

**Integrating communicative grammar into EFL instruction for effective learning**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the role of communicative grammar in EFL instruction. It examines the theoretical foundations of communicative grammar, its integration into communicative language teaching, and practical strategies for teaching grammar in EFL contexts. The study evaluates the impact of a communicative grammar lesson on the use of the present perfect tense, with the adverbs *ever* and *never*, incorporating tasks such as pair interviews and guided discovery. Data was collected from 8 pre-intermediate learners during a 45-minute online session, through observations, student feedback, and pre- and post-lesson quizzes. Results indicate significant improvement in students' ability to correctly use the target structure, with a 37.5% average increase in accuracy. The findings support the argument that communicative tasks, such as peer interviews and focused feedback, enhance grammatical understanding and encourage more natural language use. The study suggests that a communicative approach to grammar instruction promotes more effective and engaging language learning.

**Keywords:** EFL instruction, communicative language teaching, communicative competence, grammatical competence

**Introduction**

For a long time, the grammar-translation method dominated language learning, emphasizing grammatical analysis and translation between the target and native languages. Instruction was teacher-centered, with grammar taught deductively through detailed explanations and translation exercises. Focused primarily on reading and writing, this method prioritized grammatical accuracy over speaking and listening, offering limited opportunities for peer interaction.

Nevertheless, despite significant advances in language teaching methodologies, many classrooms continue incorporating elements of the grammar-translation method. Thornbury questions the often deductive approach to grammar teaching as potentially inefficient, calling it “a waste of valuable time” (1999, p. 19), with teachers presenting rules explicitly and students copying them in their notebooks, and engaging in repetitive exercises

to internalize them. The focus remains largely on accuracy, with learners expected to produce error-free sentences rather than use the language spontaneously.

In some contexts, this approach persists because there are often challenges in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). As highlighted by Ansarey, these challenges “stem from four directions, namely, the teacher, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself” (2012, p. 61). This traditional method often overlooks the importance of communication, leaving students with limited ability to apply grammar in real-life situations.

### **The communicative approach to teaching grammar**

The continued reliance on traditional grammar-focused methods has highlighted the need for more dynamic approaches that address the communicative demands of modern language use. In EFL contexts, teaching grammar communicatively has gained prominence as an effective way to bridge the gap between knowledge of grammar rules and the ability to use them in meaningful interactions.

The main goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980, p. 6), communicative competence - the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in context - includes grammatical competence, understood as the mastery of grammatical rules. Furthermore, grammatical competence is regarded as a core element of communicative competence (Brown 2001, p. 420) and plays an important role in enabling learners to use language effectively and appropriately in interactions. In this sense, the development of grammatical competence contributes directly to learners’ overall communicative ability. CLT prioritizes opportunities for communication in the target language, fostering interaction between teachers and students, as well as among peers. In this learner-centered method, tasks and activities are tailored to meet students’ interests and needs. Consequently, CLT emphasizes learning by performing (Richards and Rodgers 2001, p. 173). In CLT, grammar is taught by embedding grammatical instruction within meaningful, real-world contexts, focusing on language use rather than isolated rule memorization.

The following guide provides a structured approach to planning and delivering grammar instruction, emphasizing effectiveness within a communicative methodology.

#### **Contextualized Grammar Instruction**

Contextualization involves presenting grammar in meaningful contexts rather than isolated sentences, since “A really good context will seem to lead inevitably to natural use of the target language” (Scrivener 2010, p. 8) and “decontextualizing of grammar often results in practice exercises that are of doubtful value” (Thornbury 1999, p. 71). For instance, teaching the past simple tense through storytelling allows learners to focus on meaning while practising the target structure (Ellis 2006, p. 91).

#### **Integrating Grammar into Skills Development**

Grammar can be taught alongside reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks in which students engage in activities that are meaningful and relevant to their lives, promoting autonomy and active participation. For instance, a listening/reading task on travel plans could incorporate the use of *be going to*, providing contextualized practice. This approach ensures that learners not only understand grammar rules but also feel confident using them naturally across different language skills.

