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**TEACHING GRAMMAR TO INTERMEDIATE LEVEL LEARNERS  
THROUGH CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION**

*Abdurasulova Jasmina Ahmadjon kizi*

*2nd stage student of Namangan State University*

**Abstract:** *It is rare for learners to reach high level of communicative ability from engaging in entirely language form either implicitly or explicitly. Likewise, focusing primarily on content may be a hindrance to embrace target language features. The integration of form-focused instruction in content-based classrooms has been effective because such an integrative pedagogy benefits learners' practice of target forms within communicative contents. It is noteworthy that conducting literature discussions has boundless possibilities of encouraging substantive talk and developing oral language. When language learners develop a critical stance towards discussions of literature, an interactive setting to construct interpretations is created. The creation of space for voices of learners invites readers to argue for the use of language to articulate perceptions, verbalize points of view and transmit thoughts.*

**Keywords:** *Language; literature; form; meaning; integration; speaking skills, beginner level, sentence structure, curriculum.*

The last few decades have witnessed an ample amount of research on teaching English to speakers of other languages. A large number of studies evolved around the effects of formal instruction on second-language acquisition because there was a growing consensus that high levels of linguistic competence were considered as a strong potential foundation for language learning. However, the center of attention has shifted from the structural properties of language to the comprehension and expression of meaning in recent years. Put another way, the effective integration of formal instruction and communicative language teaching has become a major concern in most of the recent foreign and second language

instructional methods<sup>1</sup>.

It is rare for language learners to reach high levels of communicative competence from engaging in entirely form-focused instruction. Likewise, communicative syllabus which neglects grammar instruction is inadequate in EFL pedagogy. In line with this perspective, combining communicative language use with grammar instruction provides clear advantages for learners to recognize language patterns in context and utilize them for meaningful communication. It has been surmised that if learners attend to form within communicative practice, they obtain information concerning language form by means of form-meaning connection and use it for expressing messages. In this regard, the integration of form-focused instruction and content-based instruction within literature-based classroom discussions creates some of the strongest rationales for grammatical accuracy development and productive use of the target language in which learners engage in more interaction and provide more language output in meaningful communicative contexts. This instructional strategy can enhance speaking accuracy and fluency of language learners. These two components in a complementary manner help learners exhibit progress in developing speaking proficiency. While speaking accuracy is the ability to produce error-free speech, speaking fluency is the ability to produce speech in a rapid and smooth way<sup>2</sup>.

In broad terms, form-focused instruction (henceforth FFI) is defined as drawing attention of learners to certain features in the target language. In foreign language methodology, the role of grammar teaching has been emphasized in the communicative classroom. Paesani persuasively argued that grammar instruction raises consciousness of learners to differences between first language and the target language, and for successful acquisition, grammar instruction should be provided with contextualized and meaningful comprehensible input. Ellis claimed that consciousness-raising assists learners' acquisition of grammatical knowledge essential for communication. The acquisition of grammatical forms in

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<sup>1</sup> Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2021). Focus-on-form and corrective feedback in communicative language teaching: Effects on second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 12, 429–448.

<sup>2</sup> Teaching in Academic ESL/EFL (pp. 54-73). Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston NY. Murphy & Stoller (2021). Sustained-content language teaching: an emerging definition. *TESOL Journal* 10 (2/3), 3-5.

comprehensible input leads to efficient intake. Communication activities make linguistic features a strong potential foundation for language learning. It has been surmised that language learning within communicative activities demonstrates significant gains over learning it independently. Once learners attend to language patterns in context and recognize them, meaningful communication can be achieved<sup>3</sup>.

Literary texts purvey the presentation of target structures. The acquisition of these forms for communicative purposes is necessary in foreign language classrooms. However, a notable development in communicative ability cannot be achieved simply through exposure to rich language input which aims at raising grammatical accuracy. A solution that has proven effective is the presentation of target grammatical forms in meaning-based tasks. Therefore, the integration of form-focused instruction into literary texts which can be used as meaning-based input is a useful pedagogical effort that can raise learners' awareness of target forms either explicitly or implicitly. The presentation of target grammar points in contextualized manner aids learners to retrieve in similar contexts. This study aimed at finding constructive ways to transmit knowledge from a sender to a receiver in classroom discussions of literature. In focusing on the knowledge and the sender, it endeavors to establish a suitable climate for the quality of classroom discourse in which learners can interpret messages and sustain discussions of literature. The study will employ the term FFI as it accommodates a broader meaning and a broader operation of instruction which includes explicit and implicit teaching of grammar.

