Impact of Grammar Consciousness-Raising Tasks on The Acquisition of English Tenses at University Level

Al-Mubireek, Sami

Imam Abdulrahman University, Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of grammar consciousness-raising tasks (GCRTs) compared to traditional grammar instruction in enhancing first-year university students' mastery of English tenses. Specifically, it evaluates their impact on explicit grammatical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, and learner attitudes. Over a two-month intervention, 43 students in the experimental group engaged in GCRTs, while 41 students in the control group received conventional instruction. A mixed-methods design was employed, incorporating pretests and posttests to measure grammatical accuracy and explicit knowledge and questionnaires to assess learners' attitudes. Quantitative data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, variance, and Student's t-test. Results indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in grammatical accuracy and explicit knowledge. Classroom observations further revealed enhanced learner interaction, autonomy, and motivation, while survey responses reflected positive attitudes toward the innovative approach. These findings support the pedagogical value of GCRTs as an effective alternative to traditional methods for teaching grammar, particularly verb tenses.

Keywords: grammatical consciousness-raising tasks, explicit grammatical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, interaction, autonomy.

Introduction

This research aims to illuminate a persistent and complex issue in language education—the teaching of grammar. The primary problem lies in the declining standards that characterize university students of English in both speaking and writing. Students make numerous grammatical errors before entering university and continue to make the same errors after completing grammar courses in college. Due to prevalent language sloppiness, this issue demands thorough investigation in both laboratory settings and classroom research to develop a pedagogical solution to this global quandary. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the role of grammar in the language curriculum changed drastically from a fundamental status to a very low standing, with a revived interest in the nineties, but it has not regained the prominence it once enjoyed since its inception. As Ellis (2003) pointed out, traditional grammar instruction, particularly the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) model, has faced criticism for its inherent limitations. Similarly, Nunan (1989) observed that the status of grammar became increasingly "uncertain" in the wake of CLT's ascendancy. A compelling body of evidence has accumulated recently supporting the view that Grammar Consciousness Raising on its own is not enough, and that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on its own is not enough either. Although TBLT is reported to yield promising results in developing language acquisition (Nunan, 1993; Prabhu, 1987), it is not without problems of its own (Seedhouse, 1999; Swan, 1990). Learners following TBLT are generally found to be good but inaccurate communicators, as fluency is emphasized to the detriment of accuracy. To solve this problem, SLA researchers propose integrating TBLT (Prabhu, 1987) with Grammar Consciousness Raising (Rutherford, 1987) to allow learners to gain accuracy and fluency in tandem. This combination resulted in what is called Grammar Consciousness Raising Tasks (GCRTs), an approach that is believed to be suitable for grammar instruction for its compatibility with the SLA principles of learning and teaching (Fotos, 1993, 1994; Goetz, 2023). These tasks aim to increase learners' awareness of grammatical features through communicating about grammar (Ellis, 2003).

Consciousness-raising constitutes an inductive and explicit pedagogical approach that seeks to enhance learners' awareness and foster the development of declarative knowledge without directly promoting the acquisition of implicit procedural knowledge (Rutherford, 1987). GCRTs embody this approach by integrating grammar instruction with communicative activities wherein learners discuss grammatical structures and collaboratively address problematic features. In such tasks, grammar serves as the principal content of communication. Two broad paradigms for task implementation have been distinguished: purely communicative-driven tasks and structure-driven tasks, conceptualized by Nobuyoshi and Ellis (1993) as 'unfocused communication tasks' and 'focused communication tasks,' respectively. Proponents of the former argue that engaging learners solely in

communicative interaction, absent any explicit attention to form, suffices to facilitate second language development; however, this position has been subject to considerable criticism on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Conversely, advocates of the structure-driven approach maintain that explicit attention to grammatical forms is indispensable for the development of grammatical competence and must be systematically incorporated into task design. Within this framework, two principal task-based approaches to grammar instruction have emerged: (1) Consciousness-Raising Communicative Tasks and (2) Grammar Consciousness-Raising Tasks (Fotos, 1993, 1994; Ellis, 2003, 2006). The present study is concerned exclusively with the latter, given its demonstrable efficacy in facilitating the acquisition of grammatical knowledge.

Literature review

Traditional grammar is based on a transmission of knowledge. Many forms and structures that are taught through controlled drilling and practice do not emerge in non-controlled situations. In the 1990s, the heyday of communicative language teaching, numerous researchers downplayed the role of grammar in the language curriculum, claiming that there is a non-interactive position between teaching grammar and language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). Other researchers stood against this tendency, arguing for an interface position and contending that learners need some type of focus on form, such as grammar consciousness raising, to notice their gaps and restructure their interlanguage (Rutherford, 1987; Schmidt, 1993). Numerous scholars advanced solid arguments in favor of grammar instruction. Ellis (2003) asserted that grammar instruction is necessary for students to develop their explicit knowledge. Likewise, Nassaji and Fotos (2011) demonstrated that modern studies have shown that grammar instruction is necessary for achieving language proficiency. Macaro and Masterman (2006) explored the impact of grammar instruction on grammatical knowledge and written production. They demonstrated that their findings support previous studies that explicit grammar instruction results in gains in explicit knowledge but fewer gains in production tasks due to memory limitations and SLA principles.

