

## ENHANCE GRAMMAR OF THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH MAJOR THROUGH PEER CHECK AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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### SUMMARY

In the period of industrialization and modernization of the country, with the renovation policy and open policy, international integration of our Party and State, English plays a very important role. In training, while most other countries teaching English only in high school, in Vietnam, English is taught at the university level as a compulsory subject. At university level, writing skill has always been more critical for English majors. In fact, students' writing still has a number of grammatical errors. So, the aim of this study is to find out the result of using peer check method to help students improve their grammar. The participants of this study are the third –year English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education ranging in the same age group of 20-21 years. Through the application of the student's analytical approach, the study has collected the grammatical errors that students have and suggested solutions to improve and enhance it. The findings of the study will be useful for English major students at Thai Nguyen University of Education in particular as well as non-English majors in general.

**Keywords:** *common grammar mistakes, peer check, English major students, students at TUE, writing skill.*

### INTRODUCTION

This study provides an opportunity to explore the results of the use of peer check to improve grammar for students at the Thai Nguyen University of Education. This is a good method for teaching, providing opportunities for interaction between students and students. Peer check method requires two students paired together to correct grammatical errors. Teachers can organize this form at any time in any classroom of the writing class to test their understanding and progress. This method helps students to correct grammar mistakes and learn more from mistakes. The effective use of this method in the classroom can provide a learning experience.

Writing is one of the most important skills in learning a new language. It is a productive skill. Writing is the act of putting down the graphic symbols that present a language in order to convey some meaning so that the reader can grasp the information which the writer has tried to important. Turk and Kirkman (1989) [4] stated that we start from

the assumption that thinking about writing can improve it, and that everyone can learn to write well. "Most people, in reality, can write successful letters to their friends and effective complaints about faulty goods". This is a good choice for many activities as well as methods to improve grammar for students in a writing lesson. Peer check method is extremely simple and students can easily do it. This method allows students to pair with any student in the class. Using peer check method provides plenty of time for students to interact with each other. It also changes the speed of the class. Using this method, students are led by someone other than the teacher. Students who practice this method will also be comfortable, free to express their opinions and acquire the right knowledge for themselves.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **The concepts of grammar and teaching grammar**

Grammar is a way of understanding the language. On the other hand, grammar is also a tool for managing words, making words from a word or words into the meaningful sentence and really useful. Grammar is one of

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the major parts to form complete and meaning sentences. As Oxford Dictionary, grammar is the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics. Teaching grammar has some principles. According to Thornbury, Scott (1999) [6], there are several principles of teaching grammar that teachers must consider their missions. Firstly, the teacher should always present grammar in context. That means presenting the meaning of the grammar in that context: why did the speaker/writer choose that grammatical form? Secondly, the teacher should always provide opportunities for students to put the grammar to some communicative use: practice, practice, practice! Thanks to this, students can use grammar to comprehend and produce real language and make sure the students produce the grammar in a communicative context. Thirdly, the teacher should minimize presentation and direct explanation time in order to provide maximum practice time. By practicing, students think, communicate, experience learning and remember the language. Fourthly, the teacher should teach only the grammar your students need to learn and use a diagnostic activity at the beginning of the class to see how much they know. Fifthly, the teacher ought to create a right environment, conditions, and numerous opportunities for students the most effective learning grammar. Grammar acquisition is a gradual process and needs the right conditions: input is accessible for learners, the output includes fluency and accuracy and feedback includes fluency and accuracy. Finally, all of the above must be interpreted in relation to students. The teacher should consider all these rules according to the level, needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the students.

There are many problems in the grammar class. Firstly, students insist on using their mother-tongue. Secondly, teachers often feel out of control their class. Thirdly, students are defiant, rowdy, or distrusting of another.

Next, classroom materials are inadequate. Finally, students are bored or unmotivated. There are several suggestions for English language teachers:

- Teach grammar through the introduction of structures, rules, and examples.
- Use the illustrator graphics to the introduction of the grammar problem.
- Introduce to the problem, the grammatical structure through the situation.
- Use the method of thinking
- Practice: After teaching the basic concepts, the teacher should give students the right assignments on the new knowledge. Teachers should also give homework assignments to students and spend the time to check it in class as well as explain student questions.
- Create the most comfortable atmosphere in the class
- Give simply examples to students understand easily.

### Peer check

Peer check, which is referred to under different names such as peer response, peer review, peer feedback, is defined by Oxford Dictionary that evaluation of scientific, academic, or professional work by others working in the same field.

