

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FLIPPED LEARNING IN DEVELOPING ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL PERFORMANCE OF UNDERACHIEVING LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT THE SECONDARY STAGE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of flipped learning in improving English grammatical performance in speaking and writing of underachieving language learners. The participants of the study consisted of forty nine first year secondary stage students at Port Said military secondary school for boys in Port Said Governorate. The two groups pre-post test quasi-experimental design was used. The instruments of the study included the verbal intelligence test for youth prepared by Hamed Zahran and the pre- post grammatical performance in speaking test and grammatical performance in writing test. The results of the study revealed that flipped learning significantly developed English grammatical performance in speaking and writing of both underachieving language learners and their normal peers.*

**KEYWORDS:** flipped learning, English grammatical performance, underachieving language learners, secondary stage.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The growing interest in using technology in education led to the emergence of many online learning materials and activities that are used to develop a variety of language skills. Flipped learning (FL) is considered to be one of the active learning approaches that focuses on switching in-class instruction time with at-home practicing time using technology, especially videos. Clark (2013) refers to FL as an instructional approach that intends to improve student engagement and performance by moving direct classroom instruction outside the school with the help of technology tools and moving homework and tasks with concepts inside the classroom via learning activities. By utilizing virtual lectures, valuable class time can be devoted to engaging activities promoting mastery learning with instructor remediation and support (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Any language aims at communicating meaning through grammatically correct sentences. Grammar is the means to understand how language works. Brown (2001) indicates that grammar gives the learner the tool to talk about language by providing a terminology, a system of classification, and by making him/ her aware of the basic pattern of English sentences. Grammar, as Brown asserts, can help the learner develop a varied and interesting style in speaking and writing. Supporting Brown's view, Cotter (2005) indicates that grammatical knowledge is

necessary for an individual to be able to speak a language to some degree of proficiency and say what he/ she really wants to say.

Unfortunately, learners are trained to construct grammatical sentences that do not enable them to produce real life discourse, because teachers use limited techniques of teaching as they introduce the form and meaning, neglecting the function and use of the structure (Nolan & Hoover, 2003). This result in bored, disaffected students who can produce correct forms on exercises and tests, but consistently make errors when they try to use the language in context (Byrd, 1998). In other words, grammatical performance is essential, especially in speaking and writing, to avoid communicative misunderstanding (Lush, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

With regard to linguistic difficulty, Tanveer (2007, p. 49) points out that grammar has been found to be the second most important aspect that ESL/EFL learners find difficult when learning to speak a second/foreign language. This difficulty, as he adds, may impede learners' fluency in communicative situations. Many researchers (e.g. AbuSeileek&Rabab'ah, 2007; Al-Mekhlafi&Nagaratnam, 2011;Povjakalova, 2012; Soliman, 2008) argue that teaching grammatical rules using traditional methods does not provide learners with the appropriate contexts that enable them to use language effectively during communicative situations. Accordingly, grammar should be related to what is said or written.

Underachievement represents a real problem for many students. Levesque (2011, p. 3025) defines it as a discrepancy between ability or potential (expected performance) and achievement (actual performance) that cannot be explained by a learning disability or the documented need for any other category of special education services. Concerning foreign language learning, Ganschow and Sparks (2001, p. 81) identify underachievers as those students who are unsuccessful in the study of foreign languages. These students, as they describe, have specific learning disabilities in understanding and/or using language, consequently, they have imperfect abilities to listen, think, speak, read, spell, or do mathematical calculations in English. These challenges draw the attention to the significance of using different approaches like FL to help underachieving language learners improve their grammatical performance in speaking and writing

### **Context of the problem**

One of the most widespread problems among learners of foreign languages is their considerably lower grammatical performance when compared to their passive knowledge. Using grammatical rules correctly and appropriately when speaking and writing is a challenge for many individuals, especially underachieving language learners. Many students focus merely on rule memorization and fail to communicate in the real world. These views are supported by Linh (2013) who indicates that many English learners have the misconception that when they have memorized many grammar structures and can write well, they can speak well. Yet, when they stand up to speak on something, things do not appear to be as easy as they expected since their speech is full of grammatical errors.

Concerning Egyptian students, although they have studied English grammar since primary school, only a few of them can apply their grammatical knowledge in communicative contexts.

Soliman (2008) adds that the main difficulty with grammar acquisition, is the existence of certain differences between the grammatical rules in the mother tongue and the foreign language that students learn. Research findings also showed that Egyptian students' writings are loaded with grammatical errors (Hegazy, 2005; Salem, 2003).

As a general supervisor of teaching practice at the secondary stage, the researcher observed that students found difficulty in using grammatical rules in communicative situations, especially answering oral questions and paragraph writing. Of course this is a serious problem especially for underachieving language learners who always perform below their own abilities. In addition, some school teachers consider them as lazy and unmotivated students who do not have the desire to learn. Instead, they should help them by using online motivating tasks to urge them to improve their academic performance. Grammatical rules should be taught in context using communicative tasks to be easier for students to understand the function of these rules.

As a result, how teachers present grammatical rules is just one side of the problem, the other side is how they motivate their students study these rules and apply them in speaking and writing. Although the effectiveness of FL in developing academic performance of different students is well established (Gilboy, Heinerichs, &Pazzaglia, 2015; Missildine, Fountain, Summers, &Gosselin, 2013; Schawankl, 2013; Tune, Sturek, &Basile, 2013), no studies- as far as the researcher knows- investigated the effect of FL on developing grammatical performance of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage.