One type of CLT that has become omnipresent is content-based instruction (henceforth CBI) in which learners use the new language with the intention of learning subject matter that is of value and interest to them. The integration of language and content has proved challenging but has prevailed in language classrooms. It is argued that depriving learners of pedagogy based upon language and content integration may be a hindrance to focus on specific language features

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<sup>3</sup> Stoller, F., Tedick, D. (2019). Methods for promoting the acquisition of content and language. ACIE Newsletter. The Bridge.

at the time when they are highly motivated to learn. However, the implementation of CBI in the EFL context is a worthwhile endeavor. The combination of formal accuracy and content teaching works together to meet communication needs of learners as both form and meaning are important features of language learning. Through incorporating content into the lessons, learners negotiate form and meaning and extend their knowledge. Content-based classrooms engage learners in private speech, provide learners occasions to sort out input and interact with more knowledgeable peers to promote their knowledge at increasing levels of complexity.

Research in language classrooms has shown that exclusive exposure to rich language input falls short of error-free production. To put it another way, communicatively oriented classrooms may not result in the development of high levels of communicative ability. In the same vein, Swain observed that good content teaching does not lead to effective language teaching. In this regard, the integration of FFI in content-based classrooms has proven effective in grammatical accuracy improvement. Such an integrative pedagogy, the introduction of language forms in communicative interaction, benefits learners' practice of target forms within communicative contents. Language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input. In line with this, the focus of instruction in CBI classes is on the subject matter rather than the form which conforms to Krashen's view of "what is being said rather than how". In addition to comprehensible input, development of communicative competence entails productive use of the target language. CBI constantly insists learners on generating comprehensible and coherent output in terms of both language and content<sup>4</sup>.

Quantitative research was driven in this study to quantify data. The study was interested in the quantity and accuracy of the responses that the students generated. Audio-taped classroom discussions were analyzed immediately following taping. The quantity of utterances, participation, and accurate utterances were counted and

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<sup>4</sup> Kasper, L.F. (2020). Sustained Content Study and the Internet: Developing Functional and Academic Literacies. In M. Pally (Ed.), Sustained Content Teaching in Academic ESL/EFL (pp. 54-73). Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston NY.

classified according to their levels: phrase, sentence, and discourse. The literature discussions were analyzed according to their levels to depict the effects of instructions employed in this study on the quantity of language utterances. One problem was that the state of engagement was not easy to delve into. Nystrand and Gamoran argued that student engagement is a cognitive phenomenon and states of mental functioning cannot be accessed through direct methods. For this, the quantity of participation in classroom discussions was focused on. The collected data were thoroughly reviewed to determine internal consistency. Further, the method of reliability of scoring was used to conduct a valid study. With this method, the researcher asked one of his colleagues to categorize the data and then compared his categorization with his own. His colleague worked closely with the researcher to analyze, synthesize and categorize the data to enhance the richness of the information. Finally throughout the study, member checks were conducted continuously for comments and verification<sup>5</sup>.

For a successful integration of language and literature, the selection of literature is worthy of consideration. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to acquaint students with appropriate literary texts that appeal to their interests. The literary background, linguistic proficiency, and cultural background of students are essential elements to consider before selecting the literary pieces. In the same vein that teachers are equipped with appropriate teaching methods, background experience in literature and the ability to raise questions about characteristics of literary texts result in language learning. Lastly, it is of teachers' concern to develop motivation in students since it is one of the affective variables that determine language learning outcomes. Teachers should embrace the needs of infrequent participants, reduce anxieties of speaking during discussions and seek ways to motivate students to actively engage in literature discussions and encourage them to find their voices in this setting. Teachers can come up with entertaining literature-based activities to encourage students to enthusiastically engage in the learning process. Teachers should realize their own part of the responsibility to

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<sup>5</sup> Pally, M. (2022). Skills development in “sustained” content-based curricula: Casestudies inanalytical/critical thinking. *Language and Education* 15(4)  
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ensure that students like, know and use English. Learning becomes more purposeful if teachers enhance students' active engagement in discussions.

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study investigated the role of literature under different treatments in speaking skills development. The students in Group 1 received instruction that included form-focused and literature-based components. The students in Group 2 received instruction that included content-based and literature-based components. Finally, the students in Group 3 received instruction that included mixed-methods. The findings illustrated that the students in the experimental group produced more language output than the other groups. Besides, they engaged in the classroom discussions more and achieved more accuracy. When the accurate utterances of all groups are compared, it is clearly seen that the highest achievement was performed by the students in Group 3.

The study found that classroom discussions of literature were essential grounding for producing output in meaningful communicative contexts. Classroom discussions offered a continuum for dialogic talk that stimulated learners to construct and argue for their interpretations and build knowledge. The combination of grammar instruction by means of FFI with communicative language through literature discussions helped learners express more accurate messages although a notable improvement in the quantity of the utterances could not be achieved. Similarly, the study showed that the implementation of CBI in literature discussions encouraged learners to engage in more verbal interaction. Although more language output was produced in this approach, a noteworthy development of accuracy was not accomplished. However, collaborating FFI and CBI within classroom discussions of literature created learners occasions to negotiate form and meaning that provided the strongest rationales for attending to linguistic accuracy and fluency simultaneously to involve in effective communication.

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