

Teaching English to Papuan Students: A Preparation Program for University Level	73
Enhancing Students' Grammar Learning through the Use of Dialogue Journals	81
Microteaching Students' Perception on Their Set Closure Implementation in Microteaching Class	91
Promoting Metacognition in EFL Learning Contexts	99
The Acquisition of Negation of Jakarta Indonesian Yohana Veniranda	107
Integrating Cultural Understanding to English Materials for Junior High School to Enhance Communication Ethics: A	
Proposed Model	117
Book Review Markus Budiraharjo	125

LLT	Vol.	No.	Pages:	Yogyakarta	ISSN
Journal	14	2	73 - 131	October, 2011	1410-7201

PUBLISHED BY
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM
SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY

Enhancing Students' Grammar Learning through the Use of Dialogue Journals

Made Frida Yulia

Sanata Dharma University

Abstract

First year ELESP students often find difficulties in learning grammar, among others because the school culture is different from that of high school and the language used for classroom instruction is not their L1. Besides, there are many grammar rules to learn. To help students yield optimum result in the study, teachers should facilitate them. Research have found dialogue journals to be a tool to develop language ability and as a means of communication (Staton, 1987; Yorks, 1996; Peyton, 1993; Mirhoseini, 2009; Szeto, 2009; Widianingsih, 2010). Through such journals students can be put at ease to express whatever is in their mind and in return they obtain responses or feedback from the teacher. The teacher, on the contrary, can also tell students whatever they need to know, and give encouragement.

This action research was aimed at integrating dialogue journals into Structure I class, with the purpose of discovering its effects on enhancing learning. In fact, through journal writing students can learn grammar incidentally. The findings revealed a conducive learning atmosphere and teacher-students relationship which resulted in enhanced grammar learning and better understanding of grammar, which are fundamental for English teacher candidates.

Keywords: dialogue journals, grammar learning, Structure I class.

A. INTRODUCTION

First year university students normally experience 'culture shock' because the school culture is different from that of high school. The situation is worsened when the language used for classroom instruction is not their L1. This is what happens to the first year ELESP students when they are learning grammar in Structure I class. Despite its importance as one of the fundamental courses, this subject has long been considered difficult because there are a lot of grammar points to cover and there are many rules to learn in order to produce grammatical sentences. To help students yield optimum result in such a situation, teachers should facilitate the learning.

As a norm, this course is taught in a teacher-centered fashion, where students are given exercises to work out after a certain grammar point is presented. Interaction

between teacher-students is rather distant in nature and the classroom atmosphere is not conducive to learning. When they do not understand a concept, they seem reluctant to ask the teacher. No wonder the students' success rate in this subject is low.

Research suggested that dialogue journals be a tool for creating good communication between teacher-students, and that they promote learning and enhance motivation. Using dialogue journals results in a meaningful learning, which eventually leads to advancement in the learning. For these reasons, I am challenged to find out how I can improve the learning atmosphere in Structure I class, which can lead to enhanced grammar learning. Specifically, the research addresses the following question: How do dialogue journals enhance grammar learning of the first year ELESP students of Sanata Dharma University?

B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This part discusses grammar learning while highlighting the significance of incidental grammar learning, and elaborates the use of dialogue journal writing in the learning process.

Grammar Learning

Research have shown that explicit grammar teaching is crucial in developing language proficiency (Nho, 2005; Widodo, 2006). Learners acquire rules and patterns which are presented explicitly in class. However, to be more successful, learners should complement this deliberate grammar learning with incidental grammar learning. Incidental learning enables learners to gain implicit knowledge required for applying the grammar effortlessly for communication by means of various practices (Widodo, 2006: 124).

Some research have been done about the role of incidental grammar learning to help learners apply rules in communication, such as for speaking or writing (Nho, 2005; Chung, 2005; Ghabanchi, 2010). Lankard (1995) as cited by Ghabanci (2010) argue that "incidental learning increases specific knowledge, skills, and understanding." Without incidental grammar learning, all the concepts and learned rules will stay as memorized stuff which is not completely internalized. This kind of learning may be done among others through learning by doing and learning through a series of interpersonal events (Ghabanci, 2010: 71), where teachers "provide learners with authentic discourse samples to illustrate all the contextually dependent grammatical rules" (Ellis and Celce-Murcia in Nho, 2005).