### **Statement of the problem**

The problem of the study can be identified in the weak performance of EFL underachieving language learners at the secondary stage concerning their grammatical performance in speaking and writing. Hence, this study sought to find answers to the following main question:

What is the effectiveness of using FL in improving grammatical performance in speaking and writing of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage?

The following sub-questions were also answered:

- 1- What is the level of underachieving language learners in English grammatical performance?
- 2- What are the features of a treatment based on FL to improve English grammatical performance in speaking and writing of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage?
- 3- How far is using FL effective in improving English grammatical performance in speaking of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage?
- 4- How far is using FL effective in improving English grammatical performance in writing of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage?

### **Hypotheses of the study**

Based on the discussion of literature and related studies, the following hypotheses were derived:

- 1- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post grammatical performance in speaking test in favour of the former.

2- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post grammatical performance in writing test in favour of the former.

3- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking test for the experimental group in favour of the latter.

4- There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in writing test for the experimental group in favour of the latter.

5- There would be no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking test for the control group.

6- There would be no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in writing test for the control group.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was twofold:

- 1- Examining the effectiveness of using FL in developing English grammatical performance in speaking of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage.
- 2- Investigating the effectiveness of using FL in developing English grammatical performance in writing of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage.

### **Significance of the study**

The significance of the study stems from the following considerations:

- 1- The grammatical performance tests might be beneficial to EFL researchers and curriculum designers.
- 2- The study might provide guidelines upon which further treatments may be used to develop English grammatical performance of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage.
- 3- The study might draw the attention of educators to develop specific interventions for underachieving language learners at the secondary stage.

### **Delimitations of the study**

Since it was beyond the limits of a single study to consider a wide range of factors, this study was restricted to:

- 1- A selected number of grammatical rules (nine) in “Hello! English for secondary schools, the second term”.
- 2- A limited duration for implementing the treatment (nine weeks).
- 3- Forty nine first year secondary stage students at Port Said military secondary school for boys in Port Said Governorate.

### **Definition of terms**

Flipped Learning Network (FLN) has defined flipped learning as “a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter” (Sams, Bergmann, Daniels, Bennett, Marshal & Arfstrom, 2014, p. 1). In the present

study, FL is defined as an instructional approach in which first year secondary stage students watch short video lessons at home to form the basic knowledge about grammatical rules that are identified from the prescribed text book “Hello! English for secondary schools, the second term” that can then be discussed more in depth in the classroom to improve their grammatical performance.

### **Grammatical performance**

Salem (2003, p. 9) defines grammatical performance as the students' ability to use, apply, and produce the target structure in real life situations appropriately. Hudson (2010) refers to grammatical performance as patterning in written or spoken texts. In the present study, grammatical performance is defined as the ability of students to use syntactical rules correctly in expressive speaking and writing forms.

### **Underachieving language learners**

Reis and McCoach (2000, p. 157) assert that "underachievers are students who exhibit a severe discrepancy between expected achievement (as measured by standardized achievement test scores or cognitive or intellectual ability assessments) and actual achievement (as measured by class grades and teacher evaluations). To be classified as an underachiever, the discrepancy between expected and actual achievement must not be the direct result of a diagnosed learning disability and must persist over an extended period of time.

In the present study, underachieving language learners are defined as secondary stage students who have the tendency to work below their own abilities and as a result they have a weak grammatical performance.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The following section sheds more light on the main variables of this study which are flipped learning, grammatical performance, and underachieving language learners.

### **Flipped learning**

The idea of flipped classroom, first known as inverted classroom, began to gain popularity when Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams used video lessons to enhance instruction in their chemistry classrooms. They recorded class lectures and provided the videos online to enable students to watch and review the teaching contents more conveniently. With such a strategy, significant results were obtained, which inspired them to further employ it before classes (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). The instructional strategies and pedagogies practiced in FL are mainly based on constructivist learning philosophies of active learning, Kolb's experiential learning and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Yemma, 2015). FL and flipped classroom are used interchangeably in the present study since many researchers are using these two concepts to refer to the same practices and procedures.

Huereca (2015) defines FL as an instructional approach to teaching that integrates technology and intends to enhance learning. This type of learning incorporates a pedagogical model that flips the typical lecture given by the teacher and the homework assigned to students to take home. Thus, students use short video lessons at home to learn new concepts that can then be

discussed more in depth in the classroom. In-classtime, as she argues, aims at promoting rich conversations, collaboration amongst students and with the teacher, as well as projects or other tasks that can expand or clarify students' knowledge of the intended learning goals. Prunuske, Batzli, Howell and Miller (2012) point out that students who view online lectures demonstrate increased performance on lower-order cognitive learning objectives. Meanwhile, class time can be used to achieve higher-order cognitive learning objectives and allow instructors to identify student-learning misconceptions of key concepts.

Sams, Bergmann, Daniels, Bennett, Marshall, and Arfstrom (2014), on their part, identify four pillars that should be incorporated into practice to constitute FL. The four pillars of FL are derived from the acronym "FLIP". They illustrate that FL is a pedagogical approach flipping the roles of direction instruction and activities resulting in a Flexible learning environment, active and meaningful Learning cultures in the classroom, using Intentional content in and out of the classroom, and Professional educator roles serving as facilitators to enhance student learning. Furthermore, Huereca (2015) indicates that FL integrates technology in a way that allows students to use today's technologies outside the classroom and creates a student-centered environment inside the classroom in an attempt to support student learning. This type of approach, according to Clark (2013, p. 11), describes how students should construct their knowledge through engaged learning activities. In addition, FL allows for the practice of active learning activities during class time without sacrificing course content (O'Connor, Mortimer & Bond, 2011).

