

The Influence of Teaching an English Grammar by Using the Computer by Iraqi ESP Institute Students

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1-Introduction

Successful of mastery of the second language may be due to learners own personal investments of time , effort and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language .

The world around us witnesses changes in the field of teaching EFL. Winds of change have begun to blow on the western world in the 1960s and the 1970s of the twentieth century, to result in radical changes in methodology of teaching. The contemporary views of language teaching give a prominent role for interaction while learning, for the reason that "language is acquired as learners actively engaged in attempting to communicate in the target language" (Nunan, 2001: 51).

The prevailing traditional methods of teaching have weakened the four skills of communication: listening, speaking, reading and writing for most of our students, since such approaches to EFL teaching perceive students as passive learners who listen to the teacher and write down their notes without being actively engaged in language learning. Such learning environments are mind-numbing and uninspiring for students' education. The result is that most of Iraqi EFL learners face many difficulties in recognizing and producing many aspects of English grammar. On the one hand, students need to know the rules in order to pass the final examinations. On the other hand, there is a good need for communication in an EFL with a number of foreign visitors, interacting with native speakers of English via the internet, to seek job opportunities or further education in foreign countries, etc. That is why the need for mastering not only the syntactic rules of language but also rules of how to use the language, to whom and in what circumstances increases (Musumeci, 1997).

Iraqi ESP institute students as learner of the English language face difficulty in learning the English language . So, this study aims at investigating the effect of using computer to learn the English language . To fulfill the aim of the study the researchers attempt to test the following hypothesis in order to accomplish the aim of the research.

– There is no statistical difference between the experimental and the control group in learning English grammar at (0.05) level of significance.

2-Communicative Language Teaching:

In their continuous search to find out the typical method or approach to foreign language teaching, researchers in the field of second language acquisition . Second language acquisition in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century have focused on the careful watch of the situation in which teacher and learners interact in the classroom (Trebell, 2008:1). To achieve this goal "hundreds of observation systems have been developed" .Thus "the focus of classroom interaction studies

shifted from prescriptive to descriptive and from evaluative to awareness raising." (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 120).

At the beginning, the focus of classroom interaction studies was on how the teacher initiates the communication to extract information from his students, praise or criticize their behaviour and the time devoted to their opportunities during verbal exchange in relation to the way they influence the "interaction" and the chances they provide for learners to produce language. Recently, the study is directed towards the output of students, "their communication strategies, and the relation between task types, learner interaction and opportunities for negotiation of meaning" (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 120).

Richards and Rodgers (2001: 21) state that "interaction" is considered a basic concept for foreign language acquisition theories and curriculum design for more than two decades. In England for example, laymen emphasized using language as a vehicle of interaction "in various content subjects in L1 classrooms, including mathematics, science and humanities subjects" (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 121). Trebell (2008:1) supports this point of view saying that CI is also considered a significant agent not only in the syllabus design, but also in the learning process.

With respect to first language acquisition theories, Brown and Attardo (2005: 194) illustrate three: "behaviorism,... innatism or nativism,... The third, interactionism, has many current proponents but no central figure. The third appeared when opponents of nativism perceived "interaction" as a critical factor in acquiring the mother tongue. They used to call it "**motherese**" or "**child-directed speech (CDS)**" or "caregiver speech" or "more informally, **baby talk**" (Fromkin, *et al*, 2003: 346). To get a brief understanding of these theories see Table (1) which is adopted from Brown and Attardo (2005: 198), where LAD refers to the Chomskian Language Acquisition Device and UG to universal grammar.

	Behaviorism	Innatism	Interactionism
Imitation	Essential	Triggers LAD	Part of the process
poverty of stimulus	-	UG	-
Critical period	-	LAD shuts off	-
CDS	-	Degenerate	Essential
Correction	Essential	Useless	
overextension of rules	-	rule-governed UG	-

Table (1)

A summary of "various approaches to language acquisition"

Pertaining to language teaching, three prospects or stances concerning the characteristics of language and how they have affected the development of the present methodology of English foreign language education; "three different theoretical views of language and the nature of language proficiency explicitly or implicitly inform current approaches and methods in language teaching" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 20). The first is the structural view which holds "that language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning" and learning the

target language is achieved by mastering the "phonological units..., grammatical units..., grammatical operations..., and lexical items" (ibid: 20–1) .

