

Using Dictogloss Tasks:
Attention to Form in a
Collaborative Classroom Activity
With Female Students at King Saud University

Abstract

This longitudinal study examines the effects of using the dictogloss task procedure on Saudi female university students enrolled in Grammar -1- at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh. Developed by Ruth Wajnryb (1990) and preformed either with pairs or small groups, these dictogloss tasks were utilized to find out whether they lead to better performance on grammar tests, particularly in regard to verb tense accuracy.

It was assumed that there would be a significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the study's three divisions; students who were given verb tense practice using only traditional-type grammar exercises found in their grammar textbooks, those who were given verb tense practice using the same traditional-type exercises coupled with dictogloss in pairs, and those who were given verb tense practice using the same traditional-type exercises coupled with dictogloss in small-groups. This statistical difference in mean scores was expected to be in favor of those who did traditional-type exercises coupled with dictogloss done either in pairs or in small groups.

Three intact classes were randomly selected from the 1st semester 1427/1428 (2007/2008) Grammar -1- classes. Students were divided into experimental "pairs", experimental "small-groups", and "control groups". Participants' attitudes and

perceptions toward the application of dictogloss tasks were also investigated. The experiment lasted for 12 consecutive weeks of the designated semester.

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the problem and discusses its significance and implications to second language teachers, researchers of educational linguistics, as well as those concerned in the field of Applied Linguistics. It also outlines the purpose, aim and direction of the study as it lists the research questions, and expounds on some of the terms being used.

The second chapter surveys and reviews a considerable amount of related literature. It does so under four main headings: (1) The focus on form approach in grammar pedagogy, (2) Form-focused tasks: Collaborative output tasks, (3) A collaborative output task: The dictogloss task, and (4) Empirical studies focusing on the dictogloss task.

The study's methodology is presented in Chapter Three. Procedures and protocols are outlined. There is description of the sampling process and the population from which samples were drawn. The chapter also provides a systematic description of the instrumentation and the treatment utilized during the course of the study including the research approach and its design. Also discussed are scoring criteria.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data obtained through the scoring of the questionnaire and the verb tests. Descriptive, inferential, and nonparametric statistical methods were used to analyze the data. The rationale for the selection and utilization of each technique is explained. Analyses were directed toward answering each of the study's research questions by testing the significance of the findings.

Based on the findings of previous studies, it was predicted that regular implementation of the dictogloss task procedure would marginally improve students' use of the English verb tenses. However, at least in this study, it was found that:

1. In general, there was no significant statistical difference in verb-tense performance between the three groups' weekly test scores that were immediately administered after presenting dictogloss tasks.

2. All groups performed poorly on the posttests, even getting worse grades than the ones they obtained on their weekly verb-tense tests. In addition, there was no significant statistical difference in means test scores between the three groups' posttests taken one week after the end of experiment.

3. Though the pretest-posttest means differences were minor within all three groups, these same pre-/post- differences were statistically significant within each group. The group who received dictogloss tasks in pairs achieved the highest significance.

4. Most students, in both experimental groups, expressed satisfaction with the dictogloss task as a whole. Some, however, had mixed feelings about certain dictogloss procedures.

In Chapter Five, a synopsis of the study, procedures, and findings are presented. Its theoretical and pedagogical implications are highlighted for applied linguists and language teachers who are interested in similar form-focused or integrative activities. Also discussed are the limits of this study as well as some promising suggestions that could be implemented in future research.

دور استخدام مهام الاملاء الانشائية
في الدقة اللغوية أثناء النشاط الصفي التعاوني
لتدريس الانجليزية لطالبات جامعة الملك سعود

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