The following characteristics of FL are proposed by different scholars (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2014; Bishop & Verleger 2013; Kim, Kim, Khera, & Getman, 2014):

- (1) Changes in the usage of class time: Those teaching contents that were traditionally taught through direct instruction are provided in other forms, such as video, for students to learn outside the classroom. Besides, in-class discussion, projects, and problem solving are included in the class to help students apply what they have learned and to cultivate their analytical and judging abilities.
- (2) Changes in the usage of time outside the class: The time used to do homework is moved to the class time. Different ways of self-learning, such as watching videos, are scheduled before the class time.
- (3) The time outside the class time is designed for students to gain knowledge at the remembering and understanding levels.
- (4) Peer interaction, student-teacher interaction, and problem-solving skills are emphasized in class. Students gain knowledge at the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels.

In addition, Fulton (2012) highlights some of the advantages of FL. For example, students are able to work at their own pace while allowing teachers the ability to identify learning misconceptions and provide immediate remediation. FL also allows for customizable curriculum and options for achieving mastery learning of objectives. In addition, it creates an effective use of class time for engaged learning through collaboration and cooperation. Educators have also reported that FL allows greater teacher insight into students' level of learning while increasing student-teacher interaction (Roehl, Reddy, & Shannon, 2013). The flipped classroom provides the ability for the teacher to act as a facilitator or guide of knowledge acquisition while also providing support for the students to become independent and self regulated learners (De León,

2012). McLaughlin, Griffin, Esserman, Davidson, and Glatt (2013) also suggest that flipping a classroom promotes student empowerment, development, and engagement.

Therefore, the educational value of FL is to let students apply what they have learned with the teacher's guidance. Students would be more active in the class and their higher order thinking ability would be cultivated (Spencer, Wolf, & Sams, 2011; Francl, 2014). Besides, the increasing population of online social networks helps realize the concept of individualized teaching and enables teachers to discuss and answer every student's questions. More time is used for online and in-class discussion, which helps students clarify the ideas and boosts student/teacher as well as peer interaction. Through peers' influence, students with low academic performance can increase their learning speed (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Tucker, 2012).

Researchers have indicated some of the reasons for adopting FL (Bergmann, Overmyer, & Wilie, 2011; Francl, 2014; and Lasry, Dugdale, & Charles, 2014). First, the teaching video allows students to review and preview to have a profound prior knowledge before class, and lets those students who miss classes catch up. Second, multimedia digital teaching materials are easy to save, manage, revise, and impart. Third, in the process of preparing a flipped classroom, educators can inspect and reflect on the whole curriculum and improve the teaching contents and activity design. Fourth, with enough prior knowledge, students have more time to conduct higher level activities and questions. Fifth, in-class activity and discussion can increase teacher and student as well as peer interaction.

Most studies agreed that perceptions of students and teachers were positive towards FL (Clark, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Pearson, 2012; Snowden, 2012). Concerning students' academic achievement after being exposed to FL, the studies showed different results. For instance, Marlowe (2012) argued that mixed outcomes were obtained from assessments students took while being enrolled in a flipped classroom. He added that while semester grades showed improvement, exam grades did not show significant improvement. In 2013, two different studies conducted by Bishop and Clark revealed that no significant differences were shown between students in the flipped classroom and those who were in a traditional classroom environment.

On the other hand, three studies attempted by Missildine, et al., (2013), Schawankl (2013) and Tune, et al., (2013) pointed out that examination scores were higher for the flipped classroom group than for the control group. Similarly, in a nutrition course, Gilboy, et al., (2015) found that with FL not only students' learning results increased, but also both the students' and the teacher's satisfaction with the course tended to be high.

Other studies explored different constructs associated with FL, such as self-efficacy, anxiety, and stress. For instance, a survey from Columbia University in 2012, found that 80% of students going through FL argued that they had more positive collaboration with other students and with teachers during instructional class time and that they liked that the concept of FL allowed them to work at their own pace (Driscoll, 2012). Likewise, The Flipped Learning Network surveyed 450 teachers who were somehow incorporating FL components into their classrooms and found that teachers associated FL with improved student performance and attitudes, and increased job satisfaction (Pearson & The Flipped Learning Network, 2013).

In short, FL is a pedagogical approach which moves the learning contents taught by teachers' direct instruction to the time before class in order to increase the chances for the students and teacher to interact. Therefore, teachers would have more time to guide the learning activities and solve students' problems in order to promote the learning effects. Consequently, more in-class discussion or practice can make students engage in more in-depth learning and help them clarify any misconceptions.

### **Grammatical performance**

Grammar is essential to be able to use any language to some degree of proficiency. It is defined as a set of rules which describe how language works. These rules include syntax (related to word order), morphology (related to word formation), phonology (related to sound system), and usage. Syntax is the study of the principles by which words are used in phrases and sentences to construct meaningful combinations (Van Valin, 2001). In addition, Azar (2007) indicates that grammar helps learners develop a varied and interesting style in speaking and writing which is one of the main goals of English study. In other words, knowledge of syntactical rules is required for the mastery of language since learners cannot use words unless they know how these words are put together.