GCRTs are quite compatible with SLA research and language learning principles. They did not emerge in isolation, but they emanated from several research theories. Specifically, they are in tune with Piaget's (1964) constructivism, which rejected transmissive and behaviorist theories of learning and emphasized the individual's construction of knowledge through interaction and meaningful experience. Similarly, GCRTs worked in harmony with Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory (1978), where social interaction and meaningful negotiation shape human mental functioning within 'the zone of proximal development'. Likewise, they also agree with Prabhu (1987), who considered that explicit grammar instruction is obstructive as learners acquire grammar rules in meaningful tasks. They are also in tune with Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis (1981). Krashen maintained that learners acquire structures that are slightly beyond their current level while focusing on meaning rather than form. Additionally, GCRTs are in harmony with modern consciousness-raising theories (Rutherford, 1987), the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1993), and skill-building theories (Bialystok, 1982), which insist on the move from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. Moreover, they are in symbiosis with Long's interaction hypothesis (1983), which emphasizes interaction among learners to allow them to negotiate meaning using comprehension checks and clarification requests. They are also in conformity with Swain's output hypothesis (1985), which acknowledges the role of comprehensible output for promoting grammatical competence and testing out hypotheses about language. All these hypotheses complement each other and present real opportunities for learners to interact and gain accuracy as well as fluency in the target language.

Many researchers explored the impact of GCRTs. Fotos and Ellis (1991) sought to find a pedagogical solution to the teaching of grammar in a way that is theoretically and empirically compatible with the fundamental principles of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this comparative study between teacher-fronted grammar lessons and GCRTs applied to Japanese college students about dative alteration, they revealed that both methods produced significant gains on comprehension and grammaticality judgment, and GCRTs enhanced interactive negotiation and communication about grammar. They concluded that "Formal instruction and communicative language teaching can be integrated through the use of grammar tasks designed to promote communication about grammar" (ibid. 610).

In a subsequent article, Fotos (1993) examined students following grammar lessons and grammar tasks in learning indirect object placement, adverb placement, and relative clause usage. The findings showed that GCRTs were as effective as formal instruction in the promotion of subsequent amounts of noticing in communicative input. In a follow-up article, Fotos (1994) sought to investigate (1) the proficiency gains produced by formal grammar lessons and GCRTs, (2) the number of L2 negotiations made through both approaches, and (3) the effects of variations in task formats on the quantity of "learners" L2 negotiations (ibid. 328-29). She combined grammar instruction and communicative language use through GCRTs. She found that these tasks promoted both proficiency gains and negotiated interaction and recommended the integration of "formal instruction within a communicative framework" at a time when many teachers are looking to bring back traditional grammar into communicative classrooms (p. 323). GCRTs provided learners with grammar problems to solve interactively. learners focus

on form while they are engaged in meaningful communication to develop grammatical knowledge.

Ellis (1992) argued that traditional grammar instruction has fallen out of favor because it is based on an educational transmission model that limits learner autonomy and conflicts with contemporary research on second language (L2) grammar acquisition and with progressive views about education as a discovery process. In response, Ellis advocated for a task-based approach integrated with consciousness-raising, which frames learning as a problem-solving activity that involves analyzing and discussing grammatical structures. He emphasized that formal instruction should aim to develop learners' explicit knowledge, which can later support the development of implicit knowledge. Rather than promoting rote practice, Ellis placed greater importance on GCRTs, whose purpose is to foster both grammatical understanding and meaningful communication. Later, Ellis (2002) highlighted additional benefits of these tasks, noting their adaptability to diverse learning styles, ability to reduce learner boredom, promotion of collaboration, encouragement of problem-solving, and support for interpersonal skill development.

GCRTs are learner-centered activities focused on input processing where learners rely on their cognitive capacities to discover grammar rules by themselves. The declarative knowledge that they develop will gradually affect their interlanguage via communication and develop into procedural knowledge. GCRTs consist of information-gap activities where students complete a given input, reasoning-gap activities where they induce the rules underlying the given sentences, and decision-making activities where they reach an agreed solution to a problem via information exchange (Ellis 2003). Eventually, Ellis (2006) concluded that the alternative to a form-focused approach emphasizes meaning and message creation as in TBLT.

Consonant with the above models, Nunan (1989) advocated that 'grammatical consciousness-raising activities' of the kind provided by Rutherford (1987) should be incorporated into task design because they "imply a more critical and reflective learner role than those in which the learner is memorising or manipulating language" (p. 83). In a follow-up study, Nunan (1991) advocated for the use of GCRTs because (1) they are in tune with the view that learning a language is an 'organic' rather than a 'linear' process, (2) that they reject the split between 'acquisition' and 'learning', (3) that it contrasts with traditional grammar in many ways, including greater emphasis on form-function relationships, and (4) that they reject the view that once something is taught it will necessarily be learned (pp. 148-149). TBLT has gained considerable attention as an alternative to traditional grammar-focused approaches. Central to this framework is the belief that language is best learned through meaningful interaction and problem-solving. Willis (1996) proposed a structured framework for task-based learning that emphasizes real-world tasks, encouraging learners to use language for communication rather than for rote repetition. Her model includes a pre-task phase, task cycle, and language focus, allowing for both fluency and accuracy development. Willis and Willis (1996) demonstrated that GCRTs engage learners in a variety of cognitive processes, including assimilating content, responding to comprehension questions, noticing linguistic patterns, formulating hypotheses, and confirming or revising those hypotheses based on evidence.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of grammar consciousness-raising tasks (GCRTs) in second language learning. Takimoto (2006), for example, found that GCRTs significantly enhanced learners' pragmatic proficiency. Similarly, Amirian and Abbasi (2014) reported positive effects on learners' grammatical knowledge. Other scholars underlined that these tasks generated confidence and willingness to take risks (Dörnyei, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). The findings of Iskandar and Heriyawati (2015) demonstrated that these activities significantly improved students' grammatical competence and triggered their motivation in learning grammar. Dkhissi (2014) supported these tasks for their role in addressing learners' communicative needs. Azizifar et al. (2015) demonstrated that such tasks also contributed to improved reading comprehension. Supporting this line of inquiry, Underwood (2017) emphasized the benefits of integrating grammar instruction with communicative activities because they led to improved student engagement, greater motivation, self-confidence, and more meaningful language use. Miranda et al. (2018) further evidenced the efficacy of GCRTs in facilitating learners' acquisition of verb tenses such as the simple past, past continuous, and present perfect. Similarly, Akhmarianti (2021) confirmed that these tasks support the development of metalinguistic awareness, explicit grammatical knowledge, and narrative tense accuracy. More recently, Ouazani (2022) found that GCRTs were more effective than TGI as they actively engage learners in critically analyzing linguistic data. In a newer study, Tashmuradova et al. (2023) underscored the contribution of GCRTs to fostering morphological awareness and explicit knowledge. In due course, Badpa and Mardani (2025) concluded that GCRTs significantly enhance grammatical proficiency. Collectively, these studies affirm the pedagogical value of GCRTs and their superiority over more traditional approaches to grammar instruction.

