Didactic Model: Teaching the English Temporal System to Arabic Freshman Learners of English

Modelo didáctico: enseñanza del sistema temporal del inglés a estudiantes árabes universitarios

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This study took place at a medical college with 57 Arabic first-year students taking an intensive English course. The aim was to address the problems that learners experience when using the English tenses properly. The didactic model was developed and implemented in the study group only (27 students). Pre, mid-, and post-tests were administered to study and control groups at three points in time. The model is a selection of aspects from different methods combined aiming to lead participants to a higher level of linguistic competence in terms of language awareness, reading and writing skills, and vocubulary building. The results indicated statistically significant differences in the post-test between the two groups over time regarding the level of linguistic competence.

Key words: Arabic, didactic, language awareness, model, reading, vocabulary, writing.

Este estudio se llevó a cabo con 57 estudiantes universitarios árabes que participaban en un curso de inglés intensivo. El objetivo era resolver los problemas que se evidencian en los estudiantes al momento de usar los tiempos verbales del inglés. Se desarrolló y aplicó un modelo didáctico con el grupo experimental (27 estudiantes). Se aplicaron pruebas previas, medias y finales a los dos grupos en tres momentos. El modelo era una selección de aspectos de diversos métodos que se combinaron con el propósito de permitir a los participantes alcanzar una mayor competencia lingüística en términos de conciencia lingüística, habilidades de lectoescritura y construcción de vocabulario. Los resultados muestars diferencias estadísticamente significativas en la prueba final entre los dos grupos en relación con el nivel de competencia lingüística.

Palabras clave: conciencia lingüística, didáctica, escritura, lectura, lengua árabe, modelo, vocabulario.

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Introduction

The proper use of tenses is one of the main problems facing Arabic-speaking learners of English. It does not only result from the poor situation of English language teaching and learning in Syria and Saudi Arabia, but is almost common to the entire Arab world. One of the reasons is the continuous search of the Arabic-speaking students for morphological counterparts of the English tenses in Arabic. When the students fail in their attempt to find equivalents for the English tenses in Arabic because of their superficial understanding of the systems of both languages, they sometimes tend to use the English tenses randomly or resort to the strategy of avoidance and restrict their use to one or two tenses.

One of the reasons is the nature of the Arabic language. Arabic presents a situation of diglossia[1] through which temporal expression is not uniformly expressed in the two almost separate forms of Arabic, namely, colloquial and standard. The aspectual and temporal distinctions exhibited in the perfect and progressive forms of English can be found in both varieties of Arabic and the learners can draw upon them to understand the English temporal and aspectual system. The learner just needs to be made aware of both forms of Arabic and the grammatical rules governing them to comprehend the proper equivalences presented in Arabic of the English tenses. This leads us on to the second difficulty Arab learners have with the English tenses.

The wide variety of English tenses: Twelve tenses if we do not count the passives ones baffles the Arab learners who had been taught the Arabic "tenses" as being made up of only two: present and past. In fact, studying the English tense system reveals that not all the tenses are there to express time; their task is also to characterize action: perfective/imperfective, progressive/non-progressive and perfect/non-perfect (with all its subclassifications) (Comrie, 1976), or what is called the "aspect". Tenses may also express "modality", that is, the attitude of the speaker. We consider that awareness of the tense and aspect system and of modality in the native language as well as in the target language will facilitate the teaching/learning process of the English temporal system.

The third reason for the difficulty presented by the English tenses is the methodology of teaching grammar in general, and the tenses in particular. This methodology is still traditional and relies mainly on the teacher giving lists of uses of the tenses followed by systematic practice that often proves to be meaningless when real use is needed (Demirok, Baglama, & Besgul, 2015).

Considering the abovementioned problems coupled with the proliferation of language teaching approaches and methods, Arab teachers no longer have to adhere to one specific method for teaching grammar and may therefore opt for an eclectic didactic modeling which meets the students' needs. Being a teacher herself, the researcher has developed her own model for teaching grammar based on her accumulated experience in teaching English to Arabic learners, her observations of learners' progress and achievement in addition to insights taken from various approaches and methods in language learning and teaching.