The second is "the *functional view*" (ibid), or as Richard, *et al*, (1992:149) call and define it "**functional Linguistics**... which is concerned with language as an instrument of social interaction rather than as a system that is viewed in isolation." According to this view language is seen as a means of communication and conveying meaning. Wilkins (1976) tried to translate this view in the form of teaching materials in his Notional Syllabuses. Thus, "The notional syllabus ... takes the desired communicative capacity as the starting-point" where "the linguistic content is planned according to the semantic demands of the learner" (ibid: 18–19). A heavier weight is given for the "semantic and communicative dimensions of language" rather than "the grammatical characteristics" in designing the teaching material. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 21).

The interactional view is the third, where the progress in language acquisition and the social maturity are intermingled and related to each other as long as a person cannot be understood without the other. Proponents of this view emphasize the social context of language enhancement and how interaction with other people inspire language learning. Bachman (1990: 93) has the same opinion adding that "any act of interpersonal language use involves two levels of message: context and relationship." Richards and Rodgers (2001: 21) say that this view "sees language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. Language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations."

Methods and approaches to language teaching based on the interactional view of language include "Task-Based Language Teaching, Whole Language, Neurolinguistic Programming, Cooperative Language Learning and Content-Based Instruction" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 22). As well as "Strategic interaction and communicative approaches" www.LinguaLinks.com

2.1-Implications of Classroom interaction

The term 'grammar' is used to refer to the basic units of a language and how these units are brought together to form meaningful sentences, and the knowledge of what, when and to whom these sentences are said (i.e. their functions). In other words grammar is concerned with rules of construction and use (Richards, *et al*, 1992 :161). Thornbury (1999: 13) agrees with this definition and broadens it by saying that grammar gives additional "meanings" which cannot be attained from "immediate context". These are basically:

representational – that is, grammar enables us to use language to describe the world in terms of how, when and where things happen, and

interpersonal – that is, grammar facilitates the way we interact with other people when, for example, we need to get things done using language.

Grammar is a useful tool that improves the learner's performance in both the mother and foreign language because it is able to record actual usage and formulate

the rules whereby sentences are general and understood. (Harmer, 2007:59-61). Cook (2001: 19) and Thornbury (1999: 13,28) point out the key role of grammar in FL research and the approaches by which grammar is taught.

Hult (2008) assert the significant role of Classroom interaction in teaching grammar and FL. In their allegation, they have insinuated explanations of theories correlated to Classroom interaction (the sociocultural theory, the Input Hypothesis, the Interaction Hypothesis and the Output Hypothesis). These theories give a heavy weight to interaction and negotiation of meaning in smoothing the progress of students' language learning by promoting the acquisition of FL grammar.

To conclude, classroom interaction can be seen as a useful tool to teach grammar. For the reason that CI activities provide opportunities to combine the form of the grammatical rules with their function. Additionally, Classroom interaction tasks help students to induce the accurate and fluent use of these rules during their interaction with their interlocutors, the teacher and the text. (Cook, 2001: 37-44). This conclusion corresponds to what Hatch (1978: 409) has pointed out about the usefulness of Classroom interaction in promoting the grammar of English language "One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally and, out of this interaction, syntactic structures are developed".

Many specialists in the field of teaching EFL have assigned the significant role of Classroom interaction in education. The researcher has detected the following advantages of classroom interaction for the learning process:

1- Classroom interaction requires a kind of cooperation between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves under the supervision and direction of their teacher. Cooperative learning techniques require students to take different roles in the group, thus students can be assigned different roles according to their abilities; when they feel more comfortable using the target language, students can take on more challenging roles. (Jacobs *et al.*, 2002: 136).