Other studies revealed positive attitudes expressed by students who were exposed to GCRTs. Foremost, Eckerth (2008) showed that these tasks yielded not only targeted learning gains such as explicit knowledge but also nontargeted gains like collaboration, interaction, scaffolding, hypothesis testing, and autonomy. In the same perspective, Nassaji and Fotos (2011) concluded

that SLA studies recommended the incorporation of form-focused tasks for their various beneficial effects. Additionally, Fatemipour and Hemmati (2015) found that GCRTS had a considerable impact on promoting young learners' grammar and generating other positive attitudes. Similarly, Azizifar et al (2015) showed that they created a 'positive social atmosphere' among students. Correspondingly, Namaghi and Charmchi (2016) showed that they were better than TGI and brought about positive perceptions among learners. Miranda et al. (2018) found that these tasks significantly supported students' grammatical learning with gains maintained over time by promoting active engagement, awareness, and reflective thinking.

In a newly published paper, Tilahun et al. (2022) revealed that GCRTs considerably improved students' narrative tenses competence, leading to improved understanding and usage of grammar features, heightening communication, and bolstering positive attitudes compared to traditional grammar. Conformingly, Alqaed (2023) revealed that this approach improved metacognitive grammar awareness and boosted students' attitudes. Also, supportive classroom environments yielded by GCRTs have been shown to enhance learner confidence and willingness to communicate (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2019; Li, 2020). Other scholars revealed that such tasks spawned psychological safety, positive classroom dynamics, a low-stress atmosphere, active participation, and sustained motivation (Mercer and Dörnyei, 2020; Pawlak, 2022). More recent studies provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of GCRTs not only in enhancing learners' explicit knowledge and grammatical proficiency but also motivation (Mardani and Badpa, 2024; Yazdani and Zare, 2025). Given the extensive benefits ascribed to GCRTs by the aforementioned scholars, this study was undertaken to empirically investigate their pedagogical effectiveness within real classroom settings at a Saudi university.

Significance of the study

Despite extensive research highlighting the shortcomings of traditional grammar instruction (TGI), grammar teaching remains largely unchanged. Instruction continues to be heavily teacher-centered, relying on mimicry, drills, and rote practice (Ellis, 2006; Fatemipour and Hemmati, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). To foster effective language learning, innovative teaching methods must be tested not only through controlled empirical studies but also within the context of real classroom environments. Moreover, students frequently struggle with the complexities of tense usage and often look to their teachers to distill the seemingly chaotic nature of language into clear, manageable rules.

Methodology

Research questions

Building on prior research, the present study hypothesizes that Grammar Conscious-Raising Tasks (GCRTs) are more effective than traditional grammar instructions (TGI) in enhancing students' explicit grammatical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, interactive engagement, motivation, and autonomy. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do GCRTs enhance students' grammatical accuracy?
2. To what extent do GCRTs develop students' explicit grammatical knowledge?
3. To what extent do GCRTs foster negotiated interaction among students?
4. To what extent do GCRTs promote student autonomy in learning verb tenses?
5. Do GCRTs yield any non-targeted benefits beyond grammatical outcomes?

Participants

The participants in this study were first-year Arab English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students aged between 18 and 19 from the Preparatory Year Deanship in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Two groups took part: an experimental group of 43 students who received Grammar Conscious-Raising Tasks (GCRTs), and a control group of 41 students who underwent traditional grammar instruction. The same teacher, who was also the researcher, taught both groups, delivering 50-minute English lessons five times a week during the three-month intervention period. The experiment was conducted following the Direction of Research Studies and its established ethical principles.

Instruments

This study utilized three research tools—a proficiency test, classroom observations, and questionnaires—to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The reliability and validity of the tests were confirmed by three professional experts in applied linguistics.

1. Proficiency test: The study used both a pretest and a posttest for gauging students' competence in tenses. Each of the pretest and posttest sessions lasted one hour. The tests included twenty multiple-choice questions about English tenses, each question with four options, where students opted for the appropriate one for grammatical accuracy and provided a grammatical judgement as an explicit grammatical justification. The tests were rated out of twenty points; one point for each item. The results revealed that both groups had a homogeneous proficiency level.

2. Classroom observation: This qualitative analysis aimed to examine students' performance to gather detailed information. Its objective was to transcribe, analyze, and interpret the behaviors under study. To evaluate students' negotiated interaction, we employed Fotos (1994) units of analysis, which included clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, repetitions, and requests for repetition.

