The Role of Grammar Instruction in Developing Communicative Proficiency: What the Secondary Level Teachers say

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Abstract

Grammar instruction plays a pivotal role in an EFL context but the way grammar is taught depends upon the availability of teaching materials and resources, students' expectations, teachers' maxims and beliefs, and the organizational culture of schools. The present article is an attempt to find out secondary teachers' views regarding the role of grammar instruction to develop communicative proficiency. The study also aimed at finding out what attempts they make for balanced language development (i.e., accuracy, fluency and restructuring). The study used purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to generate data. After thematically and descriptively interpreting the data, the study found that teachers are positive towards the role of grammar instruction in EFL to develop communicative proficiency of the learners. The study also found that grammar error correction prevents learners from the risk of fossilisation. Furthermore, the teachers emphasised both accuracy and fluency for the organic development of English in learners' minds and were aware of the use of various teaching of grammar resources for effective teaching. Finally, the article draws pedagogic and research implications for English language teachers.

Keywords: Fossilization, Communicative proficiency, Semi-structured interview, Instruction

The research context

The status of teaching grammar in language classes has been in the state of flux. Traditionally, the teaching of grammar was given heavy emphasis in language teaching. This trend was followed by 'No Grammar Please' approaches. Recently, however, literature shows that the teaching of grammar has revived. Lately, I have taught a course called Advanced EFL Grammar and Pedagogy to the graduate students in TESOL in the Far Western university. The M. Ed course is a kind of pre-service training to the would-be teachers. The general objectives of this course are (a) to make the student teachers practice various elements of English grammar, and (b) to provide the student teachers with the skills of teaching English grammar. Most of the students who have passed

M.Ed. have become secondary level teachers, and I was interested in finding out their view of the role of the teaching of grammar to enhance the communicative skills of their students. Likewise, I wanted to find out what techniques and resources the graduate teachers were employing. Therefore, I aimed at finding out teachers' perceptions of how they transferred their training in their actual classes. In this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- How do the teachers view the role of grammar instruction in developing communicative competence?

- What techniques and resources do the TESOL graduate teachers use in teaching grammar?

- What is their perceived role of error correction in language teaching?

- How do they perceive the importance of teachers' critical self-evaluation of their own classes in enabling the learners to achieve the outcomes?

- What challenges do they face while teaching grammar? What attempts are they making to address the challenges?

Literature review

Grammar is concerned with how sentences and utterances are formed. According to Thornbury (1999), "Grammar is partly the study of what forms (or structures) are possible in a language … a description of the rules that govern how a language's sentences are formed" (p. 1). Grammar acts as building blocks to make a language. It deals with acceptable and unacceptable forms and the distinctions of meaning these forms create. Ur (2009) says, "Grammar may roughly be defined as the way a language manipulates and combines words (bits of words) so as to express certain kinds of meaning, some of which cannot be conveyed adequately by vocabulary alone" (p. 3). In the words of Cowan (2008), "Grammar is the set of rules that describe how words and groups of words can be arranged to form sentences in a particular language." (p. 3). In the second or foreign language (SL/ FL) situation, the value of grammar in teaching English cannot be ignored. Various scholars have put forward their views regarding teaching grammar from various perspectives. The Grammar Translation method believes that language teaching means teaching of its grammar rules. On the other hand, the Deep-end CLT advocated by N. S. Prabhu (Prabhu, 1987), the Natural approach advocated by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) and the Direct Method reject the teaching of grammar because these approaches view that second language learning parallels first language acquisition. That is to say, some argue for the explicit teaching of grammar while others' strongly put forward their views that grammar instruction is fragile.

According to Thornbury (1999), "The teaching of grammar has always been one of the most controversial and least understood aspects of language teaching" (p. ix). In the words of Ur (1991):

The place of grammar in the teaching of foreign languages is controversial. Most people agree that knowledge of grammar means, among other things, knowing its grammar; but this knowledge may be intuitive (as it is in our native language), and it is not necessarily true that grammatical structures need to be taught as such (p. 76).