A "peer" is someone who is equal to you in knowledge, expertise, and status. A "review" is an appraisal, a revaluation or a re-visiting of your work. A peer review is thus an appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of your proposal, paper or project by someone who is as good as you are (or better) and who works in the same area as you. Peer check is not a new method in the world as well as in Vietnam. Vygotsky (1978) [7] claims that the mind develops through one's interaction with the world around him/her. He emphasizes that learning is not an individual activity; but rather a cognitive activity that the nature of learning shifts the focus on learning from the individual to the interaction within a social context. Thereby, peer interaction is cardinal to the improvement of students' learning,

because it allows students to construct knowledge through social sharing and interaction. Some researchers refer to peer review as an important teaching technique in which students read and make comments about their peers' written work. She also stated that this technique gives students an opportunity to learn about their own weaknesses and strengths. In addition, she defined peer review as a way in which students provide feedback to their peers for future improvement. Some researchers note that teachers need to provide students with guidelines (reference list or checklist) that they can refer to as they consider and evaluate their peers' written work

#### **Advantages of peer check**

Peer feedback has been advocated in several studies for a number of benefits. For example, Hyland (2000) [3] mentions that peer feedback encourages the students to participate in the classroom activity and make them less passively teacher-dependent. Yarrow and Topping (2001:262) [8] claim that peer feedback plays a pivotal role in "increased engagement and time spent on-task, immediacy and individualization of help, goal specification, explaining, prevention of information processing overload, promoting, modeling and reinforcement". Moreover, using peer feedback can lead less writing apprehension and more confidence as well as establish a social context for writing. Some researchers state that peer feedback is beneficial in developing critical thinking, learner autonomy and social interaction among students. More importantly, the practice of peer feedback allows students to receive more individual comments as well as giving reviewers the opportunity to practice and develop different language skills.

#### **Disadvantages of peer feedback**

Despite its perceived benefits, some researchers found that peer feedback was viewed with skepticism and produced few benefits. A number of studies challenged the strong positive comments about peer review

and cautioned that some peers are likely to comment on surface errors and give advice that does not help revision. In doing research on the impact of peer and teacher feedback on the writing of secondary school EFL students in Hong Kong, some teachers discovered that all students prefer teacher feedback than peer feedback. The main reason is that they assume the teacher is the one who is qualified to provide them with useful comments. So the teacher is defined as the only source of authority for giving the suitable comments. Some researchers report that a number of studies indicate that there are a number of biases associated with peer feedback including friendship, reference, purpose (development vs. grading) feedback (effects of negative feedback on future performance), and collusive (lack of differentiation) bias. Another issue of concern is that most peer responses focused on product rather than the processes of writing, and many students in L2 contexts focused on sentence-level errors (local errors) rather than on the content and ideas (global errors) (Storch, 2005). [5]

#### **Organizing pair work in the classroom**

Some tips are suggested by Byrne (1989) [1] to prevent problems with pair work:

- Divide the students into pairs in the most convenient way possible
- Make sure the students know exactly what they have to do
- Keep activities simple
- Don't let activities go on too long
- Carry out selective checking
- Control the noise level as necessary
- Provide feedback

#### **How to set up peer check method**

- Be sure to fully explain the procedure before dividing the class.
- Demonstrate the activity or show the examples first
- Ask students to tell you what they have to do before they do it to check their understanding.

- Have filled in activities ready for the quick finishers. However, you should be sure that they have accomplished the task correctly first and haven't just finished early because they misunderstood what they had to do.
- Don't forget to have feedback time after pair or group work
- Set a clear time limit.
- Control who works with who so children aren't always being dominated or dominating others.

### **The role of teacher in peer check**

To organize these activities successfully, the teacher plays an important role in the classroom. The teacher is full control of what and how students study. The role of the teacher will depend to a large extent on the function he performs in different activities. Harmer (1998) [2] examines the roles of controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, recourse, tutor and investigator. In addition, once the pair or group work activity has actually started, the students should work independently of the teacher and their own pace. The teacher should walk around the classroom, pause briefly beside each pair, listen to them and note any language errors which can be taken up later on with the whole class. It is best not to interrupt them or correct them while they are working.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilized writing analysis to find authentic information. The participants of this study are English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education ranging in the same group of 20-21 years. They are the third-year students that are studying grammar in the third-year on Thai Nguyen University of Education. The total number of participants are 6. The researcher collected 48 academic writings which were written by 6 English majors in 8 weeks. The goal of analyzing these writing was to find out some of the student's common grammatical mistakes. Then, the researcher applied peer-checking method for all of them to help them correct their mistakes as well as to point out the

importance and effectiveness of peer-checking method in enhancing grammar for the third-year English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **Analysis of data from students' writing**

For more accurate information on grammatical errors that students are encountering as well as to test the results when applying peer check method to improve student grammar, the researcher conducted the following: The researcher chose 6 students out of a total of 52 students in his 3rd year at Thai Nguyen University of Education, including 2 excellent students, 2 good students, and 2 bad students. The researcher divided into 3 pairs. Pairs 1 and 2 consist of a good student and a bad student, and pair 3 includes 2 good students. The study was held for 8 weeks and on Monday every week. Every week, students write one paragraph about 200 words in 35-40 minutes. In week 1 and week 2, the researcher collected 12 paragraphs from 6 students and from this pointed out some of the students' mistakes:

- Wrong grammatical structures
- False subject and verb agreement
- Incorrect tenses
- Wrong synonyms
- Incorrect word classes

