



# Reflections on the Application of Story-Based Teaching in College English Grammar Classes

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores reflections on the application of the story-based teaching method in college English grammar classes, aiming to address the long-standing issues of monotonous teaching and low student engagement. This paper analyzes the advantages of story-based teaching method such as enhancing immersive learning experiences, reinforcing grammatical understanding through meaningful contexts, and fostering students' cultural awareness. It also delves into practical strategies for overcoming challenges, emphasizing the importance of customized story design and interactive classroom activities. Ultimately, the story-based teaching method holds great promise for revolutionizing college English grammar instruction, but continuous exploration and improvement are essential to maximizing its value.

**Keywords:** story-based teaching; English grammar; contextualized learning; students

## **Introduction**

It is widely believed that grammar serves as the fundamental cornerstone for developing a comprehensive set of language proficiency. Grammar gains prominence in language teaching, particularly in EFL and ESL, since without a good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development will be severely constrained (Widodo, 2006). However, based on the actual level of non-English major students in college, they still make mistakes when using basic English grammar. Grammar is part of the English language which is still considered difficult to learn (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). If teachers usually adopt the approach of lecturing, simply explaining grammar rules and giving examples, it's difficult for them to focus on learning grammar during the English class.

Grammar is presented out of context and learners are given isolated sentences (Nunan, 1998: 102). Traditional grammar-teaching methodologies that prioritize mechanical accuracy over communicative practice often fail to sustain students' motivation. This teaching style makes lessons hard to follow and uninteresting. As a result, students easily forget what they learn and have trouble using English to communicate. To overcome such problems, more interesting and meaningful ways should be created. Students should be exposed to language in authentic and meaningful contexts and repetition and recycling are also encouraged to use to improve learners' language competence (Nguyen, 2021: 289). The integrated story-based grammar learning model was also designed based on students' need analysis in learning English grammar. It is the combination of the deductive and inductive approaches to grammar learning (Yunita et al., 2019).

## **The Advantages of the Story-Based Teaching Method**

The educational value of using stories and the technique of storytelling has always been undisputed throughout the world. Stories are a great tool for teaching English in class (Porrás González, 2010). Nowadays, more and more EFL teachers of young learners are using carefully selected stories from the world of children's literature (Kalantari & Hashemian, 2016). Storytelling can be employed as a pedagogical strategy to teach the English grammar.

It is confirmed that one of the main advantages of using stories is to put the students in a varied and enjoyable context (İnal & Cakir, 2014). Moreover, it can arouse interest and increase motivation among EFL students (Martinez, 2007). Researchers monitored the development of a group of young EFL learners who employed keywords and story maps to narrate and repeat straightforward tales in both their native language and English, and determined that these learners gained advantages from recounting their own stories (Cortazzi & Jin, 2007). Most significantly, storytelling transformed grammar instruction into a dynamic process where linguistic forms were naturally assimilated through narratively scaffolded, socially mediated practice. It is beneficial to enhancing the confidence of college students, empowering them to meet with difficulty and showcase their inherent imagination and creativity. The most important advantages of storytelling may be summarized as follows: stories are fun and can help develop positive attitudes towards foreign language learning; it allows the teacher to introduce or revise new sentence structures by immersing the children to language in varied, memorable, and familiar contexts (Dujmović, 2006).

English grammar teaching isn't merely about guiding learners in language structure or sentence patterns, meaning, and usage; instead, it encompasses assisting them in grasping cultural elements, which empowers them to participate in authentic and productive communication. A good story may offer versatile benefits to learners and teachers. Besides improving students' language skills, stories can also foster intercultural awareness. Through this approach, students develop intercultural competence by engaging with diverse cultural perspectives, geographical contexts, and social practices, thereby expanding their worldview. Stories will truly offer them universal life experiences. By applying the storytelling approach, the classroom atmosphere transforms from a dull and uninteresting setting into a vibrant one where students are fully engaged, actively participating, and demonstrating their learning outcomes.

### **Challenges and Optimization Strategies in the Application of the Story-based Teaching Method**

Although the stories are one of the beneficial tools in language classes, they are still underused (Fojkar et al., 2013). The story-based teaching approach faces the following difficulties in actual classroom teaching, such as the great difficulty in screening story materials, the challenge of controlling class time, the difficulty in taking into account individual differences among students, and the challenge of attracting students' interests. To address these challenges, the following optimization strategies are proposed, including enhanced story design, creative activity formats, and technology integration, offering actionable pathways for teachers to provide feasible suggestions for teaching practice. Firstly, based on the students' existing proficiency levels, storytelling should be in line with their cognitive levels. If the difficulty is too low, it cannot stimulate students' interests. Otherwise, students will find it difficult to understand and thus lose confidence. For instance, when it refers to the past perfect tense, we can tell the story of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf". Most students are familiar with this story, which meets their cognitive levels. In

this story, the boy had lied to the villagers multiple times before they refused to help when the wolf really came. By analyzing the sequence of events in the story, students can clearly understand that the past perfect tense is used to describe an action that happened before another past action. They can see how the boy's repeated lies (expressed in the past perfect tense) led to the villagers' lack of trust (in the simple past tense), thus effectively grasping the usage and significance of the past perfect tense. Secondly, the atmosphere of the story should be relaxed and highly engaging. Moreover, it is necessary to combine knowledge, ideology, and fun. Thirdly, the themes of the stories should be diverse, and the content should be fresh, interesting and highly attractive. The thematic scope may encompass mythological narratives, folk tales, idiom-based stories, and biographical accounts of historical figures. Each narrative selection must fulfill three pedagogical criteria: explicit linguistic objectives, focused grammatical exemplification, and targeted skill development, ensuring optimal alignment with instructional goals. To effectively teach the "there be" structure, teachers can employ the traditional Chinese story "Three Monks" as an engaging pedagogical tool that naturally contextualizes this grammatical concept while contrasting it with the possessive "have" construction. The story's exposition opens with an establishing sentence "Once upon a time, there was a temple on the mountain", progressing to "There was a young monk who lived in the temple", and culminating in "There were three monks here". The story provides multiple authentic contexts to demonstrate how "there be" structure expresses existence and quantity in specific locations, distinct from "have" which denotes possession (e.g. "three monks have no water to drink."). This approach not only makes the abstract grammar rule more memorable through visual storytelling and cultural content but also allows for meaningful practice as students describe the changing temple scenes using target structures, thereby internalizing the grammatical pattern, cognitively engaging repetition that reinforces both form and function.

## **Conclusion**

Grammar can only be better acquired by students when it is placed in a meaningful context. Despite existing implementation challenges, the story-based method facilitates subconscious grammar acquisition through contextualized narrative practice. Story elements such as characters, plots, suspense, serve as powerful motivators, converting grammar learning from mechanical drills to meaningful engagement. This story-based method inserts English words and sentences into vivid stories, making them the parts that college students feel most strongly and remember most deeply when listening to stories, thus achieving the best memory effect. The story-based method is an effective way to master grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures because it provides meaningful context for learning. By engaging with stories, learners naturally absorb grammatical rules, word meanings, and sentence patterns as they follow the plot and characters. Stories make abstract grammar concepts more concrete, allowing learners to see how different tenses, clauses, and phrases function in real-life communication. Additionally, the repetitive exposure to key structures within a compelling storyline reinforces memory retention, while the emotional and situational cues help learners intuitively grasp nuances in usage. This approach not only makes

learning more enjoyable but also enhances long-term comprehension and application of language rules.

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