

Teaching Grammar to Adult Arab Learners: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the richest and biggest nation in the Middle East. The researcher has been working at college of business administration in Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj since 2014. Every year, three hundred students approximately take admission to pursue business administration course in the college. The researcher teaches grammar course. The students' lives are closely associated with cars, mobiles and football. They accept the discussion when it is closely associated to their lives; otherwise most of them switch off themselves. In this regard, he decided to change his teaching strategies that would be friendly to them and got support from them. The researcher used inductive approach in his classroom to teach grammar to the students. Contextual examples, kinesics, online practice tests, Google images, and objects around him supported him. Inductive approach to teach English to these learners yielded a positive result.

Key words: grammar, inductive approach

1. Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the richest and biggest nation in the Middle East. It is one of the biggest oil producers in the world. Foreseeing the future, KSA introduced English into the curriculum. As English being the only language to communicate with the world the kingdom has been emphasizing it in the curriculum. In this regard, teachers and professors all over the world have got opportunities to teach English in KSA. The schools and universities have non native speakers to teach English besides the native speakers.

The researcher has been working at College of Business Administration in Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj since 2014. Every year, three hundred students approximately take admission to pursue business administration course in the college. The students have to clear eight semesters to obtain their degree here. Each semester is called 'level'. The graduation program is called BSBA (Bachelor of Science and Business Administration). During the first two levels, the students study six English courses (three in each level). They study Grammar, Reading, and Writing courses in Level 1 and Listening and Speaking, Reading in Business and Technical Writing in Business in Level 2.

The students are in the age group of 18-21. A few students who got admitted in the program cannot write their names in English. Interestingly, students have been exposed to English since standard VI. However, English was taught in Arabic medium in a few schools according to them. So, the job begins from there to the faculty of English in this college. I insist every student to write his name in English from day one. One of the biggest challenges faced by the researcher is training the students to comprehend what he discusses during the lecture.

The researcher teaches Grammar course. Grammar Sense 1 by OUP is used for this course. The course is taught for fifteen weeks. Each class is for one hour fifty minutes. The topics discussed in this course are Nouns, Personal Pronouns, Adjectives, Present be form,

Imperatives, Present Continuous, Present Simple, Adverbs of frequency, and Article (a/an). At the same time, the present 'be form' (am/is/are) is discussed along with affirmative sentences, negative sentences, Yes/No, and Wh- questions in every chapter. It means students have to use these in every chapter.

The students' lives are closely associated with cars, mobiles and football. They accept the discussion when it is closely associated to their lives; otherwise most of them switch off themselves. Hence, the teaching techniques should be as such that should create interest among themselves. When the importance of English is spoken before them, the level of motivation was less. The research himself had tried to motivate the students by speaking about the importance of English, but the response was negligible in Reading in Business (level 2) course. In this regard, he decided to change his teaching strategies that would be friendly to them and got support from them.

2. Inductive Approach

In an inductive approach, each student learns grammar rules through examples. The instructor doesn't present the rules of the grammar. If he does so, it is called deductive approach. The foreign language learners get frightened with deductive approach. Learners are forced to remember the rules of grammar in deductive approach.

The researcher thought different ways of presenting the examples to the students. Based on the examples provided to them, the students tried themselves to identify the concept of particular topic on discussion.

2.1 Introducing Nouns:

To differentiate persons, places and things to them, the researcher highly relied on contextual examples, Google images, kinesics, online tests and the objects around him to improve their grammatical knowledge. For example, the students don't know the word 'train' but they know train. When an image of train is showed to them they recognize and told me that it was called قطار (qitar).

My work begins with introducing things around me. During the first few weeks students co-operated a little. However, when they understood that it was a way of learning a language, they started accepting slowly. Besides, I told them that unless they get introduced to certain nouns in the grammar course, they can't understand Reading and Writing courses and the courses that follow in level 2. They were also informed that English is essential to them to study rest of the six levels in the program. Some students were able to realize the big task ahead and some couldn't.

2.2 Introducing Pronouns:

While introducing personal pronouns, the researcher began with the personal pronoun 'I'. Kinesics supported him a lot here. To introduce, I, We, You, He, She, It, and They, gestures were used and students picked them up. Further, they were introduced to how to substitute pronouns instead of nouns in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, Yes/No, and Who-questions. For example:

John is working late tonight.

Students are asked to write pronoun to it. They are asked to change this assertive into negative sentence, write contractions, and write a Yes/No question to it. The responses will be like this:

1. He is working late tonight.
2. He isn't working late tonight. OR He's not working tonight.

3. Is he working late tonight?

In addition to textual exercises, the researcher provided online exercises to the students. He noticed that they participated enthusiastically when they understood the concept and showed interest in learning.