## **Interactive and Collaborative Activities**

Pair and group work are central to CLT, where learners practise grammar through interaction. As noted by Larsen-Freeman, the “grammar [...] that the students learn follow[s] from the function, situational context and the roles of the interlocutors” (2000, p. 128). The combination of collaborative learning with a functional approach to grammar – one that emphasizes context, communication, and the roles of interlocutors – helps learners not only master grammatical structures but also develop the confidence and competence needed to use those structures effectively in spontaneous communication.

## **Guided Discovery**

The communicative method employs inductive approaches, where learners infer grammatical rules from examples rather than having them explicitly explained. In this regard, Thornbury (1999, p. 52) highlights the importance of discovery learning as a process of experimentation, in which students learn through trial and error while teachers provide guidance and feedback to help them refine their understanding and improve their approach.

## **Clarification and Analysis of the Target Language**

CLT stresses the importance of conveying meaning first (Thornbury 1999, p. 93). Meaning relates to the function or usage of the structure. This involves explaining how it conveys specific ideas or relationships. Understanding the meaning helps learners see the relevance of the structure in communication and how it adds depth to the language.

Focusing on form refers to presenting grammar in context. This involves focusing on how the structure is constructed, including aspects such as word order, the use of auxiliaries, or the addition of suffixes. Highlighting these features allows learners to understand the building blocks of the structure and how it fits within a sentence. Ellis emphasizes that grammar instruction is most effective when it occurs within the context of meaningful interaction, allowing learners to focus on both meaning and form simultaneously (2006, pp. 100 -101).

Pronunciation addresses the spoken aspects of the structure. This might include features of connected speech such as contractions, assimilation, elision, stress patterns, or intonation changes. Teachers model the correct pronunciation of the grammar structure during activities, and students repeat it through drilling, a type of “controlled manipulation [that is] very useful” (Scrivener 2010, p. 8). Paying attention to these elements ensures natural language acquisition.

## **Controlled Practice**

The teacher needs to provide structured activities to reinforce the form and usage. These activities are typically gap-fill exercises, sentence transformations, or matching tasks where students apply the grammar in a restricted way. Feedback during this stage is critical for correcting errors and reinforcing accuracy.

## **Semi-Controlled Practice**

At this stage, activities that allow for more creativity but still focus on the target grammar are introduced. Examples include sentence building, short dialogues, or controlled role-play. This bridges the gap between controlled practice and freer communication.

## **Free Practice**

At this point in the lesson, the focus shifts to fluency and the natural use of the structure, with minimal interruption for error correction. Teachers should encourage students to use the target grammar in communicative, open-ended tasks. Activities might include discussions, storytelling, and creating their own dialogues, reflecting the aim of grammar practice “to get students to learn the structures so thoroughly that they will be able to produce them correctly on their own” (Ur 2000, p. 83).

### Feedback and Error Correction

The lesson concludes with constructive feedback, addressing common errors while avoiding singling out individuals. Achievements and areas for improvement are highlighted to reinforce learning.

### Materials and methods

#### Materials

To evaluate the impact of the communicative grammar lesson on the use of *ever* and *never* with the present perfect tense, a lesson plan was created to guide the session and ensure effective content delivery. Language analysis was also included. Data were collected from 8 pre-intermediate learners during a 45-minute online session. The *Speakout Pre-Intermediate* (second edition) textbook served as a resource for the lesson.