2- Creating a joyful climate in the class and consequently the students will enjoy and positively participate in the learning process. This learning environment which is vital and full of fun the students have the opportunity to practice the foreign language freely without tension will result in reducing anxiety, since the learnt grammatical texts are learnt and used in a social context similar to that in which they are going to similar to real life situations, through classroom interaction. (Littlewood, 1998: 97-8).

3- Students are provided the required time to arrange their messages and put them into words. This will assist them to exploit and invest the communicative strategies (e.g. "avoid communication, use paraphrase, seek help, etc." (Littlewood, 1998: 84-7) in a productive way.

4- Research in the field of classroom interaction shows the importance of the social interaction or "Language Socialization" as Riley (2008: 398) calls it, in providing the sufficient amount of essential, understood input for learners due to the fact that they share similar educational background and level of knowledge. Research in the field

of "learner-learner interactive processes has shown how collaboration may result in the provision of developmentally appropriate assistance" (Lantolf, 2000: 52).

5– In classroom interaction the furniture of the classroom is ordered in a way that the teacher can see all the students, in other words the students' desks are arranged around in the form of an open circle. Through this organization the teacher can distribute his paralinguistic signs to all students and consequently makes them feel that they are all engaged with him and should pay attention to his instruction and questions because each student sits in the zone of the teacher's sight. (Sadker and Sadker, 2003: 85).

6– When the teacher asks a question he does not direct it to a certain student, instead he will direct it to all the students. This "**group alerting**" will keep them "awake and on their toes" (Sadker and Sadker, 2003: 87); (Byrne, 1987: 15).

7– Through classroom interaction, students learn law and order. For the reason that the teacher sets the rules which guarantee their mutual privileges and opinions, seek permission when they want to participate, appreciate the possessions and seats of each other and give the students the opportunity to add their own rules, after the teacher and the class agree on it. (Sadker and Sadker, 2003: 84).

2.2-Teacher Interactions with Learners

This type of interaction deals with the ongoing process of classroom interaction between teachers and their students. Because of its importance in promoting EFL education, researchers in this field have built up many research tools to scrutinize and analyze classroom interaction "Over twenty observation instruments have been developed just for studying classroom interaction in second language classes... most of these focus on the teacher" (Long and Sato 1983). Among these twenty instruments the following are considered of critical value:

- 1 Teacher questions
 - 2 Teacher error correction
 - 3 Quantity of teacher speech
 - 4 Teacher explanations
 - 5 Teacher 'wait-time' for student responses
- (Brown and Rodgers, 2002:81).

Throughout this process learners commit mistakes and errors, but it is preferable for the teacher not to confuse the teaching-learning process by telling the learners that this is wrong, or that they have performed wrongly. Instead, his duty would be to lead his student(s) to recognize their mistake and direct them to avoid such an error in the future.

There are several major interactive teaching skills that a teacher ought to master in order to promise classroom interaction. These skills are intermingled and related to each other like a net work. Studies about the teaching skills revealed that a unique characteristic of "teaching skills is their interactive nature" (Kyriacou, 1991: 33). The teacher faces varying situations, most of which are unexpected, thus he needs to redirect his performance to cope with these changes. Clark and Peterson (1986) have noticed that the successful teachers moderate and adjust their manners and tactics with regards to the lesson progress. They have also pointed out that with the passage of time a lot of this interactive executive is converted into a custom

which is somewhat conscious and the teacher just has to consider the more unpredictable circumstances which need a careful attention and care.

The important skill a teacher needs to master in order to guide a successful classroom interaction during tutoring is how to provide the appropriate environment for learning to take place. Studies about the classroom climate, including the studies of (Rutter *et al.* (1979:125)) stress its importance. The climate of the classroom is defined by Richards, *et al.*, (1992:53) as

the effective aspects of the classroom, such as the feelings generated by and about the teacher, the students or the subject matter, along with aspects of the classroom itself that contribute positively or negatively to the learning atmosphere.