The purpose of teaching grammar, as Widodo (2004) asserts, is to furnish the basis for the four language skills. Grammar plays a crucial part, for listening and speaking, in grasping and expressing spoken language since learning grammar is considered necessary to be able to produce grammatically acceptable utterances in any language. In reading, grammar enables learners to comprehend sentences interrelationship in a paragraph, a passage, and a text. In the context of writing, grammar allows the learners to put their ideas into intelligible sentences so that they can successfully communicate in written form. As for vocabulary, Doff (2000) indicates that learning grammar enables learners to form phrases, clauses, and sentences to express meaning. Hence, establishing communicative tasks is essential in teaching grammatical rules.

Grammar plays a vital role in learning English language. Urbankova (2008) confirms that grammar is the frame of the language which controls the relationship between the huge number of words. Grammatical rules, the author asserts, serve as a consistent regulatory framework for linguistic grounds that help to use language effectively. Furthermore, Ellis (2006) points out that grammar teaching should involve drawing learners' attention to some specific grammatical forms to help them either to understand it meta-linguistically or process it in a production.

According to Azar (2007, p.3), the role of grammar is to help students discover the nature of language, i.e. language consists of predictable patterns that make what is read, said, heard and written intelligible. Without grammar, words hang together without any meaning or sense (Cotter, 2005). The use of incorrect grammar in one's speech or writing can influence understanding negatively. So, good teaching of grammar should be meaningful, interesting, content-based, contextualized, discourse-based rather than sentence-based (Rott, 2000).

Cameron (2001) and Celce-Murcia (2000) agree that grammar should never be taught as an end in itself but always with reference to meaning, social function or discourse or a combination of these factors, which are the purpose of grammar teaching. They view grammar teaching as a communicative end that consists of three interrelated or intertwined dimensions of form,

meaning, and use. Nunan (2005, p. 74) adds that grammar techniques need to be repeated in different ways and multiple times to produce a desired effect.

Unfortunately, grammar learning is a negative experience for many language learners. Learners have difficulty both in applying the grammatical rules of English in order to form grammatically correct sentences, and in knowing when and where to use these sentences and to whom in writing (Lush 2002). Larsen-Freeman (2003) points out that although form, meaning and use are interrelated, each of them can appear diversely challenging for language learners. A challenge, the author adds, may be in the case that a learner knows how to form a grammatical structure but does not realize that the structure includes more than one meaning and can be used in different situations.

These difficulties may result from focusing on structure, describing the form and meaning of grammatical constructions out of context. Grammarians do not describe how forms and meaning are actually used in spoken and written discourse. And this is not enough for the purposes of communication (Biber, Conrad & Leech, 2002). Howatt and Widdowson (2004) add that teaching meaning and use of all grammatical structure as separate items is unreasonable matter. Thus, as they assert, it is certainly important to make sure that learners understand the various ways in which the principal structures of a language can be used, and that they become proficient in these uses.

The new dominant practice for grammar instruction has been to integrate grammar into the practice of speaking and writing ( Broze, 2001). Using Kolb's learning styles in teaching grammatical structure at the secondary stage, Salem (2003) revealed that the written performance of students improved, their mistakes in writing decreased, and their awareness about how to use grammatical structure in real life situations increased. In her study, Amin (2008) showed that teaching grammar in context reduced grammatical errors in students' writing. El-Gandour (2003) also found that using situationally based dialogues to teach grammatical rules was effective in developing some communicative skills of prep stage students.

Concerning using technology in teaching grammar, Torlakovic's research (2004) asserted that CALL grammar instruction was effective in improving learners' performance and confidence in positioning adverbs in English sentences. Al-Jarf (2005) pointed out that the integration of online learning and in -class grammar instruction improved EFL freshman college students' grammatical achievement and attitudes. At the same level, Al-Zu'bi' (2009) found that internet computer assisted language learning was effective in developing KingSaudUniversity students' grammar achievement in English.

As for language activities, Hegazy (2005) indicated that free linguistic activities were effective in developing primary school pupils' use of both the form and the function of English grammatical rules. Similarly, Soliman (2008) asserted that the use of some language activities (songs and games) developed English grammatical performance of primary stage pupils. In her study, El-Basel (2012) showed that using a suggested social constructivism strategy was effective in developing English grammatical performance of first year secondary stage students.

For many learners, learning grammar often means learning the grammatical rules and having an intellectual knowledge of grammar. Teachers often believe that this will provide the generative basis on which learners can build their knowledge and will be able to use the language eventually. But this does not help to use grammar effectively. As a result, grammar teaching should involve applying grammatical rules in different communicative situations during speaking and writing.

### **Underachieving language learners.**

Underachievement is a relatively common phenomenon in adolescence. Brophy (1996, p. 140) defines underachieving students as the learners who are not oriented toward academic achievement and thus do the minimum required from them rather than their best work. Brophy further asserts that underachievers have a persistent tendency to work below their own abilities and they resist to increase their responsibilities of their own learning for the sake of being better achievers.