2.3 Introducing Adjectives:

Introducing Adjectives was a little difficult task. As per the prescribed text book, I had to discuss quality, size, origin, shape, age, and color. While introducing words related to quality it took a lot of time to make them understand and that couldn't be easy at all. Cambridge English-Arabic online dictionary was used at times when all the methods like contextual examples, kinesics, and the objects around failed. For example, I took the support of Cambridge English-Arabic online dictionary to introduce words like 'noisy', delicious, cheap etc. At the same time, opposite words of adjectives also assisted the researcher to introduce few words like expensive, long, new, ugly etc. When the opposites of these words (cheap, short, old, beautiful) were told, they could understand but couldn't give proper word.

2.4 Introducing wh-questions

Students were taught how to make wh- questions and yes/no questions. Making them understand how to put a Yes/No question was easy to me. However, the problem rose when he had to introduce wh- questions to them. Finally, he put the following questions to them and asked them what it was in vernacular language. Then, he asked them if they understood 'wh' in each questions. Questions were like the following way:

1. What is your name?
2. Who is your professor?
3. How are you?
4. Where are you from?
5. Whose book is this? (I took a text book from two students. I went to a third student and put this question to him.)
6. Which is your book? (I took a text book from two students. I went to a student and put this question to him.)
7. When is your next class?
8. Whom did you meet in the cafeteria?
9. Why are you late to the class?

Students responded to these questions enthusiastically and could recognize the respective meaning of each wh- question in their vernacular language.

3. Testing

Though they are few speculations on teaching, testing, and assessing students, the researcher relied on assessments conducted by him to know the comprehending ability of the students. The assessment methods in College of Business Administration are quizzes (10 marks), assignments (10 marks), and two mid-term exams (15 marks each). It comes to 50 marks. The final exam consists of 50 marks. Each student should score 60 marks to pass in the course. As exams are the only way to judge the students' learning ability, I consider the same to assess their grammatical knowledge. The researcher taught Grammar course for two sections. 28 and 40 students got registered for the course. Out of these 68 students, 22 students continued till the end of the course and rest of them discontinued the course.

4. Quizzes

Three quizzes were conducted on topics like nouns, pronouns, articles, identifying errors in sentences and correcting them, possessive nouns and adjectives, present continuous tenses during the course and the average of the three quizzes is shown in the graph below.

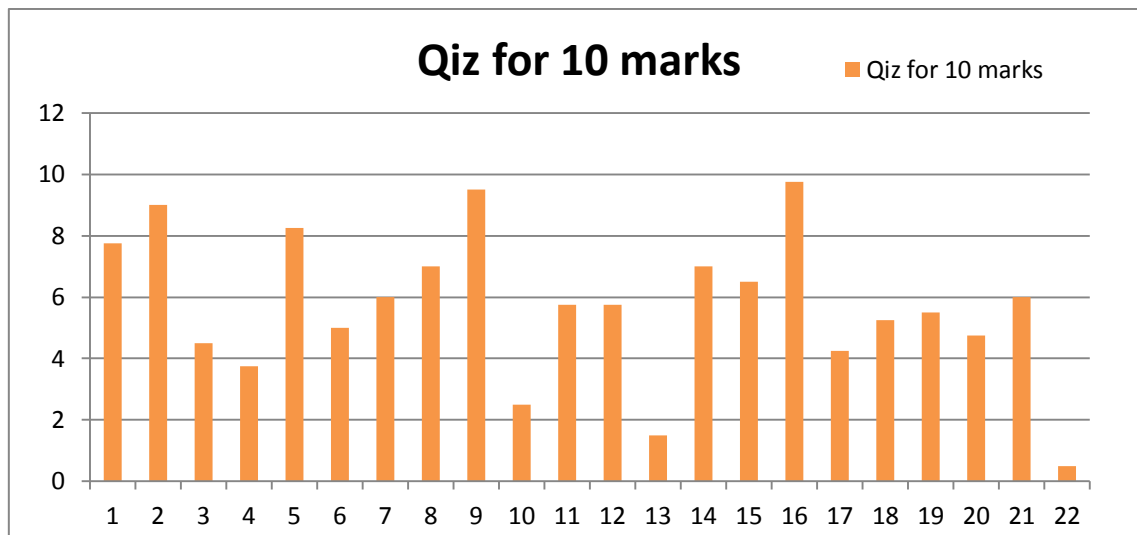


Figure 1

Students 16 and 9 gave their best in the quizzes and students 22 and 15 scored very less in the quizzes.

5. Assignments

Five assignments are conducted on topics like changing Statements into Yes/No questions, Imperatives, making negative contractions, simple present with 'be' and Adverbs of frequency. Before providing assignments to students, I gave them a good number of online exercises within the classroom in addition to textual exercises. The results of these five assignments were averaged for 10 marks and performance is provided below.