**Table 1. Lesson plan.**

<b>TOPIC/THEME:</b> <i>Hidden Talents</i>	
<b>LENGTH</b> 45 min	<b>LESSON FOCUS:</b> Grammar
<b>AIMS:</b> <b>Main:</b> By the end of the lesson, students will be better able to revise and practise the present perfect simple with <i>ever/never</i> in the context of an interview about hidden talents <b>Subsidiary:</b> Students will develop their scanning skills Students will be better able to practise speaking for fluency by discussing past experiences and hidden talents	
<b>EVIDENCE:</b> Ss will use the present perfect and past simple tenses more accurately in a freer way when speaking about experiences and past events	
<b>ASSUMPTIONS:</b> ( <i>what language do you expect students to know that you are not planning to teach? What language items have students looked at in previous classes that are relevant to your aims? Students' interest/general knowledge in relation to the material/context you will be using?</i> ) The Ss have the appropriate level of English to understand the reading material The Ss know the Past simple and Present perfect tenses The Ss should be able to identify the past participle for irregular verbs	
<b>CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT and SKILLS: ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS/SOLUTIONS</b> There may be late students (ask them to work with a partner), and an odd number of students (have one group of three).	
<b>AIDS AND MATERIALS:</b> Clare, A., Wilson, J.J. <i>Speakout Pre-Intermediate</i> , Students' Book (2 <sup>nd</sup> edition), Pearson Education: Harlow, 2015, p. 38.	

STAGE NAME	PROCEDURE	STAGE AIMS	TIME & INTERACTION
<b>Lead in</b>	<p>T displays pictures of various talents and asks Ss to brainstorm in pairs which talents are represented.  <i>Look at the pictures. What talents are represented?</i>            Ss come up with their ideas.            T asks questions about the pictures:  <i>Have you ever sung on a big stage?</i>            Feedback. Students answer the questions.</p>	To generate interest in the theme	5 minutes Ss-Ss Ss-T
<b>Scan reading</b>	<p><b>Pair work. Ex 2A.</b> Ss read the conversation and compare answers in pairs.  <i>Read the conversation. What tenses do the speakers use?</i>            Feedback. Open class. T checks the answers.  <b>Answers:</b>            The present perfect and past simple tenses (and one example of the present simple tense)</p>	Ss get familiar with the overall content of the text and with the context of the target language	5 minutes Ss Ss-Ss Ss-T
<b>Highlighting and clarification</b>	<p><b>Pair work. Ex. 2 B.</b>            Ss do the exercise individually and then check in pairs.  <b>1. Underline two questions about general experiences (where the exact time is not important).</b>            CCQ 1 Is it a general experience? (Yes)            CCQ 2 Is it an exact time? (No)  <i>How are they formed?</i>            _____you ever+past participle            T elicits the use of <b>ever/ never:</b>  <i>When do we use ever?</i> (In questions)  <i>When do we use never?</i> (In negatives)  <b>2. Find two sentences which say <i>when</i> the actions happened in the past.</b>  <i>Which verb tense is used?</i> (Past simple)            CCQ 1 Is it a general experience? (No)            CCQ 2 Is it an exact time? (Yes)  <b>3. Circle three short answers to Have you...?</b>            Ready-made feedback/open class.</p>	<p>Ss notice the target language in context             Ss work out the meaning, pronunciation, and form of the target language</p>	10 minutes Ss Ss-Ss T- Ss

	<p><b>Answers:</b></p> <p><b>1 . Questions:</b>          Have you ever made a speech in public?          Have you ever made friends with someone from another country?  <b>Form:</b> <i>have you (ever) + past participle</i></p> <p><b>2. Sentences:</b> He met a woman from Chile in 2014. In fact, they got married a week ago!  <b>Verb tense:</b> past simple</p> <p>3. No, never. Yes, I have. No, I haven't.</p>		
<b>Focus on pronunciation</b>	<p><b>Ex. 2C.</b> T tells Ss to listen to the pronunciation of <i>have/haven't</i>.          In the feedback, T refers Ss back to the sentences on the board from Ex 2B.          T elicits/underlines the stressed words in each sentence:  <i>Have you ever made a <u>speech</u> in <u>public</u>?</i>  <i>No, <u>never</u>. Have <u>you</u>?</i>          Yes, I <i><u>have</u></i>.</p> <p>T tells Ss that <i>have</i> is stressed in short answers and pronounced /hæv/, but isn't stressed in questions, where it's pronounced /həv/.</p> <p>Ss listen and repeat the conversation, paying attention to the sentence stress and weak (unstressed) forms.</p>	To clarify the pronunciation of the TL	5 minutes Ss T - Ss
<b>Controlled practice</b>	<p><b>Individually. In pairs (compare answers). Ex. 3A.</b>          Ss do the exercise alone and then compare answers in pairs.  <i>Underline the correct alternative.</i>          ICQ 1. Where do you take the alternative from the exercise or your head?          In the feedback, T rechecks the concept of the two tenses.</p> <p><b>Answers:</b>          1 was 2 Have you ever written 3 've never eaten 4 finished 5 Have you ever been 6 finished</p>	Ss practise using the target language in a controlled way	8 minutes Ss Ss- Ss T – Ss