Literature Review

Since the early 1920s linguists and educationalists have experimented with methods of teaching in an attempt to find the method through which second language acquisition can best be achieved. We shall review in this section those methods which formed the backbone of our approach.

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1 Diglossia is "a situation in which two varieties of the same language live side by side, each performing a different function. It involves the use of two different varieties of a single language (Colloquial Arabic is basically spoken and MSA [Modern Standard Arabic] is basically written, whereas bilingualism definitely involves two different languages." (Kaye, 1987, p. 675). MSA is formally taught in schools all over the Arab world, while the colloquial varieties are actually the students' real mother tongues. It is assumed, though, that as MSA is the language formally learnt at school, it may also influence the students learning a foreign language.

Discourse-Based Approaches

With a stronger return to grammar teaching in an innovative way, some researchers opted for discourse-based approaches (Bicen & Uzunboylu, 2013; Nezakatgoo, Alibakhshi, & Mezajin, 2017). The focus of concern of discourse analysis is the study of those features of language that contribute to the understanding of spoken or written language such as topic continuity and textual connections (grammatical and lexical, explicit and implicit) (Celce-Murcia, 1990, 2002). Grammar is relevant to discourse analysis to the extent that it contributes to the understanding and description of those features of discourse. Before that, most L2 teachers used to tackle grammar as a "sentence-level phenomenon" (Celce-Murcia, 1990) free from context. They also used to contrive texts to serve the grammatical end resulting in artificial language, cut off from the real world. A reaction to this artificiality was a growing interest in teaching authentic language use, structures and their meanings in discourse and text (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002; Ozcan & Bicen, 2016; Uzunboylu, Hursen, Ozuturk, & Demirok, 2015) to make the relationship of form to meaning more realistic. The difference between discourse and any contrived texts lies in the experience that the learners get in handling authentic texts and approaching language as it is actually used by native speakers. Discourse-based approaches to grammar teaching aim at teaching how discourse is generally constructed including sentence-structure and morphology.

Language Awareness

Another line of research aims at integrating grammar with opportunities for communicative use of the language—"consciousness-raising tasks" or "structure-based tasks with an explicit focus on grammar" as they are often referred to in the literature. They fall within the general frame of "language analysis activities" and are also called "language awareness activities" or even "meta-communicative tasks" which are tasks where the focus is explicitly on language form and use (Willis, 1996, p. 102).

They encompass different aspects of language awareness: "explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use" (Svalberg, 2012, p. 376). They aim at developing explicit knowledge and are "effective in promoting awareness of grammatical features, both in terms of learners' ability to judge the grammaticality of sentences and also their ability to subsequently notice the features in input" (Ellis, 2005, p. 718).

The use of consciousness-raising tasks has been widely advocated in second language classrooms. These tasks require the learners to solve grammar problems through interaction with the grammar structure, which forms the task content. The aim of these tasks is stated in Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985) as "the deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language" (p. 274). The rationale behind the use of this type of task is that once consciousness is raised, many learners are able to notice the structures in subsequent "meaning-focussed" activities (Schmidt, 1990; Uzunboylu & Tugun, 2016). However, the task can either be followed by a formal lesson containing the target structure or preceded by instruction explaining the rules for its use so that learners can activate their previous knowledge of the form and integrate the new material with what they already know (Fotos, 2002). We do not expect them to replace the formal lesson; and as Rutherford and Sharwood Smith conclude, consciousness-raising "will [not] automatically ensure the acquisition of some structure [but] consciousness-raising is a sufficient condition for acquisition to take place" (p. 275).

Integrating Language Skills and Vocabulary in Grammar Teaching

Grammar teaching should not be directed to only the teaching of rules, but should also encompass all the language skills. Recent studies have investigated the role of grammar in the writing curriculum (Myhill, 2005; Myhill & Watson, 2014), in developing communicative

abilities of second language learners (Golabi & Hajilou, 2015; Kaymakamoglu, 2017; Liamkina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2012), in addition to its effect on students' writing when it is taught within context (Jones, Myhill, & Bailey, 2013; Kuimova, Uzunboylu, & Golousenko, 2017).

