

*A Comparative Analysis of Virtual and Traditional Grammar Approach in Teaching Use of English at College of Education, Ikere, Nigeria*

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**Abstract**

This study aims to compare the pedagogical feasibility of two distinct approaches in teaching the use of English to freshers in College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria : The Virtual Approach and Traditional Grammar Approach. Furthermore, the study, aims to discover which one of these approaches is relevant and rewarding to the communicative and linguistic needs of the students. A total of one hundred (100) subjects were split in equal halves and divided into experimental and control groups. Both groups were exposed to treatments in form of intensive teaching of a designed curriculum focused on use of English using the virtual and Traditional Grammar Approaches. A pre-test was administered on the subjects and the result showed no significant difference in the competence in use of English course. However, the post-test revealed that there was significant difference in the competence level in use of English course between the two groups. Summarily the results revealed that the use of virtual approach was better than the traditional grammar approach. The inclusion of social media as a virtual approach showed a significant level of appreciation over the traditional grammar approach. However, the study emphasises the importance of synchronizing the positive attributes of both approaches in teaching use of English in a second language situation (ESL)

Keywords: English as a second Language (ESL) use of English, Traditional Grammar Approach and Virtual approach,

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## **Introduction**

Language is a vital tool for existence in the world today and it is a binding force which holds humanity together despite the various socio-cultural or religious difference usually exhibited by man. The ability to communicate with language is hinged on the acquisition of basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Consequently, the survival chances of human beings in the modern world become high depending on the level of linguistic cum communicative competence that is attained. This attainment depends on the informal and formal exposure of the individual to the various rules governing the use of the target language, which is English in this instance.

English as a second language (ESL) sees English in a society where it is taught and learnt after the acquisition of one or more indigenous language. Therefore, the learning of English as a second language at the tertiary level has numerous challenges and more often than not the methods and approaches employed by the language teachers.

Consequently, government and non-governmental agencies including the Federal Government take the pain to ensure that the learners of English at all levels of education become averagely competent and efficient in the use of English. The just concluded Millennium Development Goal (MDG) programme is a pointer to this fact. Running through the pages of the last manual on English (MDGP, 2008) and that of UBEC (2013), there is emphasis on the methodology of teaching the various aspects of English Language. The concern of this article is on the use of two techniques of teaching the use of English course – GSE III and the relating methodologies to enhance better performance. The methodologies as specified in the aforementioned manual indicate a paradigmatic shift from the so called “old” methods to “new” ones. Nevertheless, this study is concerned with the use of two approaches of teaching the use of English course in the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti with a view of finding out which of these approaches will be beneficial to the learners of English as a second language. Not only that, this study will also attempt to create a pedagogical road-map for the teachers in charge of the teaching of use of English course (s) in the College of Education as regards the use of a more productive and learner – centred approach beneficial to both teachers and learners.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The frequency of low level of proficiency in the use of English structures by undergraduates in the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti is creating anxiety in the stake-holders saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring quality education for the learners. One of the reasons for the poor performance in use of English course can be traced to the use of inappropriate teaching methods in the English class, or rather over reliance on teaching methods that may be considered as not being learner-friendly. For instance, the provisional results of students that offered GSE III – General English I (use of English) for the Harmattan Semester 2014/2015 academic session in the Department of General Studies Education showed a high level of grammatical incompetence as reflected in their poor academic performance.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to find out:

1. Whether learners in the experimental group are grammatically competent after being exposed to Virtual Approach.
2. Whether learners in the control group are grammatically competent after being exposed to the Virtual Approach.
3. Whether learners in the control group are grammatically competent after being exposed to the Traditional Grammar Approach.
4. Whether learners in the experimental group are grammatically competent than learners in the control group after treatment.

## **Research Questions**

1. Are learners in the experimental group grammatically competent after being exposed to Virtual Approach?
2. Are learners in the control group grammatically competent after being exposed to the Virtual Approach?
3. Are learners in the control group grammatically competent after being exposed to the Traditional Grammar Approach?
4. Are learners in the experimental group grammatically competent than learners in the control group after treatment?

