



Výuka předpřítomného času v hodinách anglického jazyka na 2. stupni ZŠ

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Teaching the Present Perfect Tense in Lower Secondary EFL Classes

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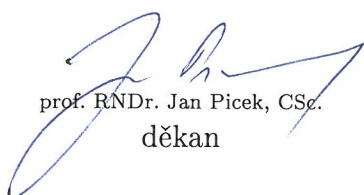
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ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis concentrates on practice activities that help lower-secondary learners differentiate the present perfect from the past simple and present simple tenses.

The theoretical part deals with reasons for and against grammar. Approaches in English teaching, their advantages and disadvantages, are introduced. The present perfect is described with complications that it causes to the learners. Furthermore, language skills in grammar are presented. At the end of the part basic recommendations for teachers arising from the theory are provided. In the practical part the theoretical knowledge is transformed into the real grammar practice. Various exercises and activities were used in seven sample lessons. The teacher's reflection and also evaluation from the students are provided in that part.

The objective of this thesis is to evaluate whether the activities improved the learners' knowledge and their fluency while using the present perfect in reality. The research proved that the chosen activities taught by inductive approach helped the learners enhance their results. These are evaluated and summarized at the end of the practical part.

Key words:

Grammar, practice, activity, present perfect, skill, approach, lower-secondary learners.

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se soustředí na aktivity, které pomohou žákům 2. stupně základní školy odlišit předpřítomný čas od minulého prostého a přítomného prostého času.

Teoretická část se zabývá důvody, proč vyučovat či nevyučovat gramatiku. Jsou představeny přístupy ve výuce anglického jazyka, jejich výhody a nevýhody. Uvádějí se problémy, které předpřítomný čas žákům způsobuje. Dále jsou popsány jazykové dovednosti při procvičování gramatiky. Závěr této části obsahuje doporučení pro učitele vyplývající z teorie. V praktické části se teoretické poznatky převádějí do skutečného procvičování gramatiky. V sedmi ukázkových hodinách byly použity různá cvičení a aktivity. Tato část také obsahuje reflexi jak od učitele, tak od samotných žáků.

Cílem této práce je zhodnotit, zda aktivity pomohly zlepšit vědomosti žáků a jejich plynulost při skutečném používání předpřítomného času. Výzkum potvrdil, že vybrané aktivity, vyučované induktivně, pomohly žákům zlepšit jejich výsledky. Na konci praktické části jsou tyto výsledky vyhodnoceny a shrnuty.

Klíčová slova:

Gramatika, procvičování, aktivita, předpřítomný čas, dovednost, přístup, žáci 2. stupně ZŠ.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 10 |
| THEORETICAL PART | 12 |
| 1. GRAMMAR..... | 12 |
| 2. WHY TO TEACH GRAMMAR..... | 13 |
| 2.1 The arguments for grammar | 13 |
| 2.2 The arguments against grammar..... | 15 |
| 3. HOW TO TEACH GRAMMAR..... | 18 |
| 4. OVERT AND COVERT GRAMMAR TEACHING | 19 |
| 5. CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES | 20 |
| 5.1 Deductive approach | 20 |
| 5.2 Inductive approach..... | 21 |
| 5.3 The PPP model | 22 |
| 6. PRESENT PERFECT..... | 24 |
| 6.1 Difficulties for learners..... | 29 |
| 6.2 Teaching and practising the present perfect | 31 |
| 7. INTERACTION IN THE CLASS..... | 32 |
| 8. LANGUAGE SKILLS IN GRAMMAR..... | 33 |
| 8.1 Reading activities..... | 34 |
| 8.2 Listening activities..... | 34 |
| 8.3 Speaking activities | 35 |
| 8.4 Writing activities | 35 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 9. SUMMARY | 36 |
| PRACTICAL PART | 37 |
| 10. INTRODUCTION | 37 |
| 11. RESEARCH | 39 |
| 11.1 Tests | 42 |
| 11.2 Questionnaire | 42 |
| 11.3 Practice activities in lessons | 43 |
| 11.4 Results and comments | 52 |
| CONCLUSION | 56 |
| REFERENCES | 58 |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | 60 |
| LIST OF TABLES: | |
| Table 1: Differences between the present perfect simple and continuous | 26 |
| Table 2: Differences between the past and present perfect | 27 |
| Table 3: Differences between the present perfect tenses | 28 |
| Table 4: Results in written tests | 52 |
| Table 5: Results in computer tests | 54 |

INTRODUCTION

In this bachelor thesis I focus on the teaching activities of the present perfect to lower secondary students of English. The use of this tense is natural for native speakers. However, for non-native speakers of English it appears to be a complex problem, especially for those who do not have present perfect tense in their own language. It is often omitted as it is difficult to understand and use in both spoken and written language. It seems easier to avoid the tense. English language learners often contradict the necessity of the present perfect tense as its usage is incomprehensible in the native language – there is no connection. On the one hand, it is highly recommended to study the structures very carefully from the beginning. With the present perfect tense it is possible to locate the situations both into the past and the present as it connects both of them. Although it means that the time reference is not defined exactly, the meaning is clearly understood. On the other hand, it is widely known that there are difficulties for the learners of English language to fully understand the tense and the use of it properly.

First, there is a problem to recognize slight differences between the present perfect and the present. It is important to see the difference between the events that have just occurred and the present activities. Rastall (1999) calls it “the inclusive present” (79). He also claims that it is widely used in everyday English.

Secondly, there is the connection with the past that causes problems, too. Speakers of English should always perceive that in the present perfect there is the link with the present whilst in the past tense the events are finished. According to Rastall (1999) and also Buitkiene and Valeika (2010), it is helpful to use finished-time adverbial expressions such as ago, last week and many more with the past events to show that the activities are over. There are different adverbials for the

present perfect – for example recently, yet, since. They help distinguish the situational recency. Although the adverbials are not the ultimate solution to recognize the differences, they have their potential to help the learners of English choose the tense correctly.

All in all, the present perfect tense has been and is going to be confusing and problematic for non-native speakers of English as its variability is large. In my opinion the only way to decrease the problems it causes is to practise the tense as much as possible. Well-chosen teaching methods are of vital importance for the learners of English.

Nowadays the teaching methods are throughout emphasized. They are numerous, both less or more successful. It is possible to induce motivation in students by choosing appropriate teaching methods. Then, they tend to solve the problem by themselves. If theoretical and practical knowledge is connected correctly, the result is understanding of the problem or at least partial understanding, which is especially important to weaker students. They are able to be more active during the lessons and it also makes the lessons more effective.

This bachelor thesis consists of two parts – a theoretical and research one. In the theoretical part I have concentrated on some terminology connected with the present perfect tense – it is the tense itself, then the role of grammar, teacher and learner. There are already known teaching methods and activities described. They can be used for better understanding of the present perfect in connection with the present and past. The emphasis is also put on the motivation because the learning is useless without it. In the research part there are activities I used in my lessons to make the students understand how to use the present perfect tense and the results they achieved, their opinions and feedback.

THEORETICAL PART

1. GRAMMAR

According to Harmer (2007) grammar is “the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in the language” (12). In case the grammar rules are applied too carelessly, the communication both spoken and written is not comprehensible. Creating good grammar rules is very complicated. Some rules are extremely complex. The teacher’s explanation of the rules should be as simple as possible to help students understand. Over-simplification is not desirable; however, it can be a good starting point for English learners.

Another explanation of grammar is given by Ur (1996) – it is “the way words are put together to make correct sentences” (75), which can serve as a simple way how to explain the word. She also uses the term “grammatical” which is applied to units smaller than sentences. She mentions that some phrases or words are grammatically acceptable and some are not, for example:

| | | |
|-----------|-------|------------------------------|
| <i>go</i> | ————→ | <i>went</i> /acceptable/ |
| <i>go</i> | ————→ | <i>goed</i> /not acceptable/ |

Grammar has got specific instances called “structures” (Ur 1996, 75). Hence the present perfect is a structure. All languages do not have the same structures – in Czech there is not such tense as the present perfect in English – therefore the English learners can have problems. It is not always that these discrepancies entail problems. Sometimes the learners understand them rather easily. It depends on a lot of factors such as motivation, their level of English, their needs...

2. WHY TO TEACH GRAMMAR

The reasons for teaching grammar vary. In fact, the role of grammar in the teaching process has been questionable for a long time – among experts, teachers and even students. Although some experts assume that the role of grammar is important, there is another group of experts who claim it does not have to be emphasized so much. Anti-grammarians claim that developing the second language skill reflects the acquisition of the first tongue. However, the absorption of the mother tongue is subconscious. Acquiring the second language is much more difficult – it needs time, motivation – as it is a conscious process.