According to Richards, *et al.* (1992: 54), the skilful teacher can create the climate that suits the learning process by inspiring the thoughts and insights of his students positively. This can be achieved by :

- 1– Constructing an environment in which educational objectives are stressed.
- 2– The teacher monitors and rewards the achievements of his students in order to promote high educational levels of his students'.
- 3– The relationship between the teacher and his students is based on mutual respect and understanding.
- 4– The teacher provides a feedback which plays a role in fostering the students' self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 5– The arrangement and design of the classroom should contribute to positive attitudes of students towards the lecture and smooth the progress of the activities.

2.3-Computer as a language teaching device

In teaching EFL, problem solving is a common task where the learner is put in a difficult situation and by using his critical thinking will choose the right solution that leads him to the required aim. Problem solving activities are

learning activities in which the learner is given a situation and a problem and must work out a solution. Such activities are said to require higher-order thinking. Many activities in COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING involve problem solving and offer feedback while the student is trying to solve the problem.

(Richards, *et al.*, 1992: 290)

This technique helps students to find out and identify the different forms and functions of the grammatical rules. Harmer (1987: 39) asserts the importance of problem solving activities in drawing the attention of learners to the information about language and lead them to use their critical thinking during their schooling, "encouraging students to discover grammar for themselves is one valuable way of helping them to get to grips with the language. Very often this discovering of grammatical facts involves students in a fairly analytical study of the language".

Students will form their own hypotheses about the "grammatical facts" and test them to find out, for themselves, whether their hypotheses are correct. Thus, learners can examine a set of grammatical forms related to the future tense, for example, instead of just dealing with one form of future, "going to" for instance, or to formulate an accurate awareness about "the kind of aspects of grammar...the problems of form and function" (Harmer, 1987: 37–38). Through problem solving activities, students will be able to recognize that the same form (the progressive) is used to convey variable meanings.

3-The Experimental Design

The experimental design represents the strategy which is set by the researcher to collect the necessary information and control the factors or variables which may affect this information and finally carrying out the suitable analysis to test the hypotheses of the research within a comprehensive plan.

The researcher should choose the suitable experimental design which provides valid conclusions about the relationships between both independent and dependent variables (Brown and Rodgers, 2002: 210).

A "pretest–post–test control group design" (Cohen, *et al.*, 2000: 231) is used, in which two groups "matched for age, sex, ratio of boys to girls, social class" (Bell, 1987: 9) are chosen randomly. The form of this design is shown in Table (2):

Experimental group	Pre-test	Independent variable	Post –test
Control group	Pre-test	-----	Post –test

Table (2)
The Experimental Design

Brown and Rodgers (2002: 211) call it "*true* experimental design" and is characterized by the following features:

1. Selecting two groups at random and assigning them to an experimental and a control group.
2. The independent variable is administered only to the experimental group.
3. Both groups of subjects submit to "a pre-test and post-test" to measure the influence of the dependent variable.

The experimental group is taught by using computer , while the control group is taught by using the traditional method. The experiment is lasted for two months

(1/11 - 31/12 /2012) . The researchers adopted the diagram below from (Best, 1981: 70) so as to further explain the experimental design.

