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Editor-in-chief

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The Effect of Explicit Teaching of English Stress Rules on EFL Students' Performance at University Level

*Reem Abduljabbar Yahy **

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Abstract

Teaching English word stress constitutes a real problem for Iraqi EFL students at university level. The currently used method is to encourage students to listen attentively to how stress is placed on syllables and word without giving them rules for stress patterns. Relevant literature clearly shows that there are stress rules and patterns although exceptions are quite common. The present study attempts to make use of the rules in explicit teaching of English stress. More specifically, it addresses the following question. Will explicit teaching of English stress rules better help EFL students use stress patterns correctly and appropriately? It is hypothesized that teaching stress rules explicitly help EFL students use stress patterns appropriately at word level. In order to verify this hypothesis an experimental design will be used. Two groups of students (the experimental group and the control group) are taught English stress. The control group is taught without being given explicit rules. The experimental group is taught stress patterns by rules. The groups are pre-tested and post-tested. The results obtained showed explicit teaching of stress rules and patterns are considered more effective. The study concluded that explicit instruction is valued in its possibility to raise learners' awareness of English knowledge. Further research is recommended to measure on learners' levels of proficiency from different age scales and genders, with different levels of skills.

Keywords: Explicit instruction (Teaching), Stress, Rules, Iraqi EFL, Students, University.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the aim of language pedagogy is to facilitate communication, and such facilitation is made clear through proper pronunciation, which is regarded as a key factor to achieve the former aim. It is very significant to shed light on the value of proper pronunciation, for Darcy (2015, p. 2) expresses his ideas saying that "language is sound". He sees communication as a process that occurs when only the speakers are exposed to proper pronunciation, regardless these speakers' limit due to their inadequate vocabulary storage or grammatical competence. A support is shown by Fraser (2000, p. 7) as he asserts that "with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas." Moreover, Cook (1998, p. 20), states that "Working Memory is the gateway to language processing, and pronunciation is the key to Working Memory." Therefore, proper speaking skill is very important to set the initially involved process mentally and comprehensively. As a result, improper pronunciation can bring about most misunderstandings and failures of communication. Archer and Hughes (2011), believe that explicit instruction is "structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills" (p. 1). Here, it conforms to teaching clearly and directly. For explicit instruction, it is seen as the existing tool that is employed to increase students' competence. While implicit teaching according to Ellis (1993), involves a way to create an environment of learning as learners get enough exposure to rules of pronunciation without any mindful work. Even Krashen (1981) is of the belief that a second language can be learnt by SLs depending on the level of exposure they are going through while learning that target language. This input has its effective role for learners to acquire proper pronunciation. However, it has been controversial concerning this issue by many practitioners with varied viewpoints. It has been proposed that English language requires learners to have a varied and hybridized criterion of an "international" language that is understandable, while "local" can be dealt with as a form of identity (Crystal, 2001, p. 57). Specifically speaking, the evolution of "bi-dialectalism" (ibid) has allowed English to launch its two

varieties (i.e. international and local ones) to coexist as mutual and accepted targets. For EFL learner, and in the case of varied cultures and ethnicities, they may feel like they lose their identity. This issue has motivated Crystal (2001) to propose that learners “recognize the importance of international diversity, as a reflection of identity” (ibid., p. 63).

Roles of encompassing intercultural competence will be developed by learners when they get the adequate exposure to globalization and transnational educational standards. The teachers of English whose language is originally English believe that practice often determines whether items of English language that EFL learners are exposed to will accord their essential needs while they are conversing in EFL classes. According to a study carried out by Wu (2006), in which she discovered that what principles of teaching are followed by instructors and what expectations are shown by learners, go in the same way. As stated by her, learners of a foreign language have deficiency to rightly use the models of the native speakers for their linguistic involvement as they are the second speakers of such a language.