This research focuses on the use of dialogue journal writing experiences as one form of interpersonal experiments in which the learners try to share their ideas through writing a journal entry. Through this activity, the explicit rules, patterns, and concepts the students have learned can be put into use in real communicative activities. Besides,

the need to provide learners with authentic discourse samples to illustrate all the contextually dependent grammatical rules can be provided through teachers' responses to a learner's journal entries. This research is, therefore, significant in that it tries to see how incidental grammar learning which is done through journal writing strengthens explicit grammar learning, and results in enhanced learning.

Dialogue Journals

Journals have received increased interest in education context. They have been found to be a fruitful way of communication between teacher and students. Liuolienė & Metiūnienė (2009) mention some purposes of journal writing. It can create a positive atmosphere for learning and foster deep learning by making learners relate new knowledge with previous one. Moreover, as confirmed by Boud (2001), journal writing encourages students to articulate their level of understanding. In short, journal writing can improve students' interest, participation, and autonomy in their learning.

Of various kinds of journal is one so-called dialogue journals. Dialogue journal is a tool where a student establishes a private, written conversation interactively and regularly with the teacher for a certain period of time (Staton, 1987; Peyton, 1993). In these journals, students may write about any topics that they initiate, including questions and comments, and then the teacher will write back as a response to them, while providing encouraging remarks to motivate them (Peyton, 1993; Szeto, 2009).

Research have reported their numerous benefits. First, dialogue journals can engage students in applying various language functions in a natural writing activity (Mirhoseini, 2009; Kreeft, 1984; Gambrell, 1985; Staton, Shuy, Peyton & Reed, 1988; Peyton, 1993; Icy, 2004; Szeto, 2009; Nurdin, 2009; Widianingsih, 2010), hence incidental grammar learning. They are a vehicle for students to share their reflection

on academic and non-academic matters, and to articulate their thoughts by sharing their ideas and problems with a more mature person (Staton, 1987; Yorks, 1996). In such an instance, Staton (1987) and Yorks (1996) point out that Vygotsky's theory is applied in that learning is most fruitful when it done in collaboration with "a more experienced partner." **Teachers** only function "mediators," who assist students to come to Zone of Proximal Development by facilitating them to articulate their understanding level (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995 cited in Sysoyev, 1999).

In addition, dialogue journals may serve as subconscious language exposure from the teacher, which develops language and literacy (Kreeft et al., 1985 in Staton, 1987; Peyton, 1993; Mirhoseini, 2009). They are instruments to discover students' thinking processes which can be used to improve instructions that meet the students' needs" (Yorks, 1996). Staton (1987) and Genesee & Upshur (in Mirhoseini, 2009) maintain teachers can better plan the subsequent lesson and provide necessary tutoring partially based on the information gained through them. Furthermore, dialogue journals foster students' and teachers' autonomy (Bartelo, Birkitt, & Davis, 1990 in Widianingsih, 2010; Tonthong, 2001, Jay and Johnson, 2002 in Mirhoseini, 2009). Staton (1987) also points out that they "seem to improve classroom management and discipline." Yet, this claim has not been verified.

Despite the good points, dialogue journals have a weakness in terms of the time teachers should invest to read and respond to each journal entry (Yorks, 1996; Peyton, 1993). With a small class it may create no or little problems, but with a big class with around thirty students or so, plenty of time would be spent on reading each submitted entry and respond to various issued raised in it. Nevertheless, it pays off because the useful information gained can be useful for planning a better instruction.