When grammar is taught within context, the occurrence of new words is inevitable. As Hammerly (1982) said,

> In a full-fledged second language program, we should teach approximately 99 percent of the phonological rules and elements, 80 percent of the grammatical rules and patterns, and about three to five percent of the total vocabulary of the second language. (p. 124)

In other words, while phonology and grammar can be taught, vocabulary cannot fully be controlled (Novianti, 2016). However, research has shown that both first language learners and second language learners (Krashen, 1989; Waring & Takati, 2003) may incidentally benefit from meaning through reading. The point is that context should be taken into consideration when vocabulary building comes into question and the strategy used is crucial (Abdulhay, 2015).

Research Supporting a Combination of Approaches

From our review of the different approaches, we have noticed that effective teaching makes use of a variety of methods offered by approaches to teaching, because no single one of those reviewed can stand by itself and yield positive, long-lasting results. Most of the studies conducted combined more than one approach and researchers could not always tell which one was responsible for the positive results obtained, as Spada (1997) remarked.

In spite of this return to grammar teaching, none of the new approaches integrates all the language skills in its presentation of the grammatical concept; they mostly take into consideration that grammar is part of efficient communication, and so its integration within communicative activities is primary. Hence, effective

grammar instruction should be weaved into the reading and writing activities that function as the backbone of the curriculum with special focus on vocabulary; and the only way to reach that goal is to be "eclectic" (Ellis, 2006) in our didactic modeling in the sense that a combination of aspects from different methodologies of teaching should be put in the service of grammar teaching.

Review of Problem-Related Studies for the Teaching of the English Tenses

Although the majority of Arabic-speaking learners of English find problems in properly using the English tenses, little research has been conducted to probe this problem. Richards (1981) discussed generally problems related to teaching the English perfect tense and how it is interpreted as an optional alternative to the simple past tense and that such an interpretation leads to frequent errors of tense usage. Sieny (1986) stated that "two of the most disturbing grammatical errors committed by [Arab] students were in the area of proper use of English verb forms, including tense, aspect and mode, both on the sentence and discourse levels" (p. 41). Al-Buanain (1992) found that the strategy of teaching the present progressive with the simple present on the basis of the differences between the verb forms does not help Arab learners of English since the two forms are identical in their own language. The researcher rather finds that colloquial Arabic makes distinctions between simple and progressive forms that are not made in modern standard Arabic. Colloquial Arabic can therefore be used to make Arab learners of English aware of that distinction which is crucial to the English language.

Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to implement a didactic model for teaching the English temporal system to Arabic-speaking learners of English.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the effect of the didactic model on language awareness, the reading and writing skills, and the vocabulary level of the freshman learners of English in the study group at three points in time (beginning of the semester, half way through, and at the end).
2. To assess the language awareness, the reading and writing skills, and the vocabulary level of the freshman learners of English in the control group who were taught English in the traditional method at three points in time (beginning of the semester, half way through, and at the end).
3. To assess the difference between the study and the control groups in the three concepts: language awareness, the reading and writing skills, and vocabulary.

Secondary Objectives

To train the freshman students to become autonomous learners through keeping a journal with which they monitor their progress.

Questions of the Study

The present research has the following questions to answer:

1. Will the didactic model raise the language awareness, the reading and writing skills, and the vocabulary level of the freshman learners of English over time?
2. Will the traditional approach improve the freshmen's language awareness, the reading and writing skills, and vocabulary level over time?
3. Are there differences between the control group and the study group in terms of the three concepts: language awareness, reading and writing skills, and their vocabulary level over time?

Hypotheses of the Study

The current study is an implementation of a didactic model to grammar teaching which transforms the grammar lesson into a language lesson where the students' language awareness is raised, their reading and writing skills are improved, and their vocabulary is expanded.

Hypothesis 1

The didactic modeling will increase the participants' language awareness, their reading and writing skills, and their vocabulary over time.

Hypothesis 2

The traditional method will not improve the participants' language awareness, their reading and writing skills, or their vocabulary.

Hypothesis 3

There will be differences between the study group and the control group in the three concepts measured.

Method

Design and Setting

It is an experimental study. The researcher has developed her own didactic model for teaching the English temporal system to Arabic freshmen in their first semester of English at the College of Medical Sciences (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). She implemented it in the Fall semester.