2. Explicit and Implicit Instruction in the EFL Classroom

Globally, it is acknowledged that explicit and implicit instructions are implemented by teachers in EFL classes. When conducting explicit teaching, learners are exposed to the rules that enhance practice in learning. Oxford (1990) is of the argument that demarcated explicit instruction might assist in developing the consciousness of the learning principles for the learners to practice the targeted language with the newly applied principles. By this, a student can show his/her self-evaluation of the principles in use and practice to transfer knowledge to a newer set-task. According to Lee and Van Patten (2003), “The acquisition of implicit knowledge in language learning involves three separate procedures: 1. Noticing; 2. comparing; and, 3. Integrating” (p. 171).

Generally speaking, language instruction can be divided into two parts: “indirect” and “direct” intervention, Ellis (2009, p. 16) believes that “indirect intervention aims to create conditions where learners can learn experientially through learning how to communicate in the L2”. It is on the contrary that, “instruction, as

direct intervention, involves the pre-emptive specification of what it is that the learners are supposed to learn and, typically, draw on a structural syllabus.” To show the difference on one hand, by applying implicit instruction, students are allowed to infer the rule by personally and insentiently. After that “indirect intervention is implicit in nature”. On the other hand, and by applying explicit instruction, learners become aware of the rules and that is why “explicit instruction constitutes direct intervention” (Ellis, 2009, p. 17).

Other researches such as (Minhong & Ailun, 2006; Papachristou, 2011) have conducted in varied EFL settings, and have added to prevailing debate as some favored implicit instruction of pronunciation and stress rules, and to take-it-for-granted in which such instructional style would assist students to improve their English proficiency in terms of speaking as they are exposed to an autonomous learning.

On the other side, explicit teaching has the favor of applying conscious policies in teaching learners via making them fully aware of the learning process (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Activities of language can be involved in this type of instruction, and among such activities are teaching techniques such as to memorize, to form a hypothesis or to test.

EFL instructors are motivated in practicing a direct instruction in language learning strategies such as to select attention, to activate preceding knowledge, to summarize, to question, and to make inferences (Chamot et al, 1999). Training as a strategy may be regarded as an explicit type of instruction that is used for teaching learners the way in applying language learning and use strategies while teaching is going on. Seliger (1975) in a study conducted, discovered that learners of ESL in the United States of America had the capability of retaining knowledge of rules in a better way next to the said by which the presentation of knowledge had been occurred in an explicit way. Such as study was confirmed by a study conducted by Reber (1976) adding that the critical factors for explicit instruction included the number of variables to be learnt, as well as the range to which the critical features in the new input were noticeable.

3. English Speaking in the EFL Classroom

Being a significant skill among the existing skills of language learning, speaking skill is regarded as the part of teaching of any foreign language, which entails an environment of communication. Such environment is given by integrating both the explicit and implicit methods of teaching into a communicative approach. Such a procedure is conducted to attain efficacious combination into the EFL curriculum. Moreover, as a teaching approach, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is applied in language teaching via a designed syllabus. Within the EFL classroom, the teaching of English as a spoken language can be carried out show how English in their cultural setting can be used away from the target language in a daily-life conversation.

As an activity of communication, English speaking involves English spoken language to attain the specified aim in the English language medium. When it comes to any international faculty, such a cultural facet of language learning tends to disappear. The cultural boundaries of the target culture are well-presented in the EFL classroom environment as language fully engaged, with arranged access to English-language media, and the attendance of the teachers of the target language.

Lee, & VanPatten (2003, p. 100) believe that EFL learners are fully anticipated that their share of the “communicative burden” is accepted. This communication “burden” suggests that learners are expected to undertake responsible to initiate, respond, manage, and negotiate the part set for them orally while they interact. While Rao (2000) proposed that the adaptation of teaching by the teachers of the way that learners from a particular community. Improving the learners’ level of both the communicative competence and performance is what CLT aims to achieve. (Richards, & Rodgers, 2001). It is stated by Rao (2000) that, “Only by reconciling communicative activities with non-communicative activities in English classrooms can students in non-English-speaking countries benefit from CLT” (p. 85).

