USING MOODLE TO IMPROVE THE ENGLISH GRAMMAR SELF-STUDY ABILITY OF STUDENTS OF THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

With the current globalization process, English has been widely considered an important mean of communication. English is one of the compulsory subjects that students of Thai Nguyen university of Economics and Business administration (TUEBA) have to take in their studying process; there is also a requirement of B1 (CEFR) English proficiency level for all students of the university to obtain in order to graduate. English grammar has played an important role in helping learners construct right structures in all English skills.

Moodle software has been long used to facilitate the teaching and learning process both online and offline. The Moodle system has been used in teaching and learning of many subjects in TUEBA's e-learning system and it is proved that it has successfully help to ease the teaching and learning process of lectures and students of TUEBA; furthermore, it is a useful tool to help students to improve their self-study ability during the current period of social distancing because of the epidemic Covid-19.

With the above facts, the authors have conducted a study to identify the usefulness of using an online system – Moodle – in helping students to improve their English grammar self-study ability.

Keywords*: English grammar, Moodle, e-learning system, self-study, Thai Nguyen university of Economics and Business administration, TUEBA*

Current situation of learning English grammar of TUEBA's students

This study was conducted during the first semester or first-year students. At the beginning of the semester, we conducted a survey asking 500 first-year students about their English learning before entering the university; because most of the students are non-majored students, we had a very urgent situation of learning English of students before entering the university as presented in the following table:

Table 1. Current situation of learning English grammar of students before entering the university
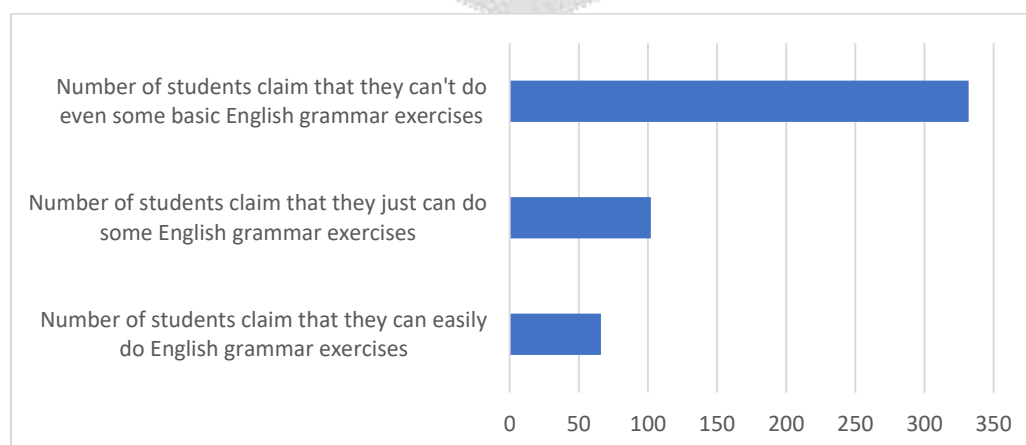
Although most of the students are non-major students, they did study English before entering the university; in which 413 students claimed that they had studied English for at least 7 years before entering the university, 58 students claimed that they had studied for at least 3 years, only 29 students (most of them come from the northern mountainous areas) said that they had never studied English before. But despite having studied an amount of time before, 66.4% of the students found it hard to do any English grammar exercises, even the basic ones; 20.4% of the students said they just could do some basic grammar exercises; only 13.2% claimed that they can easily do the English grammar exercises.

Current situation of teaching English grammar of TUEBA's lecturers

Traditional teaching method with chalk, board and lecturers' presentation is normally used. The grammar rules are presented on the board, after that students are given some illustrating examples and then some exercises are given to students to practice the rules. The process of teaching seems complicated and boring to students and teaching grammar become a real challenge to lecturers because most of the grammar points were taught at high school level, but the students couldn't recall them, they just remember but not clearly enough for them to apply those grammar points in real studying situation at university level.

Recently, with the fast development of technology, there are a lot of online and offline softwares that efficiently facilitate the teaching process of lecturers, they can use offline application softwares to present the grammar rules such as Microsoft powerpoint, Prezi to make these grammar points more interesting and attracting to students, with the appearances of audio-visual supports, lecturers can more easily attract students' interests in learning; furthermore, after asking the lecturers about the most frequently-used online application, we have found out 2 most frequently-used one are Quizizz (https://quizizz.com), Moodle (https://moodle.com). Moodle can help lectures structure a full course in which students can self-study the given knowledges, practice them and do the tests; meanwhile Quizizz helps students instantly practice a language point with the support of audio-video effects, students actively join in a race to find out the person with the most correct answers.

With such above useful online and offline tools, lecturers are date-by-date recognize the importance of applying advanced technology in their teaching process.