A demographic survey was designed for the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a pre-test was administered to all the students, and the model was implemented in the study group. Another instructor from the department taught the control group in the traditional way, that is, she taught grammar deductively starting with an explanation of the rules followed by the exercises provided in the course book. We administered the mid-test half way through the semester and the post-test at the end. The results of both groups were compared first with their scores on the pre-test and with one another after the implementation of the model. For reasons of objectivity, the researcher did not intervene in the correction or grading of either group.

The Colleges of Medical Sciences has set the pre-professional program (24 hours/week) whose goal is to prepare the students for studying health sciences through the medium of English.

The Experiment

The model is a selection of aspects from different methods combined in such a way that the resulting activities are compatible with each other and reinforce each other, aiming for a higher level of linguistic competence. It consists of four main phases. The terms used for the first two phases are adapted from Piaget (1975) in which he describes the learning process, whereas the terms used for the last two phases are the researcher's and they form a continuation of the learning process. In the Appendix, a practical application of the approach is presented.

The Reception and Assimilation Phase

It consists of comprehension-based exercises meant to initiate the students to the new structures. These exercises may take the form of reading comprehension passages where the target grammatical structure is used. So the initiation to the structure is done indirectly.

The Accommodation Phase

Having initiated the students to the grammatical structure, we introduce the consciousness-raising exercises where the students discuss the form-meaning relationship in a passage through answering comprehension questions. This is followed by the translation exercises which raise the students' awareness of the target structure and how it is expressed in their mother tongue. This technique works particularly well with adult students who find it hard to be detached from their language and culture. This translation technique also promotes vocabulary learning as the students have to read authentic or constructed texts and are asked to keep a log book in which they jot down pieces of language that capture their interest to be reviewed and checked later by the teacher.

The Production Phase

This phase aims to sensitize the students to actual language use and consequently improve their linguistic competence. They do reconstructive exercises followed by free writing. More practice is done at home through assigning the practical part of the book as homework assignment.

The Self-Assessment Phase

This is the fourth and last phase of the model. It is ongoing throughout the learning process as the students are advised, at the start of the semester, to keep a journal or diary to be completed on three occasions during the course. The journal is divided into three sections: the first one contains questions for direct assessment; the second a list in which the new lexis and grammatical points are listed together with sentences illustrating their proper use; and the third section is used by the students to write their own mistakes and to provide corrections. The journal is submitted to the teacher to be reviewed, discussed, and graded. The use of such a record helps the students to develop the ability to monitor their progress and to judge their performance at the same time; it is also a source of reference which contains a stock of new vocabulary items.

Suitability of the Model for the Personality Characteristics and the Learning Styles of Arabs

The researcher's didactic model is expected to be well received by Arab students because it is varied, so all learners will have the opportunity to show their aptitude in one or another of the language skills.

Arab learners are mostly of the careful type and avoid making fools of themselves in front of the class. Therefore, comprehension-based exercises can function as warming up and input for more productive tasks. On the other hand, if the class comprises some learners of the adventurous type, who may feel bored with the comprehension-based exercises, the teacher

can handle them by giving them more challenging questions.

The students are expected to enjoy and pay much attention to the language-awareness exercises because they are of the dynamic type—as Arabs are. Moreover, the students do not get bored listening to lengthy explanations in English from the teacher, but are involved in answering questions on the reading passage. Therefore, grammar teaching becomes more interesting for the students as it is supported by explanation in their mother tongue and illustrated by visual stimulation such as drawings and iconic mediators. In this way, any ambiguity is dispelled; the students feel more secure and therefore readier to pick up the new rules. The teacher might also bring up Arabic sentences to further explain the grammatical point by comparing the L1 system with the L2 in order to make the students aware of how the L2 system works. On the other hand, reconstructive activities are also expected to be well received by Arab learners because the students do not have to take many risks; they have all the elements required for successful fulfillment of the productive task.

The Context of Language Teaching

The teaching conditions in the Arab countries also favor the adoption of the researcher's model as it meets four main factors mentioned in Marton (1988, pp. 22-27): (1) intensity of teaching, (2) size of class, (3) level of language study, and (4) the teacher and his characteristics.