Thornbury (1999, 15–20) states two groups of arguments about grammar:

2.1 The arguments for grammar

- *The sentence-machine argument*

In the language there are some regular structures. In case learners know them, they have got unlimited options how to make sentences using them in various situations. Learners' creativity is supported as well. In the present perfect it is possible to make sentences such as:

I have never been to Italy. OR She has visited Greece.

Students can make their own changes and use their own ideas when they make similar sentences. The teacher should encourage their efforts by outlining appropriate situations.

- *The fine-tuning argument*

Grammar teaching should prevent from making mistakes which can lead to uncertainty in the speech. If students understand grammar rules properly, they are able to avoid making mistakes in a spoken language, too. It means they should practise the learned structures to achieve confidence in speaking. It can be done through repetition,

gap-filling exercises and so on. Students should be exposed to various activities and get used to the taught grammar. More practice means better fluency.

- *The fossilisation argument*

Formal study helps learners achieve higher levels as there is usually a “border” in understanding grammar which they cannot overcome alone. In English the present perfect is an example of such “border”. Students can study the rules of the present perfect on their own; however, it is much better when the teacher helps them with that by giving examples of situations and sentences where the tense occurs. The teacher also gives explanations when different tenses are used – these variabilities in meaning are harder to see and understand with nobody’s help.

*What did you do? /Co jsi dělal? např. včera/
What have you done? /Co jsi to udělal?/*

- *The advance-organiser argument*

Grammar learners are able to notice previously learned structures while they use the language in the interaction with native speakers. It means that they can recall the rules they studied earlier in grammar lessons, put the pieces of the grammar knowledge together and organise them. The previously learnt grammar rules help students make faster progress.

- *The discrete item argument*

Language can look huge for both the learner and teacher but if the rules are organised into smaller parts, they can be easier to digest. The present perfect is an example of such a discrete item in English. Students learn only a part of grammar and that is why it is easier for them to understand. It is normally simpler and not so confusing for students to study smaller grammar parts /one by one/ – first the present perfect continuous and then simple is recommended.

- *The rule-of-law argument*

The knowledge /meaning facts and rules/ is transmitted from teachers to learners. It means that lessons are structured. Teachers provide the rules of grammar to learners step by step, in comprehensible order.

- *The learner expectations argument*

Students come to classes with their own expectations – they may feel that they need system and structure while learning grammar. Teachers should take these expectations into account; otherwise, students' learning may feel unsatisfactory for them.

While learning the present perfect, students often prefer a systematic guidance from teachers as they help them apply the rules in different situations. They also provide diverse activities that suit them best as there are different students with different needs to fulfil.

2.2 The arguments against grammar

- *The knowledge-how argument*

Language learning can be viewed as a skill – we learn it by doing it. The best way how to learn grammar and in this case how to learn the present perfect properly is through practice and communication.

- *The communication argument*

It is called CLT or Communicative Language Teaching. If learners are engaged in communication, they learn the grammar unconsciously which means that learning grammar consciously is useless and a waste of time. When learners use the present perfect in their communication, it is more natural to get used to it. Moreover, they can see the present perfect tense in various sentences that are not prepared beforehand /e.g. by the teacher/ while communicating.

- *The acquisition argument*

There is the connection with our first language. As we do not need the rules while we learn our first language, it is not necessary to learn them in the second language either. Learning is the natural process. It is possible and also natural to pick up the language while communicating with people who know it. If learners are exposed to a lot of language with the present perfect, they will be more successful to acquire it without learning grammar rules.

- *The natural order argument*

The acquisition of grammar items has got its natural order and learners have to go through it to get to the higher level. It is normal to make mistakes /we all make them/ at lower levels. As learners get to higher levels, they gradually make less and less mistakes. It is no good if teachers insist on immediate accuracy because they interrupt the natural process their learners have to go through.

It is expected that learners make mistakes in the present perfect at the beginning as it is new for them. Later, as they practise a lot, they become more accurate and the mistakes slowly disappear.

- *The lexical chunks argument*

According to Thornbury (1999) “chunks are larger than words and smaller than sentences” (19). It is advisable to acquire chunks in English as it saves time. They have their role in the development of the language. On the basis of chunks it is possible to make other combinations. For example: *Have you ever been...?* is a frequent expression and it may be better to use a lexical rather than abstract grammatical approach.

- *The learner expectations argument*

There are learners who expect communication in the class (as they were introduced to plenty of grammar in previous years). For them, conversation plays the key role. In this case, when learners are exposed to plenty of present perfect communication in lessons, it will be helpful for them. It is the teacher's job to recognize learners' preferences and adapt the lessons to their needs. Otherwise, as it was mentioned above, the lessons will be useless.

Scrivener (2011) points out that if the learners study grammar rules by heart, they may not understand them. Reciting grammar rules is not what is really needed while teaching grammar. He claims there is no evidence that the people achieved accuracy and fluency in the language that way. It is useful in case the knowledge is transformed into "a living ability to use the language" (157). What is vital for the learners in connection with the grammar rules according to Scrivener follows:

- learners are supposed to be exposed to the language as much as possible
- they should try the language themselves
- used items should be noticed
- learners should understand the form, meaning and use
- learners should remember things

Summing up, different authors have different views on the subject of grammar. Some of their views are similar, or mingle together and some vary. It is important to find a balance. For the second language learners it seems more appropriate to study grammar rules, especially while studying more complicated ones – and the present perfect belongs into the complicated category.

For most of the learners it is not possible to learn the second language subconsciously, for them it is a conscious process and learning grammar rules is a

part of it. Good grammar knowledge can be the start point for the learners – a kind of a stepping stone for their further development in the language. It should help them be more fluent, which means being more confident while speaking.

3. HOW TO TEACH GRAMMAR

As it is mentioned before, the complexity of grammar rules can be a problem for students. They should be explained to the students in a simple way, clearly and relevantly. The students should not be demotivated by an extreme amount of grammar rules. However, over-simplification is not worthy, either. It is up to the teacher to find a balance while explaining the rules.

It is needed to mention two principles of teaching grammar which Thornbury (1999) calls the rules of thumb (25–27). They are *The E-Factor: Efficiency* and *The A-Factor: Appropriacy*. Both grammar presentation and practice activities are supposed to be assessed by the mentioned factors.

The E-Factor: Efficiency

Teaching grammar is supposed to be as efficient as it is possible. It is up to the teacher's decision how to achieve that. Efficiency can be divided into 3 factors – economy, ease, efficiency. Economy is about grammar presentation which should be short but not too much. Ease deals with setting up the activity. It is often true that easily arranged activity means a good activity. The efficacy factor represents functioning /whether it will work/. Here, evaluation is not easy. It can be measured by the degree of attention the students are paying or using tests. Amount and quality of information in the context may play a big role as attention with no or little comprehension is a waste of time.

The A-Factor: Appropriacy

Learners differentiate in their needs, interests, goals, attitudes, levels they are on and other things. In case the grammar activity works for one individual or group, it does not necessarily have to be the same with the others. Activities are not universal and that has to be taken into account by teachers; otherwise, they will not probably work. The teachers have to know their students and should be able to choose the most suitable activities which sustain their progress.

4. OVERT AND COVERT GRAMMAR TEACHING

Thornbury (1999) also states that grammar teaching has different meanings to different people. It involves 2 attitudes – covert and overt grammar teaching (23).

- ***Overt grammar teaching*** – it means teaching according to a grammar syllabus and a clear presentation of the grammar rules using grammar terminology.
- ***Covert grammar teaching*** – it means teaching to a communication syllabus; it deals with the grammar problems as they emerge while doing communicative activities. Students are supposed to pay attention to the activities, not to the grammar itself.

Summing up, both overt and covert approaches have their assets in present perfect teaching. Students are presented the grammar rules first and become acquainted with terminology that goes along with the tense. As they are mentally mature enough and their abstract thinking is developed, the students do not have problems to understand explicit grammar rules. Then, it is easier to move to communicative activities and deal with problems that occur.

Overt grammar teaching is more suitable when new rules are introduced to learners. On the other hand, covert grammar teaching is more desirable when the

learners have some grammar knowledge which they can build on. As they get practice activities on a specific grammar /in this case the present perfect/, they are able to deduce the rules from the situations.

5. CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES

There are two theoretical concepts according to Thornbury (1999, 24):

- ***Focus on form*** – students should be led to know the form right; teachers should supply them with plenty of activities to achieve that goal.
- ***Consciousness-raising*** – it does not have to necessarily mean that it directly leads to understanding of the structure but it can release the mental process. In the end the result is accurate and appropriate production. However, not always. It may subsist on the level of understanding and remembering.

Thornbury also mentions two specific approaches in grammar learning. They are a deductive and inductive approach. Both of them have their advantages and disadvantages.