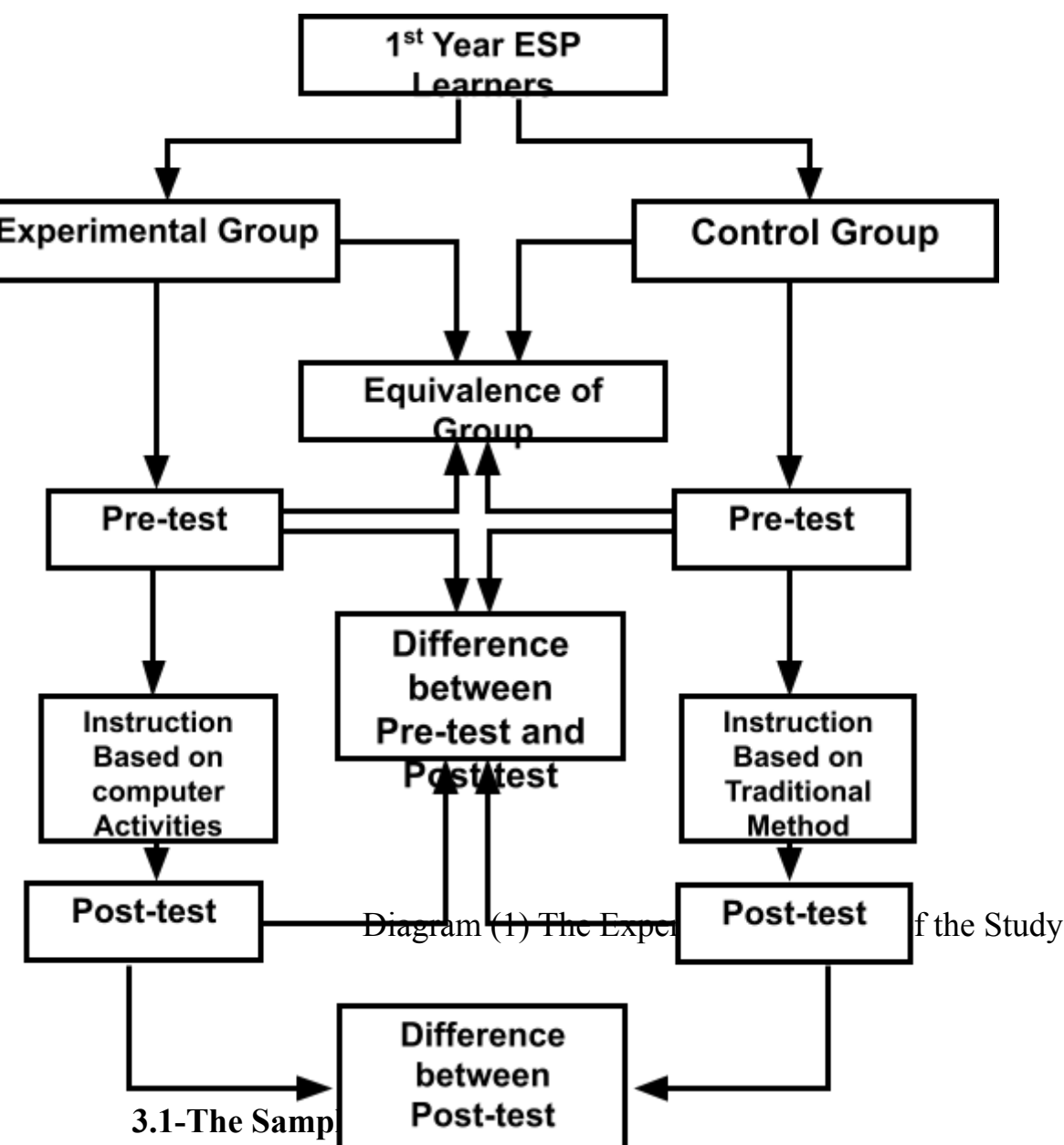


Diagram (1) The Experimental Design of the Study

3.1-The Sample

The sample of this study has been selected randomly from first year students in the Electronic Department ,Technical Institute of Babylon, during the academic year (2011-2012) . According to Byrne (1987: 9) Classroom interaction activities require the participation of groups of learners who can be easily directed and guided by the teacher in the educational tasks depending mainly on themselves, therefore, the size of the sample can be described as typical.

This sample consists of (41) students, one of the students is excluded because he has failed in the previous academic year (2010–2011). The remaining (40)

students are distributed into two groups, the experimental and control. Each group consists of (20) students.

As for the experimental group , the researcher begins every lecture with questioning strategies via computer in order to create an interactive language classroom which is the main purpose of an English special purpose course . In addition , it provides necessary stepping stones to communication . Then, the subjects are given the title of the topic . Then , they are given a clear definition of it . After that the researcher explains to them the topic and she gives some examples to clarify it . Finally , the subject are asked some questions about the topic . All these steps of teaching are done via computer .