3. Questionnaire: This posttest aimed to explore students' attitudes toward GCRTs as experienced during the intervention in terms of enhancing explicit knowledge, grammatical accuracy, negotiated interaction, autonomy, and other non-targeted gains. A five-point Likert questionnaire—with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree—was administered to the experimental group to gauge the impact of GCRTs via a multidimensional checklist.

Teaching Methods

Traditional Grammar

The control group participants were taught the same grammar tenses provided in OUP's Q Skills for Success: Reading and Writing Books: 3 & 4 through the conventional approach. The teacher projected the book onto the blackboard and explained the tenses. Then, students engaged in practice activities such as sentence completion, matching, filling in the gaps, and the teacher provided them with corrective feedback. The book adopted a deductive approach for teaching grammar points: presenting the rules, providing two or three examples, and then practicing. This process reflects the teacher-centered approach based on the conventional PPP model: presentation, practice, and production.

GCRTs

In GCRTs, students are divided into groups of four and given different parts of teacher-taught materials to be exchanged. GCRTs, then, are reminiscent of the jigsaw method defined by Johnson (1995: 114) as a method "in which teachers divide the academic content to be learned into parts and delegate individual parts to each group member. Thus, group members are responsible for learning only one part of the content and then teaching that part to the rest of the group". GCRTs comply with Pica et al. (1993: 19-26) criteria for developing real tasks including 'jig-saw', 'information gap', 'problem solving', 'decision making', and 'opinion exchange'.

GCRTs developed in this study are designed in conformity with the task components proposed by Candlin (1987), Nunan (1989), and Ellis (1998) including 'goals', 'input', 'procedures', 'setting', 'learner roles', 'teacher roles' and 'outcomes.' The goals of these tasks are to raise students' consciousness about the English tenses and gain grammatically explicit knowledge and subsequent grammatical accuracy. They are also designed to provide opportunities for students to interact, negotiate meaning, and enhance their autonomy and motivation. For the input, students are provided with task sheets, task cards, and task directions. For instance, to teach the present simple, as an instance, a task sheet consists of the four forms of the present simple to be completed, and their four uses to be identified in a series of four sentences included in the four task cards. Regarding the task cards**,** four cards are distributed to each member of the group. Each contains one form of the tense: affirmative, negative, interrogative, and imperative, and one use of the present simple: truth, habit, planned future actions, and past related as present or historic present. Students in each group complete the task cards individually. Each student must share their content with the subgroup and discuss the use of the tense that corresponds to the given sentences. They help one another to write down the information on the task sheet and negotiate their choice with the other subgroups. The task directions allow students to raise their awareness and gain explicit knowledge about the different forms and uses of the tenses through interactions and the exchange of information. In the procedures, students are required (a) to analyze the task card input to find the appropriate tense form and rule governing the set of sentences to be copied in in the task sheets, (b) to negotiate the answer provided by each member of the group, (c) once the right answer is agreed upon, it should be submitted to the whole class for a general agreement under the teacher's guidance. The outcomes are targeted to develop students' understanding of the forms and uses of the tense under study. Students must choose the correct rule underlying the tense through interaction. This procedure will heighten their autonomy.

Data analysis

Pretest results

The results of the pre-test and post-test were examined using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (version 29.0). First, the pre-test results of statistical analysis, including mean, standard deviation, and variance of the experimental group (EG) and control group (CG) in the pre-test scores, are illustrated in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1: Grammatical Accuracy Pretest Scores - Descriptive Statistics

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
CG	41	4.73	2.16	4.65
EG	43	4.86	2.04	4.17

Table 2: Explicit Grammatical Knowledge Pretest Scores - Descriptive Statistics

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
CG	41	4.39	1.96	3.84
EG	43	4.41	1.86	3.47

The students' pretest scores in grammatical accuracy and explicit knowledge were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, variance, and student's t-test. The results showed that there was no significant statistical difference between the mean scores of the control group (CG) and experimental group (EG). The grammatical accuracy score for the CG mean is 4.73, and the EG mean is 4.86. The explicit grammatical knowledge for the CG mean is 4.39, and the EG mean is 4.41. The grades were below average, suggesting that low levels of competence and performance were likely due to the negative impact of traditional grammar institutions, TGI, which students were exposed to for many years in general education.

To ensure group equivalence before the intervention, independent samples t-tests were conducted on both grammatical accuracy and explicit grammatical knowledge pretest scores. For the grammatical accuracy pretest, inferential analysis using a student's t-test yielded a t-value of 0.29, df = 82, p = 0.77. This result was not statistically significant, as the p-value exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Regarding the explicit grammatical knowledge pretest, the student's t-test revealed a t-value of 0.05, df = 0.96, p = 0.96, and degrees of freedom = 82. These findings indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups, as the p-value was greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). Overall, the pretest results indicated no significant differences between the CG and EG before the intervention, confirming that both groups were comparable at baseline in terms of both grammatical accuracy and explicit grammatical knowledge.

Posttest results

The posttest results of statistical analysis are illustrated in Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3: Grammatical Accuracy Posttest Scores - Descriptive Statistics

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
CG	41	11.21	2.09	4.37
EG	43	14.81	2.47	6.11

Table 4: Explicit Grammatical Knowledge Posttest Scores - Descriptive Statistics

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
CG	41	10.48	1.40	1.96
EG	43	12.53	2.33	5.45

The posttest results revealed that the mean grammatical accuracy score for the CG was 11.21, while the EG scored significantly higher with a mean of 14.81. In terms of explicit grammatical knowledge, the CG had a mean score of 10.48 compared to the EG's 12.53. Inferential analysis using a student's t-test for grammatical accuracy yielded a t-value of 7.37, df = 82, $p < 0.0001$, and a Cohen's d of 1.61, indicating a highly statistically significant difference in favor of the EG. Similarly, the t-test for explicit grammatical knowledge produced a t-value of 5.01, df = 82, $p < 0.0001$, and a Cohen's d of 1.08, also reflecting a highly significant improvement for the EG. Overall, these findings demonstrate that the EG outperformed the CG in both grammatical accuracy and explicit grammatical knowledge following the treatment, with statistically significant differences observed in both areas.

