Effectiveness of Deductive Teaching and Use of L1 in English Articles Acquisition

Dr. Abdulkhaleq A. Al-Qahtani
Associate Prof., Faculty of Languages and Translation
King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia
PO Box 9100, Abha 61421, Saudi Arabia.

ABSTRACT:

The present study hopes to shed light on one of the most debated issues in the acquisition of English as a foreign language, namely whether teaching the English articles useful or not. The study also inquiries about the effectiveness of the use of students' mother tongue when teaching these articles. Previous literature has not proven the viability of those approaches particularly for Saudi students. Thus, the study attempts to answer two major questions. The first aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the deductive instruction approach that is widely used in grammar teaching, and its success in assisting students' acquisition of articles in Saudi Arabian EFL context. The second question provides insights into the practicality of using students' first language (L1) as a convenient resource in teaching such fine aspects of English grammar. Two groups of university students (test group-control group) presented pre/posttests, after the pre-test, the two groups were taught by the common teaching method (the deductive teaching approach), the test group have been taught by Arabic and English languages, while the control group has been taught by English language only and the same method. Every group was in three levels: the first, second and third levels in grammar course, bachelor degree in King Khalid University. The results showed that formal deductive focused instruction did not benefit students in general. However, certain subgroups of students made good use of instruction, counterintuitively, the advanced level group that received instruction solely in the target language (TL). The results led to suggest that L1 use in teaching English articles is not beneficial, particularly at the advanced levels of English proficiency.

Keywords: deductive teaching approach, EFL teaching, English articles, second language acquisition.

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جدوى التدريس الاستنتاجي واستخدام اللغة الأم في اكتساب أدوات التنكير والتعريف في اللغة الانجليزية

د.عبدالخالق بن عبدالهادي القحطاني

الأستاذ المشارك بقسم اللغة الانجليزية

كلية اللغات والترجمة في جامعة الملك خالد

ملخص:

تأتي هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على واحدة من أكثر القضايا جدلًا في مجال اكتساب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية/أجنبية، وهي ما إذا كان تدريس أو عدم تدريس أدوات التنكير والتعريف الانجليزية مجديًا في حد ذاته، ومدى فائدة استخدام لغة الطلاب الأم في تحقيق ذلك، لذا تهدف هذه الدراسة للإجابة عن سؤالين رئيسيين: الأول عن جدوى طريقة التدريس الاستنتاجي الذي يستخدم على نطاق واسع في تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، ومدى جدواه في مساعدة الطلاب اكساب لأدوات التنكير والتعريف للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المملكة العربية السعودية، والسؤال الثاني يطمح ليجيب عن جدوى استخدام اللغة الأولى للطلاب (L1) كأسلوب مريح وجاذب في تدريس هذه الجوانب الدقيقة لقواعد اللغة الانجليزية، حيث إن الدراسات السابقة لم تثبت إلى هذا الوقت جدوى هذه الأساليب للطلاب السعوديين تحديدًا، وفي هذه الدراسة قدمت مجموعتان (مجموعة اختبار والأخرى ضابطة) من طلاب الجامعة وعقد لهم اختبارين قبلي وبعدي، بعد الاختبار القبلي تم تدريس المجموعتين بأسلوب التدريس الشائع وهو التدريس الاستنتاجي (the deductive teaching approach)، مجموعة الاختبار حصلت على التدريس باللغتين العربية والانجليزية، أما المجموعة الضابطة فحصلت على التدريس باللغة الانجليزية فقط بنفس الأسلوب، وكل مجموعة كانت على ثلاثة مستويات: المستوى الأول والثاني والثالث في مادة قواعد اللغة الانجليزية في برنامج بكالوريوس اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الملك خالد، وتوصلت الدراسة إلى عدم استفادة الطلاب بشكل مجدٍ إحصائيًا من تدريس أدوات التنكير والتعريف بصفة عامة، ولكن عند تقسيم الطلاب إلى طلاب متفوقين وطلاب عاديين تبين أن الطلاب المتفوقين في أعلى مستوى حققوا الفائدة القصوى من التدريس وبشكل مهم إحصائيًا، والممتع أن المجموعة التي حصلت على هذه النتيجة هي مجموعة المتفوقين في المجموعة الضابطة وليست مجموعة الاختبار، مما يقود إلى الاستنتاج بأن استخدام اللغة الأم للطلاب كأسلوب مريح غير مفيد في مساعدة الطلاب لاكتساب أدوات التعريف والتنكير في اللغة الانجليزية.

