammar module. Thus, the evaluation of this module is done in terms of its usability and suitability would give a better understanding of how productive the module can be to assist learners in learning grammar.

METHOD

The research population consists of 20 students, studying at Advanced level in the English Language Centre (ELC), in one of the private institutions in Malaysia. These EFL learners have a basic grasp of English language. They were taught English in the classroom and the classroom is the only English speaking environment for them as all of them come from countries where English is not emphasized.

The questionnaire that has been used to evaluate the learning-to-learn grammar module has been adapted from an English language learning website called i-SELL developed by Mohamed Amin Embi (2010). Learners were given the questionnaire to evaluate the grammar module in terms of its suitability, usability and user-friendliness. The questionnaire consists of 14 scale type questions where the response ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree and the learners would evaluate the performance of all the five strategies. The evaluation is to evaluate the grammar module or learning-to-learn grammar module that has been developed. The evaluation questionnaires were analyzed based on the date to produce mean scores. The key performance index is adapted from Mohd Zaki (2011) from his research entitled 'Development and Evaluation of Learning to Learn English Module for EFL Learners'. The key index score used in this study is shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2 Key Performance Index**

Score	Indicator
1.0-1.75	Very Weak
1.76-2.5	Weak
2.6-3.25	Good
3.26-4.0	Very Good

## Finding

Table 4.3 indicates the mean scores for the grammar strategies according to the 14 items.

**Table 4.3 Mean Scores for the Grammar Strategies**

Strategies	Mean score according to the items														Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	
Strategy 1	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5
Strategy 2	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5
Strategy 3	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.5
Strategy 4	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.5
Strategy 5	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5

All five grammar strategies indicate the mean score that ranges from 3.5 and 3.6, which is 'very good' or 'excellent'. According to Oxford and Lee (2007), grammar is very much neglected in language learning strategies research. However, by developing and designing grammar modules for EFL learners, new opportunities are opened for them to learn grammar skills in an interesting and meaningful way. The first strategy is "The Order of Adjectives", where learners learn how to write or speak out adjectives in a correct order through the use of an adjective chart. This is a memorable strategy because for each adjective, a picture or an object has been used to make the students understand and remember the correct order. This strategy also helps them to use the correct expressive order when they are using more than one adjective either in written or spoken language. Learners might find all the mentioned items relate to the strategy and that might encourage them to give a high score for the strategy. In the "My Five Senses", strategy, learners learn to recognize abstract and concrete nouns using their five senses (see, smell, hear, touch, and taste). This strategy involves learners' imagery to imagine which nouns can be related to their senses and which cannot. The use of five senses helps them distinguish differences between abstract and concrete nouns. As in for "My Five Senses", the learners might think that all the items are applicable to it and received a positive feedback. The third strategy is "Clouds of Adverbs", where learners learn adverbs by recognizing those that can give a brief picture of "when", "where" and "how often" an action happens. This strategy requires them to question themselves with "when", "where" and "how often" questions to place adverbs according to its correct expressive order. Once they have identified the adverbs and when to use them, learners can construct simple sentences and apply them accordingly. The strategy not only enables them to identify the adverbs, but also enable them to use it in sentences, which gives this strategy a very good rating. The fourth strategy is "FANBOYS", where learners learn the

coordinating conjunctions through the use a formula. This strategy helps learners to memorize the coordinating conjunctions with the use of formula and applies its rules accordingly. In this strategy learners can use the learnt formula to memorize coordinating conjunctions and apply them correctly in sentences. The strategy achieves this by enabling them to use correct conjunctions when they want to join or link two or more sentences together or two words within the same sentences. Perhaps, this might be the reason for the learners to give very good remarks for the strategy. In the "My Visual Preposition" strategy, learners learn the prepositions of position by using pictures. This strategy helps them to visualize the position of an object. Later, they replace the objects with pictures. In this way, they can visualize a thing and its position. This strategy also helps learners to use prepositions of position in simple sentences. Learners have given very good remarks for this strategy because they can apply this to focus on objects' position in their conversation.

All the five grammar strategies have gained very good ratings because the module was designed in such a way to capture their attention. As mentioned earlier, grammar has been a much neglected area in language learning research because there are not many grammar strategies that have been designed and developed to cater to the needs of language learners. Designing and developing suitable grammar module has opened new ways to learn grammar. These learners are adult learners and they know that learning grammar can be frustrating, rigid and boring. Taking all that into consideration, the module was designed for these adult learners and in a way that it looks appropriate for their age. These strategies met all the 14 criteria

and have received positive feedback from the learners. Learners probably thought that this is a fun and interesting way to learn grammar as compared to the traditional way of learning grammar and reflected this in their feedback. Moreover, it would benefit them in the mastery of English and help them in their achieving their personal goals.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this study evaluates a Learning-to-Learn grammar module for EFL learners in one of the private international universities in Malaysia. The Learning-to-Learn grammar module has received positive feedback from learners as can be referred to the mean scores for the grammar strategies. As claimed by Abdu Mohammed Al-Mekhlafi and Ramani Perur Nagaratnam (2011), learners feel uncomfortable and sometimes are even terrified when grammar is mentioned in the classroom. However, introducing this grammar module for EFL learners is an initiative towards learning grammar that can be fun and interesting and even motivate them to learn grammar. The results of this study reveal that learners are able to master the knowledge of grammar in fun and easy way because they can apply the same strategies in future if they were to encounter difficulty, also that they can learn grammar independently. The grammar module can be introduced in schools, colleges and universities to develop a more successful English learning environment.

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