<b>Freer practice</b>	<b>Pair work. Ex. 3B.</b> Ss complete the sentences individually. Ss work in pairs, interviewing each other using the target language. <i>Complete the sentences. Check your answers in pairs.</i> T monitors the accuracy of their sentences. Feedback. T elicits examples from students.	Ss use the target language to interact meaningfully by sharing and discussing their own experiences	9 minutes Ss Ss – Ss T- Ss
<b>Feedback</b>	Open class share (feedback on content) <i>Which tense is used for an exact time?</i> (Past simple) <i>What tense do we use to talk about experiences when the time is not specified?</i> (Present perfect) Delayed error correction.	T wraps up the lesson and acknowledges students' contributions Ss notice their language inaccuracies and correct them	3 minutes T- Ss Ss - T

**Table 2. Language analysis. Grammar.**

<b>TARGET LANGUAGE</b>
<b>Present perfect tense with ever/never</b>
<b>EXAMPLE/S FROM MATERIALS</b>
<i>"Have you ever made a speech in public?"</i> (Clare and Wilson 2000, p. 38) <i>"OK, have you ever made friends with someone from another country?"</i> (Clare and Wilson 2000, p. 38)
<b>MEANING:</b>
<b>a) define the meaning:</b>
The present perfect tense is used to talk about experiences people have had at some time in their lives (Workman 2008, p. 75). <i>Ever</i> is often used with perfect tenses to mean at some/any time up to now (Swan 2005, p. 456) to ask questions about experiences (Workman 2008, p. 75). <i>Have/ has+subj.+ ever + past participle</i> <i>Never</i> is used to talk about experiences which people haven't had at some/any time up to now (Swan 2005, p. 456). The affirmative present perfect form is used. <i>Subj+have/has+never+ past participle</i>
<b>b) state how you will convey it:</b>
The meaning will be conveyed from the context. CCQ 1 <i>What tense indicates a specific time in the past?</i> (Past simple) CCQ 2 <i>Do you use time expressions such as yesterday, last week, or last month with the past simple tense?</i> (Yes) CCQ 3 <i>Do we use the present perfect tense to talk about past experience?</i> (Yes) CCQ 4 <i>Do we say the exact time?</i> (No) CCQ 5 <i>Do you use ever/ never with the present perfect tense?</i> (Yes) CCQ 6 <i>Do we use ever to mean during your life until now?</i> (Yes) CCQ 7 <i>Do we use ever to ask questions?</i> (Yes)

<p>CCQ 8 Do we use <i>never</i> to talk about experiences we haven't had? (Yes)</p> <p>CCQ 9 Do we use <i>never</i> to refer to something that has not happened at any time in life? (Yes)</p>
<p><b>ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: MEANING</b></p> <p><b>Problem:</b> Ss may confuse the usage of the present perfect tense with the past simple tense.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> Ask the CCQs above. Elicit the difference.</p>
<p><b>FORM</b></p> <p>Affirmative: S+have/has ('ve, 's) + (<i>time phrase or adverb</i>) +past participle</p> <p>Negative: S+have/has+ never+past participle</p> <p>Question: Have/has+s+ever +past participle?</p> <p><b>Short answers:</b> No, never. No, I haven't. Yes, I have.</p>
<p><b>ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: FORM</b></p> <p><b>Problem:</b> Ss may not know all past participle forms of the irregular verbs.</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> provide students with the irregular verbs chart.</p>
<p><b>PRONUNCIATION</b></p> <p>Contractions: I've /aɪv/, you've / ju've / we've /wɪv/ he's /hi:z/, she's /ʃɪz/ (toPhonetics n.d.).</p> <p>The auxiliary <i>have</i> is normally weak or unstressed in connected speech at the beginning of questions - [həv] (toPhonetics n.d.).</p> <p>The auxiliary <i>have</i> is stressed in short answers / hæv / (toPhonetics n.d.).</p>
<p><b>ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: PRONUNCIATION</b></p> <p><b>Problem:</b> Ss may stress the contracted form <i>I've</i> and not stress <i>have</i> in the question form.</p> <p>Ss may not know that in short answers, <i>have</i> is stressed and pronounced /'hæv/, /'hæz/, /'hæznt/ (toPhonetics n.d.).</p> <p><b>Solution:</b> The stress patterns will be highlighted in different example sentences.</p> <p>Model and drill the stressed words in a present perfect sentence chorally and individually.</p>