The native speakers of English have tacit knowledge of grammar which they develop naturally and subconsciously without any role of formal instruction. On the contrary, SL/ FL learners develop grammatical consciousness as a result of formal instruction. So, grammar needs to be taught formally to the SL/FL learners. Some experts, however, view L1 and L2 learnings as similar processes and avoid the teaching of grammar (Krashen &Terrell, 1983; Prabhu, 1987). Despite the contentious issue as to whether grammar should be taught or not, several ELT methods give prime importance to grammar instruction – may it be deductive or inductive instruction or explicit or implicit instruction. In this regard, Ur (1988) says, "there is no doubt that knowledge – implicit or explicit – of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language" (p.4). Thornbury (1999) provides the following seven arguments for putting grammar in language teaching:

a)   **The sentence machine argument**

The sentence machine argument asserts that grammar is a sentence producing machine. It means innumerable sentences can be generated from the limited rules. The number of possible novel sentences is constrained only by the learners' command over vocabulary items and his/her creativity. It follows that the teaching of grammar offers the learner the means for potentially limitless linguistic creativity.

b)   **The fine-tuning argument**

The teaching of grammar makes the learners aware of the ambiguous and incorrect sentences. It also provides learners with corrective measures.

c)   **The fossilization argument**

The argument asserts that language learning is not possible without mastery of grammar. In other words, the rate of language learning fossilizes if learners receive no instruction. Simply speaking, linguistic competence stops to foster if grammar instruction is totally rejected.

d)   **The advance-organizer argument**

Formal instruction of grammar not only has a present effect but, it has a delayed effect also. Internalization of the rules of grammar in the initial stage works as a prerequisite for later acquisition of language. Schmidt (1990) from his own

experience of learning Portuguese in Brazil concluded that noticing is a prerequisite for acquisition.

e)   The discrete item argument

Any language, if viewed peripherally seems gigantic which may create confusion for the learners. But this edifice of language can be reduced into simpler grammatical items since grammar consists of a finite set of rules. So, the mastery of grammar brings neatness in the use of language. By tidying language up and organizing it into neat categories (sometimes called discrete items), language can be made more digestible, and hence more teachable and learnable.

f)   The rule of law argument

Grammar is a system of rules that are transmitted to learners from the teachers. This transmission is typically associated with the kind of institutionalized learning where rules, order and discipline are highly valued. The need of rules, order and discipline is particularly sharp in large classes of unruly and unmotivated teenagers– a situation that many teachers of English are confronted with daily. In this sort of situation, grammar offers the teacher a structured system that can be taught and tested in methodical steps.

g)   The learner expectation argument

Learners come to the language classes because they have some expectations as to what they will do there. Learners expect to learn language through grammar rules in some contexts. If teaching goes beyond learners' expectations, they get de-motivated and learning does not take place.

The teaching of grammar seemed to have gained its lost status from the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, Tonkyn (1994, p. 1) rightly says, "Grammar is back!" It is also said that without the teaching of grammar, learners run the risk of fossilization (Selinker, 1972). Experts opine that for balanced language development, the teaching of grammar should not be de-emphasized. Recently the teaching of grammar has regained some of its lost prestige since research has shown that while not all grammar instruction impacts learning, exposure to explicit grammar does impact the students' level of L2 proficiency (Purpura, 2014). The revival of grammar has been underlined by two theoretical concepts: focus on form and consciousness-raising. Recent approaches to teaching language focus on the teaching of forms and functions (i.e., rules as well as meaningful and contextually appropriate language). Chalker (1994) states that grammar rules should not be divorced from meaning, use and contexts. The lexical approach to teaching is equally useful for developing accuracy, fluency and restructuring in the learners. What Willis (1994) believes is that teaching grammar should be based on the meaningful words that help the learners develop insights into the target language. More

recently, it is thought that grammar is a valuable asset in language learning (Saaristo, 2015). It is believed that the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language (Zhang, 2009).

Ji and Liu (2018) conducted a study on the "Effectiveness of English: The teaching of grammar and Learning in Chinese Junior Middle Schools" and found that the effectiveness that junior middle school students show in English grammar learning was very low, and teachers' current teaching strategies could not meet the standard of students' communicative competence. Besides, the results of the survey demonstrated that there was a significant demand for teachers to encourage students to improve the efficiency and accuracy of English grammar from reading. It can now be said that teachers' inappropriate teaching strategies may be the cause of students' low achievement. Most of the teachers seem to fail to encourage their learners, which results in students' poor communicative proficiency in English. While teaching grammar, students need to be taught how to learn. Similarly, Adhikari (2017) surveyed student-teachers' views on grammar and the teaching of grammar, and its communication to their students. He found that his student-teachers preferred learner involvement, collaborative approach, task-based activities, and so on. In contrast, the classroom observation showed that their teaching was lacking learner-centeredness and that their teaching was totally teacher-centered and traditional. There was lack of compatibility in what the subjects said and did. Most of the teachers of Nepal are well acquainted with the terminologies like learner centeredness, learner autonomy, and eclectic approach, but they fail to practically apply these notions in their actual classes.