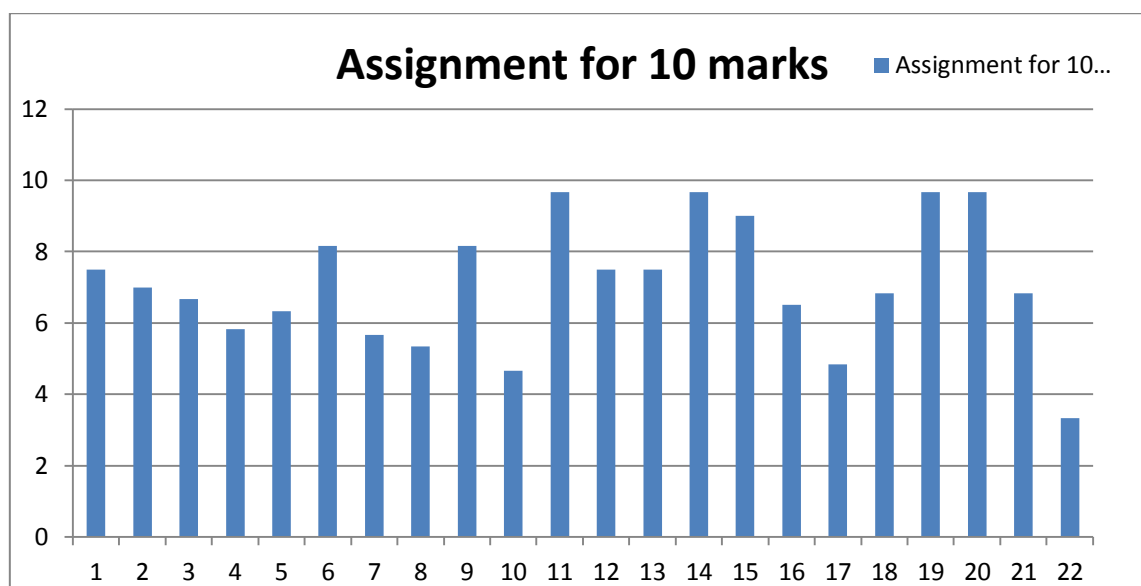


Figure 2

Students 11, 14, 19 and 20 performed well and Students 10 and 22 couldn't. The students who performed well in assignments couldn't give their best in quizzes. At the same time, student 22 couldn't progress well in quizzes and assignments.

6. Mid-exams

Two mid-term exams were conducted during the course. Mid-term A was conducted during week 6 and Mid-term B was conducted during week 12. The course is offered for 15 weeks.

The results of two mid-terms were summed up and provided below.

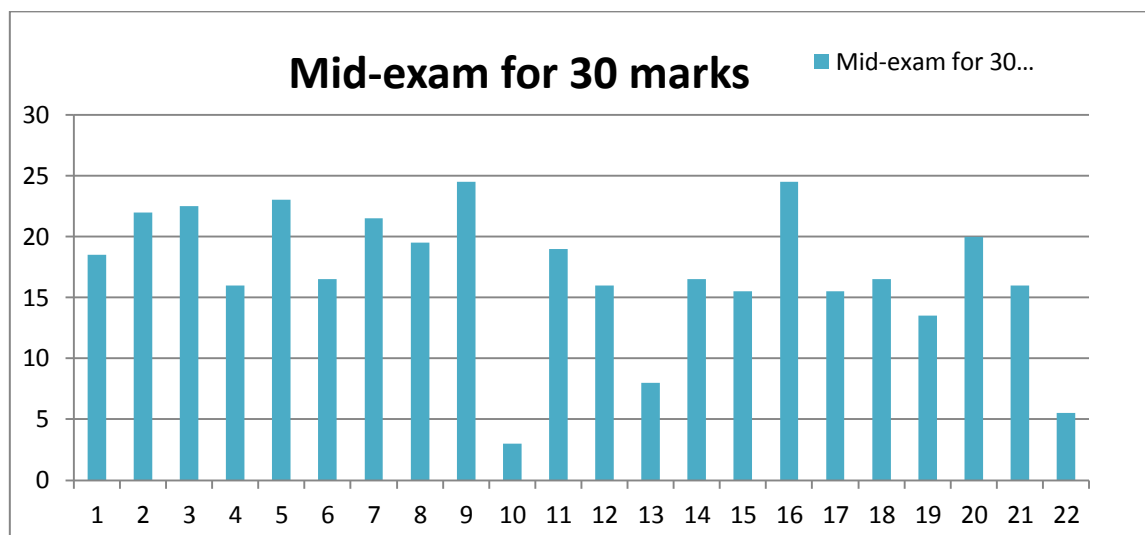


Figure 3

Students 9 and 16 scored high in the mid-terms and students 10 and 22 scored less. Interestingly, students 9 and 16 could do well in quizzes and mid-terms but not in assignments. At the same time, student 22 remained unchanged.