Variables such as age, students' achievements in the preceding course, parents education, gender and ratio of boys to girls have been taken into account to ensure that the two groups are equivalent. Such variables have an important role and may affect the achievements of students in English (Bell, 1987: 9) .

3.2-The Test

A test is "any procedure for measuring ability, knowledge, or performance" (Richards, *et al*, 1992: 377). The test is designed to compute the amount of language acquired by students within a certain period of education. It also assists the educator to evaluate the effectiveness of his instruction "language tests can be a valuable tool for providing information that is relevant to several concerns in language teaching" (Bachman & Palmer, 2000: 8). Tests are considered useful tools for language learning research since they benefit from this type of research and provide assistance to FL research. Bachman (1990: 2-3) puts it in plain words "Language tests... are frequently used as criterion measures of language abilities in second language acquisition research. Similarly, language tests can be valuable resources of information about the effectiveness of learning and teaching." Therefore, a written test is formulated to elicit data about the effectiveness of using computer in teaching grammar.

3.3-Construction of the Test

The researcher has collected the items of the test from various grammar books. The written test is made up of four questions that encompass equally the level of recognition and of production. The first two questions cover the level of recognition, while third and fourth are at the production level. (See Appendix I).

3.4-Objectives of the Test

The current research is conducted in order to assess the influence of teaching an English grammar by using computer. To achieve this objective, the test is designed to measure their ability to recognize and produce an English grammar by using computer.

3.5-The Post-test

At the end of the teaching period, the subjects of the control group and the experimental group were post-tested on 2/1/2012.

The same testing procedures were followed in conducting the test. The whole tests were applied by the researchers .

3.6-Statistical Tools

The following statistical tools were used in this study:

1. The "t-test" formula is used in order to identify whether there are any significant differences between the two groups in certain variables such as age and level of achievement in English. It is also used to calculate the statistical differences between the experimental and control group in the pre-test and post-test.

$$t = \frac{X_1 - X_2}{\sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - 1) S_1^2 + (n_2 - 1) S_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} (1/n_1 + 1/n_2)}}$$

Where:

X_1 = the mean of the experimental group

X_2 = the mean of the control group

n_1 = the number of the experimental group

n_2 = the number of the control group

S_1 = the variance of the experimental group

S_2 = the variance of the control group

(Brown and Rodgers, 2002: 208)

2. One-sample t-test of two tailed for correlated samples to test the differences between the pre-test and post-test within each group, i.e. experimental and control group.

$$t = \frac{\bar{D}}{SD / \sqrt{n}}$$

\bar{D} : Mean of differences between scores.

SD : Standard deviation of differences between scores.

N : Number of subjects

(Glass, 1970: 298)

4-Discussion of the Results

The statistical analysis of the results indicates that the mean value of the experimental group was found to be (68.2), which is higher than the mean value of the control group, in the post-test, which was found to be (42.7). This means that the achievements of learners in the experimental group is significantly higher in average than the achievements of learners in the control group in the total scores of the post-test. It can be concluded that this experiment demonstrates significantly higher learning effects for using computer, i.e., the (null) hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

This indicates that teaching grammar with various activities that promote interaction among the learners, with the teacher and the text, along with encouraging

learning by using computer is more advantageous to ESP learning than the traditional method which does not give the students the chance to discuss and communicate inside the classroom. Therefore, interaction among the learners as well as with and under the supervision of the teacher is better for learning ESP than just listening to the teacher's explanation and interaction with text, gives the students the opportunity to develop their thinking, a chance which may not be possible outside the class.

The results of the present study are in agreement with those of Slimany (1992), which shows that there are significant differences between the achievements of the 1st year University experimental group, who were instructed according to classroom interaction, and the achievements of their colleagues in the control group. This means that the achievement of the experimental group, who were preparing to undertake engineering studies in English, and are taught ESP by using classroom interaction, in the post-test, was higher than that of the control group, who were taught without using classroom interaction.