5.1 Deductive approach

First, the rule is presented and then there are some examples given. It is also called “rule-driven learning” (Thornbury 1999, 29). It is usually associated with Grammar-translation method but there are other ways how to use this approach. Needless to say, it does not have to be dependent solely on the translation as many grammar books are written in English.

Krashen (1982) states that this approach seemed to make sense for a lot of teachers and scholars (113). Students are not bothered to guess rules. If the explanation is presented clearly and plenty of practice follows, rules are internalized.

Arguments against:

- Some students can be dissuaded when the lesson starts with presentation of the grammar. Furthermore, they may not understand some terminology or concept.
- Students are not involved much. The teacher is in the centre.
- Students do not memorize much.
- The emphasis is on the rules.

Arguments for:

- It can save time because some rules are possible to explain quickly and then there is more time to practise the structures.
- The maturity of the students is respected. Cognitive processes are confirmed.
- It is beneficial for students with analytic learning style.
- The teacher is allowed to concentrate on the tasks one by one.

5.2 Inductive approach

It is the other way round – first, the example is given and then it is up to the students to derive the rule. Thornbury (1999) uses the name of “discovery learning” (29). It is the way how the first language is achieved. It seems more natural. Krashen compares it to „rule-writing in linguistics“. The corpus is given and regularities are to be discovered (Krashen 1982, 113).

Arguments against:

- It takes plenty of time. The students may think that the rules are the target of the language.
- The time spent on working out the rule can be at the expense of good practice.
- The students can misinterpret the rule.
- It can be demanding on the teachers.

- Some grammar rules are not possible to explain easily.
- Some students like being told the rule.

Arguments for:

- The students find out the rules on their own – more meaningful, memorable and serviceable (Thornbury 1999, 54).
- The students engage their mentality.
- The students are involved actively and pay more attention. It is good for motivation, too.
- It is beneficial for students who like to solve problems.
- The students are more confident and independent.

Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Nowadays, teachers often use the deductive approach in their lessons as it is not so time consuming. Especially weaker students welcome explanations of the rules as they have problems with the language in general. On the other hand, brighter students are more independent at the time when they learn the present perfect and they like to find out the rules themselves. They are usually successful in doing so, which is a motivation for their further work.

5.3 The PPP model

There used to be a pattern called the PP meaning that the presentation was followed with practice. Learners were supposed to achieve accuracy through the practice stage. Nevertheless, to accomplish a mastery in a language there was something missing – production. That is why the third stage was added. Learners can

gain fluency through the production. These days the PPP model has become typical. It gives the teacher control over the lesson.

PRESENTATION → PRACTICE → PRODUCTION

Hedge (2000, 166) summarizes the purposes of activities in the PPP model as followed:

- The purpose of the presentation stage is to present new language in context clearly. It should be done both in spoken and written texts or examples. The link to forms that students have already been taught is helpful. Evoking new forms from students and exploiting previous knowledge is beneficial. Hedge mentions the role of comprehension at this stage as well.
- Practice should help students memorize new structures and make the correct word order. Practice is obtained through repetition. It provides opportunities for feedback and also checking for mistakes. Students become more confident at this stage.
- At the production stage students are encouraged to use new forms of language and express their own content. Students should be able to see how useful all the knowledge they have just learned is in reality. The stage serves to check achievements and diagnose problems.

Harmer (2007) describes the PPP model similarly. Furthermore, he compares it to Audio-lingual drill (80) saying there are some similarities between those two; however, the PPP model uses the context which is very important for the learners to understand the things they are learning.

There has also been a criticism of the model. He mentions students' differentiation when for higher level students controlled repetition may look inappropriate (2007, 82). Another problem is that accuracy comes first and fluency is

taken as the second stage (Thornbury 1999, 129). Learners make mistakes which postpones communication until later /when the accuracy is achieved/. This causes delay in communication and can be counterproductive.

Thornbury also presents an alternative model called a fluency-to-accuracy model /task-based model/. It goes from the opposite direction. Here, the language is acquired in lumps first as the basis are communicative tasks performed by learners. The teacher's work is to identify features of the language that the learners could have used. In the end the learners perform the tasks again or create similar ones.



To sum up, the PPP model is commonly used in schools today. In the beginning the present perfect is presented to students, the rules are explained. The practice part is very important. It is of great value to go through a lot of various exercises including speaking, listening, reading and writing. Gradually, students become aware of the usage of the present perfect in different situations and are able to communicate /meaning production/.

6. PRESENT PERFECT

There are several uses of the present perfect which affects the meaning. The past and present are linked, focus is put on the effect /result/ at the time of speaking/writing. Knowing the rules of thumb can help the learners; however, they are not sufficient as a guideline of choosing a correct tense (Parrott 2000c, 236). The recommendation is to handle the completed and uncompleted events/actions separately.

In case there is a tense system in the mother tongue /and in Czech it is/, the learners will use either a present or past tense instead the present perfect. That is why

it is significant to expose the learners to the examples of the mentioned tenses otherwise it seems unrealistic for them to make correct choices.

Uncompleted actions

It is advisable to start with the continuous tense first because “this is the basic form we use” (Parrott 2000c, 237) as it is used for example in connection with *for* and *since*, with the basic question *How long...?* or when the duration is measured until now. Students can see more explicitly when the present perfect is used.

How long has he been doing his homework?
He has been doing it for two hours.
He has been doing it since 3 o'clock.

Simple tense indicates an open action and is used in a similar way. It describes general /bibliographical/ facts:

He's smoked/been smoking since he was in the army.

The simple tense also indicates duration – it is stressed that the event/activity is a long-term:

*I've worked here most of my life. /long-term/
I've been working here for a few days. /short-term/*

When the emphasis is given to something that is repeated, the continuous tense is used:

*I've used this dictionary since I was 12. /once or twice/
I've been using this dictionary since I was 12. /repeated/*

The simple present perfect is normally used after *the first, second... time*. It is referred to events or actions in the present or future.

Is this the first time she has flown?

Last but not least, state verbs should be mentioned in connection with the present perfect. They describe existence, mental states or possessions. They are not

usually used in the continuous tense. However, we can be less strict while using them to describe *wants* and *likes*.

I have been wanting to have an opportunity to talk to you for a few days.

Nevertheless, it is normally avoided to use this – at least with the secondary school level learners as it causes confusion.

The differences mentioned above are written in the chart below:

| | Pres. Perf. Simple | Pres. Perf. Continuous |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| duration until now | yes | yes |
| with <i>for, since, how long</i> | yes | yes |
| something is short-term | | yes |
| something is long-term | yes | |
| something is often repeated | | yes |
| repetition is limited | yes | |
| with state verbs | yes | specific usage |
| after the first... time | yes | |

Table 1: Differences between the present perfect simple and continuous

Completed actions

The present perfect simple is used for completed actions or events, also for those which happened in the past but the period of time is not finished /e.g. *today, this year...*/ or implied.

I have been to that new restaurant today. /it is still today/

I have never been to Italy. /implied – in my life/

Parrott (2000c) also mentions the present perfect continuous for completed actions (241). That means something was happening over a period of time and recently stopped. It can be applied on both repeated and constant activities.

Your phone has been ringing. /now it is not/

It has been raining. /not now but the ground is wet/

| | Past | Present Perfect |
|------------------------------------|------|-----------------|
| completed actions/events | yes | yes |
| period of time is finished | yes | |
| period of time is unfinished | | yes |
| details about a living person | | yes |
| details about somebody who is dead | yes | |
| in telling stories /general usage/ | yes | |

Table 2: Differences between the past and present perfect

Quirk (1990) shows two situations – the first one in the past simple and the second in the present perfect – and compares them (191):

I left the keys at the office.
I have left the keys at the office.

In the first sentence the time indication is overleapt, however, if the time is added /e.g. last night/ it is clear to use the past. Quirk (1990) claims that the present perfect is partially limited sharing the past time territory with the simple past. He states that the orientation between these tenses is easier with time adverbials as some of them are related with the past /e.g. yesterday, a week ago/ and some with the present perfect /e.g. up to now, since Monday/. However, there is another group of adverbials that can be used with both tenses /e.g. once, today/. He gives an example (199):

*I've seen him once. /the meaning is how often/
*I saw him once. /the meaning is when/**

| | Pres. Perf. Simple | Pres. Perf. Continuous |
|---|--------------------|------------------------|
| finished activities/events | yes | yes |
| unfinished period of time | yes | |
| bibliographical, circumstantial and historical context in general | yes | |
| recently finished actions | yes | yes |
| activities happening over a period of time | yes | yes |

Table 3: Differences between present perfect tenses

Parrott (2000c) states that there is the difference between simple and continuous forms in recently finished actions (242). There are examples:

I have painted the room. /achievement/

I have been painting the room. /now I am covered in paint/

In English Grammar in Use Murphy (1994) explains the simple present perfect (14):

- It is used when there is a connection with now. The action in the past has a result now:

I can't find my bag. Have you seen it? (Do you know where it is now?)