## **Significance of the Study**

For sometime now, the teaching of use of English in Colleges of Education in Nigeria has been characterized by some traditional teaching methods such as the direct method, the audio –lingual method, grammar translation method and the instruction based on the lecture method. In most Colleges of Education in Nigeria (Faloye,2014) the teaching of use of English with the traditional method has been the predominant method widely used by the language teachers until recently where the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach has been suggested as a better language learning tool for undergraduates(Bax, 2003; Gogura and Agukwe, 2000).

However, recent findings according to Theodore (2001) and Faloye (2014) have also suggested the use of virtual approach as a new approach to the teaching of the use of English. Therefore, this study is significant because it will expand on previous researches on the use of appropriate teaching methods for effective teaching of use of English in Colleges of Education, and provide enabling environment for effective teaching and learning of the course in favour of a skill-based approach. Finally, it will assist the concerned authorities to provide the means of alleviating the English Language problems of newly admitted students into Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

## **Why use of English (General English)?**

In accordance with the requirement of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (2012) – supervisory body for all Colleges of Education in Nigeria and as also contained in the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti Handbook (2011-2012) stipulated for all Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programmes that General

English courses I – V (Use of English) be offered in the Department of General Studies Education (GSE) as part of the minimum standard.

These Use of English courses are compulsory for all registered students. They are designed to equip students with language communication skills which will enable them to comprehend their lectures fully, take down lecture notes, write acceptable summaries, reports and essays, use correctly grammatical structures, pronounce correctly, use punctuation marks correctly and making choice of words appropriately to acquire a proficiency in the use of English Language for effective communication. Therefore, the communication value attached to English in Nigerian Schools and Colleges and the position of prominence accorded to it in the society provide enough reason for its inclusion in the NCE programme. High education that must result in originality requires a thoroughly, meaningful and result- oriented mastery of the English Language.

Thus, the course is quite essential and its neglect may make the higher educational programme particularly in Colleges of Education in Nigeria largely defective. English as a language has great reach and influence. It is taught all over the world. Therefore, in a second language situation such as Nigeria, it deserves proper handling. Meyer and Gallo (2012) state that teaching of use of English in second language learning situation should facilitate learning in various forms such as acquisition of implicit grammatical knowledge needed for effortless communication.

### **Traditional Grammar Approach (TG)**

Over the years, a number of teaching approaches, methods and techniques have been suggested for the teaching of use of English course at various levels of education. Thus agitation for a more learner-friendly teaching method emanated from the fact that the Traditional Grammar Approach was largely based on the principle of Latin grammar, not in current linguistic research in English. A host of researchers such as Richards and Rodgers (2001), Frede (1987), Faloye (2013), Austin (2003) and Wright (2010) have done some works on this method of teaching and have come out with certain merits and demerits. However, TG exhibited some characteristics such as collection of prescriptive rules and concepts about the structure of language that is commonly taught in schools.

In contemporary linguistics, TG sees to explain the nature of language knowledge and ability. Also, it seeks to describe how particular languages are used or to teach people to speak or read them. It generally classifies words into parts of speech. It describes the patterns for word inflection, and rules of syntax by which those words are combined into sentences. Walker, Davies and Hewer (2012) discovered that the use of TG has gone in and out of fashion in language teaching over the years.

### **Virtual Approach**

On the other hand, Virtual Approach provides opportunities for learners to explore authentic learning environments. It stimulates learning by involving students in real activities where real life language context environments are provoked (Williams & Weetman, 2003). Under this approach, students collaborate with each other and acquire together their knowledge of the second language. It is also referred to as