C. METHODOLOGY

I conducted an action research in a Structure class class E in the 2010/2011 academic year, by applying a particular intervention, i.e. using dialogue journals. Before the implementation of the action, I gathered data for the baseline using observation checklist and quizzes. During the research, I employed observation checklist, teacher's reflection, a questionnaire, a semistructured interview, and quizzes. The cycles would stop whenever the following criteria were met; they were: (1) students became more active, shown by more participation in class activities, (2) more than 50% of the students responded positively to the implementation of dialogue journals, (3) the number of students who obtained 56 or so in each quiz was more than 50% of the total number of students, (4) The number of students who fell under 'insufficient' category and 'failed' category decreased, (5) the class average of each quiz showed improvement, and (6) more than 50% of the students reached at least sufficient level. with a minimum score of 56.

D. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the description of the implementation of dialogue journals as well as the findings found during the process in the class. Then, it describes how dialogue journals enhance students' grammar learning.

The Description of the Implementation of Dialogue Journals

The research was conducted in four cycles, which were carried out from 26 October 2010 until 30 November 2010. Prior to those four cycles, I conducted some observations about the class dynamics, as well as students' ability. I tried to gather as much information as possible about students' ability in learning grammar and their achievement in absorbing the materials. The first two meetings of the semester were times for the students to adjust to new school culture,

adapt to new friends and environment. Thus, I started to gather information about students' achievement using quizzes in the third meeting. There were two quizzes held prior to the implementation of the action. In addition to two scores of the quizzes, there was another formative evaluation in the form of a mid-term test. The results of the quizzes showed that on average the class performance was unsatisfactory. The mean score of each quiz was still below 56, the minimum score of sufficient level, although the average of the mid-term test was above sixty.

From my observations on the class dynamics, I found that the class was noisy. The students were busy chatting but the topics were not about the lesson. Whenever I asked them questions related to the materials, they were passive and silent. Even when a particular student was appointed to answer, it did not work. The wait time was long and there was no significant contribution. Only one or two students tried to involve themselves in the learning. Some students liked to sit at the back rows and detach themselves from the class. Some were sitting quietly but they looked blank and seemed unprepared for the class nor paying attention. When I finished explaining and asked whether they had any questions, none asked. However, when they were assigned to do the exercises they could not do them well. They seemed to be shy to ask, or did not have courage to do so. They preferred to ask their friends, while their friends may not have perfect understanding on the lesson yet. Having sufficient information about the students and the class situation, I implemented the action after the mid-term test. The following is the detailed explanation about each cycle.

1) The First Cycle of Classroom Action Research

The first cycle was implemented on 26 October 2010. From the data obtained from the observations and the quizzes, I could see that the students were having problems understanding the materials. It was indeed

true, that structure lesson was not easy. There were many rules, technical terms, and patterns to memorize. Yet, despite the difficulty they did not have courage to ask. Perhaps it was because they were shy, did not want to look stupid in front of their friends, they did not know how to express their problems, or maybe because they were not responsible for their learning. Thus, communication media such as dialogue journals would be an appropriate solution to bridging communication between teacher and students. The class ran as usual; I explained the materials and then asked students to do the exercises from the handbook and sometimes from additional worksheets. The students were still passive. At the end of that meeting, I introduced a new activity; i.e. journal writing. I asked them to write anything about their learning that day in the journal. To have longer time to think about what to write the activity was not done in class but assigned as out-of-class activity. The journal was to be submitted two days (at the latest) after the class meeting that week. When the journals were submitted, I noticed that some writings were very short. They might be confused of what to write. When there were materials they did not understand they just said 'I was confused' without elaborating which part they had partially understood and which parts they still had difficulties.

Having implemented the first cycle, I reflected on what went well and what needed improving. From the observation and from what the students wrote in the journal, I could conclude that without any guiding questions, they students found difficult to write. They did not really know what was expected of them. Thus, this point would be followed up in the next cycle. I would provide guiding questions for them so that they knew what points to include in their writing.

2) The Second Cycle of Classroom Action Research

In the beginning of the class, I gave them a quiz on the previous topic. Afterwards, the

teaching-learning process ran as usual. There were no changes in terms of the activities in class. The students were still behaving the same way as it was in the previous meetings. No active participation on their part.