Intensity of teaching refers to courses ranging from 20 to over 30 hours of classroom instruction per week. This applies to the Saudi medical freshman students for whom the first semester is devoted to improving basic language skills.

As for the size of the class, the researcher's model can work perfectly well with large classes (an average of 30 students per class). This is mainly because the interaction required among the students in the consciousness-raising and reconstructive activities is controlled. In other words, there is a time limit for every activity and the output is graded. Therefore, teachers need to be competent in using and managing time effectively (Keskinoglu, 2016).

As for the context of language teaching, namely, the level of language study, the students' level is assumed to be low-intermediate. With such a level, they need a great deal of exposure to the target language in order to consciously internalize its formal aspects and they need to be competent in many areas of language (Mutlu, 2015). Similarly the consciousness-raising exercises come to reinforce and promote explicit knowledge of grammar.

The fourth factor affecting the teaching environment is the teacher's proficiency in the L2. Unfortunately, not all teachers are linguistically or pedagogically competent. Therefore, they may effectively work within the framework of this model and provide listening or reading tasks that do not require much "language" from them. In a grammar course such as ours, which is cognitively-oriented, the teacher should not imperatively be skilled in speaking as the comprehension questions may be supported, when necessary, by Arabic to bring out the differences between the L1 and L2 systems. Similarly, the consciousness-raising tasks require little communicative language as the discussion is mainly on linguistic phenomena.

The Participants

The study subjects are Saudi female freshman medical students enrolled in a one-semester intensive English course. They have recently graduated from high school and their level in English is hardly low-intermediate as per the entrance test and the interviews which they had on college admission. They were exposed to English in secondary school (3 hrs/w). In addition, a demographic survey profiled the participants. Those who did not meet the inclusion criteria attended the grammar course, but their results were not included in the study.

Sampling and Sample Size

Simple random sampling technique was used to select both groups from 150 students admitted to the College of Medical Sciences and randomly divided into five sections consisting of 30 students each. Three students were excluded from the study group because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Therefore, the 150 medical students were divided into five sections, with one section (27 students) as the study group and another section (30 students) as the control group.

Data Collection

Socio-Demographic Sheet

The socio-demographic sheet was developed for determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The subjects should be high school graduates (freshman). It inquires about their age, their GPA, whether one of their parents is a non-Arab, whether they have ever travelled to English-speaking countries or dealt with English speakers in their environment, or taken any extra English tutoring after graduation from high school. These criteria will eliminate any confounding factors.

Pre, Mid, and Posttests

The three tests for both groups included the following components at each point in time, with 10 different sets of questions (one point for each question).

Language Awareness Tasks

Language awareness tasks measure the learners' ability to solve grammar problems through interaction with the grammar structure, which forms the task content.

Reading and Writing Skills

Reading and writing skills can be measured in different tasks such as cloze exercises and fill-in gaps (Bacha, 2002; Sadeghi, 2014).

Vocabulary Expansion

In addition to the four skills of the language, vocabulary constitutes one main component of a sound basis in the English language. The questions are of the multiple choice type and test the students' ability to infer meaning from a passage and to remember some root words given during the lesson.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected at three different times during the Fall semester: beginning of September, mid-October, and end of November. A pre-test was first administered to both groups of freshman students following a program in medical sciences. The results of the mid and posttests were first compared with the students' scores in the pre-test and with the variables after the implementation of the approach.

For reasons of objectivity, the three tests were corrected and graded by an external examiner who had the answer key. The tests covered the content taught during the course.

The data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), version 20.0 (IBM Corp., Released 2011). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the students' demographics. A repeated measure ANOVA was used to measure the changes over time for both groups.