The application of technology in teaching English grammar

Many researchers have showed the advantages of technology in language teaching and learning. Roblyer and Edwards (2000) states, "Technology-based methods have successfully promoted several kinds of motivational strategies that can be used individually or in combination." The kind of motivation, according to Cole, P.G. and Chan, L.K.S. (1994), helps students to have the right motivation in learning a language. They will not feel they are forced to study the language; they also will not feel embarrassed or feel that they will be criticized by any one if they make mistakes. This motivation can help to remove the mental barrier when students study.

The audio - visual and interactive features of advanced technology may influence the eagerness to acquire a new language as suggested by Pask-McCartney (1989), "The visual and interactive features of many technology resources seem to have focus students' attention and encourage them to spend more time on learning tasks." This kind of motivation will attract students, it makes them feel more interested in learning the language, they may not soon feel bored with the process of learning the language as they claimed that they did in the learning by the more traditional ways.

Roblyer and Edwards (2000) also states, "Computer-based practice may motivate students to do the practice they need. Computers don't get patient or give disgusted look when students give wrong answers"; "…unlike feedbacks from an instructor or tutor, the feedback from computers can remain unbiased, accurate and non-judgmental, irrespective of students characteristics or the nature of the student response" (Mason & Bruning, (2005)). Getting this kind of feedbacks don't discourage students, they don't feel that they are being criticized either. This helps them to be more confident to continue their studying.

Technology can facilitate the teachers and saves their time by giving immediate, accurate and individual feedbacks to students. By this way, students will feel it is more confidential, which means they do not feel embarrassed as the teachers give their study results that everyone in the class will know them. It can also help to get students' attention more easily. It can be said that, in at least one side, it helps both lecturers and students better achieve their goals of teaching and learning.

In a broader view, students can use computers connected to the internet as a source of useful information, they can easily search for the models of the structures or vocabulary which they haven't learnt or remembered, this will shorten the time they spend on re-reading the books or asking their lecturers. This means that students will feel more convenient, more confident in their self-study process.

Not only students but also the lecturers benefit the tremendous resources in which the materials and knowledge are provided freely, accurately and availably. They can more easily to plan the lesson, give the exercises with the huge available online resources.

Using Moodle software to improve the self-study of English grammar of students

At the beginning of the semester, all participated students had to take a grammar placement test to classify the students according to their levels, the collected data are presented in the following table:

Table 2: The placement test results of first year students

Scale of 10 marks
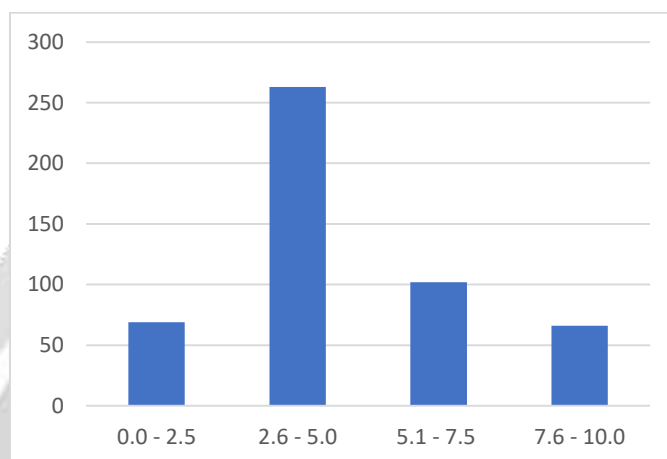
According to the collected data, the number of students get below 5.0 marks were 332 students, accounted for 66.4% of the students; meanwhile, the number of students who got 7.6 or above only accounted for 13.2%. These data showed a very urgent situation of English language ability of first-year students of TUEBA.

When we collected the above data, we classified students into 3 groups: the first group contained students who get over 7.0 marks in the placement test; this group could get the knowledge more quickly than those who belonged to the third group, which consisted of students who get under 5.0 marks. The second group included students who got average marks (from 5.1 to 6.9) in the placement test.

After having finished the classification, we assigned the groups into 3 different courses, which had been previously designed, the given grammar points, practices and exercises were all accordingly designed depending on the levels of the students. All courses lasted for 3 months. We asked all the students to participate in the courses and conduct their self-study process. Lecturers had to observe the studying of the students by continuously checking the study processes, reminding them to fulfill all the required tasks of the courses. Despite having some troubles during the process such as: some students got poor internet connection, even some students didn't have the computers or a smartphone to join in the courses, etc. Despite such problems, all the students overcame them.