After week 1 and week 2, the researcher applied peer check method. From week 3 to week 8, six students continue to write about 200 words in 35-40 minutes and then in one pair 2 students will find mistakes in peer's paragraph to help correct it. After that, the researcher gave some of the exercises to help students learn, memorize and avoid repeating these errors. After 4 weeks of applying this method, the researcher has the following results:

From the result of the study in 4 weeks, the researcher can make the following conclusions. Obviously, when there is not peer check method and students do not have the exercises to do immediately after they know the errors in their paragraphs, students

have made mistakes in the article. On the contrary, when applying this method and giving the students the right way once they have indicated their mistakes, they no longer make mistakes. Specifically, pair one, in week 3, 4, 5 and 6, the bad student had many grammatical errors, but to weeks 7 and 8 thanks to the above method in her paragraphs did not appear in the before grammar errors. Similarly, pair 2, to week 8, the article of bad students is no longer the original grammar mistakes they made. Pair 3 consists of 2 good so they had some grammatical errors, only one wrong use of the wrong type and one error using grammatical structure, and by 8 weeks they also do not get these errors again. During the study, two excellent students did not have grammatical errors in their writing.

Based on the results of the study after 8 weeks, it is possible to see peer check method is a scientific, feasible and suitable method to help students improve their grammar.

#### CONCLUSION

Using peer check method is not new in Vietnam as well as around the world. However, organizing this method of how to bring it best effect is very important. The study of this paper again reaffirms the effectiveness of this approach to improve grammar skills for students in writing. Students can work in pairs to exchange academic writing papers with each other and check them to find and correct errors. Teachers can walk around, examine students' practice and assist where there are any disagreements or questions in pairs. This technique brings us various benefits. It can make the atmosphere in the class become free and comfortable. In addition, students can learn from each other's errors. Moreover, this technique might stimulate cooperation among students. Especially, when no one in the group can find out errors and correct them, they can seek help from more advanced students until they can get the satisfactory answer. However, during the teaching process, teachers face many difficulties in organizing this method. Teachers can hardly

control the activity of all students in a class because the number of students in a college classroom is usually quite large, ranging from 50 to 70 students. In addition, students who do not have high professional qualifications, as well as negative attitudes towards English, also reduce the efficiency of this process. Therefore, the teachers with the expertise, attention to students also cannot make the school more effective, as well as this method, is desired.

In summary, after analyzing the experimental results as well as observing the attitudes of students participating in this method, it can be said that this method is a perfectly suitable method in the seminar class at Thai Nguyen University of Education. This research comes from many paragraphs as well as essays in the portfolio of English K50 students which still have many grammatical errors. Besides, students are not actively working in groups, most of them also study alone, so they cannot see their mistakes. This study was conducted at TUE but it is hoped that it will be useful for other schools in Vietnam.

Based on the results of this study, it is hoped that peer check method will be used more frequently during writing hours. In addition, this method can also be used to improve the remaining 3 skills, especially the speaking and reading skills of the students. This method improves student grammar with the hope of improving exam results, especially the IELTS exam. This research also wants to provide some effective suggestions for organizing this method during the writing lesson to help students avoid grammatical errors in sentences. It is hoped that this study could be useful for students and teachers to limit the problems in scholarly writing as well as other forms of writing.

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## TÓM TẮT

### **NÂNG CAO NGŨ PHÁP CHO SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGŨ NĂM 3 TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN THÔNG QUA KIỂM TRA CHÉO**

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Trong thời kỳ công nghiệp hoá, hiện đại hoá đất nước, với chính sách đổi mới và chính sách mở, hội nhập quốc tế của Đảng và Nhà nước, tiếng Anh đóng một vai trò rất quan trọng. Ở trình độ đại học, kỹ năng viết cũng luôn quan trọng đối với các chuyên ngành tiếng Anh. Thực tế là văn bản của học sinh vẫn còn một số lỗi ngữ pháp. Vì vậy, mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là để tìm ra kết quả của việc sử dụng phương pháp kiểm tra chéo để giúp học sinh nâng cao ngữ pháp. Đối tượng nghiên cứu này là sinh viên năm thứ ba chuyên ngành tiếng Anh của Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thái Nguyên trong cùng độ tuổi 20-21. Thông qua việc áp dụng phương pháp tiếp cận phân tích của học sinh, nghiên cứu này đã thu thập những lỗi sai về ngữ pháp mà sinh viên hay gặp và đưa ra các giải pháp chỉnh sửa và nâng cao nó. Các phát hiện của nghiên cứu này sẽ hữu ích cho sinh viên chuyên ngữ nói riêng và sinh viên trường Đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên nói chung.

**Từ khóa:** kỹ năng viết, những lỗi ngữ pháp hay gặp, kiểm tra chéo, sinh viên chuyên ngữ, sinh viên Trường đại học Sư phạm – Đại học Thái Nguyên.

**Ngày nhận bài: 07/02/2018; Ngày phản biện: 11/3/2018; Ngày duyệt đăng: 30/3/2018**

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