Results and Discussion

Using repeated measure ANOVA, all the results indicated statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding the three variables measured in the post-tests. The pre-tests showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups as they were almost homogeneous except for the three students whose results were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. As for the mid-tests and post-tests, language awareness (Table 1) took precedence over the other two variables as the study group scored higher on

Table 1. Results of the Language Awareness Test

Descriptive and ANOVA Results							
Language Awareness		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	*f*	*p*-value
Pre	Study Group	3.28	.97	2.00	5.50	.18	.67
	Control Group	3.11	.79	1.60	4.00		
Mid	Study Group	4.17	1.17	3.00	6.00	5.50	.03
	Control Group	3.23	.48	2.50	4.00		
Post	Study Group	4.54	1.18	3.20	6.60	10.30	.005
	Control Group	3.27	.41	2.80	4.20		

Table 2. Results of the Reading and Writing Test

Descriptive and ANOVA Results							
Read & Write		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	*f*	*p*-value
Pre	Study Group	4.05	.73	3.00	5.00	4.93	.039
	Control Group	3.32	.73	2.00	4.20		
Mid	Study Group	4.75	.95	3.00	6.20	1.27	.273
	Control Group	4.36	.52	3.00	4.80		
Post	Study Group	4.81	.98	3.00	6.00	7.38	.014
	Control Group	3.90	.39	3.00	4.30		

both tests: mid (4.17, SD = 1.17) and post (4.54, SD = 1.18) compared with the control group (3.23, SD = .48) and (3.27, SD = .41), respectively. This indicates that the goal of the translation and language awareness exercises (which were mainly meant to give the students awareness of how the English structure is rendered in Arabic) is achieved and the students outperformed the control group.

Coming to the second variable, namely, reading and writing skills (Table 2), the results indicated no statistically significant differences between the two groups in the mid-test: (4.75, SD = .95) for the study group and (3.36, SD = .52) for the control group with *p*-value higher than .005. However, the post-test revealed the precedence of the study group over the control group with 4.81 (SD = .98) for the study group and 3.90 (SD = .39) for the control group with *p*-value = .014. This result was somehow expected as the reading and writing skills need more time to exhibit any effective improve-

ment. This result, as well as the result of the language awareness test, is supported by Kim (2011) in a study on Korean learners of English where the researcher proved that using translation exercises helped his students recognize the importance of accuracy for successful written communication; additionally, using the mother tongue in a second language writing classroom can be a positive tool for improving the students' writing proficiency and helping them realize the importance of seeing their own writing more objectively.

Similar results were obtained in the vocabulary (Table 3) as both groups showed no statistically significant differences in the mid-test with *p*-value = .37. The differences were obvious in the post-test with the study group scoring 4.94 (SD = .95) and the control group, 3.42 (SD = .81) with *p*-value = .001. Here also both groups were taking other courses and their vocabulary was naturally growing; however, the post-tests witnessed

Table 3. Results of the Vocabulary Test

Vocabulary		Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	f	p-value
		Descriptive and ANOVA Results					
Pre	Study Group	2.79	.82	1.75	4.70	.08	.77
	Control Group	2.89	.60	1.75	4.20		
Mid	Study Group	4.33	1.13	2.70	6.00	.84	.37
	Control Group	3.90	.94	2.80	5.80		
Post	Study Group	4.94	.95	3.75	6.30	14.60	.001
	Control Group	3.42	.81	2.20	4.90		

the outperformance of the study group over the control group because the study group was taught strategies on how to make use of contextual clues to glean the meaning. Grammar questions were mechanically answered previously where comprehending the passage was not critical for solving them. The new approach with its involvement in the context for inferring the meaning was a challenge for the students who needed more time to apply it. This agrees with the study by Huang, Willson, and Eslami (2012) in which they carried out a meta-analytic study of the effects of output tasks on second or foreign incidental vocabulary learning and included 12 studies. One of the mediators examined was the involvement load hypothesis. The results showed that learners who performed a task with a higher degree of involvement load, gained more vocabulary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This experimental study was an attempt to see whether the researcher's didactic model for teaching the English temporal to Arabic freshman learners of English could yield the desired results. The outcomes of the study support our three hypotheses of the three variables measured. The study group outperformed the control group shortly after the implementation of the approach. The other two skills, namely, the reading and writing as well as the vocabulary took a little bit longer,

that is, up to the administration of the posttest to show the positive impact. Therefore, its implementation is recommended in the grammar classes of Arabic learners so that the traditional class is transformed into a more dynamic one. More research is needed to see whether the approach can be adapted to students whose language background is not Arabic.