الكلمـات المفتاحيـة: طريقـة التـدريس الاسـتنتاجي؛ تـدريس اللغـة الانجليزيـة كلغـة أجنبية؛ أدوات التنكـير والتعريـف في اللغة الانجليزية؛ اكتساب اللغة الثانية.

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INTRODUCTION:

A unanimous consensus among scholars in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) attests to the fact that the acquisition of the English article system is difficult for second language learners (Butler, 2002; Hawkins *et. al*, 2006; Millar, 2006; Haiyan and Lianrui, 2010; Snape and Kupisch, 2010; Jian, 2013 and many others). Because the misuse of articles could result in many miscommunication incidents even among highly proficient users (Pica 1983; Butler, 2002; Alhaysony, 2012), the call to find ways to overcome this issue has intensified over the past several decades. Thus, miscommunication, caused by non-target-like use of articles, exhibited by L2 learners is due to the complex nature of the English article system (Master, 1997; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Zdorenko and Paradis, 2008). It has been assumed that article use is about shared knowledge and experiences among participants, speaker/writer on the one hand and listener/reader on the other (Bickerton, 1981; Master, 1995; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

L2 learners were classified into two groups according to their L1s: there are certain difficulties for L2 learners from article-less {-ART} first languages, L1s (e.g. Chinese, Russian, Korean, etc.). The type of difficulties they exhibit is somewhat different from those L2 learners coming from L1 with articles {+ART} (e.g. Arabic, French, and Spanish). Master (1987, 1997) contends that L2 learners from {+ART} language backgrounds are one level ahead of their {-ART} counterparts. Ionin (2003), Ionin *et. al.* (2004), Ionin *et. al.* (2008), Hawkins *et. al.* (2006) and Ionin *et. al.* (2009) contend that L1 transfer is unmistakable. L2 learners from {+ART} make use of their knowledge of the article system in their respective L1s, and consequently those L2 learners from {- ART} show more variations (fluctuations) in their

performances (Master, 1997; Lardiere,2004). Charbaszcz and Jiang (2014) conducted a comparative study between highly proficient English users from two different L1s: Spanish {+ART} and Russian {-ART}. They found that Spanish speakers performed almost perfectly on the use of the articles whereas their Russian counterparts did not do as well.

Instruction of the English article system

The teaching of the article system, however, has been a point of debate in the field. On the one hand, there are people who subscribe to Krashen's notion of the dichotomy of unconscious acquisition vs. conscious learning where the article system was classified among the acquired features (unteachable) of English (Dulay, *et.al.* 1982). The advocates of this position see that instruction does not improve L2 production of the articles (Snape and Yusa, 2013), and class time is better devoted to the learned features of the target language-TL (Schwartz, 1993).

Extensive exposure to natural language in its natural milieu remains the ideal setting for SLA and second language learning for both processes (unconscious acquisition and conscious learning), and exposure entails growth in L2 knowledge (Schwartz, 1993). Actually, the proponents of not teaching the article system apparently operate from an ESL platform/setting where L2 learners have ample opportunities to acquire many aspects of the TL naturally from their surroundings.

Lopez (2015) conducted an experimental study on 50 low-intermediate Chinese students divided into three groups and tested after undergoing three types of instruction treatments. One group received instruction on specificity and definiteness, the second group received normal/traditional instruction on definite/indefinite contrasts, and the third did not receive article instruction at all.

Interestingly, the three groups made comparable improvements. Furthermore, the group, which did not receive instruction at all along with the group that had normal/traditional instruction, made significant improvements in one of the tests administered by the researcher (the time-judgment task test).