In an answer to the question of who are underachievers at school, Chukwu-Etu (2009, 89-90) argues that underachievers include those students:

1. who do not perform according to expectations in a particular subject area.
2. who as a result of behavior do not show interest/do well in their studies.
3. who do not perform well in a specific subject area.
4. who do have the necessary intellectual ability but still underachieve.
5. who are limited by culture, language and gender from doing well academically at school

Marcus (2007) suggests another typology of underachievers that include those who are worried and anxious; acting and manipulative; easygoing; lazy and unmotivated; oppositional; and introspective. However, underachievers appear to be a fairly heterogeneous group. While some underachievers may have low levels of the characteristics named above, other underachievers score high on these measures (McCoach&Siegle, 2003). In addition, underachievers are more likely to be male than female. Across a number of studies of under-achievers, the ratio of male underachievers to female underachievers appears to be at least 2:1 (Matthews &McBee, 2007; Siegle, Reis, McCoach, Mann, Greene, & Schreiber, 2006).

The beginning of underachievement often occurs in middle school or junior high school and often persists into high school. A study of academically gifted underachievers and achievers examined the school records of 153 gifted students and analyzed trends in their achievement throughout their secondary school careers Results revealed that 45% of the students who were underachieving in grade seven continued to underachieve throughout junior high and high school (Peterson &Colangelo, 1996). Peterson (2000) conducted a follow-up study of these achievers and underachievers four years after high school graduation. High school and college academic achievement were strongly related; the correlation between high school and college achievement was .64.

Much of the recent research in the area of underachievement has explored the characteristics of underachievers. The factors that are commonly associated with underachievement include low academic self-perceptions (Freedman, 2000; Matthews &McBee, 2007), low self-efficacy

(Siegle&McCoach, 2005), low self-motivation, (Rayneri, et al. 2003), low goal valuation (Baslanti&McCoach, 2006; Matthews &McBee, 2007) and negative attitudes toward school and teachers (McCoach&Siegle, 2003).

A review of the literature has revealed considerable divergences of opinion on what causes underachievement in students. Lack of motivation amongst students in secondary, primary and higher education is cited as one of the causes of underachievement (Reis &McCoach, 2000; Sousa, 2003). Research by Mroczek and Little (2006) on personality studies revealed that negative self concepts can cause underachievement when parents do not acknowledge their children's abilities or fail to support them.

Concerning language learning, a study conducted by Dadour (2001) revealed that promoting autonomy was effective in solving some learning problems of underachieving language learners and improving their academic achievement in English. Abu Armana (2011) examined the impact of a remedial program on developing English writing skills of the seventh grade low achievers at UNRWA Schools in Rafah.

Luo (2009) found that English underachievers in universities of science and technology enhanced their abilities with regard to vocabulary, phrases and listening as a result of using the E-learning web site as a remedial teaching aid after school. The web site was also an inspiration to the underachievers and encouraged them to have more interest in learning English.

To sum up, underachievers are a diverse group of students who share some common characteristics, such as low motivation, low self-regulation, and low value for school and academic tasks. In such learners, the poor grammatical performance is a big handicap, as it makes their ability to use the language for its most important purpose – the exchange of information –limited. FL, as a motivational instructional approach, is expected to have a positive effect on developing the grammatical performance of these underachieving language learners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Participants of the study included forty nine first year secondary stage students at Port Said military secondary school for boys in Port Said Governorate . They were randomly assigned into two groups, experimental (18 normal, 6 underachieving language learners), and control (18 normal, 7 underachieving language learners). Students' age in the two groups ranged from 15.9-16.8 years. These underachieving language learners were identified using their first term scores in English, their teacher's opinion, and the verbal intelligence test for youth prepared by Hammed Zahran (1979). To determine the performance of the two groups before the treatment, both tests were applied. Then the researcher used Mann-Whitney test for independent samples. The statistical results revealed that there were no statistical significance between mean ranks of the two groups on both tests. In other words, both groups were similar in their performance on entry level.

Table (1): Mann-Whitney values of pre grammatical performance in writing and speaking tests

Level	Skills	Experimental group			Control group			Z-value	P-value
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
Underachievers	Speaking	6	7.33	44.0	7	6.71	47.0	0.29	0.77
	Writing	6	6.75	40.5	7	7.21	50.5	0.21	0.83
Normal students	Speaking	18	18.61	315.5	18	19.47	350.5	0.06	0.95
	Writing	18	21.67	390.0	18	15.33	276.0	1.80	0.07

### Design of the study

The researcher used the pre-post test quasi-experimental design. The pre tests was used to evaluate students' grammatical performance in English. Then the treatment was carried out for nine weeks. The participants were divided into two groups. In the experimental group, the teacher used FL to help students use grammatical rules in speaking and writing situations effectively. In the control group, grammatical rules were taught using the traditional method.

### Instruments of the study

Three instruments were used in this study: (available with the researcher upon request)

- A- The verbal intelligence test for youth prepared by Hamed Zahran (1979).
- B- The pre- post grammatical performance in speaking test.
- C- The pre- post grammatical performance in writing test.

A- The verbal intelligence test for youth prepared by Hamed Zahran (1979)

This verbal intelligence test was mainly used to identify underachieving language learners in each group. Based on the review of literature, underachieving language learners should have, at least, an average IQ. The test included 100 items that students have to answer in 30 minutes. The IQ is determined according to the following equation

$$IQ = \frac{\text{Mental age}}{\text{Chronological age}} \times 100$$

For more details about the verbal intelligence test, see Appendix A.

B- The pre- post grammatical performance tests

The tests were constructed in the light of the following resources:

- Reviewing previous studies concerned with language tests, especially those tackling the topic of how to develop grammatical performance tests.
- The grammatical rules identified after reviewing “Hello! English for secondary schools, the second term.”