- It is used when we give new information or to announce a recent happening:

Ow! I've cut my finger. (Now it is bleeding. OR There is a plaster on it.)

Harmer's (2001) explanations are similar (40):

- it is used for actions which started in the past and continue up until present
- for the actions which started in the past and have present relevance
- for actions that have not finished

For the present perfect continuous the explanations are the same to Parrott's. Murphy also states that the activity or event has just/recently stopped. There is a connection with *now*, e.g.:

Have you been running? /the person is not running now but is breathing heavily/

The duration until now or still in progress is explained the same way, too. There are two meanings (Murphy 1994, 18):

How long has it been raining? It's been raining for 2 hours. /it's still raining/
It's been raining for 2 hours. /not anymore but the ground is wet/

6.1 Difficulties for learners

The present perfect causes agony to English learners as there is no such tense in Czech. Although there are grammar explanations, the usage both in written and spoken language is rather complicated. Parrott (2000c) states that speakers of European languages who do not use a similar form in their mother tongue have problems with the present perfect in particular. The first language is not the only reason why students make mistakes, though (Krashen 1983, 64).

Not only in the context /whether it refers to the present time or the past time/ it is difficult to understand. Here, Parrott advises to deal with the uses separately. Another difficulty is the difference between the continuous and simple tense. Learners at lower levels welcome clear rules. However, for higher-level students it is advisable to use conversations and texts. Then, there is a comparison between the tenses that also supports the knowledge.

First, learners are often uncertain how to decide between the simple and continuous tenses. They also have to deal with the usage of the past tense. For example if the question begins with *How long...?*, the learners may not be able to

understand correctly as there is no explicit time reference. Another thing is that they can replace it with the present tense /this is a common mistake/:

How long have you been waiting for me? ➡ *How long are you waiting for me?*

Sometimes the learners use *How long time...?* They may feel that when expressed like this it is more straightforward.

The learners tend to make this mistake because it makes sense for them and seems logical. However, they do not realize that they are expressing something else than it has been intended:

They are staying here for a week.

/the initial intention was the meaning ***until now*** but the sentence in the present continuous may be understood as ***the total length of the stay***/

Avoiding the present perfect after *the first... time* is also a common phenomenon. To say '*It's the first time I'm flying.*' sounds more natural.

There are often problems with the past, e.g. *I waited for you for 10 minutes.* and *I've been waiting for you for 10 minutes.* have absolutely different meanings. Choosing between the simple past and present perfect is problematic. If the tenses are misused, they are causes of confusion and misunderstandings.

Last but not least thing to mention is the over-usage of the present perfect. Some learners are so determined to use the tense and they do not realize it is not possible in all situations. They always have to remember the message they want to send to listeners or readers. For example: *He's been working as a teacher for 10 years.* /if the person is retired or does not do the job anymore, it will be confusing/.

6.2 Teaching and practising the present perfect

Using different methods and activities in education is of high value. While practising the present perfect and concentrating on production it is possible to use group or pair work. Students can cooperate and exchange their opinions on the subject. Nevertheless, individual work can be beneficial, too. When the students do fill-in exercises or answer questions, it can be useful to see how well each student is able to complete the task. Another example can be brainstorming – the students can brainstorm sentences or short situations in the present perfect to show they understand the practised grammar.

Teaching methods are the means how to achieve the outlined goal as stated before. They are composed of steps that are not isolated but connected. Methods cannot be either depreciated or overestimated. It means that the contents of the lesson must have priority over the form.

A long time exposure and plenty of examples is needed to achieve mastery in the usage of the present perfect. Even if learners are clear about it, they can make mistakes while communicating. It is also caused by their own language that does not make this kind of distinction (Parrott 2000c, 243).

In conclusion, it is advisable to practise the present perfect tense separately. First, the concentration should be on the continuous and then on the simple present perfect. Other tenses should be added afterwards. The teacher should focus not only on the rules /which are also important/ but with higher-level students on practice. More practice activities means more grammar comprehension for the students as they feel more certain and fluent while using the tense.

7. INTERACTION IN THE CLASS

Observations show that interaction in the classroom commonly used is known as IRF which means *Initiation – Response – Feedback*. The exchange is normally initiated with questions /e.g. *What have you been doing?!*, answers follow and the teacher gives feedback such as assessment, correction, comment. The interaction between the teacher and students goes on like this. However, there are alternative patterns – depending on activity of the teacher and students (Ur 1996, 227).

Students can work on their own, in pairs, groups or as the whole class – there are always advantages and disadvantages. Class grouping depends on activities being taught and practised.

In the groups each student belongs to the team, they work on the same task. Students can feel that there is a bond among them, they are not alone. The teacher controls the class. It works well if the teacher wants to explain, instruct, show or present some materials. The class improvement is obtained this way, too. It is rather common and preferred class style (Harmer 2007, 114).

Harmer also mentions negatives that this style brings (2007, 115). As the class is a big group, all activities are done at the same time, have the same length and an individual pace of each student is suppressed. Many students are not willing to be engaged in front of the whole class /as they may be afraid of failure/ which lowers their efforts. Students may not feel responsible for their learning. Furthermore, communication is on a lower level when the group is big.

The exact opposite is when students are working by themselves. According to Harmer (2007, 115–116) the teacher is able to take into account students' individualities. It means less stress for the students. Self-confidence and

independence are supported. On the other hand, cooperation and team work are not. It involves more thought and preparation from the teacher.

In pair work students are encouraged to communicate and cooperate. It supports students' independence and individuality. The teacher can work with one or more pair. The management of the class is not complicated (Harmer 2007, 116). Nevertheless, it is important to mention disadvantages. Students tend to talk about something else, the class is noisy. Some students need more relation with the teacher. Interaction between students who are not on the same language level causes difficulties, too (Harmer 2007, 116).

Group work promotes individuality, cooperation and communication between students. Problems are: noisiness, some students do not like this kind of work, some of them are more passive than the others and it takes more time to manage activities and the class (Harmer 2007, 117–118). Ur (1996) mentions the fact that group work is valuable in the practice of oral fluency (232).

It always depends on the teacher whether students work alone, in pairs or groups. He/she decides according to the students who are taught. Each group of students is specific. Activities performed in lessons also play an important role. On the one hand, it is better to choose a pair or a group work for the ones where cooperation is needed. On the other hand, the students can work alone on tasks which need more concentration and test their abilities.

8. LANGUAGE SKILLS IN GRAMMAR

There are different activities – more or less effective – how the present perfect can be practised in the class. It is up to the teacher what activity or activities /as there does not have to be just one/ are chosen. There has to be a sufficient amount of

language which is being practised. A bit higher level activities can be done to make students think harder of the usage of the language they practise.

Scrivener (2011) divides following activities into two groups. Speaking and writing are productive skills (211) and reading and listening are receptive skills (249).

8.1 Reading activities

Ur (1996, 143–146) presents plenty of ideas how the practice of an item /here the present perfect/ can be achieved. Students are given a text with a lot of present perfect in it. After reading it, they answer comprehension questions. Ur finds this task more motivating when students have to answer some questions before reading the text. When the reading is finished, students find out whether they answered the questions correctly or not. Students can also form their own questions using the present perfect in them. Gap filling is a good activity, too. The gaps can be in the whole text or in a part of it concentrating on the target grammar. Summarizing is another example activity how to work with the reading task.

8.2 Listening activities

Ur (1996, 113) presents a lot of activities such as listening to stories, songs, videos where no overt response is needed. Then, there are number of activities requiring response, e.g. true/false answer, skimming for information, mistakes detection. Longer responses are needed while answering questions, summarizing.

Ur (1988, 236) also gives an example of current news listening in connection with the present perfect. The teacher is recommended to listen to it in advance and write down all examples of the present perfect tense. Students should listen and the teacher should make sure they understand /new vocabulary is explained/. They write as much of the present perfect as they can and discuss them with the teacher. The

activity can be followed by setting homework, e.g. writing a news bulletin and recording it /after the teacher has checked that/.

8.3 Speaking activities

Speaking has to be well organized and prepared (Scrivener 2011, 211). The teacher should choose issues that are simple to talk about and interesting. The teacher should help and motivate students to talk and also to listen to each other.

Ur (1988, 236–25) presents various activities using the present perfect such as brainstorming of *what has not yet happened* or *has happened now*, describing past events that lead to the present or processes reaching into the present.

8.4 Writing activities

Most of the activities that are mentioned above can be written as well – either in the class or set as homework. They can also follow after reading, listening and speaking as additional practice.

Scrivener (2011) recommends choosing relevant writing tasks such as emails, blogs, questionnaires (238). The tasks should be interesting and relevant and therefore encouraging to fulfil.