The next step was that, after one month, we asked the students to do the first process test, we collected a positive result, in which there was a shift of students from the third group to the second group, and we can see that the number of students who get lower than 2.5 marks decreased noticeably; this means that the knowledge of the students did improve after a month of self-studying. The detailed data are presented in the following table:

*Table 3. The first progress-test result*
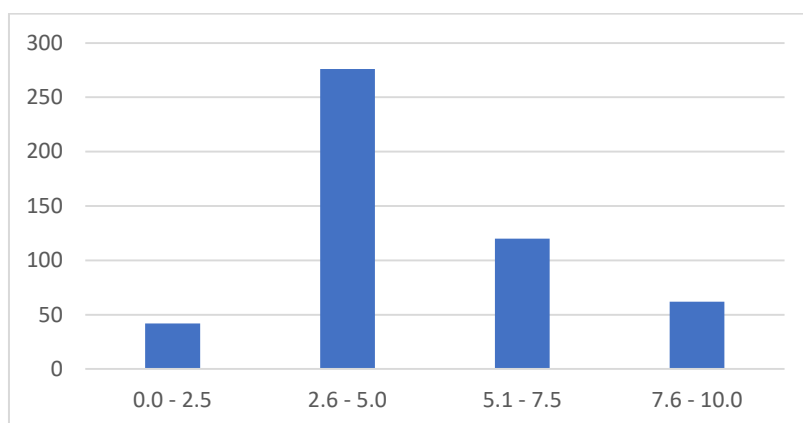
After having taken the first progress test, students continued their self-study process, and then they took the second progress test at the end of the second month, this time we can see the number of students who got over 5.0 marks increased remarkably, meanwhile, some students from the second group got higher results as we can see in the table below:

Table 4. The second progress-test result
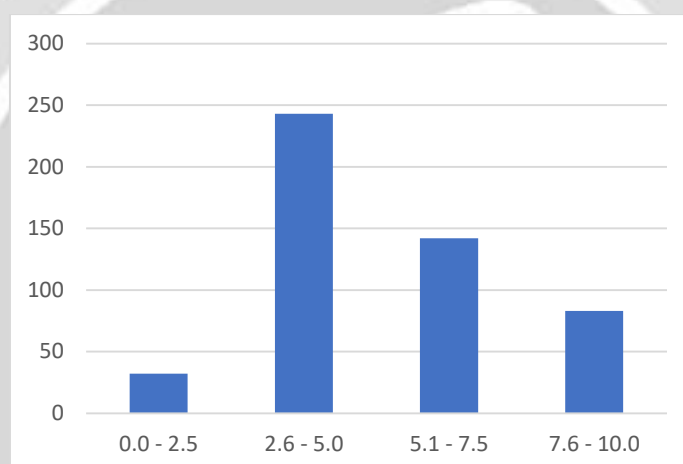
At the end of the online 3-month course, students were all asked to take the end- of- term test, the result is presented in the following table:

Table 5. The end- of- term test result
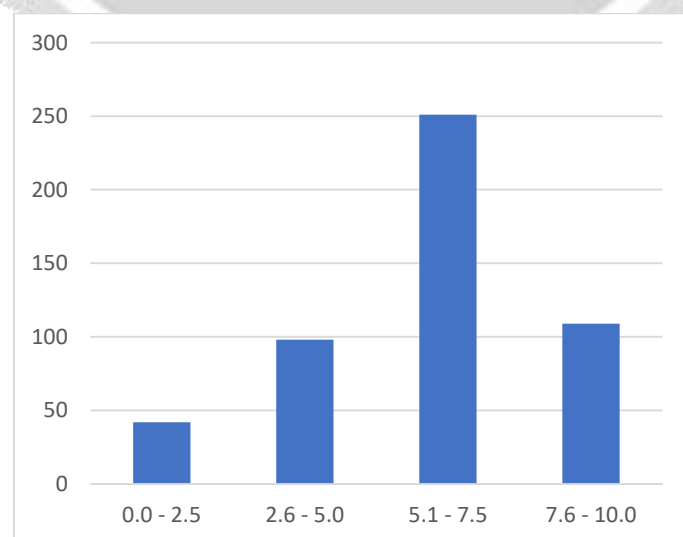
There is a remarkable increase of the number of students (251 students) who can get over 5.0 marks after 3 months self-study. The number of students who can get over 7.5 noticeably increased from 66 at the

beginning of the course to 109 at the end of the course. We can easily see that the number of students who can get below 5.0 marks drops from 332 to 140 students, which is more than half of the students made a positive improvement.

Conclusion

English grammar plays an important part in the development of students' language ability, with the combination of traditional teaching methodology and advanced technology we can help to improve students' grammar ability; they are facilitated with the more interesting way to approach grammar, which mean they are more interested in learning English grammar. In the current period of expansion of Covid-19 epidemic, learning online has become a crucial way to help both universities and students to conduct their teaching and studying. Not only English subject but also other subjects can take advantages of the advanced technology to be conveyed to learners. Further studies can be conducted to study the advantages of this kind of teaching and learning.

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