Approaching the end of the class, I returned the dialogue journals. Initially, there were no specific responses. They accepted the journals as if the journals were their

quizzes. However, when they saw that there was a reply from me towards their writing, I started to see a different look on the students. Some showed happier faces, and became more involved and felt recognized. I assigned them to submit another journal entry. This time it was done in a slightly different way. I provided guiding questions. Figure 1 presents the list of the questions.

- a. What was the most important thing you learned during the class?
- b. What was something you already knew or had learned and it was reinforced during the class?
- c. Write down questions you have concerning the topic(s)
- d. What worked well for you in class?
- e. What did not work well for you in class?

On this stage, I tried to reflect upon what happened in the second cycle. In terms of teaching-learning activities, there were no changes in the class dynamics. Not all students were completely involved in the learning. When they were assigned to do the exercises, most students preferred to work alone. Some discussed the tasks with his/her neighbor. The interaction between students was still very little.

In terms of their achievement, the average of the quiz was 55.68. It barely reached the minimum score of sufficient level. In terms of students' writing, there was an improvement. They wrote longer and more elaborate then. The guiding questions seemed to do the task well. Students could follow the pointers there. Therefore, I could say that for improving the next cycle, I should find an activity which could foster interaction between students. From one of the journals I found a suggestion about employing group work as one of the class activities. This was worth trying in the next cycle.

3) The Third Cycle of Classroom Action Research

In the third cycle I added group discussion as a new technique when I assigned

the students to do the exercises. I asked them to work in a group of three or four and shared their understanding and lack of understanding with the group members. I could observe that the situation now became noisier. The students were busy discussing with their friends. At the end of the class session, I distributed the dialogue journals containing my responses to their entry. Their second writing was longer and more elaborate. This happened probably because they believed that their writing would be read and, more importantly, responded. I could see their eagerness to read what I wrote in the journals. Even some of them were eager to see my responses to their friends' journal entry. More students showed friendly face. Our relationship was improving in quality.

Having given them sufficient time to read their journal, I then asked them to write another journal entry and submit it two days later at the latest. In the beginning of the next meeting, I gave them a quiz about the topic learned in the last two meetings; i.e. about present perfect tense. Due to the complexity of the topic, the class continued discussing more grammar points under that

tense, complemented with doing exercises in groups of three or four students.

The results of the guiz showed improvement from 55.68 to become 59.14. This may be an indication of better mastery. The journals also revealed better responses. There were more students asking questions about things they did not understand in class, even some shared their problems which were unrelated to Structure course. I sensed this as a positive sign about their learning. They became more reflective, and they are more responsible for their own learning now. The students' perception had changed in that they were not afraid of the teacher and the course anymore, As a result, they were no longer shy or afraid to ask. In class they dared to ask directly. To convince myself of this achievement, I conducted another cycle to confirm.

4) The Fourth Cycle of Classroom Action Research

Since this was only a confirmation cycle, everything was done exactly as the previous cycle. As usual I returned their journals first to let them know my responses. After explaining some grammar points, I assigned the students to do the exercises in group of three or four. As I moved around the class to observe how the group carried out the tasks, I noticed some students trying to explain things to other group members. Some others were arguing about the answers to some questions. I also found some students who raised their hand to gain my attention to come closer to their group. They asked some questions related to their confusion. This was a good sign. Now they started to be courageous to ask directly, not only in written form. After the allotted time for discussion was over, I invited them to discuss the answers together for feedback. At the end of the class, I asked them to write the last journal entry, since that was nearly the end of the semester. They were to submit it next two days. In the following meeting, which was the end of the semester, I gave them a quiz on present perfect tense. I held it in the beginning of the class session, so that

we could have time to discuss the answers as feedback for them. The remaining time was used to do some review exercises to prepare the students for the final exam.

The Contribution of Dialogue Journals to Enhancing Students' Learning

To discover the contribution of dialogue journals to students' learning, it is not enough to infer from what was happening in each cycle. In addition to examining the results of the observations, I also needed to take account of the results of the questionnaire and interview. The following is the summary of the results of the questionnaire and interview.