problem-solving and task based approach. Furthermore, Virtual Approach refers to the online classroom delivery tools within the virtual learning environment. It is part of the distance learning platform which typically incorporates course materials, homework, tests, assessments and other tools that are external to the classroom experience. It could also include social media tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, IMO and conference calls that allow learners and instructors to interact via chat or online discussion board. Berry (2009) opines that Virtual Approach is playing an increasingly important role in education especially in language learning due to the interactive nature as well as a collaborative approach to the acquisition of new concepts and a high level of engagement. Cooke-Plagwitz (2008) estimated that over 200 Universities or academic institutions were involved in virtual worlds.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted the pre-test post-test quasi-experimental design. The Quasi experimental design was used in this study because random assignment of subjects was not possible due to use of intact classes (Dawson, 1997). The subject consisted of two classes from the Department of General Studies that offered GSE III – General English (use of English) in the Harmattan Semester 2014/2015 academic year. The two classes comprised the experimental and control groups respectively. The results from the post – Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) as observed, showed that the two groups had a similar level of overall English proficiency. The two groups were taught by the Traditional Grammar method and the Virtual Approach for ten weeks. Each lesson was held twice a week and the course content for GSE III as contained in the College Handbook (2011 – 2012) was strictly adhered to.

## **Instrument**

1. **Pre-test:** The paper for this test comprises fifty multiple choice questions weighing 100 marks. The content for the pre-test consisted of grammatical items such as parts of speech, tenses, punctuation marks, concord, verbs, direct and indirect speech and passive and active voice..
2. **Post-test:** The paper is to test the subjects' grammatical competence after the experiment. The format of the paper is identical to the content of the pre-test. The post-test was conducted after ten weeks of intensive teaching involving both the control and experimental groups.

## **Validity**

The face, content and construct validities of the instruments were thus established after the instruments had been evaluated and appraised by my colleagues and experts in the field. All suggestions were taken into consideration in the final drafts of both pre-test and post-test.

## Reliability

The instrument was administered on subjects in two senior secondary schools in Ondo and Osun States. Their results were analyzed using a split half method of analysis. The Kuder-Richardson formula (KR21) was applied. This yields a co-efficient of 0.95 which was considered substantially high to assume that the instrument could be relied upon to measure the variables for which it has been designed.

## Procedure

The pre-test was administered during the first week of the Harmattan Semester of the 2014/2015 academic year on the subjects before they were split into the experimental and control groups. The test consisted of fifty multiple choice questions. Each of the five sections tested five grammatical items in line with the five sections contained in the course content of General English I (use of English). The second to the ninth week (2-9 weeks) were used for intensive teaching of the five items contained in the test. The experimental group was taught with the virtual method while the control group was exposed to the Traditional Grammar method by the same lecturer and with the same lecture notes. The final stage comprises the implementation of the post-test on both groups of this study.

## Data Collection

The tests were carried out under the supervision of the research assistants in the Department of General Studies and the researcher. The scores were compiled for data analysis using SPSS 16.0

## Results and Analysis

In attempt to reveal any significant difference in the effect of the two teaching methods on the experimental and control groups in terms of grammar competence, the results of the statistical analyses were presented in relation to the research questions:

**Table 1:** The subjects' grammatical competence before the experiment (Pre-test).

Descriptive Statistics						
Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Experimental	42	52.43	6.81	84	1.28	1.98
Control	44	50.64	6.12			

## Discussion

The results in table 1 show that the pre-test average score of the experimental group is little lower than the average score of the control group. There is however, no significant difference between the scores of the two groups. The t-cal for both groups for pre-test scores signify that the current level of grammar competence of both groups is not likely to influence the effect of the experiment.

### Research Question 1

Are learners in the experimental group grammatically competent after being exposed to Virtual Approach?

**Table 2**

Descriptive Statistics						
Experimental	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Pre-test	44	64.19	7.31	82	8.36	1.98
Post-test	44	79.67	7.71			

### Discussion

The results in table 2 show that progress was made by the experimental group in the post-test with the mean score standing at 79.67. This is an improvement over the pre-test score with a mean of 64.19. The pre-test and post-test were designed identically and there was no difference in content, time, allocation and administration of both tests. This signifies that there is a significant difference in the average scores after the experiment.

**Research Question 2:** Are learners in the control group grammatically competent after being exposed to the Virtual Approach?

**Table 3**

Descriptive Statistics						
Control	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Pre-test	44	54.32	6.27	86	3.97	1.98
Post-test	44	70.10	10.12			

### Discussion

The results in table 3 reflect a significant difference in pre-test and post-test showing a level of effect of the Virtual Approach. The mean of 54.32 and 70.10 respectively shows that the teaching method had an effect on subjects in the control group. This result can be interpreted as an improvement in grammar competence of the control group.