On the other hand, there are leading figures in the field who believe that the article system is indeed teachable, and focused instruction is particularly helpful. The evidence gathered from experimental and semi-experimental research is mounting in favor of focused instruction. However, the type of evidence cited in some of these studies attests to the improvement in certain aspects of the English article system, not all aspects (Master 1987, 1994, 1997; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999; Master, 2002; Miller, 2005; Kao, 2013).

Acquiring English articles in EFL contexts

In EFL contexts, exposure to natural language, where acquisition ideally occurs, is minimal. The major sources of input in such contexts are primarily classroom instruction, interactions and assigned texts despite the availability of media resources and other advanced technologies (e.g., the internet, social media applications, etc.).

Even within the EFL context, it was found that the intensity of exposure varies among teaching settings as was found by Shalaby (2014). He compared the performances of Arab sophomore students in high school who were enrolled in two different school environments: English-medium school and Arabic-medium school in the United Arab Emirates. The English medium school group outperformed the Arabic school significantly in their accuracy of the English article system.

This state of affairs adds a burden to the responsibilities of EFL instructors. They not only need to introduce their students to new forms and functions of the TL, but

also to make up for the absence of natural language. The English article system is one of those areas that poses a nuancing challenge to both the instructor and the students. EFL students become aware of the importance of the article system as they increasingly receive all sorts of negative feedback from their interlocutors and composition teachers (McGirt, 1984; Master, 2002; Millar, 2005).

Saudi Arabian EFL context is an example of this situation where students' input is limited in large part to classroom interaction and instruction. Exposure to the natural language is usually restricted to watching movies or clips on YouTube. Thus, natural acquisition of those aspects of language-in this case the article system-suffers greatly despite students' access to an article system in their own L1 (Arabic is a {+ART} language).

As surprised as Crompton was in 2011 when he said, "Surprisingly little has been written on English article system errors made by L1 Arabic speakers" (p. 5), the lack of sufficient research continues. Most previous research on English articles was mainly error analysis studies. The bulk of other research was conducted in artificial environments where participating students were pulled out of their respective classes based on either their language proficiencies or their L1 backgrounds. Apart from the research cited above (e.g. Master 1990; Master, 1994; Millar, 2005; Snape and Yusa, 2013; Lopez, 2015), not enough studies have tested the viability and/or effectiveness of instruction as practiced in real-world classrooms on the acquisition of the English article system, specifically, the inductive vs. the broadly used deductive teaching approach in grammar courses. The Saudi Arabian context in particular lacks such studies that would either support the status quo or warrant some partial and/or radical changes. In addition, no study was found that dealt with the use of students' L1 in instruction when

introducing/explicating the concepts of the English article system.

Grammar teaching method in Saudi Arabia

The most widely used method of teaching grammar in Saudi Arabia (and possibly in many other EFL contexts) is the deductive teaching method, which is a manifestation of the teacher-centered approach (Al-Qahtani, 2015). In this method, the instructor introduces the grammatical rule first, then offers examples, and then ends with exercises. The assigned grammar textbooks used in most Saudi Arabian universities adhere to this deductive method (e.g. Azar's grammar books).

The focus-on-form techniques are also used within the framework of the deductive approach to help cater to individual needs as they arise from time to time. Instructors use either reactive or preemptive responses. For example, the instructor would correct mistakes as students commit them. At times, when certain mistakes or errors reoccur, the instructor would preemptively bring the problem to students' attention.

The purpose of the study

Thus, the present study is to scrutinize the effectiveness of formal instruction (as it is actually practiced in regular Saudi classrooms described above) on the acquisition of the English article system subscribing to the position that English articles are indeed teachable. Based on the mounting evidence cited above, it is assumed that since Arabic is an article-based language {+ART}, L2 learners from this language would acquire the system easily and score well on assessment tests. It is also assumed that focused instruction using students' L1 would have a positive effect on students' performance as learners would have a clear/precise understanding of the grammatical elements in focus.