All in all it is important to find a balance while using different skills in the class. It is very important that the teacher chooses the skills most suitable for the group of students he/she works with. The students have different preferences and the chosen skills should respect them to make learning effective as much as possible. Although one activity can be perfectly suitable for one group of the students, it can be useless for another one. The teacher should have all that in mind.

9. SUMMARY

It is possible to state several recommendations and conclusions based on ascertained findings. They concern attitudes and choices of activities that can be used while practising the present perfect tense to lower secondary learners. It is vital that the teacher respects learners' needs, personalities and also their previous knowledge.

The recommendations are:

- a) choosing a suitable approach in teaching
- b) choosing an appropriate model
- c) concentration on time reference while using the present perfect
- d) support of communication and cooperation in the group
- e) choice of activities for consolidation and development of the knowledge
- f) practising all 4 skills

PRACTICAL PART

10. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the practical part is to verify whether activities used in the research help lower secondary students of English to understand the time reference expressed by the present perfect tense. The obtained information can help teachers of English choose suitable activities for their students. It can also enable the students in reducing their errors while using the present perfect tense either in a spoken or written language.

It was important to make students understand the usage of the present perfect in contrast with the past and present simple as much as they could. The teacher should make them see what is or is not acceptable while completing the tasks. The students were supposed to spot the differences in meaning while using the mentioned tenses. All that can be achieved only if they are not careless in applying grammar rules they had been taught – which is Harmer’s recommendation. Drobot (2014) also states the importance of understanding the context while applying grammar rules – “learning how to use tenses needs to be accompanied by imagining the contexts when you use them” (86).

According to School Educational Programme the present perfect tense is taught in Year 8. In Year 9 students should revise and practice the tense in more detail. That was the reason the explanation from the teacher was short as the students had had some knowledge of the present perfect tense from the previous year. The aim was not to drown the students in an extreme amount of grammar rules because the proper practice was desired. The practice was based on a former knowledge a lot; however, the emphasis was put on a more detailed discussion about the distinctions. Therefore, the inductive approach was used – also to enhance interaction. It was vital to use

activities that would wake up interest in the students and not the lack of it. They were supposed to concentrate, pay attention, cooperate with the teacher and also with each other.

The target group of this thesis are students between 13 and 16 years of age, the adolescents. Sometimes they are considered as uncooperative and unmotivated, however, the truth is that teenagers are probably the best learners (Ur 1996, 286). They must be encouraged, and shown that the teacher cares for them. If they are engaged appropriately (for example using their own experience and thought; not involving abstract activities only), then they are the ones who are fun to teach. The teacher's teaching methods and activities must be challenging. They should tend to engage the students' imagination. The students must feel the teacher's control over them, however.

The learners of the present perfect are on a higher level which often means that they find themselves not improving much. Harmer (2007) designates that as "the plateau effect" (44). The progress at this stage is very slow and the learners do not often see it much. They accept the level they are on as the maximum limit they are able to achieve. At this stage the teacher is supposed to wake up more interest in the learners, set new clear goals for them and show them there is more to learn ahead by choosing appropriate activities.

The practice started with the present perfect continuous and the present perfect simple which were practised separately. Other two tenses /the past and present simple/ were gradually added; however, the emphasis was on the past tense. The teacher provided diverse activities /gap-filling exercises, repetition, answering questions.../ to make the students understand and decide correctly according to the context. Speaking, writing, listening and reading skills alternated to make the

students see the present perfect in a wider range of activities. The emphasis was put on typical situations; the students were not supposed to deal with exceptions or complicated usage of the present perfect. Furthermore, vocabulary used in the activities was not on a high level either; therefore, the students could concentrate on the grammar and not on new words.

There are a lot of exceptions when the present perfect is used. To know all of them is not of particular importance for lower secondary learners; basic rules are enough. The students' knowledge should include:

- usage of present perfect simple and continuous
- actions resulting until now /present perfect/
- life experience /present perfect/
- usage of *for, since, how long* in connection with now /present perfect/
- finished actions, somebody who is dead /past/
- state verbs for simple tenses

11. RESEARCH

The research was based on practising the present perfect in contrast with the past and present simple tenses to lower secondary students. It included practical work of the teacher who supplied the students with various materials. The attention was paid to a convenient choice of materials with respect to their age and level of their knowledge which is A2/B1 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The materials for the activities were chosen from Project 4 students' book and workbook /course books used in Year 9 at the school/, New Headway Pre-Intermediate workbook /the third edition/ and English Grammar in Use. There were used Terasoft 4 and 5 computer programmes, too.

The needed data was obtained in two ways:

- Specific information was collected through questionnaires that the students filled in. It served as feedback for the teacher.
- The students sat two tests during the research. One of the tests was sat on computers and the second was a written test. Both tests were sat at the beginning and at the end of the research to see whether the students made progress. It was supposed to indicate to which extent the chosen activities were effective or not.

There were 14 students in the group who participated in the research; 7 girls and 7 boys. One of the girls has a reduced intelligence capacity and she does not attend the second language classes. The students were selected as a sample group for analysing the influence of different practice activities on their knowledge of the present perfect tense in connection with the past and present.

The PPP model was chosen because it was easier to lead the students into the problem first; especially the weaker ones who generally need and appreciate clear guidance. However, as the students had been taught the present perfect in Year 8, the presentation was very short – it served as a reminder. The emphasis was on the practice and production. Also, the inductive approach was chosen while doing the activities. The students were advanced enough to express their own opinions on the subject. They were urged to think about the situations more carefully which proved very helpful and motivating in the end. It turned out the students liked discussing the subject of the usage of the present perfect and participated with concern.

The activities chosen in the lessons were not supposed to be difficult but not too easy, either. The intention was to make the students see the usage of the present perfect in various contexts; to force them to think and discuss the situations. They

should develop and broaden their knowledge lesson by lesson; adding more and more information. At the end of each lesson they were asked to make their own examples of the grammar they had practised to make the teacher see whether they achieved desired results in understanding.

The students were mostly left to decide freely whether they wanted to practise alone, in pairs or groups. The intention was not to restrain their preferences. It also helped deploy discussion in the class. The students were gradually able to come up with their own explanations regarding the usage of the present perfect. The peer discussion over the subject proved priceless because even the weaker students came up with their ideas which they had talked through with their mates first. It reinforced their self-esteem.

The aims of the lessons:

- students should decide correctly which of the mentioned tenses to use in different situations
- they should understand texts or situations while the present perfect is used in connection with the past and present simple
- they should be able to make their own sentences in the present perfect, past and present simple
- they should be active and communicative

The research started with two tests – the first one was performed on computers and the second was a written test. Both tests contained various gap-filling sentences /or exercises/ on the tenses mentioned above. Then, seven lessons with different practice activities followed. The students were exposed to the present perfect in

contrast to other tenses. There were three questionnaires filled in during the research. They served as a feedback from the students.

11.1 Tests

Computer test

Terasoft 5 application was used while testing the knowledge of the present perfect. There were five grammar parts chosen – past simple, verbs of transport, present simple, past tense and present perfect. The students had to complete 20 sentences while choosing from several expressions which were offered by the computer. Their results were evaluated by the computer, as well. At the end of the research the students completed the same test in order to see whether they had made any progress.

Written test

The students had to complete the same test at the beginning and at the end of the research. The written test was sat the following lesson after the computer test. There were fill-in exercises on the knowledge of the present perfect /Appendix 2/.

11.2 Questionnaire

There was a questionnaire /Appendix 1/ filled in during the research. The students expressed their opinions on the grammar activities. They could circle the most appropriate answer or write what they thought of the activities. The students were allowed to write their views in Czech as it would be hard for them to use English only /or at least for the weaker ones/. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out which activities were helpful and which were not according to the students and also whether their opinions changed during the time the research was taking place.

11.3 Practice activities in lessons

Lesson 1

The aim: Students should be able to use the present perfect continuous in various situations.

From the theoretical point of view it is recommended to start with the present perfect continuous tense which is easier to understand. The teacher introduced the grammar rules quickly and gave a few examples. Both English and Czech were used while explaining. Then, the students were given two exercises /New Headway Pre-intermediate: Workbook with key, the 3rd edition, 2007, p. 67/5, 6; Appendix 3/. They are typical examples of situations in which the present perfect continuous is used:

*Ann's been sunbathing. She's very red.
Sorry I'm late. Have you been waiting long?*

/It is clear in both situations that the activities were going on for a period of time and the result is until now./

The students could work alone or in pairs, according to their preferences. While checking the exercises, the reasons why the tense was used were discussed in situations where the students were not sure.

Evaluation: The lesson went on really well. The students paid attention and worked on the exercises. They sometimes asked the teacher about the vocabulary. They also discussed the sentences with each other and exchanged their opinions. At the end of the lesson they were asked to make some easy sentences with the present perfect continuous in them /eg. *I've been studying all day and I need a break now.*/ which they achieved well. They did not make mistakes in the tense. They also used the time reference such as *for 2 hours, since the morning* to emphasize the period of

time. It helped a lot that there was only one tense practised. The students could concentrate on it and were not confused with any other grammar.