For CLT, it was accounted as having the capacity to motivate learners in both practicing and participating in genuine speaking situations. As stated by Chambers (1997), the use language

genuinely, spontaneously and functionally is promoted by CLT to make learners speak the language fluently. In EFL class, students are motivated to deal with unrehearsed situations under their teachers' guidance. These situations and exercises will involve steps like to select, to sequence, and to arrange words, and statements to accomplish an integrated spoken dialogue. Therefore, as an expectation, students are to demonstrate their knowledge to reply to the task and express themselves through a type of meaningfully linguistic outcome, both verbally and in writing.

The necessity of spoken interaction occurs in language learning though simply, however, it simply occurs in an inadequate way by itself. In an interactive linguistic environment, both of the appropriate quantity and type of verbal interaction has to happen for learning to take place. Long (1990) suggested verbal interaction exists in three features such as input, production, and feedback. As the target language is interpreted by native speakers offered the language learner of a target language. To produce language means to create the suitable environment through the spoken language by the language learners themselves. As for feedback, it means the way learners react to the offered conversational partners to produce the language learner.

4. Instructors' Roles in the EFL Classroom

The instructors of English language with their interactive part should not be misjudged. Instructors have their significant part in the way they assist those who cannot speak proper English with the EFL classroom. Teachers of English language according to Nation and Newton (2009) were those who can control over both the content and the procedure while teaching English language, discussing topics, and deciding who the participants may or may not be. For instance, when she was examining factors for students' shyness, Tsui (1996) discovered that the part of teacher is directly affected students' shyness. She also discovered that the teacher controls the speaking taking-turns, and both negatively and positively comments as a way to motivate learners' conduct, and encourages learners through beneficial criticism. This means that teachers either facilitated or inhibited the participatory patterns for learners to deal with shyness. Moreover, to control EFL teachers as

a role, assumes that the roles of these teachers are of great significance on the part of the learners as it provides a good English speaking model for EFL learners. In this regard, Voller (1997) stated that there are three metaphorical parts for a teacher of English language who can facilitate, counsel, and have the source of authority.

Being a facilitator, the task of the teacher aims at assisting learners verbally inside the classroom. As a counselor, he / she may counsel learners on a one-to-one basis to be sure that their comprehension takes place according to what is said. As an authoritative resource, teachers offer learners with the essential assistance needed till the process of fading, and to remove the support, until it becomes appropriate. Holec (1985) proposed that the role of the teacher could be in a less directive way to facilitate as he/she personalizes the learning experience through strategies of fundamental incentive and awareness-raising. As the leaning process is made more available (i.e. to assist the learners for obstacles to be removed, and difficult messages to be negotiated to learners. From his side Wolff (1994) showed that teachers' role could act as a source of authority for language learners as teachers were able to share "action knowledge" (p. 14). This is so as a way to meaningfully achieve the learning experiences for learners to learn the way English is genuinely spoken.

Furthermore, there is another role of more significance for the teacher in the EFL classroom, which is as an implementer of effective EFL speaking strategies. This occurs as learners show a sense of unwillingness to speak. Six teacher-centered speaking strategies were framed by Tsui (1996) in a way to assist learners overcoming being anxious and shy, which are: lengthening waiting times between question and answer, improving questioning techniques, accepting a varied number of answers more than a set response, allowing students' rehearsals, emphasizing content over form, and establishing good ties with learners. Moreover, as proposed by Tsui (1996) that learners can be reminded by their teachers to evade repetitive responses to show individuality. In practice, other clues can also be given to learners by their teachers, so these learners can show their reflection in classrooms. It is

definite that connection between teachers and learners is very important for it to create the demanded trust to open up the discussion in a meaningful way within the classroom hierarchy.