The purpose of these tests was to measure students' grammatical performance in both speaking and writing of nine English grammatical rules. After reviewing “Hello! English for secondary schools, the second term,” the identified grammatical rules were included in the pre- post grammatical performance in speaking and writing tests. The grammatical performance in speaking test included nine questions. Each question focused upon a specific grammatical rule to test students' ability to use it in a specific situation (10 marks). So, the grammatical performance in speaking test was scored out of (90).

The second test, the grammatical performance in writing test, included three questions. In the first question, students were required to complete a multiple choice question that included 44 items (22 marks). As for the second question, students were asked to rewrite the sentences to give the same meaning. This question included 36 items (18 marks). Finally, they were required in the third question to edit two passages; in the first passage students had to correct the identified errors whereas in the second passage they had to identify the error by themselves then they corrected it (50 marks). This test was also scored out of (90). The post grammatical performance in speaking and writing tests were administered at the end of instruction after session 9. (For more details, see Appendix B).

In calculating the time needed for answering the grammatical performance in writing test, a group of 25 students answered it. The researcher recorded down the time each student finished answering the test. Then, time periods were averaged for the whole sample. The calculated mean time was 90 minutes for the test.

### **Tests validity**

To measure tests content validity, the first version of the tests were given to EFL jury (N. 4) to evaluate each question in terms of types of questions, difficulty level, arrangement and number of questions. The tests proved to be valid as the jury approved all the questions. In addition, the calculated intrinsic validity for the grammatical performance in speaking and writing tests were 0.83 and 0.92 respectively. Therefore, the tests were considered valid for the purposes of the current study.

### **Tests reliability**

In order to establish the reliability of the two tests, they were administered to a group of 25 first year secondary stage students at Al-Nasr secondary school for boys. Those students were neither included in the control nor the experimental groups. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronback's Alpha (Marascuilo, 1971; Payne, 1997). The calculated reliability

coefficient for the pre-post grammatical performance in speaking and writing tests were 0.82 and 0.88 respectively. Therefore, the tests were considered reliable for the purposes of the current study.

### **The treatment**

#### **\* Aim of the treatment**

This treatment aimed at developing grammatical performance of underachieving language learners at the secondary stage in both speaking and writing.

#### **\* Objectives of the treatment**

By the end of this treatment, students were expected to:

- use the selected grammatical rules in speaking appropriately.
- use the selected grammatical rules in writing correctly.

#### **\* Content and duration of the treatment**

The content was divided into nine sessions, in each session the students learned the form, the use and the function of a specific grammatical rule. Each grammatical rule was presented in two stages: before class and in class. In the before-class stage, the teacher uploaded the You Tube video containing basic knowledge and concepts to the "English Club" site. Students had to watch the specified You Tube video at home, answer a short quiz and write down any questions they encountered. During the in class stage, the teacher and students had face-to-face interaction and discussion of these questions. The students were given individualized guidance to clarify misunderstood concepts. Besides, pair and group work were emphasized to help underachievers to participate in different tasks and exchanging opinions with their normal peers. At the end of the in class stage, students were given another quiz to assess their learning status. (For more details, see appendix C).

The treatment was administered in the second term of the school year 2015/ 2016. The procedures followed in each session for the experimental group were as the following:

- 1- T. discussed the questions students wrote about the grammatical point in the You Tube video.
- 2- T. revised the home quiz and discussed different answers.
- 3- Individual students presented parts of the You Tube video.
- 4- Students worked in pairs to use the identified grammatical rule in different sentences.
- 5- Students worked in groups to present a dialogue that includes the grammatical rule.
- 6- Students were also involved in different competitive tasks such as identifying errors in passages, rewriting sentences to give the same meaning, and correcting grammatical errors in passages.
- 7- Students worked in groups to answer the in class quiz and discussed their answers with the teacher.

**\* Evaluation**

The evaluation techniques used in the program consisted of both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. Quantitative evaluation was divided into formative and summative evaluation:

**•Formative evaluation**

It was used for the purpose of assessing the progress of the students in understanding the form, the meaning, and the function of the grammatical rules as well as providing the necessary feedback that can help them use them appropriately during speaking and writing tasks. Students used to have two quizzes; one after watching the video and the other one at the end of the session. They used to discuss the first quiz at the beginning of the session as a home assignment as for the second quiz students get feedback from the teacher at the end of the session. (For more details about the hand outs, see appendix D).

**Summative evaluation**

It included the administration of the pre-post grammatical performance tests to investigate the effectiveness of FL in developing English grammatical performance in speaking and writing. Concerning qualitative evaluation, the six underachieving language learners at the experimental group were interviewed at the end of the treatment to investigate their impression about FL and awareness of changes in their grammatical performance.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****Results**

The results of the study will be presented in terms of the study hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis one: There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post grammatical performance in speaking test in favour of the former.

In order to test the previous hypothesis, the researcher used Mann-Whitney test for independent samples. The results of this test proved to be consistent with the above stated hypothesis. The following table shows this statistical significance.