### Research Question 3:

Are the learners in the control group grammatically competent after being exposed to the Traditional Grammar method?

**Table 4**

Descriptive Statistics						
Control	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Pre-test	44	54.32	6.27	86	3.97	1.98
Post-test	44	70.12	10.12			

## Discussion

The results in table 4 reflect a significant difference in pre-test and post-test showing a level of effect of the Traditional Grammar method. The mean of 54.32 and 70.12 respectively shows that the Traditional Grammar method had an effect on subjects. This result suggests that the use of TG also had a significant effect on the control group as reflected in the mean scores obtained in the pre-test (54.32) and post-test (70.12). This result can be interpreted as an improvement in grammar competence of the control group.

### Research Question 4:

Are the learners in the experimental group grammatically competent than learners in the control group after treatment?

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics						
Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-table
Experimental	44	69.67	11.23	84	3.60	1.98
Control	44	61.14	6.24			

## Discussion

The results from the post-test in table 5 reveal an improvement in the grammatical competent in the experimental over the subjects in the control group after treatment. The post-test was designed with a similar format for both groups. The average score of the experimental group is 69.67 while that of control group is 61.14. The SD further suggests a significant difference between the grammatical competence level of the experimental and control groups.

### General Discussion

The results from the tables above show the learners' significant progress in their use of English after being exposed to the virtual approach for ten weeks. This is an indication that the Virtual Approach to teaching use of English had more pedagogical impact on the learners than the Traditional Grammar method which had been named by a host of researchers as inappropriate for present day learners of English.

However, it is suggested that a synchronization of both methods would yield better results in the English class since each method has its merit and demerits. In this case, the teachers are expected to build on the strength of both methods with the learners' needs in mind. Austin (2003) represented the school of thought that saw more good than bad in the traditional grammar approach. In his view, this method helps the learner to understand the influence of one language on the other like potential errors caused by negative transfer form from the first language (L1). He believes like others that the learners will be able to explain why errors occur and try not to make the same mistake again.

Furthermore, this study has revealed the need to make the use of English less cumbersome. Instead, the use of simple but accurate pedagogical means to bring use of English to the learners would attract their interest and curiosity. So the lecturers



could build on the findings of this study. As a result, students offering use of English courses in Colleges of Education would perform better in the use of basic grammatical structures of English as well as obtain good grades after-being examined.

## **Conclusion**

This study has revealed that virtual method is learner-centered model. Both students and lecturers are active participants who share responsibility for the students' learning. The lecturers and students work together to identify how students are expected to use the language. The lecturers model correct and appropriate language use, and students then use the language themselves in practice activities that simulate real communication situation. The active engagement of students and lecturers leads to a dynamic classroom environment in which teaching and learning become rewarding and enjoyable. This is evident in the performance of the students after being exposed to the Virtual Approach.

A host of researchers in the behaviorists' camp argue that most grammar books have attempted to use rules and terms appropriate for Latin grammar to teach English. Supporting the findings of the researcher, Bryson (2000) observes that English is so complex and confusing for the very reason that its rules and terminologies are based on Latin – a language with which it has little in common. In this same vein, it is believed that learners of English as a second language tend to find it relatively difficult to learn Basic English structures and within a short period too. Harmer (2003) is of the opinion that learners of ESL need a technique that would open their minds to English. Furthermore, he opines that new generation use of virtual learning will change grammar from a fragmented whole to unifying it into the system it really is.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Stakeholders saddled with language teaching should make available modern day equipments that will enhance the teaching and learning of English in a second language situation.
2. The teachers of English Language should be abreast with the modern day techniques of teaching use of English so as to enhance the learners' appropriate use of the language.
3. There is no “the method” in language teaching. Therefore, eclectic approach involving the use of different methods as dictated by prevailing circumstances is recommended.
4. The language teachers should see themselves as role models and therefore be knowledgeable in the target subject.
5. All language teachers should be conversant with the various approaches in the use of computer especially in E-learning.
6. The governments at all levels should engage in training and re-training of language teachers.

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