

# Chapter 5

## A breakthrough in grammar lessons!

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Patcharin Kunna



**Teaching experience**

14 years

**Area of interest in teaching**

Motivating students, planning lessons, and classroom research

## Introduction

Nowadays, English is increasingly seen as an international language that is widely used as a tool for global communication. Nevertheless, it is difficult for Thai students to have many opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. To use English to communicate well, Hongthong (2015) stated that students need to possess adequate language content, specifically English vocabulary and grammar. However, it seems that even though Thai students study English in school for many years, their English language proficiency level remains low, with grammar being a particular issue. Therefore, teaching grammar remains an important topic for English teachers to focus on (Sinthai, 2016).

In general, I have a good rapport with my students, and the class atmosphere during lessons (including those focusing on vocabulary or on skills) is positive. However, I noticed that in grammar lessons, students' participation and interaction levels dropped. Reflecting on my research teaching journal, I decided to work on improvements to grammar lessons.

## Method

After the journal reflection, I developed the following questions to investigate the possible causes of the problem:

1. How do I teach English grammar?
2. What classroom activities do the students like or dislike during grammar lessons?
3. What behaviours do the students show when I teach grammar to them?
4. How do students participate in grammar lessons?

To answer these questions, I selected the following activities: (5.1) writing a reflective journal to reflect on impressions after teaching, (5.2) making a video recording to observe teaching, and (5.3) conducting interviews to learn more from the students.

**My teaching reflective journal**

Topic/ area of teaching: Present simple vs Present continuous

Class: Grade 9 (Mattayom 3.8)      Date of teaching: September 9th, 2022

I taught present simple vs present continuous tense and informed them that I was going to record the video of my teaching. Surprisingly, they didn't act strange! I started the lesson with comparing sentences of the two tenses to have them notice the similarity and difference as I believe they have studied about these two for several times.

I elicited them after letting them search for more information on usage, form and example sentences of the two tenses. I walked around to see if they're doing the task or not. Most of them were using the phone for working while a few watching some clips on another app. Then, I randomly picked students using popsicle sticks to fill in the mind-mapping. I just realized that I always look for students on my right-hand side to answer because they're always response to me when I ask them. I should try to change this or motivate students in other sides to speak more. I also like the way students came up and wrote sentences on the board. Previously, I had them speak the sentences so I didn't know that they used the correct form of verb or not.

By writing, I could see that some students misspelled words and forgot punctuation mark. I will try to have them write more in the next classes. I used gap-fill exercise for them to practice the grammar. From my observation, there're students that need more help noticing the subjects of the sentences whether it's singular or plural so that they can work on correct form of verbs. They also tell me they wanted to know keywords of the tenses so when I check their answer with the whole class, I helped them point out the keywords first.

I ended the class with checking their books so I could see that they're on track. I planned on having them review the form and will work on semi-control and freer practice.



Picture 5.1. Writing a reflective journal

From these activities, a researcher would be able to see clear evidence of the problem. One example showed that activities in grammar lessons lacked student participation and students also had less support on the language. This led me to ask the following question: What activities can I implement in grammar lessons to make them more communicative?

I re-designed lesson plans by adding more active and interactive activities in the practice and production stages, such as personalisation, online interactive exercises, sentence writing, class survey, and writing stories, as described in Table 5.1. I also added a variety of interaction patterns so the students would have chances to use grammar structures on their own and with their friends.

Activity/Approach	Guideline
<b>Personalisation</b>	I asked the students to use their own photos along with a timeline to practise using past simple tense to describe their past events.
<b>Online interactive exercise</b>	Kahoot and Quizizz were used after the students finished working on a controlled practice activity with present perfect tense. I also usually used them as a review or a warm-up activity before presenting new grammar points.
<b>Sentence writing</b>	This activity went alongside a 'rip and run' activity. I had students work in groups and practise sentence writing to review forms and usages of present simple and present continuous.
<b>Class survey</b>	To have students use present perfect tense form, I applied a class survey in freer practice. They had a table that listed some life experiences, and they would ask their friends whether they had experienced any of them. After that, I asked for feedback from students who would report back on what they got from the survey.
<b>Writing stories</b>	This activity was used to help students work in groups and use the language more creatively. I gave the template of a social media post, and they had to write stories using the present continuous and present simple forms in the context of posting whilst being on vacation.