Improvement Analysis

Posttest results indicated that the EG significantly outperformed the CG in both grammatical accuracy and explicit grammatical knowledge. The treatment produced large effect sizes for grammatical accuracy (Cohen's d = 1.61) and explicit knowledge (Cohen's d = 1.08), with a more pronounced effect observed in grammatical accuracy. While both groups demonstrated improvement, the EG showed substantially higher percentage gains in grammatical accuracy (204.7% vs. 137.0%) and explicit grammatical knowledge (184.1% vs. 138.7%). These findings provide strong evidence that GCRTs are more effective than TGI in enhancing both grammatical accuracy and explicit grammatical knowledge among first-year university students.

Classroom observation results

Given that the researcher also served as the instructor, potential bias was acknowledged, particularly the Hawthorne effect, a form of performance bias that may arise when participants alter their behavior due to awareness of being observed, often aligning themselves with a specific treatment (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Despite this limitation, classroom observation was employed due to its close link with both formative and summative assessment processes. As Ya-nan (2023) noted, "Summative and formative functions are the two main purposes that classroom observation serves."

Observation of the control group

Instruction in the control group followed the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model, a hallmark of traditional grammar instruction (TGI). During the presentation stage, students appeared to be

passive recipients of the teacher's explanations. While a few students posed direct questions about specific grammar rules, the teacher responded with detailed explanations and illustrative examples. However, no negotiated interaction was observed. In the practice stage, student participation was limited to providing brief, specific answers to textbook exercises. The teacher devoted the majority of classroom time to transmitting grammatical content, offering minimal opportunities for student-led exploration or interaction. Despite repeated encouragement, some students were unwilling to engage fully with the activities. The structure of TGI, which prioritizes rule explanation and accuracy over interaction, did not facilitate meaningful exchanges among learners. Although the teacher made attempts to promote discussion, student inhibition remained a persistent barrier, and collaborative dialogue failed to emerge.

Observation of the experimental group

Students in the experimental group demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility for their learning. They actively engaged with the GCRTs by negotiating meaning, exchanging information, and collaboratively making decisions to comprehend the various tense forms. All group members were focused and fully involved in the learning process. Achieving consensus on grammatical issues required collaboration both within individual groups and across the entire class.

Students' negotiated interactions were observed through the units of analysis advanced by Fotos (1994, pp. 333–334). Learning was facilitated by peer-to-peer support, including checks for understanding and the provision of feedback among students. For example, clarification requests were common, as illustrated by Ali's question: "I am really confused. Could you explain this rule again?" Confirmation checks were also frequently used, such as when Salim asked: "Do you mean that all these sentences that are used in the present simple indicate past events? Why not use the simple past?" Students engaged in comprehension checks to verify their understanding, as Ali inquired: "When do we use the present and the past in this situation?" Additionally, requests for repetition were often observed, exemplified by Saad's comment: "Could you please repeat the various uses of the present perfect? I didn't get your point." Such interactions and inquiries reflected the learners' collaborative effort to arrive at accurate understandings of grammatical form, meaning, and use. Overall, the classroom atmosphere supported active involvement, critical thinking, and shared responsibility for learning.

Classroom observation provided compelling evidence that GCRTs fostered not only negotiated interaction regarding grammatical structures but also promoted discussions on word meaning and accurate pronunciation**.** In instances where group members encountered persistent disagreements, they occasionally sought clarification from the teacher. GCRTs encouraged students to engage in an active, inductive learning process that required critical thinking to understand, analyze, and explain grammatical concepts to their peers. The level of student engagement was notably high, as successful completion of the tasks depended on the active participation of all group members.

In sum, GCRTs fostered not only the development of grammatical knowledge but also enhanced learners' ability to engage in negotiated interaction. Throughout task performance, students consistently exhibited high levels of collaboration, autonomy, and motivation. These activities also stimulated socioemotional competencies, including perseverance and social interaction, within a supportive learning environment. Although students initially faced challenges in engaging with the grammar tasks, they gradually overcame these difficulties as they became more familiar with the task structure. Notably, the final reporting stage contributed significantly to improving students' confidence and presentation skills, enabling them to communicate their findings effectively and maintain the attention of their peers.

Results of the questionnaire

Following the intervention, a questionnaire was administered to assess students' attitudes toward GCRTs and TGI. The instrument included sections on demographic information, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions to facilitate comprehensive data collection. Items were organized under key themes, including explicit grammatical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, negotiated interaction, collaboration, autonomy, self-confidence, motivation, and overall satisfaction. Respondents indicated their views using a five-point Likert scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly Agree). A checklist was incorporated into the questionnaire to systematically gather data aligned with the intended outcomes of GCRTs. This tool provided the researcher with both inclusive qualitative insights and quantifiable data suitable for structured analysis. Students' attitudes were analyzed using percentage distributions. The questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.90—an excellent level of reliability.