Lesson 2

The aim: The teacher will make students be more fluent while using the present perfect simple in various situations.

The teacher introduced the present perfect tense and gave several examples. The explanation was given partially in English and partially in Czech. This time the students were asked to work by themselves. They were using their Project 4 workbooks /Project 4: workbook, 4th edition, 2014, p. 14/3, 4 and 15/5; Appendix 4/.

There were sentences such as:

She's played table tennis. I haven't played table tennis /in my life/.

/It's about historical context; a piece of information about her/my life./

There was also a speaking part in the second half of the lesson. First, the speaking activity was used to make a change in the lesson, to enliven it. Second, it should show whether the students were able to use the written examples and move the obtained knowledge into communicative production. They were asked to make their own questions using *Have you ever...?*. They sat in a circle, asking each other questions. As they generally tend to use the same verbs such as *play, go, do, be* all the time, the activity was changed by the teacher. The students were given three irregular verbs and they had to make questions with them.

Have you ever burnt pancakes? OR Have you ever stuck on the chair?

They enjoyed the activity quite a lot because some of the questions were funny which created an easy-going atmosphere in the class.

Evaluation: The lesson went on well. Everything, that needed to be done, was completed in time. The students paid attention. They completed the exercises with no

difficulties. It was easier for them because there was only one tense that was practised as in the previous lesson; therefore, no big mistakes were expected. The students participated in the speaking activity rather enthusiastically and tried not to spoil it. The sentences were correct as the students felt rather comfortable making them.

Lesson 3

The aim: The students should be able to choose and use a correct alternative – the present perfect simple or continuous – in everyday situations.

The students practised both present perfect tenses. They were given two exercises /New Headway Pre-intermediate: Workbook with key, the 3rd edition, 2007, p. 68/7 and English Grammar in Use, 2012, p. 21/10; Appendix 5/ by the teacher. The exercises were chosen with respect on the sentences – they contained situations the students could come across with. Also, no difficult vocabulary was used in them. The students worked on their own that time to see whether they were able to spot the differences with nobody's help. There was a discussion about the distinctions, for example:

They have been living/They live here for 3 years. in order to help better understanding of the meaning. Some of the students stated correctly that the first option was correct because the activity started 3 years ago and was still true. In the second option it would be correct without the time reference – *They live here.* – as it is a routine.

Evaluation: It was harder for the students to complete the exercises and they had to concentrate more; however, they managed well. They made only a few mistakes. The first exercise was achieved with no complications. The students were able to differentiate the tenses. In the second exercise /gap-filling/ it was the form

that was problematic for the weaker ones. They understood the differences in meaning and named the tense correctly but afterwards they mixed up both tenses together:

Did you played tennis? instead of *Have you played tennis?* /situation 1/

At the end of the lesson the students were given 5 pieces of paper with one sentence on each of them. The sentences were the same for all students. Some of the sentences were correct and some needed to be corrected, for example: *He has been losing his keys and he can't find them anywhere.* The aim was to sort out the sentences and correct the ones with mistakes in them. The brighter students completed the task successfully. On the other hand, the weaker ones had problems with the correction. They were able to decide which ones were incorrect but they could not put them right. The activity verified that the students could see the difference; however, it also showed that the weaker students were lost while correcting them. For this reason, I would recommend to do this activity as a pair work and put together the weaker students with better ones who could be able to help them.

Evaluation according to the questionnaire:

Most of the students preferred to do the exercises on their own; only 3 students chose pair or group work because they could discuss their opinions with their peers. The easiest activities were matching two columns and choosing correct options. The students claimed they did not have to think about the activities much. Those were also the activities which the students regarded as the least helpful. The most difficult activities were gap-filling while using both tenses and making their own sentences because they sometimes could not find appropriate words to make the sentence meaningful. On the other hand they found the sentence-making activity the most

helpful. While practising grammar the students preferred speaking activities to listening and writing. They could choose more options and the result was 9:5 in favour of speaking.

All in all, the results of the questionnaire after one week showed that the students liked more difficult activities because they were forced to think of what they were doing. It also enhanced a discussion in the class. The students were keen to express their opinions on the practised grammar.

Lesson 4

The aim: The students should use the present perfect and the past simple correctly.

The students practised the present perfect contrasted with the past simple tense. Project 4 students' books and workbooks were used to practise the two tenses. They did comprehension activities – listening, reading and answering questions /Project 4: students' book, 3th edition, 2009, p. 22/1, 23/2; Appendix 6/. Variable activities in the lesson were supposed to support communication and enhance activity. During this lesson the students worked in pairs as it could help the weaker ones. The weaker students had some vocabulary problems /eg. *rescue, who, arrest, through*/ in the text, although it seemed easy and low-level. Therefore, they found it difficult to understand the situations properly and answer questions. The listening to the story was done twice – once at the beginning after the students read the story quickly; that time they followed the lines. The second listening was given after the whole activity was completed; the students had their books closed. We had translated the text together, talked about the usage of both tenses and differences in meanings before the second listening.

Afterwards, another listening activity followed – Project 4 students’ book was used /SB 23/7; Appendix 6/. The students listened to various situations and were supposed to choose a correct option. The activity did not take long but it required more attention from the students as they did not see the listening text.

Evaluation: The lesson functioned well; all the activities were finished. Some students had questions about the differences in the usage of both tenses. Those were discussed and clarified by the teacher. Some of the students participated in the discussion, which was beneficial – it clearly showed they understood the distinctions as their perceptions were correct. It showed that they were able to connect the rules to the situations.

Lesson 5

The aim: The teacher will make the students more self-assured while using the present perfect and past simple.

There were exercises where the students had to complete the gaps with suitable forms of verbs and choose correct options /Project 4: students’ book, 3th edition, 2009, 23/6 and Project 4: workbook, 4th edition, 2014, 15/6; Appendix 6/. Sentences such as:

I have lived here since 2005. Before that, I lived in Edinburgh. were typical examples of both tenses. It was highly vital to make the students understand the time reference here – *since 2005* /meaning until now/; *before that* /finished in the past/. They worked on their own but they could discuss their ideas with the partners who they were sitting with.

Then, the students were asked to make their own sentences in both tenses. In each sentence they should use a time reference connected with either the present perfect or the past simple. They did well and made sentences with only a few

mistakes – concerning mainly weaker students who needed some help from the teacher. It was the word order which was problematic because they concentrated on the tenses; however, were not attentive to the word order. For that reason, the basic structure of the English sentence was written on the board in Czech:

podmět + významové sloveso /přísudek/ + předmět /co?/ + čas /kdy?/

Evaluation: All activities were quite easy to complete for the students. Some minor problems with the usage of the tenses occurred concerning the weaker ones. The students felt rather confident after they had done the written exercises. They enjoyed the speaking activity very much. They were enthusiastic to make the sentences.

Evaluation according to the questionnaire:

Summing up Lessons 4 and 5, it is important to say that the students' learning preferences changed. This time 10 out of 14 students preferred pair work. The reason was that they could discuss their ideas with each other, which was helpful and encouraging. Gap-filling exercises and choosing correct options were the easiest activities. Although the students regarded making sentences as the most difficult activity, they thought it had been the most helpful one. Choosing correct options was the least helpful activity. They equally liked speaking, reading and writing activities. Nobody chose listening as a preferred grammar practice.

When the students wrote their opinions on the activities they had done, the most popular and helpful was again making own sentences. They regarded the activity beneficial from both vocabulary and grammar points of view. They became aware of the structure of the sentences and they could use their own ideas which they regarded as enjoyable and fun. Gap-filling exercises were considered as useful;

however not so much fun. Choosing the correct option was not much help for the students. They also thought that listening was confusing and they sometimes got lost.

As in the previous lessons, the students were keen on doing more difficult exercises. They liked the activities where they had to think carefully and engage their brains better. When they discussed the usage of the present perfect in context with the past simple, they started to see the differences.

Lesson 6

The aim: The teacher will improve the student's understanding while using the present perfect contrasted with the present simple.

This time the practice focused on translation. It is considered as the most difficult activity; therefore, it was dealt with at the end of the practical part. The students were given 10 sentences to translate /Appendix 7/. The sentences were prepared by the teacher. They clearly demonstrate the usage of both tenses; there are no exceptions. The students could work on their own or as the whole group, which was useful for the weaker students. Although the sentences were not complicated from the vocabulary point of view, the students could use their dictionaries while translating them. It was not intended to use difficult vocabulary and distract the students from the practised grammar.