The result can be attributed to the following reasons :

- 1- the training that the subject of the study have received via computer has led to the improvement in their performance .
- 2- Throughout the experiment, the researcher has recognized that there is a great interest on the part of the students in acquiring an English language .
- 3- Creating an activity through the questioning strategy prior to the presentation of material has assisted the subjects to comprehend the text .
- 4- The information which is presented in the context via computer is remembered .

5-Conclusions

This study has investigated the efficiency of using computer in teaching English grammar to develop the achievements of first year ESP learners. The findings of the present study can be worded as follows:

1. The result of the post test for two independent samples shows that there is a significant difference between the subjects of the two groups . This difference is in favor of the subjects of the experimental group who is taught an English grammar via computer . Therefore , the previous hypothesis which states that there are no statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in their achievement in English grammar is rejected and an alternative hypothesis is accepted which states that there are statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in their achievement in English grammar .
2. Teaching through interaction creates the suitable climate, which is similar to the real world for learning the foreign language. Consequently students will be motivated in such an exciting, joyful and pleasant environment.
3. The less the number of students in the class, the more the opportunities to interact and negotiate the meaning among students will be.

6-Recommendations

In the light of the results, the following list of recommendations may be helpful for students, teachers, syllabus designers and governmental decision makers in the field of education .

1. Syllabus designers should stress the implementation of computer in the educational curriculum, at all levels, for all subjects and foreign languages in particular.
2. There is a need for adding a new subject to the syllabus of English departments in colleges of education . The new material gives the students and their teacher chances to interact with native-speaker teachers of English from England via the internet, under the supervision of senior Iraqi instructors. This goal can be achieved through making an intranet system across the world wide website and covers all the Iraqi College and Institute .

Appendix – I –

The Test

Q1: Choose the most appropriate choice:

1. Some people are tall, whereas others are _____.
a. large b. thin c. short d. small
2. A train is _____ as a plane.
a. as fast b. not as fast c. faster d. too fast
3. This water is very cold, isn't it?
a. a water cold b. a cold water c. cold water d. water called
4. She has _____ money than her sister.
a. few b. less c. least d. little
5. I entered the classroom _____ because I was late.
a. quite b. quietly c. quiet d. more quiet

Q2. Tick (√) correct sentences and cross (X) wrong ones. Then correct the wrong ones.

1. They came yesterday to visit us here.
2. Your work needs to be better. It is not good enough.
3. The hardest you study, the more you will learn.

4. Money is important, but it isn't the most important thing in life.
 5. Do not call her now. It is too late to call her.

Q3. fill in the blanks with the appropriate words as required:

1. old, the oldest. late, _____. pretty, _____
 2. slow, slower. heavy, _____. far, _____
 3. easy, easily. good, _____. near, _____
 4. desire + able, desirable. manage + able, _____. rely + able, _____
 5. total, totally. sincere, _____. merry, _____

Q4. Write the correct form of the words between brackets:

1. I got a (value) mobile on my birthday.
 2. (luck) the driver was not hurt in the accident.
 3. All the strawberries in this box are (rot).
 4. He appears (uneasy) about something.
 5. She is a very (fascinate) woman.

Appendix -2-

Learners' Post-test Scores

Experimental Group		Control Group	
No.	Scores	No.	Scores
1	60	1	42
2	64	2	54
3	72	3	41
4	60	4	36
5	71	5	53
6	71	6	44
7	72	7	51
8	74	8	32
9	67	9	63
10	58	10	46
11	72	11	59
12	72	12	44
13	63	13	28
14	81	14	36
15	71	15	31
16	85	16	27
17	58	17	39
18	60	18	49
19	54	19	43
20	80	20	36
$X_1 = 68.25$		$X_2 = 42.7$	
$\sum y_{i1} = 1365$		$\sum y_{i2} = 854$	
$\sum y_{i1}^2 = 94519$		$\sum y_{i2}^2 = 37866$	

$\sum(y_{i_1})^2 = 1863225$	$\sum(y_{i_2})^2 = 729316$
SD = 8.453	SD = 8.584
$S^2 = 71.465$	$S^2 = 73.694$

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