Table (2): Mann-Whitney values of post grammatical performance in speaking test

Skills	Level	Experimental group			Control group			Z-value	P-value
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
Speaking	Underachievers	6	9.33	56.0	7	5.00	35.0	2.02	0.044
	Normal students	18	23.81	428.5	18	13.19	237.5	3.03	0.002

It is apparent from data presented in table (2) that there were statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the grammatical performance in speaking in favour of the latter for both underachieving language learners and normal students. Thus the first hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis two: There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group on the post grammatical performance in writing test in favour of the former. In order to verify the validity of the previous hypothesis, Mann-Whitney test for independent samples was used. The results proved that there were statistically significant difference between the mean ranks of post grammatical performance in writing test for both underachievers and normal students in favour of the experimental group. Table (3) shows this statistical significance.

Table ( 3): Mann-Whitney values of post grammatical performance in writing test for both groups

Skills	Level	Experimental group			Control group			Z-value	P-value
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		
Writing	Underachievers	6	9.33	56.0	7	5.00	35.0	2.00	0.045
	Normal students	18	26.78	482.0	18	10.22	184.0	4.72	0.001

Close inspection of data presented in table (3) revealed that there were statistically significant differences at 0.045 for underachievers and 0.001 for normal students in favour of the experimental group. Therefore, this provides enough evidence to support hypothesis two. Hypothesis three: There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking tests for the experimental group in favour of the latter. In order to test the previous hypothesis, the researcher used Npar tests - Wilcoxon Signed Ranks for paired samples. The results proved to be consistent with the above stated hypothesis. The following table shows this statistical significance.

Table (4 ): Npar tests -Wilcoxon Signed Ranks of pre- post grammatical performance in speaking tests for the experimental group

Skills	Level		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z-value	P-value
Speaking	Underachievers	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	2.21	0.027
		Positive Ranks	6	3.5	21		
		Ties	0				
		Total	6				
	Normal students	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	3.73	0.001
		Positive Ranks	18	9.5	171		
		Ties	0				
		Total	18				

It is apparent from data presented in table (4) that there were a statistically significant difference at 0.027 for underachievers and 0.001 for normal students on the pre- post grammatical performance in speaking test for the experimental group in favour of the post test.

Hypothesis four: There would be statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in writing tests for the experimental group in favour of the latter.

The aforementioned hypothesis has been verified in the present study. Tables (5) shows the mean ranks of the pre-post grammatical performance in writing test for both underachievers and normal students in the experimental group.

Table (5): Npar tests -Wilcoxon Signed Ranks of pre-post grammatical performance in writing tests for the experimental group

Skills	Level		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z-value	P-value
Writing	Underachievers	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	2.20	0.028
		Positive Ranks	6	3.5	21		
		Ties	0				
		Total	6				
	Normal students	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	3.72	0.001
		Positive Ranks	18	9.5	171		
		Ties	0				
		Total	18				

Clearly, table 5 indicates that the obtained values of Z for Wilcoxon test were significant at different levels; 0.028 for underachievers and 0.001 for normal students in favour of the post test. As a result, the fourth hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis five: There would be no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking tests for the control group in favour of the latter. The researcher used Npar tests -Wilcoxon Signed Ranks for paired samples to test the significance of difference in the mean ranks of the control group between the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking tests. The results proved to be consistent with the above stated hypothesis. Results of the fifth hypothesis are presented in table (6).

Table (6): Npar tests -Wilcoxon Signed Ranks of pre- post grammatical performance in speaking tests for the control group

Skills	Level		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z-value	P-value
Speaking	Underachievers	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	1.73	0.083
		Positive Ranks	3	2.00	6		
		Ties	4				
		Total	7				
	Normal students	Negative Ranks	5	10.30	51.50	1.19	0.233
		Positive Ranks	12	8.46	101.5		
		Ties	1				
		Total	18				

The results revealed that the difference in the mean ranks of the control group between the pre and post grammatical performance in speaking test was statistically insignificant for both underachievers and normal students. Thus this hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis six: There would be no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the pre and post grammatical performance in writing tests for the control group in favour of the latter.

The aforementioned hypothesis has been rejected in the present study. Tables (7) shows the mean ranks of the pre-post grammatical performance in writing test for both underachievers and normal students in the control group.

Table (7): Npar tests –Wilcoxon Signed Ranks of pre- post grammatical performance in writing tests for the control group

Skills	Level		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z-value	P-value
Writing	Underachievers	Negative Ranks	0	0	0	2.37	0.018
		Positive Ranks	7	4.00	28		
		Ties	0				
		Total	7				
	Normal students	Negative Ranks	3	6.83	20.50	2.83	0.005
		Positive Ranks	15	10.03	150.5		
		Ties	0				
		Total	18				

It is apparent from data presented in table (7) that there were statistically significant differences at 0.018 for underachievers and 0.005 for normal students between the mean ranks of the pre-post grammatical performance in writing test in favour of the post test for both underachievers and normal students in the control group. It is clear that the regular method of instruction improved students' grammatical performance in writing. To find out which group of students achieved the highest level of grammatical performance in both speaking and writing, the percentage of improvement was calculated. The following table shows this percentage.

Table (8): The percentage of improvement in grammatical performance for both groups

Level	Groups	Writing skill			Speaking skill		
		Pre	Post	(%)	Pre	Post	(%)
Normal Students	Experimental group	42.42	70.78	66.86%	28.78	38.00	32.04%
	Control group	37.11	42.78	15.27%	28.06	28.83	2.77%
Underachievers	Experimental group	20.83	37.67	80.80%	20.67	29.17	41.13%
	Control group	20.07	26.00	29.54%	18.43	18.86	2.33%

Based on table (8), it could be stated that the highest level of improvement was obtained by underachievers in the experimental group 80.8% on grammatical performance in writing followed by their normal peers 66.86%. Generally, students' improvement in grammatical performance in writing was better than their improvement in grammatical performance in speaking in both groups.