### **Methods**

Data collection methods included observation of student participation during activities, collection of informal student feedback, and analysis of pre- and post-lesson quizzes to assess performance. Students were observed during various activities, including pair and group work. The observations focused on their engagement with the lesson, use of the target language (the present perfect tense with *ever/never*), and ability to complete tasks successfully.

The key data sources included:

#### **Student output analysis**

Students' participation was observed in controlled and free practice activities, focusing on their ability to use the target language (e.g., *Have you ever ...?* and *I have never....*).



Recurring challenges included incorrect word order (e.g., *I never have...* instead of *I have never...*) and auxiliary verb omission. Another common mistake in short answers was using the main verb instead of the auxiliary verb (*Yes, I made* instead of the correct form *Yes, I have*). Additionally, pronunciation errors were observed, particularly in sentence stress and the use of weak forms in both the present perfect and past simple tenses.

Form-focused feedback and peer correction techniques were used to address mistakes. This targeted approach helped students overcome habitual errors and internalize correct usage.

### **Engagement and interaction**

Observations revealed that students were most engaged during the peer interview activity, in which they asked their classmates questions using *ever* and *never*. Notably, 6 out of 8 students used the present perfect tense correctly at least 75% of the time during the activity.

### **Student Feedback**

Informal feedback was gathered through brief questioning at the end of the lesson, allowing students to share their thoughts on the clarity of the lesson, their comfort with the target language, and any challenges they encountered. One student noted, "*Asking my partner questions with ever and never made it easier to remember the rules because I had to use them.*"

### **Pre- and post-lesson quiz**

The pre-lesson quiz aimed to assess students' initial familiarity with the concepts of *ever* and *never* with the present perfect tense in the context of past experiences. The goal was to gather data about students' intuitive understanding of the grammar structure, to adjust lesson content and teacher's expectations. The same quiz was given after the lesson to measure improvement.

Analysis of pre- and post-lesson quiz scores showed increased accuracy: a 37.5% average improvement in students' ability to correctly use *ever* and *never* with present perfect tense sentences. For example, while only 50% of students could form *Have you ever...? / I have never...* correctly before the lesson, 87.5% succeeded after guided practice and communicative tasks.

### **Results and discussion**

Taken together, the results support the communicative approach to grammar teaching. The improvement in student performance suggests that interactive tasks, such as guided practice and peer interviews, effectively promote understanding and retention of grammatical structures.

Additionally, guided discovery, modelling, and drilling were crucial for reinforcing accurate sentence structure and supporting learners with varying levels of confidence. The increased use of the target language in context suggests that communicative tasks provide essential opportunities for learners to consolidate their understanding.

### **Conclusions**

CLT views grammar as an integral component of effective communication, not just a set of abstract rules. The importance of teaching grammar communicatively lies in its potential to engage students more deeply, foster motivation, and encourage them to see how grammatical structures work in real-world communication. Therefore, incorporating this approach in EFL classrooms ensures that students are better prepared to address the complexities of using English in diverse settings.

The strategies discussed in this article, ranging from contextualized instruction to collaborative activities, provide practical tools for teachers to enhance their grammar instruction, advocating for a paradigm shift that prioritizes meaningful communication over mechanical memorization in grammar teaching. Through meaningful practice, learners gain the ability to internalize grammar naturally, making it a functional part of their overall language proficiency.

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