Students admitted that they liked journal writing activity. Some said that the responses motivated them to study and help them solve their problems. All students stated that through dialogue journals the teacher could teach them better and 97.1% of the students believed that through dialogue journals the teacher could facilitate the learning in much better ways because they could give suggestions to my teaching (52.9%).

Concerning the advantages, thirtytwo students mentioned that dialogue journals made them more responsible for their learning and able to monitor their own learning (97.1%). Most students argued that the journals became a place for them to share their problems with me, including asking questions about the lesson which they had not understood yet. These journals also made them have a closer relation with me as their teacher. This was strengthened by the interview in that students said that the existence of journals in their class had played a significant role in becoming a medium for them to express their confusion about the materials. They admitted that as a freshman, they felt shy to ask, and not confident with their English ability. Not only did journals help them in coping with academic problems, they also argued that the journals could help them to unburden the heart whenever they had problems.

Further, students felt that the journals helped them in their study. This was so because they students obtained my reexplanation whenever they asked questions in their journal. Some other students stated that the journals motivated them to study, because they found encouragement and motivating remarks from me. They could understand the materials better (97%), hence their grammar learning was enhanced. Twenty out of 34 students stated that they tried to apply the grammar points they had learned in their writing (88.3%) and they became more careful so as not to be misunderstood. From this statement, I can conclude that their grammar awareness had emerged.

Besides, they said that dialogue journals help them foster other skills. Their communication skill improved in that they had courage to ask questions in an appropriate way (88.3%). Some other students stated that their confidence, knowledge of vocabulary, and writing skill also improved. Besides, the journals encouraged them to be reflective learners.

In addition to revealing advantages, I tried to dig out information about any limitation the dialogue journals had as well as any disadvantages they felt from the implementation. Five students mentioned having difficulty delivering their ideas in written form. Five others mentioned being not confident, shy, and sometimes confused to write in the journal. A few others told about problems in understanding a written explanation, the timing of the journal assignment which was sometimes burdensome because they also had other tasks to do. Two students even said that the journal writing was assigned too frequently. Nevertheless, the majority of the students stated that there were no disadvantages.

Whenever they were asked about their suggestions to improve the implementation of dialogue journals, the majority of them claimed that the implementation was already good, so they suggested nothing. However, two students suggested the dialogue journals

be done not too often, at least fortnightly. Some others asked corrections to be given on the journal entries, and further explanation was given following the written responses from me. Another student suggested the use of a simpler language because he found problem understanding the response due to his limited vocabulary.

I also asked them about group discussion that I tried to employ in the last few meetings. In general, they liked the technique. However, in terms of its implementation they had different opinions. One student said group discussion may be applied every meeting. Some other students argued that it should be used sparingly. To avoid boredom and monotony, it would be fine. Yet, they preferred interaction with the teacher longer. The grouping would also affect the effectiveness of the discussion. They admitted that choosing the members themselves was the method they liked, but they admitted that it had limitation in that they would not know more friends while as a teacher in the future they should be able to get along with many people.

Another student argued that using group discussion all the time was boring. It was not effective as well because mostly they would chat about other matters, or they could not run the discussion well whenever none of the members understood the topic being discussed. They suggested the teacher choose the students who were deemed capable and had understood the materials to become the leaders. They would be assigned one group to handle where they can share their understanding to help other members. The time allotted for doing the discussion should not be too long so that they still had longer time to discuss the answers with the teacher.

Whenever the students were asked what should be maintained, added, or eliminated to help students learn grammar, they said that the journals should be kept to exist. The group discussion was also useful to improve interaction between students, to help each other, as long as the grouping and

the timing were organized differently. The last one, weekly quizzes were also important to continue because they 'forced' them to study.