In sum, the ensuing study attempts to answer the following questions within the context of its population:

1. Does formal instruction (the deductive teaching approach) assist in the acquisition of the English article system?

2. Does the use of L1 in instruction help with the acquisition of the articles as manifested in actual test results?

3. Do high-achieving students benefit more from instruction as opposed to the rest of their classmates?

METHODOLOGY

The participants

Two hundred and two (202) university students from a BA English and Translation Program (8-level program, each level equals one semester) in the southwestern part of Saudi Arabia participated initially in this study. They were distributed over nine sections of English grammar courses at three levels: Grammar 1, Grammar 2, and Grammar 3. Grammar 1 is offered in the first semester of enrollment, henceforth G1. Grammars 2 & 3 were provided in the second and the third levels, G2 and G3, respectively. Students were males 18 to 21 year old and native speakers of Arabic. Their exact L2 proficiency was not measured for this study for the following reasons:

1. The main purpose of the present study was to discover the effectiveness of instruction using both languages L1 & L2 in general, not focusing on the types of error or the hierarchy of difficulty, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

2. Assigning students to groups according to their exact levels would have disturbed the BA program progression (students are admitted in cohorts) and eliminated one of the objectives of the study, which is describing the effectiveness of instruction as it is practiced and as it naturally happens in our program following our syllabuses. In addition, all enrolled students must take these courses regardless of their language proficiency.

3. The participants in each level were assigned randomly to their respective sections. Thus, uniformity is expected. In

fact, students' English proficiency is highly comparable, as proven by the small standard deviations around the means in their test scores below.

4. In terms of proficiency it has been noticed by faculty members judging from past experiences and scores in various proficiency tests in skill courses that the vast majority of our BA students (up to 90%) are classified as beginners in G1, mostly high beginners in G2, and low intermediate in G3. Sporadic exceptions were traced from time to time when we had highly competent students in English, but this would be the exception not the norm (Usually those individuals have had unusual experiences like living in the US as children or having had ESL courses in native English speaking environments). Such cases were not represented in this study.

For practical reasons namely attendance and dropouts, not all of the 202 students took both tests as shown in table (1). Thus, the total number of students who took both tests was 121. For the purpose of this study, only this number will be considered to answer the research questions.

Table (1): number of participants in the three levels.

	Total No. Students	Pre-Test only	Posttest only	No. students took both tests
G1 Arab	22	0	0	22
G1 TL	20	1	5	14
G1 TL	24	4	7	13
G2 TL	29	13	7	9
G2 TL	27	6	5	16
G2 Arab	20	0	6	14
G3 TL	18	5	5	8
G3 Arab	26	5	6	15
G3 TL	16	1	5	10
Total	202			121

The assignment of the students to their sections at each level was random by the registration office. Thus, the three levels are actually two groups of students; one is taught the target grammatical points with the help of L1 (treatment group) n=51, and the other is taught exclusively in English by native English-speaking instructors (control) n=70. First, we want to know whether instruction helped significantly in each group at each level. Second, we need to see if the means between the treatment groups and the control groups vary significantly. Then we will take a closer look to see if high achievers in each group would make any significant improvement in either (the treatment or the control), so we would not be duped/misled by the statistics.

The procedure

The students were given a pretest that consists of 11 items that included twenty-five cloze gaps on a Sunday morning. The items where adapted from the assigned grammar texts (Azar, B. and Hagen, S. 2006). The full mark was 25. They were directed to fill in the blanks with the appropriate article *(a/an, the, zero article, and the null article* as explained by Master 1997). The data were collected, analyzed and saved.

Then, the participants in both groups, the control and the treatment, were provided with normal class instruction following their regular syllabus utilizing focus-on form techniques (as defined by Ellis, 2015) within the traditional deductive teaching method widely practiced here in Saudi Arabia. The

presented content was on article use, count/non-count noun contrasts. After instruction, students were allowed to do the exercises offered in the text (Azar Grammar Book, third edition). The time allotted for exercises is towards the end of the class meeting, the teachers offered help to correct mistakes as they occurred in students' answers.

The only difference between the treatment and the control groups is that at each level of the three, one section received similar instruction by a native speaker of Arabic who instructed them in both languages and made sure that the students understood the subject matter in their L1. One week after the instruction, the nine sections were given a posttest. The posttest was identical to the test administered in the pretest round.