Evaluation: The activity was more complicated because the students had to concentrate on the tenses /as they were no options to choose from as for example in gap-filling exercises/ and also on the correct word order. They were able to specify the tense correctly according to the rules we had learned so far. However, the main problem was the word order. The teacher had to help the students in some cases /especially the weaker ones/. While doing this activity, the students worked together and advised each other.

Lesson 7

The aim: The students should distinguish the so far practised tenses.

The lesson was devoted to computer practice. The students had to complete various sentences with correct forms of verbs. They practised the tenses in Terasoft 4, grammar practice parts 1-7 and Terasoft 5, grammar practice parts 4, 6, 16, 31, 32. They were given a sentence in Czech and below there was an English sentence which should be completed using expressions that the programme provided.

Sample sentences:

Susan nebyla nikdy v Itálii.

■■■■ ■■■ ■■■■ ■■■ Italy.

The students worked according their preferences. Some of them started practising two or three parts and gradually added more. Some of them preferred to choose all exercises at once. The students made a lot of effort to make as few mistakes as they could.

Evaluation: The computer practice served as the preparation for the both final tests. The students took the practice really seriously. They also made notes in their exercise books when some of the sentences were not clear enough for them. Those were discussed with the teacher at the end of the lesson. Besides, there was not much communication in the class as the students had their set of sentences chosen by the computer programme.

Evaluation according to the questionnaire:

Most students preferred to learn in pairs because they could cooperate in case they were not sure. Only four of them also ticked the first option /on my own/. The reason was that they could concentrate more.

The easiest activities were gap-filling and choosing correct options, especially from the workbooks. Although the most difficult activity was translation of

sentences, it was regarded as the most helpful. They did not like listening much because they sometimes got lost and they were not able to concentrate properly.

Most students prefer speaking and writing while practising grammar in general. Only five students ticked reading as well. The least favourite of the four skills was listening – two students liked that.

All in all, gap-filling exercises and choosing the correct options were regarded as helpful. Sometimes the students mentioned that they got lost, especially on computers as they could not see the whole sentence, only the Czech translation. However, more they practised, less mistakes they made. Exercises on translation and making own sentences were considered more difficult but the most useful.

11.4 Results and comments

Summing up, after doing various practice activities to make the students understand the use of the present perfect in context with the past and present, it is possible to say that the time was spent successfully. The results of both tests show that clearly.

| Student's code | Test 1 | Test 2 | Variance |
|----------------|--------|--------|----------|
| 001 | 28 | 37 | +9 |
| 002 | 31 | 33 | +2 |
| 003 | 27 | 32 | +5 |
| 004 | 28 | 30 | +2 |
| 005 | 25 | 29 | +4 |
| 006 | 11 | 21 | +10 |
| 007 | 32 | 35 | +3 |
| 008 | 23 | 27 | +4 |
| 009 | 6 | 17 | +11 |
| 010 | 7 | 22 | +15 |
| 011 | 21 | 19 | -2 |
| 012 | 15 | 16 | +1 |
| 013 | 34 | 38 | +4 |
| 014 | 11 | 19 | +8 |

Table 4: Results in written tests

Test 1 was sat at the beginning of the research; Test 2 at the end. All students made progress apart from 1 of them /the results are highlighted/. The students could achieve maximum 38 points in the test.

In Test 1 the students were not successful much as only 3 of them got more than 30 points. There were also a few students who achieved rather few points – around 10 or less.

In Test 2 it was different. There was 1 student who reached the score of 38 points and then another one who reached 37 points. There were 6 students out of 14 who got 30 or more points; other two students were drawing near 30.

Another interesting thing is that the weaker students made a big progress during the research. The students whose scores were among the lowest in Test 1 did really well in Test 2. It is shown in the last column of the table that they were able to get more than 10 points in Test 2. The student 010 has a reduced intelligence capacity and does not attend the second language classes. She was able to achieve 22 points out of 38; 15 more than in Test 1 which is a great success.

The student 011 who scored fewer points in Test 2 than in Test 1 said that he had been rather nervous and had not been able to concentrate properly.

The second test was a computer test. There were 2 tests again – one at the beginning and one at the end of the research. The results are shown in the table on the next page. There are expressions the students had to complete in their tests and mistakes they made. The number of expressions is not the same for each student as Terasoft computer programme chooses the sentences.

Most of the students made a progress; however, it was not so big. The results in both tests are comparable although in the second test there were more students who

were able to make 5 or less mistakes. In the first test only 2 students were able to do so.

Feedback from the students:

According to the students the problem was compared to the written test that they could not return to the sentences. They had to complete them one by one. They were always given several expressions to choose from. In case they made a mistake, the programme showed the mistake immediately and there was no going back. Also, they could see only the expressions for the gap which was currently filled-in and not the ones for the rest of the sentence.

| Student's code | T1 expressions | T1 mistakes | T2 expressions | T2 mistakes |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| 001 | 48 | 6 | 47 | 7 |
| 002 | 45 | 11 | 53 | 2 |
| 003 | 47 | 6 | 48 | 6 |
| 004 | 40 | 3 | 44 | 11 |
| 005 | 51 | 14 | 48 | 5 |
| 006 | 46 | 19 | 47 | 14 |
| 007 | 47 | 11 | 39 | 3 |
| 008 | 48 | 12 | 48 | 6 |
| 009 | 43 | 21 | 47 | 16 |
| 010 | 54 | 28 | 42 | 16 |
| 011 | 53 | 20 | 43 | 10 |
| 012 | 50 | 20 | 46 | 11 |
| 013 | 48 | 10 | 51 | 5 |
| 14 | 42 | 4 | 47 | 1 |

Table 5: Results in computer tests

To conclude, the time spent on the research was valuable for both sides – the teacher and the students. The teacher did not follow the Project 4 book strictly;

however, the exercises from it were preferred as the book is used in all English classes in the school. There were some additional exercises and activities – exercises from already mentioned sources and speaking activities supported by the teacher. Although the students had already spent a month revising the present perfect tense, they did not perform very well in the first tests. However, they made a progress during the research, which is clearly visible in the tables with results. The lessons were enjoyable and fun; the students participated keenly while doing the activities. They were able to make correct decisions about the usage of the present perfect, past simple and present simple tenses. Moreover, they responded to the situations and led discussions about distinctions. Although the weaker students had some problems making and translating sentences, their knowledge improved a lot when we compare both tests.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis deals with the present perfect practice to lower-secondary students of English. Grammar in general is an integral part of the language – both form and practice are substantive. Nevertheless, the balance is needed.

There were 2 main objectives to achieve in sample lessons which were based on the theoretical background. First, it was the recognition of the time reference while doing the activities. Then, the attainment of better communicative competence while using the present perfect in contrast with the past simple and present.

Knowledge of basic rules helps the learners decide which tense to use. However, it is the proper and thorough practice which provides better comprehension in real-life situations. As the present perfect belongs to the most problematic tenses, an appropriate practice is vital. English learners should be exposed to as many examples as possible to acquire better communication skills. Oral and written activities were combined in order to obtain effective results. Furthermore, it was significant to make the learners see the necessity of the present perfect in everyday situations as they try to avoid using it in general.

The inductive method used in the sample lessons proved to be beneficial. It supported communication in the class. It made the students think and not only listen to the teacher. However, it must be said that the students had already some knowledge of the present perfect and were able to participate in the discussions.

The research acknowledged that grammar discussions in the class are valuable for the students more than we would admit or think. They consolidate their knowledge a lot better that way. They are forced to think about relationships and meanings by themselves. From my experience, it is enough for the teacher to lead and control the exchange of views to be correct. Therefore, I recommend that the

teachers of English should support communication in the class while practising grammar because it leads to the consolidation of their knowledge.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Appendix 2: Written test

Appendix 3: The present perfect continuous activities

Appendix 4: The present perfect simple activities

Appendix 5: Activities to practise both present perfect tenses

Appendix 6: Activities to practise the present perfect and the past simple

Appendix 7: The present perfect and the present simple – sentences

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

1. How did you prefer to learn?
 - a. on my own
 - b. in pairs
 - c. in groups
2. Which activity was the easiest for you?
3. Which activity was the most difficult?
4. Which activity helped you most? Why?
5. Which activity didn't help you much? Why?
6. What did you prefer while practising grammar?
 - a. listening
 - b. speaking
 - c. reading
 - d. writing
7. Write about activities you have done:
 - a. matching two columns
 - b. gap-filling
 - c. choosing the correct option
 - d. making sentences according to listening
 - e. making own sentences

Appendix 2: Written test

Based on <http://www.english-area.com/paginas/psimplevsppperfectoE1.pdf>

1. Complete the sentences with the verb in brackets in past simple or present perfect.

- a. She loves Paris. She /be/ there many times.
- b. Bill /work/ in that company for 3 years. /He still works there/.
- c. They /go/ to London on holiday last summer.
- d. I /read/ that book. It's good.
- e. His parents /be/ here yesterday.
- f. They /go/ to Germany when he /be/ only 4.
- g. you /watch/ any film last night?
- h. I /have/ a couple of toasts for breakfast this morning.
- i. He /live/ in Rome since he was a teenager.
- j. The house looks different. you /paint/ it?
- k. I /not see/ you in class last Friday.
- l. Shakespeare /write/ over one hundred sonnets.