5. Instructed EFL Teaching

Since the 1990s, the immense majority of publications enhance the view that proposes the usefulness of explicit instruction in EFL classroom. (Ellis, 1993; Robinson, 1996). Studies currently conducted about classroom EFL language learning have also indicated that the emphasis of learners on form, mainly through instruction, is higher to implicit learning (White, 1998). It is argued by Schmidt (1993) that whether we want our learners to gain fluency in FL, so, they (our learners) must be enabled to take part practically using that language. Such use comes to communicate something in a specified language. It is a way applied to keep the related knowledge in their memory. It is currently thought about teaching communicative approach, which is argued that grammar must obtain its status within EFL classroom.

“Accuracy, fluency and overall communicative skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning based but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focused activities and correction in context” (Lightbown & Spada, 1990: 443)

A discovery made by Schmidt & Frota (1986) concerning teaching and chances of interaction away from class, were both essential FL development. It is the formulation of Pienemann (1984:36) that a “teachability hypothesis”, which depends on the psychological study in FL teaching. As argued by him, the instruction that targets a learner’s next developmental level would bring its use more than the one that is aimed to learners beyond their current level. As a result, in EFL setting, explicit instruction is incorporated within meaning-focused instruction would strength learners of SL to give up some of the mental influence placed on the learners.

6. Learners' Awareness, Consciousness and FL Development

As it has been believed by some researches that the learning of language is essentially unconscious. Krashen & Seliger (1976)

claimed that “obviously it is at the level of unconsciousness that learning of language occurs”. Krashen (1986) elucidated that a theory distinguishes between two independent processing, genuine learning called, “acquisition” which is sub-conscious, and conscious “learning”. This is used in a lesser way as compared to actual language being produced and comprehended. However, in linguistics as well as in teaching of language, the association in the new trends accompanied with widespread recognition that awareness plays its significant role to explain the psychological phenomena. The current cognitive psychology is with the main view-point that has stressed the part of awareness in learning the language. The connection between explicit instruction and awareness is supported by Skehan (1996) suggesting that:

“Learners benefit from some type of explicit instruction is prior to the activity to help them activate their knowledge of TL structures and facilitate awareness of the forms they will encounter” (p.46).

To raise and process consciousness is regarded as an essential condition to enhance the first step in language learning. It also facilitates the other learning aspects. As it is argued by McLaughlin et al (1983) that children’s learning of the grammar rules as a result of trying to communicate while it is known that that adults’ learning may not reach the level of learning grammar while they interact.

7. Methodology

A – The Tested Individuals

The selection of the tested individuals for the current study was carried out at the university level and for English language use of stress rule and patterns through pre-test, and post-test for undergraduates of English majors. Arabic language was the tested individuals’ L1, and English language was their foreign language. Definitely, there is no clear difference among the two groups (the experimental group and control group). It can be taken-for-granted that that the tested individuals have the same level of proficiency in English language speaking.

B- The Focus of the Study

The structure of English has a problematic area, which is the English structure for EFL learners, and mainly the Iraqis. It is stress rules that brings about proficiency in English speaking in a later

stage of their learning process. Since many issues the Iraqi English language learners have to face while learning and acquiring the stress rules and patterns, the function of these rules can be in the forms focused in this experimental study.

C- Instruments Used and Procedures Followed

The selection of the two groups was made randomly and they were divided into two groups (the experimental group and the control group). The feedback received by the experimental group was in the form of re-form by the instructor, while any treatment was not delivered by the control groups and they were instructed to use communicative method only without raising their consciousness and receiving any form-focused instruction. The participation of the students was during the time assigned for instruction, which was specified for stress rules and patterns in a situation communicatively set for this purpose.

This study uses eliciting in collecting data that was presented in a form of test. The tested individuals were used as instrument to measure the EFL learners' knowledge, which has been well-presented in the review of literature previously mentioned. The subjects of the study under varied approaches of teaching (experimental group uses multimedia mode; control group uses traditional mode) occurred simultaneously. The collection and analysis of the results was carried out to identify if the multimedia mode has positively affected the learners' proficiency in English language.

