TEACHING ENGLISH RELATIVE CLAUSES THROUGH INFORMATION GAP ACTIVITIES: A COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Relative clauses are essential for producing detailed and connected speech in English. Despite their importance, many learners avoid using structures such as who, which, and that because they perceive them as complex and grammatically demanding. Traditional instruction frequently introduces relative clauses through ***rule explanation and sentence transformation exercises, which Oktabr improve*** accuracy but often limit communicative use. This article proposes information gap activities as an alternative teaching strategy. It argues that learners develop better understanding when relative clauses are used to identify, describe, and exchange information in meaningful contexts.

Keywords: relative clauses, communicative language teaching, information gap activities, grammar instruction, English methodology

Introduction

As learners progress from beginner to intermediate levels, they begin to require more precise language. Simple sentences such as:

I have a friend. She lives in Samarkand.

gradually develop into:

I have a friend who lives in Samarkand.

This shift is important because relative clauses allow speakers to combine ideas, avoid repetition, and produce more natural discourse.

However, many students continue to avoid these structures even after formal instruction. They often prefer shorter sentences because relative clauses appear difficult or unnecessary.

This article explores how communicative tasks may support the teaching of relative clauses and encourage learners to use them more confidently.

Why Relative Clauses Are Challenging

1. Sentence Combination Difficulties

Learners usually understand separate sentences but experience difficulty when merging them.

Example:

This is the book.

I bought it yesterday.

Combined form:

This is the book that I bought yesterday.

The challenge lies not in vocabulary, but in restructuring information.

2. Confusion Between Relative Pronouns

Students frequently ask:

“When should I use who?”

“When do I use which?”

“Can I use that everywhere?”

Because several options appear possible, learners become uncertain and sometimes avoid the structure entirely.

3. Mechanical Teaching Practices

Traditional lessons often include:

sentence transformation;

gap filling;

rule memorization.

Although useful for controlled practice, these methods may not show why relative clauses are useful in real communication.

Information Gap Activities as a Teaching Strategy

Information gap activities create situations where one learner has information that another learner does not possess.

To complete the task, students must exchange details.

Relative clauses become naturally necessary.

For example:

Student A receives:

I am looking for a woman. She works at a hospital. She speaks English.

Student B responds:

Are you looking for the woman who works at a hospital?

Grammar emerges from communication rather than direct instruction.

Classroom Procedure

Stage One: Object Description Task

Prepare pictures of different objects.

Students describe them:

It is something that people use for writing.

It is an object that helps people communicate.

Partners guess the item.

This develops both vocabulary and grammar simultaneously.

Stage Two: Person Identification Activity

Students receive character cards:

Examples:

teacher / likes history / lives in Bukhara

doctor / works at night / enjoys reading

Learners describe:

I know a doctor who works at night.

She is a teacher who likes history.

Stage Three: Mystery Search Game

One student secretly chooses a person, place, or object.

Others ask questions:

Is it someone who works with children?

Is it something that people use every day?

The activity transforms grammar practice into interaction.

Observations from Teaching Practice

When relative clauses are introduced through descriptive tasks:

learners speak more freely;

sentence length increases;

repetition decreases;

students become more willing to experiment.

Interestingly, learners often begin using relative clauses without consciously thinking about grammar terminology.

This suggests that communication may support acquisition more effectively than isolated explanation alone.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers may improve instruction by:

Introducing grammar after communication rather than before it;

Using visual materials and collaborative tasks;

Encouraging description and identification activities;

Allowing learners to discover patterns independently.

Relative clauses are especially suitable for communicative instruction because their main function is to add information.

Therefore, teaching should reflect this purpose.

Conclusion

Relative clauses help learners move from simple statements toward richer and more connected communication. However, rule-based instruction alone may not encourage active usage.

Information gap activities provide a practical alternative by creating situations where learners need relative clauses to exchange meaning.

As a result, grammar becomes functional, memorable, and communicatively relevant.

Future classroom research may further investigate how interactive tasks influence long-term retention of complex grammatical structures.

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