2. Say if the following sentences are right or wrong. Correct them in necessary.

- a. Have you ever been to Thailand?
- b. I've had sausages for lunch at half past one.
- c. She's enjoyed herself at the party last night.
- d. I've read that book but I didn't like it much.
- e. Tom has left school one year ago.
- f. My cousins have lived in Dublin since they've been children.
- g. We have worked here for a year and a half.
- h. My parents lived in Britain for a couple of years.
- i. James has made a cake yesterday.
- j. I've washed the car. It looks great now.

3. Complete the sentences with a verb in present perfect or past simple.

be finish stopwatch not smoke enjoy win live

- a. She smoking two months ago.
- b. She for two months.
- c. you ever to Florence?
- d. you that TV show last night?
- e. They still live in that town. They there for ages.
- f. A friend of mine the lottery three years ago.
- g. When you your homework?
- h. They themselves at the party last summer.

4. Make 2 sentences in the present perfect and 2 in the present simple with correct time reference. Use *write, wash, forget, break*.

Appendix 3: The present perfect continuous activities

Exercises taken from New Headway Pre-intermediate: Workbook with key, the 3rd edition, Soars J., L., Wheeldon S., 2007, p. 67/5, 6:

What has Ann been doing? Match a line in A with a line in B.

- | A | B |
|--|--|
| 1. Ann's been sunbathing for too long. | She's annoyed. |
| 2. She's been shopping. | She's got paint in her hair. |
| 3. She's been working in the garden. | She's crying. |
| 4. She's been reading for hours. | Her back hurts. |
| 5. She's been watching a sad film. | She hasn't got any money left. |
| 6. She's been waiting for a bus for hours. | She's very red. |
| 7. She's been doing the housework. | She's covered in soap and water. |
| 8. She's been decorating the bathroom. | The house smells of onions and garlic. |
| 9. She's been cooking. | She's got a headache. |
| 10. She's been bathing the children. | Everything is so clean. |

Making questions – complete the questions. Put the verbs in the Present Perfect Continuous.

1. Sorry I'm late. /wait/ long?
2. Haven't you finished your game of chess yet? How long /play/?
3. The streets are wet. /rain/?
4. The children are filthy! What /do/?
5. I didn't know you could speak Chinese. How long /learn/ it?
6. Hi! I'm your new neighbour. /live/ here long?
7. Why is your hair wet? /swim/?
8. I'm a postman now. – How long /work/ as a postman?

Appendix 4: The present perfect simple activities

Exercises were taken from Project 4: workbook, 4th edition, Hutchinson T.,
Trnová M., 2014, p. 14/3, 4 and 15/5:

What has happened in Polly's life recently? Look at the list and write what she has or hasn't done.

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 1. play table tennis | yes |
| 2. see a film | no |
| 3. do a project | no |
| 4. buy a CD | yes |
| 5. write an email | yes |
| 6. take a photograph | no |
| 7. visit relatives | yes |
| 8. be ill | no |

- a. Polly's played table tennis.
- b. She
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.

Have you done the things in Polly's list recently? Write sentences.

- 1. I've played/I haven't played table tennis.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

5 a **T9** **1.8** Listen to an interview with adventurer Carl Hunter. Tick (✓) the things that Carl has done. Put a cross (x) for the things that he hasn't done.



1 drive a racing car



2 ride an elephant



3 eat insects



4 see a ghost



5 sail around the world



6 break a leg



7 cycle across the USA



8 fly a helicopter



9 run a marathon

b Write about what Carl has or hasn't done.

1 *He hasn't driven a racing car.*

2 *He's ridden an elephant.*

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

Appendix 5: Activities to practise both present perfect tenses

Exercises taken from New Headway Pre-intermediate: Workbook with key, the 3rd edition, Soars J., L., Wheeldon S., 2007, p. 68/7 and English Grammar in Use, Murphy R., 2012, p. 21/10 – choosing correct options and gap-filling:

1. I am hot because *I've run/I've been running*.
2. *I've cut/I've been cutting* my finger.
3. *Have you heard/Have you been hearing* Coldplay's latest album?
4. She's tired because *she's shopped/she's been shopping* all day.
5. Sorry. *I've broken/I've been breaking* your chair.
6. How long *have you had/have you been having* this book?
7. Look what Pat *has given/has been giving* me for my birthday! A bike!
8. *They've been living/They live* here for three years.
9. *I've painted/I've been painting* the living room, but I haven't finished yet.
10. *I've lost/I've been losing* my wallet. Where did I last have it?
11. There's my wallet! *I've looked/I've been looking* for it for ages.

1. Where have you been?/you, play/ tennis?
2. Look! /somebody, break/ that window.
3. You look tired. /you, work/ very hard?
4. "...../you, ever, work/ in a factory?" "No, never."
5. My brother is an actor. /he, appear/ in several films.
6. "Liz is away on holiday." "Is she? Where /she, go/?"
7. "Sorry I'm late. "That's all right. /I, not, wait/ long."
8. "Is it still raining?" "No, /it, stop/."
9. /I, lose/ my phone.
..... /you, see/ it anywhere?
10. /I, read/ the book you lent me, but
..... /I, not, finish/ it yet.
11. /I, read/ the book you lent me, so you can have it
back now.
12. This is a very old book. /I, have/ it since I was a
child.

Appendix 6: Activities to practise the present perfect and the past simple

simple

Exercises were taken from Project 4: students' book, 3rd edition, Hutchinson T., 2009, p. 22/1, 23/2, 23/6, 7 and Project 4: workbook, 4th edition, Hutchinson T., Tmová M., 2014, p. 15/6.

B Smart Alec closes the door

Comprehension

1 Read and listen to the story. Answer the questions.

- 1 Why does Sweet Sue go on the roof?
- 2 Why can't she get down?

Sweet Sue and Smart Alec are watching a building. They're waiting for some criminals. Sweet Sue has been there since half past seven this morning.



Questions about the text:

1. Why are Sweet Sue and Smart Alec watching the building?
2. When did Sweet Sue start watching the building?
3. How long was Smart Alec there before the criminals came?
4. Who closed the door to the roof?
5. Why can't Sweet Sue phone anyone from the roof?
6. Who rescued Sweet Sue?
7. Who was on the roof for four hours?

Listening 23/7 SB:

Listen and choose the correct meaning.

1. They *live/don't live* in New York.
2. He *studies/doesn't study* German now.
3. Kate *takes/doesn't take* the bus to school.
4. She *is/isn't* in the school hockey team.
5. She *works/doesn't work* in a shop.
6. He *does/doesn't do* judo.
7. They *are/aren't* on holiday.
8. Jack *rides/doesn't ride* his bike to school.

Gap-filling 23/6 SB:

Put the verbs in the present perfect or the past simple tense.

1. I live in Dublin. I ... /live/ here since 2005. Before that, I ... /live/ in Edinburgh.
2. Smart Alec ... /leave/ university 7 years ago. He ... /be/ a detective for 6 years.
3. We ... /have/ Mr Jones for History last year, but we ... /have/ Mrs Marsh for two months now.
4. The post ... /not arrive/ yet today. It ... /not arrive/ till 11.30 yesterday.
5. I ... /not see/ Tim since last week. I ... /see/ him last Tuesday.
6. I'm hungry. I ... /not eat/ anything for five hours now. I only ... /eat/ a sandwich at lunchtime.

WB 15/6:

Choose the correct form of the verbs.

1. *I've fallen/fell* downstairs last week
2. *Did you ever see/Have you ever seen* a shooting star?
3. John's *never driven/never drove* a go-cart.
4. My mum's *been/was* on the radio last Monday.
5. *I've never had/never had* toothache.
6. *We've ridden/rode* our bikes to school yesterday.
7. *Have you taken/Did you take* a lot of photos when you were on holiday?
8. Carl's *done/did* lots of interesting things in his life up to now.

Appendix 7: Sentence translation /teacher's sentences/:

1. Už dvě hodiny prší.
2. Jak dlouho žiješ v této ulici?
3. V létě tu moc neprší.
4. Žiješ v této ulici?
5. Je to poprvé, co Petr letí na dovolenou.
6. Tento pokoj malujeme každé 4 roky.
7. Už týden malujeme tento pokoj.
8. Ona je od rána v bance; je tam celé dopoledne.
9. Obvykle chodí do banky v pondělí.
10. Od ledna je můj život jiný.