### **Qualitative data**

After the treatment, the six underachieving language learners at the experimental group were interviewed to investigate their points of view about FL and awareness of changes in their grammatical performance. When students were asked about what they liked/disliked about FL, their responses revealed the following:

1- All the students indicated that they liked watching grammar You Tube videos at home, since it prepared them for class. They could access the videos at any time. In this way, it helped them to form the basic knowledge about each grammatical rule before class. They also focused on the intensive practice of different types of exercises in addition to using a variety of quizzes in each session. They liked it because it helped them evaluate their understanding of the grammatical rules.

2- Students indicated that they felt more motivated to participate in different grammatical tasks and more confident about their ability to answer grammatical questions. They also liked writing questions about the content of the You Tube videos because it helped them focus on the meaning of these rules. Moreover, they attributed their progress to the variety and significance of grammatical tasks and group work that helped them understand the meaning of different grammatical points.

3- The immediate feedback that they used to get after answering the quizzes helped them understand the use, meaning and function of different grammatical rules. There was a high level of motivation and participation during speaking and writing tasks which led to more learning. Four students described the simple language of the grammar You Tube videos as a key element in their progress. The other two students expressed their preference of Egyptian to British teachers in presenting grammatical points in You Tube videos.

These quantitative data represented a positive picture of students' attitudes and perception of FL. The interview responses indicated the importance of You Tube videos, grammar quizzes, and pair and group work that helped students to learn in a fun and motivating environment. In addition, students' beliefs about the nature of grammar and its importance in communication changed as the focus was on the discussion of meaning of grammatical rules and their functions.

### **DISCUSSION**

The first result showed that there were statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on the grammatical performance in writing test in favour of the latter for both underachieving language learners and normal students. This positive result supports the findings of other studies like those of Gilboy, et al., (2015) and Tune, et al., (2013). This progress might be attributed to the following factors:

- Giving underachieving language learners the chance to use You Tube videos provided the motivation and individual attention that they needed to improve their grammatical performance.
- Using self-learning gave underachieving language learners the chance to become less dependent on the teacher and share responsibility with their peers.
- Watching videos at home generated a climate that is non-threatening to learners. In other words, it supported learners in constructing knowledge while reducing psychological barriers.
- Peer interaction and student–teacher interaction were emphasized in class.
- FL provided students with the content that they can use to enhance learning during class time.

In addition, the second result revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on the grammatical performance in speaking test in favour of the latter for both underachieving language learners and normal students. But there were no such difference for students in the control group. This positive result supports the findings of other studies like those of Missildine, et al., (2013) and Schawankl (2013). This result might be due to the fact that the more time students spend in practising different motivating tasks, the better they were in English grammatical performance in speaking. Moreover, they were able to imitate native speakers in You Tube videos

The third result showed that in the control group there were statistically significant differences at 0.01 for underachievers and 0.005 for normal students between the mean ranks of the pre-post grammatical performance in writing test in favour of the post test for both underachievers and normal students in the control group. This progress might be attributed to the intensive practice of answering different grammatical exercises and studying for the final exams. On the other hand, there was no such improvement in the pre-post grammatical performance in speaking test which might be due to the fact that many students do not pay much attention to speaking skill since it is not evaluated in our educational system.

## **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Conclusions**

It is important to mention that the results of the study are limited by the sample size, the characteristics of the subjects, the length of the study and the selected grammatical rules used in the study. Within these limitations, it can be concluded that FL is effective in developing grammatical performance in speaking and writing of EFL underachieving language learners and their normal peers at the secondary stage. These results support the indicators of success the FL studies revealed in other contexts (Gilboy, et al., 2015; Missildine, et al., 2013; Schawankl, 2013; and Tune, et al., 2013). To sum up, the results of the study can provide the basis for many other treatments based on FL to develop different skills in different language learning contexts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of this study and the above mentioned conclusions, the following recommendations seem pertinent:

1-EFL teachers should be encouraged to use FL to teach students how to use grammatical rules appropriately in speaking and writing for the following reasons:

- It helps students, especially underachieving language learners, to work at their own pace while allowing teachers the ability to identify learning misconceptions and provide immediate remediation.
- It helps them use specific steps to bridge the gap between their expected and actual academic achievement.
- It is flexible as pupils can practice it as individuals or groups or as a whole class.
- It is fun and motivating as students can watch videos at home for many times to understand these grammatical rules.
- It creates an effective use of class time for engaged learning through collaboration and cooperation.
- It increases student-teacher and student-student interaction.
- It provides the time for ongoing, frequent, and immediate feedback that is highly contiguous with grammatical tasks.

2- Underachieving language learners should be given special interventions to compensate for their inability to motivate themselves and regulate their academic performance.

3- Educators should strongly consider teaching their students how to use web applications not only for communication and entertainment purposes but also for learning different grammatical points.

### **Suggestions for further research**

1- Conducting studies to use FL with EFL learners at various educational levels and in different language learning contexts.

2- More research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of FL in developing different language skills.

3- More research is needed to examine different treatments that help underachieving language learners to use grammatical rules in speaking and writing correctly.

4- Conducting studies comparing the grammatical performance of both genders using other interventions.

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