8. Academic Implications

According to the findings of the study, significant implications are reached for EFL learners, language instructors to adopt and develop suitable methods to teach learners the stress rules and patterns as well as conducting tests. It is obvious that teaching EFL is inadequate to communicate and promote high-level of accuracy on the part of learners (William 1995). It can be said, that task-based language instruction appears to be appropriate for formal instruction. It can be made use of task performance to provide opportunities for the target language to both produced and comprehended (Crooks, 1989). Moreover, these tasks can allow

more orientation for non-native speaker teacher in the target languages' communicative activities.

As teachers of FL, it is needed to figure out the potentials of innovation in language learning. It is also needed to have familiarity with the strategies required to place theoretical matters in the field. Obviously, the studies in the FL education have emphasized either the theoretical debates or the communicative activities that involve negotiating the meaning of pedagogy. They are also accompanied with some propositions concerning activities of integration, inadequacy of discussing such strategies. According to the applications of FL in education and based on the currently emerging issues, it is recommended for FL education to take into account the nature of the focus of language learning on form approach and to advocate such processes/approaches to establish an integrated emphasis on form with meaningful classroom communication. To be added, FL education is advantageous in that it can be attributed to the fact that it offers more support to the significance attributed to the incorporated focus on form into meaning-oriented instruction.

Newly emerging perspectives that are supported a principled, form-focused approach to FL learning, in which it has been argued that a message based approach is insufficient to develop an accurate knowledge of language (Salimi 2004). The designers of curriculum should focus on investigating the potential ways adopted in designing suitable tasks, demonstrating the feasibility of creating activities to connect form with communication in classroom. According to such a proposition, ELT teachers offer both a chance to find out how significant to focus on form strategies in communicative context, and to think of possible ways in facilitating the integrative of both form and communication practically. All such factors can offer more opportunities to establish a communicative fluency in speaking the foreign language.

9-Results and Discussion

It is shown – via findings – that no statistically significant differences were obtained as for the average mean of valid responses for pre/test for both control group and experimental one (17.333) and (23.333). By such findings, it can be indicated as for applicants within control group and experimental one, which

appeared to be the same while gaining knowledge of word stress patterns in English. Such changes can be attributed to the mean score of both post/test in the experimental group for showing explicit instruction in word stress rules.

The analysis of the varieties is for both pre/post–test mean scores for the experimental group. It is also indicated the existence of a rationally noteworthy rise for post test score. For a better illustration, the pre–test score for valid responses that began at (23.333) rose up to (72.666) for the post–test in addition to a rise about (30%) on the post/test (Table 2). The corresponding pairs t – test applied, exhibited statistically significant differences (0.05), as for pre/post–tests, which are related to explicit instruction of word stress patterns. Furthermore, the average deviance released (17.875), scores for post–test (11.121) as compared to pre–test. Via this, it can be indicated that methodology of explicit instruction showed positively accepted changes on the part of students' presentation.

Table1

Mean Score of true answers (Control Group)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Test Gains	30	0	60	17.333	19.106
Post_Test Gains	30	0	60	24.333	15.465