It is also useful to state at this time that students study the article system and count/non-count nouns as part of their grammar classes at the three levels. In other words, G1 sections study the topic for the first time, G2 students study it for the second time, and G3 for the third time.

1- Tool inter rater reliability

The test was given to six native English speakers who are also English teachers to validate the test and to double check on the accuracy of the tool. Only one item was a bit problematic in which one instructor was not sure whether it was better to put *the* or *a* in the following example:

*Ali Salem teaches at **the/a** university.* (Ali Salem is a known person from the context).

Three teachers opted for the indefinite article *a*, two for the definite article *the*, and one provided both articles. In a meeting called for by the researcher, the three said that the article *a* is better because there might be more than one university in the area. The other two said that the definite article is better because usually people in the area know this person and there is actually one university. The difference was resolved and the instructors agreed to the fact that there is only one university in the area and this known person works for it. Therefore, the definite article was a final choice. What is interesting is that the instructors who opted for the indefinite article grew up in metropolitan areas in the United States (Philadelphia, D.C, and Los Angeles) where there are numerous colleges and universities, and the other two persons lived in college towns in the Midwest and in rural Virginia, the United States. The researcher raised the observation and the six instructors agreed that their choices might have been products of their environments.

2- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Grammar 1 (G1) results

The statistical analysis of the pretest and posttest of the first level treatment group shows that formal instruction did very little in the process of acquiring the English article system at Level 1 (G1). As shown in table (2), the two means are not that different despite the slight improvement in the posttest. The p-value = 0.14 which is not statically significant at the *p = 0.05* level.

Table (2): pretest-posttest difference in the treatment group G1

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G1 Pretest	22	9.18	2.922	-1.54-	.139
Posttest	22	10.55	4.091		

Likewise, The analysis of the pretest-posttest control group were found also not to be significant as shown in table (3) when the paired sample t-test was conducted. Like the treatment group, the control group gained a little as could be seen from the two means (pretest mean= 11.44, and the posttest mean = 12.22), but the difference was not significant at p= 0.05. The p value was 0.30.

Table (3): pretest-posttest control group Paired Samples Statistics

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G1	pretest	27	11.44	4.04	-1.048-	.3
	Posttest	27	12.22	4.98		

To see whether instruction in Arabic (students' L1) would have significantly helped the treatment group as opposed to the control group who received their instruction exclusively in the target language, the independent sample t-test was conducted. Table (4) shows the results of this test. The results show that the difference between the treatment group and the control group was not significant where p = 0.20 which is greater than the required significance level of p = 0.05.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G1	Treat.	22	10.55	4.091	-1.267-	.195
	Cont.	27	12.22	4.987		

Table (4): G1 the treatment vs control groups' results

In sum, G1 based on the data did not benefit from instruction in the acquisition of the article system in both groups. Having said that, the slight improvement in both should also be acknowledged.

These intriguing findings led the researcher to reexamine the data to see whether high achievers, based on their final grade in the course would benefit significantly from instruction. High achievers were recognized as those who scored B (80%) and above in the end of course evaluation. In the G1 treatment group, there were nine students. The paired t-test shows that there still no significant difference, and instruction did very little as the case in the general group. Table (5) shows the results: p = 0.3. Interestingly, the group of high achievers had slight improvement at almost the same pace as the rest of their group, as the mean difference in the general group was 1.67 and in the high achievers group 1.66.

Table (5): high achievers in G1 treatment group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G1_pretest_Treatment	11.56	9	2.351	-1.125-	.293
	G1_postest_Treatment	13.22	9	3.833		

To make sure that the same applied to the control group, the pair test of high achievers in the control group was conducted. Almost the same result was found in the high achiever control group as the treatment as shown in table (6). Actually the mean difference between the two groups was almost the same 1.66 treatment and 1.85 control as well as the significance level (p = 0.293) in the treatment and (p = 2.63) in the control.

Table (6): high achievers in G1 Control

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G1_pretest_Control	14.86	7	4.059	-1.236-	.263
	G1_posttest_control	16.71	7	6.264		

Grammar 2 (G2) results

G2 groups did not do much, either. The treatment group also did not benefit from instruction just like G1. The slight improvement detected in G1 was detected in this group as well. The mean of the posttest was found to be higher than the mean of the pretest. The difference,

however, was found to be not significant at the p = 0.05 level, (p = 0.3). Table (7) shows the results of paired sample t-test and statistics of this group.