Table 5: Students' attitudes towards GCRTs

Items: GCRTs ……	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1. promoted my grammatical explicit knowledge.	00%	00%	4.65%	23.25%	72.10%
2. developed my grammatical accuracy.	9.30%	6.97%	11.62%	34.88%	37.23%

3. fostered my negotiated interaction.	00%	00%	4.65%	27.90%	67.45%
4. fostered my autonomy/responsibility for learning	00%	00%	2.32%	13.95%	83.73%
5. fostered my self-confidence.	00%	00%	1.62%	20.93%	77.45%
6. enhanced my classroom collaboration.	00%	00%	00%	25.58%	74.42%
7. enhanced my motivation in learning grammar.	00%	2.32 %	4.65%	13.95%	79.08%
8. provided a relaxed classroom atmosphere	00%	00%	2.32%	16.27%	81.41%
9. involved me in discovery learning.	00%	00%	00%	6.97%	93.03%
10. offered an active classroom.	00%	2.32%	2.32%	18.60%	76.76%
11. enhanced my critical thinking.	00%	00%	4.65%	20.93%	74.42%
12. boosted my engagement.	00%	00%	2.32%	30.23%	67.45%
13. increased my interest in grammar	00%	2.32%	4.65%	9.30%	83.73%
14. triggered my attention.	00%	00%	2.32%	11.62%	86.06%
15. involved me in risk-taking situations.	%	2.32%	2.32%	30.23%	65.13%
16. supplied me with interesting teaching materials.	00%	00%	00%	9.30%	90.70%
17. helped me to get better grades in grammar.	2.32%	2.32%	2.32%	16.27%	76.77%
18. made grammar learning more enjoyable.	00%	00%	4.65%	16.27%	79.08%
19. augmented my satisfaction with learning grammar.	00%	00%	2.32%	13.95%	83.73%
20. I would prefer using GCRTs in the future.	00%	00%	2.32%	9.30%	88.38%
Total	11.62	18.57	62.02	369.68	153811
Calculated Mean	0.58%	0.92%	3.10%	18.48%	76.90%

As shown in Table 5, the overwhelming majority of the students in the experimental group expressed very positive attitudes toward GCRTs. The calculated mean of all the grades shows that 18.48% of the participants agreed with this approach, and 76.90% strongly agreed. All those who agreed added to those who strongly agreed represent 95.38%. Concerning item one, 95.35% of the students believed that GCRTS promoted their grammatical explicit knowledge, except 4.65% remaining neutral. Regarding item two, 72.11% alleged that GCRTs developed their grammatical accuracy. Relating to item three, 95.35% confirmed that GCRTs fostered their negotiated interaction. Item four revealed that those who agreed, 13.95%, and strongly agreed, 83.73%, a total of 97.68%, held that GCRTs fostered their autonomy and responsibility for learning. Item five indicated that 98.35% of the participants thought that this approach fostered their self-confidence, and only 1.62% expressed their impartiality. Remarkably, item six disclosed that 100% of the respondents alleged that GCRTs enhanced their classroom collaboration. Item seven showed that 93.03% favored GCRTs because it enhanced their motivation in learning grammar. Item eight proved that GCRTS established a relaxed classroom atmosphere for 97.68% of the students. Importantly, item nine shows that 100%, including 6.97% of those who agree and 93.03% of those who strongly agree, testified that this approach involved them in discovery learning. Equally important, item ten shows that 95.36% of the participants attested that learning grammar through this approach offered them an active classroom environment. Other beneficial effects of GCRTs were also identified through this template on the remaining questions. The percentages including 'agree' and 'strongly agree' calculated together are very high for the following benefits: enhancing critical thinking (item 11: 95.35%), boosting engagement (item 12: 97.68%), increasing interest in grammar (item 13: 93.03%), triggering attention (item 14: 97.68%), heightening risk-taking (item15: 95.36%), supplying interesting materials (item 16:100%), achieving better grades in grammar (item 17: 93.04%), heightening enjoyment (item 18: 95.35%), and augmenting satisfaction (item 19: 97.68%). Eventually, item 20 shows that 97.68% of the participants expressed their preference for using GCRTs in their future studies. On the whole, Table 1 demonstrated that the participants expressed very favorable attitudes toward GCRTs. As the calculated mean of the 20 questions shows, 95.38% favored this innovative approach.

Discussion

The present study sought to compare the effects of GCRTs and TGI on the acquisition of English tenses using quantitative and qualitative designs. Forty-three students in the experimental group followed GCRTs, and forty-one students in the control group followed the conventional approach of teaching grammar.

The first research instruments—namely, the pretests and posttests—were designed to assess the explicit grammatical knowledge and accuracy of both the control and experimental groups. The results revealed that GCRTs were more effective in enhancing explicit grammatical knowledge (M = 12.53) compared to the TGI approach (M = 10.48). A Student's t-test confirmed

the statistical significance of this difference. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies (Akhmarianti, 2021; Alqaed, 2023; Amirian & Abbasi, 2014; Ellis, 2003, 2006; Fotos, 1994; Mardani & Badpa, 2024; Miranda et al., 2018; Ouazani, 2022; Tashmuradova et al., 2023; Yazdani & Zare, 2025), which all support the effectiveness of GCRTs in promoting explicit knowledge and raising metalinguistic awareness.

Next, the posttest concluded that GCRTs significantly contributed to the development of students' grammatical accuracy (M=14.81) and TGI (M=11.21). Yet, students in the conventional approach comparatively achieved acceptable results because TGI is a teacher-centered form of making learners aware of the rules of language through explanation without task use. The results of the study substantiated the findings of numerous researchers (Badpa & Mardani, 2025; Fatemipour & Hemmati, 2015; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Fotos, 1994; Tilahun et al., 2022), who demonstrated the efficiency of GCRTs in promoting grammatical performance. Although the Oxford textbooks provided the control group with sufficient grammatical input, participants exhibited comparatively lower performance in measures of explicit grammatical knowledge and accuracy. This disparity may be attributed to the predominance of TGI, in which instructional discourse is largely unidirectional, characterized by teacher-led delivery and minimal student engagement and interaction.