Table 5.1. Activities added in the practice and production stages in grammar lessons

To evaluate the impact of this, I designed two evaluation tools: (1) peer observation and (2) focused group discussion. The tools here are different from the ones used in the exploratory stage, because they were not for investigation but rather to evaluate success and see if the change made any impact.

The lesson plan was trialled for three weeks. My colleagues conducted peer observations, and I conducted a focus group discussion with 17 students in the last week of the implementation.

### Peer Evaluation form

Objective: The objective of the peer observation is to assess the success of the actions implemented in teaching grammar communicatively.

Stages	Question	What happened
<b>Presentation</b>	Were the students able to notice the language themselves? How?	
	How did the teacher personalize grammar? Could the students personalize the grammar examples in their context?	
	How could the students notice and recognize the language by themselves?	
<b>Practice</b>	Did the group work activities help the students learn grammar? In what way?	
	How engaged were students during controlled practice activities?	
	Were the students participating in grammar lessons actively?	
<b>Production</b>	To what extent were students able to produce the language freely and communicatively?	
	How effectively did the teacher provide feedback to the students on their controlled practice work?	

Table 5.2. Peer Evaluation form

### Focus Group Discussion

**Topic:** Design the steps of teaching and provide activities to be more lively and communicative in grammar lessons.

**Introduction:** The focus group discussion aims to collect information about the teacher and your behaviour when you're in grammar lessons.

1. What starter activity did you find more effective to engage you to participate in grammar lessons? Why? (contextualisation, personalisation, visual and online interactive activity)
2. Which one of these activities (contextualisation, personalisation, visual and online interactive) was more useful to help you comprehend the grammar being taught?
3. Were you able to notice the language structure by yourself? What support did the teacher provide you to recognize language structure?
4. Did you get enough support from the teacher to learn language structures?
5. Did working alone or working with a partner help you practice grammar? In what way?
6. In what way does the visual and online interactive mode make you practice grammar more actively?
7. Did the controlled practice activities like gap filling help you minimize grammar errors? How?
8. Do you think you have improvements in your grammar? In what way?
9. How helpful is a sentence writing activity for you to minimize grammar errors?
10. Was the freer activity like the class survey useful for you to practice the language independently? How?

Table 5.3. Focus Group Discussion

## Findings

The main observable effect from the actions implemented was that the students could use the language more actively. In collaboration with their friends, their participation improved when they did the activities in the practice and production stages. From the summary of the evaluation results (shown in Table 5.2), the focus group discussions showed the following: 1) the support from the teacher whilst presenting the grammar and doing the activities made the students relax; 2) their rapport with the teacher

improved; and 3) some students found it difficult when working on long and complicated reading texts and they still needed guidance from teachers and peers whilst doing group work activities. Lastly, the design of the lessons to improve class participation and build students' confidence became more of a priority for me. Knowing more about the problem directly from students helps further understanding of how to teach students effectively. The effects from the study could be seen through my own observations and the students' observations (Table 5.2).

### What were the effects of the actions you attempted?

<p>What was the effect of your actions for key <b>finding 1</b>?</p> <p><b>Effects of the action plan: Students were able to use the newly learned vocabulary in a controlled practice task.</b></p>	<p><b>Effect on the improvement of students' participation</b></p> <p>Students got more chances to participate and communicate because they were given chances to use the language to work on their own and later on in small groups during semi-controlled practice and production stages. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>The teacher contextualised/personalised the language and structure, helping the students finish the tasks on time; when the teacher asked for the reason for their answers (which referred to the structures), they could explain their reasons. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>We got the chance to practise language and structure more in grammar lessons by working with our friends and with support from the teacher. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>Students were given an opportunity to practise language and structure freely by doing class surveys and writing short stories. Whilst the students performed the task, the teacher monitored how they used the language to complete the task. It was observed that students used the language actively with their friends and participated well. (Peer Observation)</p>
<p>What was the effect of your actions for key <b>finding 2</b>?</p>	<p><b>Effect on the student's ability to communicate</b></p> <p>Owing to the variety of classroom activities, we had more chances to use language and structure to communicate. We are more active in grammar lessons these days than we used to be. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>Now, we can answer the questions asked by the teacher because they have shown the visuals and examples repeatedly. We could notice and recognise structures. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>The teacher set semi-controlled practice in groups; whilst working in groups, the students seemed to help each other to prepare the language before performing the task. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>However, the students found it difficult when they worked on long and complicated reading texts. They said that they still needed the teacher's guidance and support on language and grammar. (Focus group discussion)</p>