In terms of students' understanding of the lesson, I could say it was getting better. It was shown by their achievement in the formative evaluation, i.e. quizzes. The class average of the quizzes increased. Furthermore, the number of students who obtained 56 or so in each quiz was more than 50% of the total number of students (see Table 1). The number of students who fell under 'insufficient' category and 'failed' category decreased. The final scores of the class after all their scores were processed

showed that more than 50% of the students could reach the minimum passing score of grade C, i.e. 56 (see Appendix).

improvements These could be attributed to grammar awareness that had started to emerge among students as a result of implicit grammar learning through journal writing. The students were made to be more sensitive to the grammar they used while writing. In addition, the creation of a better teacher-students relation as a result of mutual engagement in the dialogues made the students show positive attitude to the dialogue journals, which then affected their attitude towards the course content and consequently their learning progress.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Students' Scores

No	Range of Scores	Category	Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Quiz 3	Quiz 4	Quiz 5
1	80.0-100	Very high	10	8	1	12	7
2	69.0-79.9	High	1	6	9	4	13
3	56.0-68.9	Sufficient	4	8	13	7	8
4	50.0-55.9	Insufficien t	6	2	2	1	2
_5	< 50.0	Failed	16	13	12	13	7

E. CONCLUSIONS

From the research it was found that the use of dialogue journals, combined with group discussion, enhanced the students' learning. Students responded positively to their implementation. More importantly, the classroom atmosphere became conducive to learning. They became active and showed more participation in class activities. They dared to ask questions whenever they did not understand the materials. They answered my questions and were willing to contribute in the group discussion. Finally, the students' understanding of the lesson was also improving.

REFERENCES

Boud, D. (2001). Using journal writing to enhance reflective practice. In *New Directions for Adult and Continuing*

Education, no. 90, Summer 2001, pp. 9-17.

Chung, S. F. (2005). A communicative approach to teaching grammar: theory and practice. In *The English Teacher* Vol. XXXIV December 2005, pp. 33-50.

Gambrell, L.B. (1985). Dialogue journals: reading-writing interaction. In *The Reading Teacher*, 38(6), pp. 512-515.

Ghabanchi, Z. (2010). The effectiveness of incidental teaching of grammar to Iranian students. In *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*; Jan 2010; 7, 1; ABI/INFORM Global, pp. 71-77.

Kreeft, J. (1984). Dialogue writing: bridge from talk to essay writing. In *Language Arts*, 61(2), pp. 141-150.

Liuolienė, A., R.Metiūnienė. (2009). Students' learning through reflective journaling.

- In *Santalka. Filologija. Edukologija,* 2009, t. 17, nr. 4, pp. 32-36.
- Nho, S. H. (2005). Teaching English grammar in a communicative approach. In *Issues in EFL* Vol.3 No. 2, pp. 183-209.
- Nurdin, N. (2009). Using dialogue journals to improve English writing skill of the second-year students at MTsN Tinambung Polewali Mandar, West Sulawesi. Unpublished Thesis. Malang: State University of Malang.
- Peyton, J. K. (1993). Dialogue journals: interactive writing to develop language and literacy. *ERIC Digest*. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Dialogue_Journals.html.
- Staton, J. (1987). Dialogue journals. *ERIC Digest online*. Retrieved May 28, 2008 from http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-926/journals.htm.
- Staton, J., Shuy, R. W., Peyton, J. K., & Reed, L. (1988). Dialogue journal communication: classroom, linguistic, social and cognitive views. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Sysoyev, P. V. (1999). Integrative L2 grammar teaching: exploration, explanation and

- expression. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. V, No. 6, June 1999. Retrieved May 15, 2010 from http://iteslj.org/.
- Szeto, J. (2009). Dialogue journals help improve writing: interactive writing builds language skills in a meaningful context. Retrieved May 15, 2010 from http://classroomactivities.suite101. com/article.cfm/dialogue_journals_help_improve_writing.
- Widianingsih, L. S. (2010). Students' perceptions on the use of dialogue journalsascommunicationmediaforthe tenth grade students of SMAN 1 Depok. Unpublished Thesis. Yogyakarta: Sanata Dharma University.
- Widodo, H. P. (2006). Approaches and procedures for teaching grammar. In *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* May 2006, Volume 5, Number 1 pp. 122-141. Retrieved May 15, 2010 from http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/2006v5n1nar1.pdf.
- Yorks, K. (1996). *Using dialogue journals in support of science instruction*. Retrieved September 28, 2008 from http://www.accessexcellence.org/MTC/96PT/Share?yorks.html.