The second research instrument, classroom observation, examined students' performance under GCRTS and revealed beneficial effects on negotiated interaction, autonomy, motivation, as well as other non-targeted aims. Students worked in groups where each was given only a part of the information that was necessary for completing the task. Each student had to negotiate the input via comprehensible output to clarify the rules governing the various sets of sentences. Specifically, GCRTs were more effective for fostering negotiated interaction and comprehensible output than TGI. These results were strongly corroborated by numerous studies (Badpa & Mardani, 2025; Fotos, 1993, 1994; Eckerth, 2008; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Tilahun et al., 2022).

The abundance of L2 negotiation resulted from the students' use of information-gap activities, reasoning-gap activities, and decision-making activities as suggested by Ellis (2003). The first feature forced students to exchange information to fulfil the tasks. The second feature made them think about the raw grammatical data to induce the appropriate rules. The third feature consisted of reaching a single agreed-upon solution. The amalgamation of these task features allowed students to produce a high volume of negotiations. As GCRTs are closed-ended tasks that induce learners to provide more precise answers, they spawned much more negotiation among students. GCRTs are grounded in several theoretical frameworks, including Krashen's (1981) comprehensible input hypothesis, Long's (1983) interaction hypothesis, Swain's (1985) output hypothesis, Piaget's (1964) constructivist theory and critique of transmissive learning, and Prabhu's (1987) task-based approach emphasizing meaning-focused communication.

The third research instrument, the questionnaire, investigated students' attitudes toward GCRT and yielded compelling findings. Participants reported that these tasks contributed to the development of both their explicit grammatical knowledge and grammatical accuracy. These self-reported outcomes corroborated the results obtained from the quantitative posttest in this study. Furthermore, they aligned with the findings of previous research, reinforcing the effectiveness of GCRT in enhancing grammatical knowledge and performance (Akhmarianti, 2020; Alqaed, 2023; Miranda et al., 2018; Ouazani, 2022; Tashmuradova et al., 2023).

The findings also indicated that GCRTs fostered greater learner autonomy. Students no longer relied solely on the teacher as the primary source of knowledge; instead, they independently constructed their lessons using the task cards, guided by the instructions provided on the task sheets. This shift toward self-directed learning echoed the conclusions of numerous scholars who emphasized the role of task-based approaches in promoting autonomy and responsibility for learning (Ellis, 2006; Fotos, 1994; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Additionally, students reported a noticeable increase in self-confidence when engaging with the grammar tasks. Their active participation in grammar-related discussions revealed a low-anxiety environment, aligning with Krashen's (1981) concept of a reduced affective filter. Recent studies have similarly emphasized the role of emotional factors in language learning, highlighting that low-anxiety, supportive settings can significantly enhance learner confidence and willingness to communicate (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Li, 2020). Learners consistently described the tasks as enjoyable and fun, suggesting that the relaxed classroom climate contributed to their positive emotional engagement. This environment not only helped reduce anxiety but also fostered motivation and active participation, thereby supporting more effective and enjoyable learning experiences (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Pawlak, 2022).

Moreover, GCRTs actively engaged students in discovery learning and hypothesis testing. The data revealed that 100% of participants favored this approach, attributing it to the development of their analytical awareness and critical thinking skills. The principle that knowledge discovered independently is more effectively retained than knowledge that is passively received is well-documented, and this finding provides strong support for earlier studies (Amirinda et al., 2018; Ellis, 2006; Fotos, 1994; Nassaji and Fotos, 2011; Nunan, 1989; Ouazani, 2022; Rutherford, 1987; Swain, 1985). The inductive nature of the tasks aligns with constructivist learning principles, positioning students as active participants in the learning process rather than

passive recipients of information. Each student was required to observe, analyze, and collaborate to complete the tasks (Azizifar et al., 2015; Iskandar & Heriyawati, 2015).

GCRTs were found to substantially enhance collaborative learning, a conclusion unanimously supported by all participants. The task-based format inherently required students to work together to analyze linguistic input and construct shared understanding, making collective effort essential for successful task completion. This collaborative environment promoted not only peer interaction but also mutual scaffolding, in which learners supported each other's development of grammatical awareness (Donato, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978). As students negotiated meaning and co-constructed knowledge, they engaged more confidently in communication, which, in turn, fostered an outgoing disposition and greater willingness to take linguistic risks—key factors in second language development (Dörnyei, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Moreover, the interactive nature of GCRTs aligns with principles of communicative language teaching, where meaningful communication and collaboration are central to language acquisition (Eckerth, 2008; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Long, 2015). These findings suggest that GCRTs create a supportive, low-anxiety environment that not only reinforces grammar learning but also strengthens students' social and communicative competence.

Equally important, GCRTs have proven effective in enhancing learners' motivation and maintaining their interest and attention throughout the learning process. This outcome aligns with findings from previous studies, which emphasize the role of GCRTs in fostering active learner engagement, autonomy, interaction, and communication (Badpa & Mardani, 2025; Dkhissi, 2014; Ellis, 2006; Erlam, 2003; Fotos, 1994; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Underwood, 2017). These results further highlight the pedagogical value of GCRTs in promoting learner involvement within communicative contexts. Additionally, GCRTs have been associated with creating a relaxed classroom environment and a positive social atmosphere. These findings align with previous research in the field (Azizifar et al., 2015; Fatemipour & Hemmati, 2015), as well as with foundational educational theories advanced by Krashen (1981), Long (1983), Piaget (1964), Prabhu (1987), and Vygotsky (1978), all of whom emphasize the construction of knowledge through meaningful experiences and social interaction.