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Appendix: Sample Teaching Applying the Eclectic Approach

Teaching the Past Perfect: An activity completed before another past activity

(The following exercise is given after the Simple Past and the Present Perfect have been taught. The comparison goes now between the Simple Past and the Past Perfect. The difference between the two tenses is explained on the time line. The teacher could also compare it with the way it is rendered in MSA, i.e. *kaana +qad + al-maaDii.*)

A. Reception and Assimilation Phase

What a catastrophe!

It happened about five years ago. I had invited my girlfriend, Emma, and her parents to dinner. I hadn't met her parents before and I wanted to impress them. I had planned soup first, then fresh salmon and a chocolate mousse dessert. In fact, I was quite looking forward to it.

On the day of the dinner, I got home from work early and started to prepare the meal. Everything went fine. Emma and her parents arrived and, after giving them a drink in the sitting room, I went into the kitchen to do the last-minute preparations for the meal. I removed the fish, which was now ready, from the oven and decided to leave it in the kitchen while we were having the soup.

When I went into the kitchen to bring in the fish, to my horror I found my cat looking very pleased with himself in the middle of the kitchen. He had, of course, eaten the entire salmon. Needless to say, Emma's parents were very understanding. In the end, we all went to a Chinese restaurant. (Abbs & Freebairn, 1994, p. 44)

1. Read the magazine extract and find out who the writer had invited to dinner?
2. Why was the invitation a special one?
3. What happened to the main dish?
4. Fill in a table with the main verbs of the extract, their subjects and complements.

Subject	Verb	Complement/ Adv/ Obj.

B. Accommodation Phase

1. Take out the verbs in the Past Perfect and establish their reference point.
2. Draw the events on the time line.
3. Indicate which event happened first.

(Students should notice that the verbs with *had + past participle* refer to actions or situations that are anterior to those expressed by the Simple Past forms).

(Students carry out a bottom-up analysis, followed by a consciousness-raising task, then a translation exercise).

4. How do we express in MSA an action that happened prior to another action?

An action that happened prior to another one is generally expressed in MSA through kaana + qad + perfective verb, e.g., *lam yatafaaja?uu bin-natiijati li?annahum **kaanuu qad tawaqqaᶜuu**haa.*
neg. they-surprise-jus. by-the-result because-they were perf. part. expect-they-it
They were not surprised by the result because they had expected it.

5. Translate the sentences which contain the form *had + pp* (or the Past Perfect) into MSA.

(In these sentences, the students are confronted with the main use of the Past Perfect, but also with the use of *ago*, which is, by now, supposed to have been assimilated by the students as being specific to the Simple Past tense. Another difficulty is the use of *lam* for negating past affirmative sentences in MSA. This particle brings about the jussive mood; however, Arab learners have another option which is the colloquial negation particle *maa*, which behaves in an even simpler way than the English *not*. It just precedes the negated verb, irrespective of tense or mood or the need for an auxiliary, e.g., *maa katabtu waajibii* (not wrote-I homework-my).

It happened about five years ago. I had invited my girlfriend.
*HaSala dhaalika mundhu xamsi sanawaatin. **Kuntu qad daᶜawtu** Sadiiqatii…*

I hadn't met her parents before and I wanted to impress them…
*lam **?akun qad qaabaltu** ?ahlahaa min qabl wa**?aradtu** ?an ?atruka n-Tibaaᶜan..*

I had planned soup first…
***kuntu qad qarrartu** taqdiimal-Hasaa? ?awwalan…*

When I went into the kitchen…, I found… He had eaten the entire salmon.
*ᶜindamaa **daxaltu** ?ilaa l-maTbaxi, **wajadtu**…**kaana qad ?akala** ?al-salamun bi?akmalih*

C. Production Phase

1. Reconstruct the passage from the elements in the table.
2. Write an anecdote that happened to you using the Simple Past and the Past Perfect. (pair work)

....

....

....

....

D. Self-Assessment Phase

(The following exercise may be given at the end of the teaching sequence as a guided self-assessment tool in which the students can see whether they have really grasped the notion of the Perfect. The exercise contrasts the Simple tenses with the Present and Past Perfect tenses).

1. Choose the correct translation of the underlined verbs in the following sentences according to their context of use.

   a. I <u>have visited</u> England.