Table 5.2. Summary of evaluation results



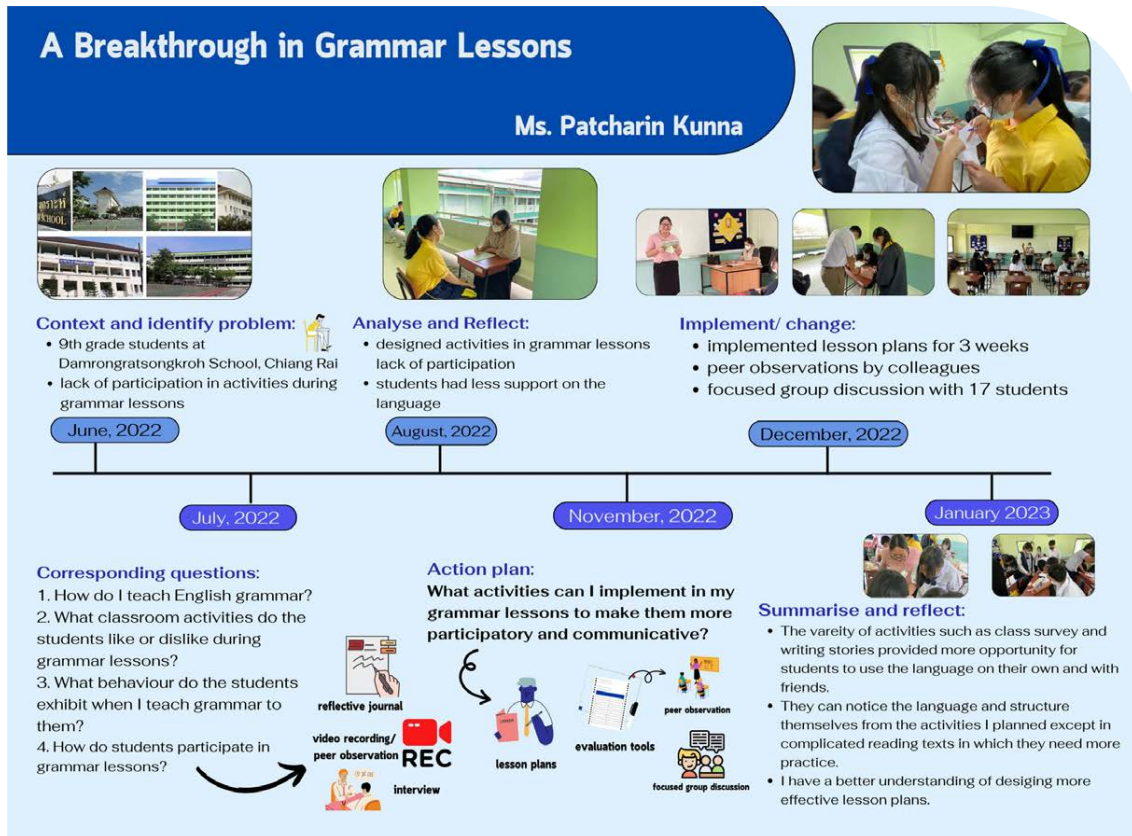


Figure 5.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The data collected suggests that my students have gradually developed their engagement in grammar lessons, which I can attest to, having observed them closely.

They used to be less active in class, because I was more focused on teaching than designing a variety of activities to enable them to participate and communicate, but now they are active in grammar lessons. They seemed to help each other in groups and in freer practice activities.

The students can now notice the language and structure themselves from the activities I planned, except in complicated reading texts, and can use them freely; however, they need more practice. This made me realise how important designing the lessons is to improve class participation.

## References

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