Table (7): pretest-posttest difference in the treatment group G2

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G2_pretest	14	10.93	3.852	-1.07-	.302
	G2_posttest	14	11.50	3.345		

The control group advantage from formal instruction in the target language was minimal in the present data as could be seen in the statistics in Table (8). The difference between the pretest and the posttest was not significant. The p-value was 0.28. A positive difference in the mean was detected, however not significant. Pretest mean = 10.72 and the posttest was 11.48.

Table (8): pretest-posttest difference in the control group G2

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G2_pretest	25	10.72	3.669	-1.107-	.279
	G2_posttest	25	11.48	4.073		

When the two groups at this level (G2), the treatment and the control, were tested for the effectiveness of using students' L1 in instruction, the results were found to be not significant. Table (9) shows that the two means were almost identical. The mean of the treatment was 11.50 and the control was 11.48 with a significance of .64 which is obviously much greater than 0.05. Thus, using students' L1 in instruction of the article system in English seems to have had no impact on the acquisition of article use at this level. Furthermore, the use of formal instruction in both groups was not beneficial at the statistical significance level.

Table (9): G2 the treatment vs. control group results

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G2	Treat.	14	11.50	3.345	.016	.642
	Cont.	25	11.48	4.073		

High achievers were identified. In the treatment group, there were six students and four students in the control group. The pretest mean for the six students' treatment group was 13 and the posttest mean was 13.5. The control group pretest mean was 17.75 and the posttest was 18. The difference between the pretest and the posttest was 0.5 in the treatment and 0.25 in the control, which are obviously not significant at the 0 .05 level. This result echoes the G1 results above. The difference between the posttests in both groups is relatively high (13.5 vs. 18) and of a significant difference, but it cannot be ascribed to instruction because the control group pretest was much higher than the pretest in the treatment. Thus, instruction was irrelevant. In fact, the control group gain from instruction was minimal as indicated by the mean difference in each group above.

3- Grammar 3 (G3) results

G3 treatment group did not benefit from instruction as could be seen in Table (10). The pretest mean was 12.2 and the posttest one was 12.8 and the significance was (0.51). Even the slight positive difference detected in the previous two groups was not that obvious as the two means difference was just (0.6).

Table (10): pretest-posttest difference in the treatment group G3

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G3_pretest	15	12.20	4.507	-.676-	.510
	G3_posttest	15	12.80	5.102		

The control group echoes the same results in the treatment group. Table (11) attests to this fact. The pretest mean was 11.78 and the posttest was 12.72. The p-value was much greater than 0.05. Thus, no significance was detected.

Table (11): pretest-posttest difference in the control group G3

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Pair 1	G3_pretest_Control	11.78	18	4.735	-1.111-	.282
	G3_posttest_Control	12.72	18	5.929		

To compare the two groups for statistical significance, an independent sample t-test was conducted as shown in Table (12). Both of the groups did not benefit from instruction and the treatment group did not benefit from instruction in the students' L1.

Table (12): G3 the treatment vs control groups' results

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G3	Treat.	15	12.80	5.102	.040	.69
	Cont.	18	12.72	5.929		

In the G3 group, four students in the treatment group and five in the control were identified as high achievers. The pretest mean for the treatment group was 15.5 and the posttest was 17.75. The p-value was .34, which is greater than the .05 threshold.

The mean for the control was 15.8 and 20 for the posttest. The t-test value was *(t = -3.096),* and the p-value this time was *(p = 0.036)*, which is less than (0.05). In this, group students seem to have gained significant improvement due to instruction in the TL rather than their L1. When the two groups, the treatment and the control, were compared, the independent sample t-test showed that the difference between them was not statistically significant; the p-value was (0.15), Table (13). Thus, though the control group benefitted from instruction in the TL significantly, the difference did not place this group higher enough to the statistical significance above the treatment group.