   Laqad zurtu ingeltra (perf. part. visited-I)

   zurtu (visited-I)

   kuntu qad zurtu ingeltra (was perf. part. visited-I)

(The students already know that *qad/laqad + perfective* comprise one of the typical ways of translating the English Present Perfect into Arabic. So, the second verb *zurtu*, which is perfective, should contain an adjunct of time that says when it happened, e.g., last year. The third option *kuntu qad zurtu* would also need an adjunct of time like *before I met you*. Therefore, the only equivalent to *have visited* is the first option).

   b. He had already finished his speech when she arrived.

   kaana qad ?anhaa kalimatahu ᶜindamaa waSalat (He had finished his speech when she arrived)

   kaada ?an-yunhiya kalimatahu ᶜindamaa waSalat (He nearly finished his speech when she arrived)

   ?anhaa kalimatahu ᶜindamaa waSalat (He finished his speech when she arrived)

(The first example corresponds to the Past Perfect, which expresses anteriority to a past action *ᶜindamaa waSalat*. The third example expresses consecutive actions, which is why both verbs are in the Perfective. In the second example, *Kaada + ?an + subjunctive* indicates that the action was almost finished, when the second action occurred).

c. When he arrived home, he remembered that he had forgotten his key in his office.
  ᶜindamaa waSala ?ilaa baytihi, tadhakkara ?annahu rubbamaa nasiyamiftaaHahu fii maktabihi
  ᶜindamaa waSala ?ilaa baytihi, tadhakkara ?annahu nasiyamiftaaHahu fii maktabihi
  ᶜindamaa waSala ?ilaa baytihi, tadhakkara ?annahu kaana qad nasiya miftaaHahu fii maktabihi

(The first example corresponds to the Simple Past preceded by a modal marker (*rubbamaa* "maybe") to express possibility. The second example describes two consecutive actions. In the third example, *kaana qad + perfective* is used to express anteriority of the action. It should be remembered here that the second example might be accepted in MSA when the aim is to use simplified Arabic. However, having taught the students how to use the Past Perfect, we expect them to make the right choice).

d. I have lived in the States since 1999.
  ?aᶜiishufii ?amriikamundhu l-ᶜaam 1999 (I have lived in the States since 1999)
  ᶜishtufii ?amriikamundhu l-ᶜaam 1999 (I lived in the States since 1999)
  ᶜishtufii ?amriikafii l-ᶜaam 1999 (I lived in the States in the year 1999)

(The first sentence is the correct translation because the verb is in the imperfective and the use of *mundhu* with that form of the verb implies the meaning of current relevance. The second sentence is wrong because the perfective form cannot be used with *mundhu.* In the third sentence, the perfective corresponds to the Simple Past).

e. As soon as the driver comes, I will ride with him.
  Haalamaa ya?ti as-saa?iq, sa-?adhhabu maᶜahu (As soon as the driver comes, I will ride with him).
  as-saa?iq sa-ya?ti qariiban wasawfa ?adhhabu maᶜahu (The driver will come soon and I will ride with him).
  ᶜindamaa ya?ti as-saa?iq, sawfa ?adhhabu maᶜahu (When the driver comes, I will ride with him).

(The first sentence is the correct translation: It expresses two consecutive actions. In the second sentence, there are two coordinated clauses both of them in the Future. The third sentence is an alternative choice to 1)

f. I have stayed in America for six years.
  Baqiitu fii ?amriikaa muddata xamsa sanawaatin (stayed-I in America for five years).
  ?aᶜiishu fii ?amriikaa mundhu xamsa sanawaatin (I-live in America since five years).
  maa ziltu ?aᶜiishu fii ?amriikaa mundhu xamsi sanawaatin (I-am still I-live in America since five years)

(The first sentence is not a suitable translation because it refers to a past period of time referred to using *muddata.* The second sentence is correct because the verb is in the imperfective—a form which shows current relevance. The third sentence can also be considered correct because it uses the verbal form *maa ?zaala*, which shows the continuation of a past situation).

2. What conclusions can you draw from this exercise regarding the conditions of use of the different forms in English? (This exercise is meant to train the students to spell out the rules behind each use).