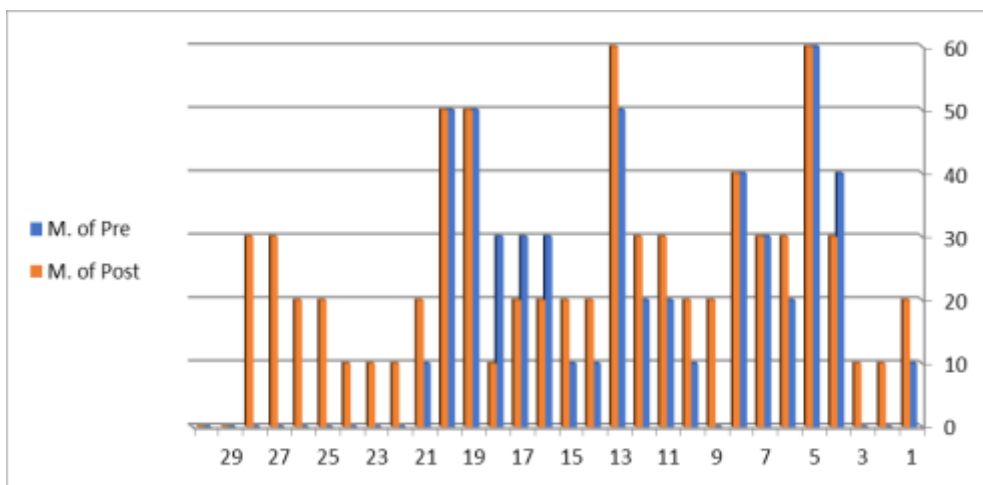
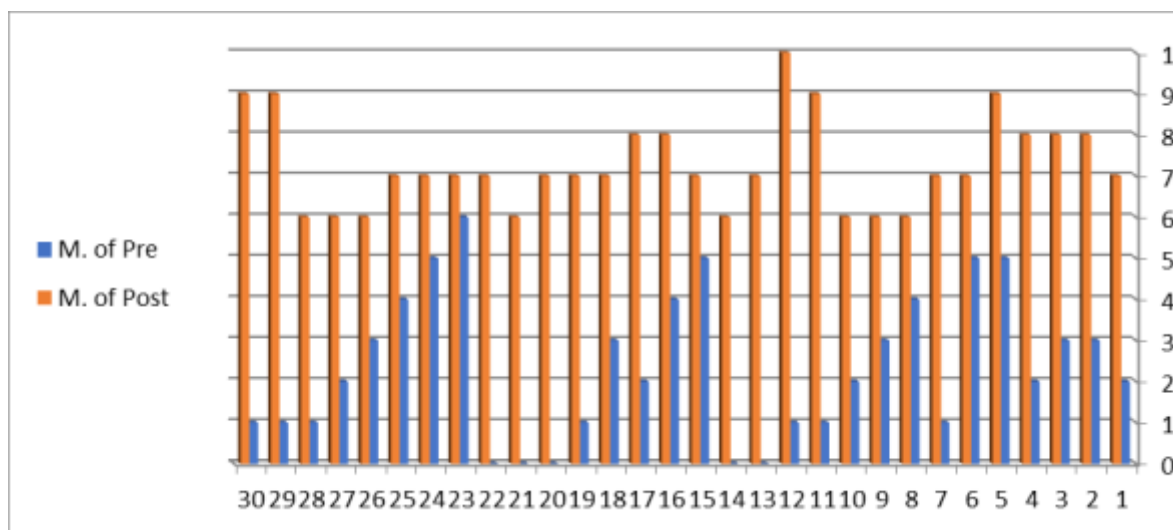


Table 2
Mean Score of True Answers (Experimental Group)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Test Gains	30	0	60	23.333	17.875
Post_Test Gains	30	60	100	72.667	11.121



10. Conclusions

The results of the study showed that explicit teaching of stress rules and patterns as they are explained in varied activities (i.e. auditory, visual, and physical), are considered more effective. Explaining the rule and patterns would lead to improve abstract knowledge, which is strengthened by suitable practice and tasks. The value of explicit instruction lies in the possibility to facilitate raising learners' awareness of English knowledge. The results as well supported the role of explicit instruction as it aims to prevent any adverse impact of the transferring of Iraqi phonological system on the English phonological system. Therefore, it can be drawn on that ELT experts should be thoughtful in simplifying provide suitable input to attain suitable output with minimal explicit

instruction. This may be insufficient to make language acquisition takes place.