Table (13): High achievers Treatment vs. control group

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
G3	Treat.	4	17.75	6.946	-.584-	.153
	Cont.	5	20.00	4.637		

General summary

In sum, the direct answer to the first question, (*does formal/traditional instruction assist the acquisition of the English article system?)* will be that traditional instruction (deductive instruction) was not beneficial for students at the three levels (G1, G2, and G3). As could be seen in tables (14) and (15) which present the descriptive statistics of the F-test (the analysis of variance test), the means of the posttests at the three levels in both groups, the treatment and the control, were not far apart.

Table (14) presents the treatment group with the mean ranging from 10.55 in G1 to

11.41 in G3, very little progress. Table (15) presents the descriptive statistics of the control group. The vast majority of students in both groups scored poorly on the posttest; keep in mind that the score is out of 25. The F test value in the control group was (F= .346), and the between groups significance was *(p = 0.71)*. Likewise, in the treatment group at the three levels the F test value was (F= 1.23) and the significance level was *(p = 0 .3)*, which are both above the *(p = 0.05)* level of statistical significance. In addition, the small standard deviation signifies a strong homogeneity among the participants.

In the present study, the posttest was conducted only one week after instruction because of the fear that a delayed posttest might allow for other factors/variables (other than instruction) to come into play as a result of a late posttest. However, the three levels were part of an ongoing program that has been running the same teaching package, using the same materials, for four years at the time of the study.

Thus, the fact that G2 has had the same course and the same syllabus using the same deductive teaching method as the semester before sheds light on the retention rate of instruction. The general mean in this level was 11.29 in the treatment and 11.48 in the control out of 25 (see Tables 14 and 15), which is almost the same as G1 groups who are taking the lesson for the first time. G3 also took the same topic for the third time in the third semester, and their general mean was 12.8 in the treatment and 12.72 in the control out of 25 (see Tables 14 and 15), which is almost as low as the other two means in the earlier semesters. Therefore, we can conclude that deductive instruction of articles does not help in the acquisition in the long run in the Saudi Arabian EFL context, and the retention rate is almost zero.

The answer to the second research question (*Does the use of L1 in instruction help the acquisition of the articles as manifested in the actual test results?*) is counterintuitively negative. The students in the treatment group in the three levels did not do well and the progress made was not, as mentioned earlier and shown in Table (14), statistically significant.

Table (14): results of the three levels (treatment)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
G1	22	10.55	4.091	4	20
G2	14	11.29	3.667	5	17
G3	15	12.80	5.102	8	25
Total	51	11.41	4.327	4	25

Table (15): results of the three levels (control)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
G1	27	12.22	4.987	5	22
G2	25	11.48	4.073	6	23
G3	18	12.72	5.929	4	24
Total	70	12.09	4.904	4	24

The answers to the first two questions were in the general context of the groups. The answer to the third question about the high achievers (*Do high-achieving students benefit more from instruction as opposed to the rest of their classmates?*) at the three levels were especially interesting. In G1, the progress they made was not that high but their means were a little bit higher than the general group, particularly the control. Table (16) presents the exact numbers. Nevertheless, the progress they made after

instruction was almost the same both in high-achiever groups at this level and in the general group where the mean difference in the treatment group was just (1.36) and (0.78) in the control, as opposed to (1.66) and (1.85) respectively.

As we move up to G2 the mean gets a bit higher than the general group, but the students in this level were initially better as they scored relatively high on the pretest. Thus, the results cannot be ascribed to

instruction. As could be seen in Table (16), the positive difference after instruction was the lowest among the groups, only 0.5.

At the G3 level, the control group attained statistical significance and scored the highest among the others (Table 16). The treatment group was tailing closely. Yet, there was no statistical significance between both groups' performances on the posttest *(p = 0.15)*, see Table (13) above.

Table (16): result means of the high achievers on both tests

	N	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Gained Difference
G1 Treatment	9	11.56	13.22	+ 1.66
Control	7	14.86	16.71	+ 1.58
G2 Treatment	6	13	13.5	+ 0.5
Control	4	17.75	18	+ 0.25
G3 Treatment	4	15.5	17.75	+ 2.25
Control	5	15.8	20	+ 4.2

4- CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is to measure the effectiveness of focused instruction within the framework of the traditional deductive method practiced in a Saudi EFL context in the acquisition of the English article system by native speakers of Arabic. Four main conclusions could be inferred from this study.