7. Internal Assessment Marks

Three internal assessments (quizzes, assignments and mid-terms) were conducted and the final result of the assessment is provided below.

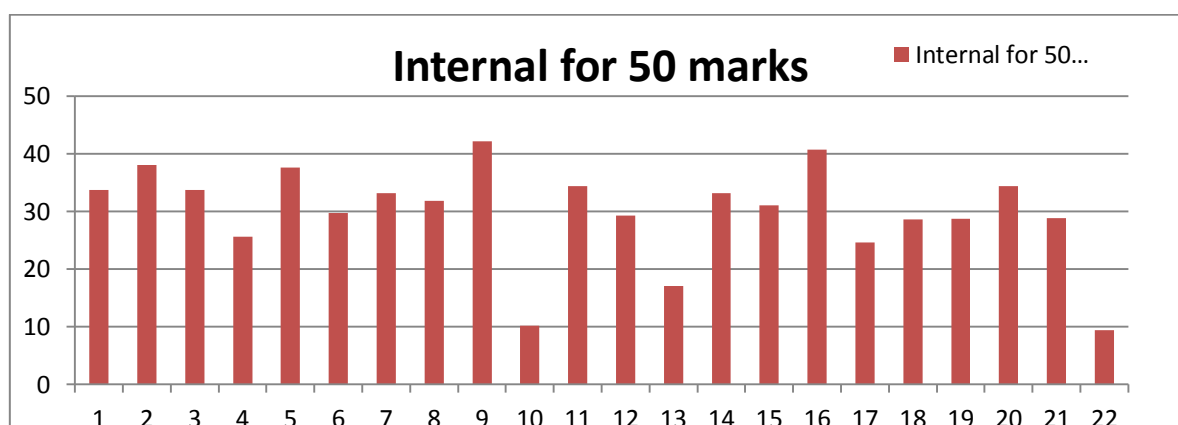


Figure 4

Students 9 and 16 topped in the list and students 22 and 10 remained at the last.

8. Comparison between Internal & Final Examinations

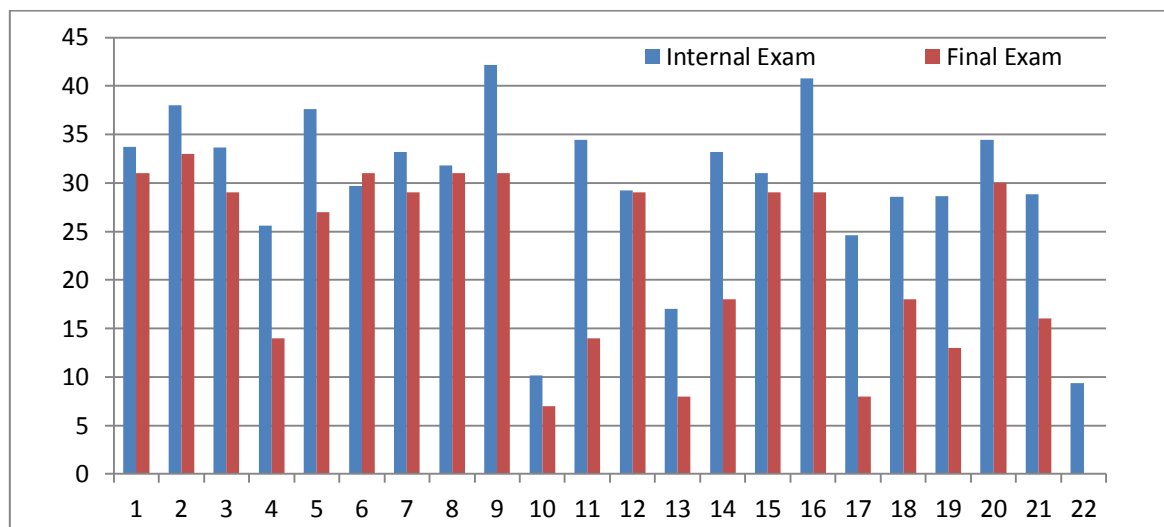


Figure 5

Students 9 and 16 performed well in the final exam and students 10 and 22 got failed in the exam.

9. Conclusion

Contextual examples, kinesics, online practice tests, Google images, and objects around him supported him in a positive way to introduce them certain parts of speech. A further research can be considered on the same line to introduce prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions to the students. Inductive approach to teach English to these learners yielded a positive result.

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