It can be summed up that explicit teaching in the EFL will offer students with a straight awareness of language learning strategies, which establishes one of the most significant individual differences in acquiring FL. Language learning strategies of explicit teaching may be reduced to accept these learners' autonomous state-of-being for their learning. Via the considered support of strategies of instruction, implicit learning may be simplified to allow comprehensive and memorizing occurrence. If instruction is carefully-planned, explicit teaching demands learners to become aware of the strategies set, use them properly and to involve personally in language learning accompanied and with few implicit degree of reflection.

It is suggested that more pedagogic intervention to be carried out, where relative complex stress rules and patters are the core of interest. The focus of teachers should be maximized to explicit knowledge of FL, and focus as well can be on the degrees of what is similar and what is different in the phonological systems of the interacting languages. Therefore, these teachers need to be motivated to attend/prepare workshops to be acquainted with the explicit instruction, its procedures, and benefits for language learners. The results again have some limitations as proposed by the study, in the first place, the time-allotted to teach stress rules and patterns may not be sufficient for generalization.

More investigation is required to compare both implicit and explicit instructions in a more allotted-period, along with a more-extended teaching time. It can also be acknowledged that results would be more validated by applying a mixed methods research. It could be of more beneficial in case future studies can compare of learners' perceptions concerning the modes of instruction to find out if these leaners' view-points would change in the treatment. Moreover, the current study was conducted on a small number of Iraqi students within a university level. It is obvious that this study would have been more enlightening, as well as the findings would be generalized if it the samples were much larger. Future research is recommended to repeat this research on learners from different age

scales and genders, with different levels of skill and in diverse learning settings.

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تأثير التدريس الصريح لقواعد التشديد في اللغة الإنجليزية على
أداء متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية على المستوى الجامعي

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المستخلص:

تعليم كلمة تشديد في اللغة الإنجليزية يشكّل مشكلة حقيقية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية للعراقيين على المستوى الجامعي؛ إذ الطريقة المستعملة حالياً هي تشجيع الطلاب على الاستماع باهتمام إلى كيفية وضع التشديد على المقاطع والكلمة دون منحهم قواعد لأنماط التشديد، وتبيّن الدراسات ذات الصلة بوضوح أنّ هناك قواعد وأنماطاً للتشديد على الرغم من أنّ الاستثناءات شائعة جداً، وتعنى الدراسة بالاستفادة من القواعد في التدريس الصريح للتشديد في اللغة الإنجليزية، وبشكل أكثر تحديداً، فإنّها تتناول السؤال الآتي: هل سيساعد التدريس الصريح لقواعد التشديد في اللغة الإنجليزية متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية بشكل أفضل على استخدام أنماط التشديد بشكل صحيح ومناسب؟ من المفترض أنّ تدريس قواعد التشديد يساعد متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية استعمال أنماط التشديد بشكل مناسب على مستوى الكلمة، من أجل التحقق من هذه الفرضية سيتم استخدام تصميم تجريبي؛ إذ ستدرس مجموعتان من الطلبة: (المجموعة التجريبية ومجموعة التحكم) التشديد في اللغة الإنجليزية، وسيتم تدريس مجموعة التحكم دون منحهم قواعد صريحة، في حين سيتم تدريس المجموعة التجريبية أنماط التشديد على وفق القواعد، وستُختبر هذه المجموعات مسبقاً ثم تُختبر بعد ذلك أيضاً، وأظهرت النتائج التي حصل الدراسة عليها من التدريس الصريح لقواعد التشديد وأنماطه أكثر فعالية، واستنتجت الدراسة أنّ التعليم الصريح له قيمته في إمكانية زيادة وعي المتعلمين بالمعرفة باللغة الإنجليزية، ويوصى بإجراء المزيد من الأبحاث لقياس مستويات كفاءة المتعلمين من مختلف المستويات العمرية والجنسية، مع مستويات مختلفة من المهارات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم صريح (التدريس)، التشديد، القواعد، تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية، لغة أجنبية، الطلاب، الجامعة.

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