The final analysis demonstrated a high level of student satisfaction with GCRTs. These tasks fostered positive attitudes toward grammar learning, a result aligned with prior research suggesting that consciousness-raising approaches can enhance learners' perceptions, increase engagement, and mitigate boredom (Alqaed, 2023; Azizifar et al., 2015; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Fotos, 1994; Iskandar & Heriyawati, 2015; Li, 2020; Namaghi & Charmchi, 2016; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Tilahun et al., 2022). The findings indicated that GCRTs not only promoted greater grammatical awareness but also contributed to higher levels of acceptance regarding grammar instruction. Most notably, the majority of participants expressed a strong preference for the continued use of GCRTs, citing their perceived effectiveness in facilitating grammar learning within the classroom context.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study provide clear evidence of the substantial impact of GCRTs on the development of grammatical accuracy, explicit knowledge, negotiated interaction, learner autonomy, and responsibility for learning. These outcomes were substantiated through both quantitative and qualitative data. GCRTs have been shown to facilitate the internalization of grammar rules by engaging learners in meaningful interaction and problem-solving activities. Significantly, the implementation of these tasks also led to a range of unintended yet valuable outcomes, including enhanced motivation, self-confidence, collaborative engagement, willingness to take risks, discovery-based learning, a relaxed learning environment, heightened enjoyment, and an overall sense of satisfaction. These findings affirm the pedagogical value of GCRTs not only as tools for explicit grammar instruction but also as catalysts for broader affective and cognitive benefits in language learning.

It is important to acknowledge that students in the control group, who were instructed through the TGI, also demonstrated satisfactory gains in explicit grammatical knowledge and accuracy. However, these improvements did not reach the levels attained by the treatment group. TGI is typically characterized by teacher-led explanations followed by controlled practice and production tasks to reinforce grammatical forms. While such an approach can help convey grammatical rules, its teacher-centered orientation limits opportunities for active learner engagement. In contrast to the learner-centered design of GCRTs, TGI tends to position learners as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in the learning process. As a result, students in the control group did not benefit from essential elements of active learning, such as autonomy, negotiated interaction, discovery-based learning, and peer collaboration—factors known to enhance retention, motivation, and deeper cognitive engagement. These indirect yet vital dimensions of learning are especially significant in contemporary classrooms, where issues of learner disengagement and lack of sustained attention are increasingly prevalent.

During CCRTs, it was observed that the classroom became quite noisy as all the students within each group attempted to convey grammatical sentences and reciprocal rules to their partners. This led to excessive gesticulation and a high level of negotiated interaction, often accompanied by loud voices that risked creating chaos without teacher intervention. Contributing to this challenge was the time-consuming nature of these

grammar activities, particularly during the initial weeks of the experiment. Moreover, the experimental students had no prior experience with such tasks, which may have amplified these issues. It is my belief that if they had been introduced to grammar-based tasks earlier, they would have become more familiar with the format and likely achieved more impressive results.

GCRTs have proven to be an effective approach for teaching grammar, aligning well with the core principles of TBLT and the foundational concepts of SLA research. They are particularly beneficial for facilitating language acquisition, as they integrate both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies during task performance. Bottom-up strategies are activated when students concentrate on selecting appropriate words and grammatical structures necessary for successful task completion, whereas top-down strategies are engaged as learners interpret task instructions and interact with the embedded grammatical content. Overall, GCRTs demonstrate greater efficiency than TGI in multiple respects, offering a more dynamic and learner-centred environment that promotes both cognitive engagement and communicative competence.

GCRTs appear to be a lasting innovation in grammar instruction rather than a fad. The growing number of scholarly publications and the international organization of seminars underscore the increasing recognition and practical utility of this approach. Moreover, a balanced pedagogical perspective that integrates focus-on-form activities with meaning-focused communicative tasks is essential to foster both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency. This dual approach not only addresses the structural dimensions of language but also cultivates the interactional and cognitive skills critical for effective language use in contemporary educational contexts.

We hope that educators will resist reverting to the widely criticized TGI, which is largely incompatible with the natural processes through which students acquire language. We also hope that the perennial debate surrounding grammar instruction will be addressed more conclusively through continued experimental research and comparative studies. In summary, GCRTs have demonstrated tangible pedagogical benefits, offering a strong foundation for a promising methodology in teaching tenses. They can be recommended for the instruction of various grammar points, particularly at a time when the conventional approach continues to maintain a strong foothold in many modern schools and universities. It is anticipated that researchers will contribute significantly not only by exploring and evaluating a range of grammar consciousness-raising frameworks but also by supporting syllabus designers in the development and integration of sound instructional materials into learners' textbooks across various proficiency levels.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited to the teaching of English tenses to university students. Future research should broaden its scope to examine the teaching of other aspects of English grammar to learners at different proficiency levels and in diverse educational contexts worldwide. Researchers need to explore whether GCRTs have long-term effects and how they compare with other instructional methods, such as unfocused communicative tasks and task-based grammar instruction. Since GCRTs do not constitute a monolithic approach, further experimentation with various implementations within the same framework is warranted. Ultimately, future studies should also assess the impact of this innovative approach not only on learners' performance in discrete-point grammar tests but also on their ability to use grammar accurately and fluently in productive skills such as speaking and writing.

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