First, focused instruction on articles does not show significant positive results as we can see in statistical analysis. However, a positive trend is still detectible. Since the time between the pretest and posttest rounds was not far apart, nothing has presumably happened to cause general language improvement among the participants. The only variable was the focused instruction. This trend of improvement attests to the claims that focused instruction is beneficial at least partially (Master 1994, 1997; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999; Master, 2002; Kao, 2013).

The improvements are more evident in the high- achieving groups. Students in these groups scored high in the pretest in the first place, and their minimal

improvement in the posttest echoes those of their respective general groups. However, in G3, the high achievers made the biggest strides. The control group in particular made the only statistically significant improvement. This leads to the conclusion that the use of TL in instruction is more beneficial to L2 Arab learners in this context, and possibly to others more than resorting to students' L1 as a convenient resource.

Second, since instruction and interaction with the students in this EFL context is a major source of TL input, instruction is always vital in the general improvement of language proficiency. Such improvement entails the enhancement of the acquisition level of the English article system. As we have seen in the G3 high-achiever results, the most proficient group showed the best gain, both in the control and in the treatment, see Table (5-3). This conclusion supports the strong correlation between students' level of proficiency and the accuracy of the article use (Mater 1997; Butler, 2002; Chrabaszcz and Jiang, 2010).

Third, using L1 in focused instruction is found counterintuitively unbeneficial. Generally speaking and based on our findings, TL and L1 use in the classroom in this particular context are equivalently similar. The students in the treatment groups scored relatively similarly to their classmates in the control groups. Even the G3 high-achieving treatment group made less progress than their control group counterparts without statistical significance (p=0.15).

Fourth, TL instruction at higher levels is more beneficial than the use of students' L1. high-achieving students benefited from TL use instruction more than the treatment group. High achievers in the G3 control group attained statistical significance after focused instruction on articles. Table (16) shows that the positive difference of this group was the highest among the other groups. Their mean general score was 20 out of 25,which is good, compared to the average means in G3 (12.7 and 12.8) as can be seen in Tables (14) and (15).

Even the treatment group in G3 followed next to the G3 control as the highest gainers from focused instruction with a positive gain of 2.25 as shown in Table (16). Both groups started from almost the same baseline as the pretest scores were almost equal, 15.5 and 15.8. This level benefited the most from instruction compared to the other two lower levels. Nevertheless, it was only the high-achieving groups, not the general group, who made the noticeable progress.

These four conclusions shed some light on the dire importance of helping EFL learners elevate their overall L2 proficiency. The pedagogical implications would be, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Teaching the article system despite the minimal tangible positive results particularly at lower levels is worthwhile. The gain seems to be accumulative and the

payoff will be evident as students move up the proficiency ladder.

2. Focused instruction (focus-on-form) as a teaching technique within the framework of the traditional deductive teaching method help in part the two lower levels, but the significant gain only emerges at the higher levels.

3. Instruction in the TL has been proven by this study to be influential particularly at higher levels in the acquisition of the English article system.

4. It is a practical fact that instruction and classroom activities constitute the main exposure venue to the target language in Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms. Thus, classroom activities conducted in the TL would help students enhance their general language proficiency, which entails better control of the English article system.

5. Using students' L1 even at lower levels is not supported by this study despite its plausibility as a handy learning resource.

The present study has its own limitations. Most notably, the results may not be applicable to other contexts in Saudi Arabia; the participants of this study belong to one university and only male students. In addition, the study did not touch on the types of error students tend to make because such an issue falls beyond the scope and purpose of this paper; in fact, it deserves a study in its own right. Thus, the research area of the acquisition of the English article system by Arabian L2 learners of English is still astonishingly wide open (Crompton, 2011). Further research is definitely needed to explore the difficulty levels of the articles by L2 learners in the Saudi Arabian context. In addition, other teaching techniques need to be explored to measure their effectiveness in helping Saudi Arabian students achieve a better control of the English article system.

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