Bastola (2016) in a similar study found that almost all the teachers of English teach grammar in their classrooms deductively. The study also showed that the teachers were using the deductive method of teaching not because of their own will but because of their students' desires. To interpret Bastola's (2016) findings, it can be said that many teachers put learners at the centre of teaching and learning process and they teach according to their learners' will and desires. However, they do not seem to make their learners explorers of knowledge. This is because traditional teaching is deeply rooted in our society and maybe it is difficult for the teachers to change the way teaching is being practiced.

Badilla and Chacon (2013) concluded through the survey that students mentioned their disappointment in the methodology used by most of the professors. It consisted of written activities that did not allow them to see the grammatical rules and sentence structures. It was suggested that the professors combine traditional teaching of the rules and the teaching of communicative activities to make grammar fun and catchy. It was also concluded that teaching grammar requires more than making students memorize lists of words, noun phrases, verbal phrases, prepositions, articles and other grammatical structures. Therefore, it can be said that students' learning remains incomplete unless the teachers resort to forms; only teaching of functions eschewing the forms may produce linguistically and communicatively handicapped learners.

Teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical skills have an impact on how they teach. Teachers are often guided by their own philosophy of what makes them a good teacher. Wong and Barrea- Marlys (2012) indicated that there was a mixture of perceptions regarding the inclusion of explicit grammar instruction in a CLT classroom. The findings also revealed that teachers' perceptions of what they deem to be effective L2 instruction are influenced by their experience as learners as well as their observation of student learning. Generally, teachers' beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices. Recently there has been a shift from product-based instruction to process-based instruction. ELT experts have found out that learning-centered approach, not the teacher-centered or learner-centered ones, have fruitful results. Following Lightbown and Spada (as cited in Cameron, 2001) children can attain native-like accent and listening skills but they lack accuracy if the input is provided focusing on meaning only. If meaning is only the focus, learners seem to bypass the grammatical aspects. As a result, language learning becomes severely handicapped. Cameron (2001) writes, "…grammar does indeed have a place in children's foreign language learning, and skillful the grammar teaching can be useful" (p. 96). The study of Ji and Liu (2018) showed that the cause of students' low achievement might be the teachers' inappropriate teaching strategies. Adhikari (2017) showed incompatibility between what the teachers know regarding language teaching and what they do. Likewise, Bastola (2016) thinks that teachers tend to use the deductive approach because of their students' desires. Badilla and Chacon (2013) stressed the need of teaching both forms and functions for developing communicative competence in EFL contexts. All these works inspired me to find out the secondary level teachers' perspectives on the teaching of grammar in the EFL context.

This study investigates novice teachers' perceptions of the role of grammar in developing students' communicative competence.

Study method

The study adopted a narrative research design to accomplish the objectives of this study. It focused on what secondary level teachers' do as told through their own stories. All the secondary level English teachers who studied the course of 'Advanced EFL grammar and pedagogy' in the Far Western university formed the population of the study. Out of the whole population, twelve teachers were purposively selected. Factors, such as geographical proximity, availability of respondents at a certain time, easy accessibility, and their willingness to volunteer (Dornyei, 2007) influenced their selection. Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool for eliciting and recording data. Prior to starting an interview with teachers, they were told about the purpose of the study. Once the data elicitation process was over, the audio recorded data was transcribed and analyzed descriptively. Then the transcribed data was categorised into different categories/ themes and the respondents' stories were written down under appropriate themes.

Findings

The data obtained from semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analyzed by using thematic analysis. The findings include the following themes: importance of teaching grammar in general, role of grammar instruction in EFL context, attitudes to grammar error correction, use of grammar: for introducing language items or for remedy, challenges in teaching grammar, ways to overcome the challenge, critical evaluation of one's own classes, focus on accuracy or fluency, and resources for teaching grammar. In this study, pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identity of the participants and to maintain confidentiality. In this section, I have included teachers' views verbatim with a view to maintaining the authenticity of their voice.

Importance of teaching grammar in general

Different people view the teaching of grammar differently. Some suggest that the teaching of grammar has a major effect in language learning, others advocate that the teaching of grammar is subservient to exposure, and some others claim that the teaching of grammar is harmful. Developments in early second language acquisition research suggest that direct grammar teaching is not only futile but also harmful since such teaching has a minor impact in face of more powerful naturalistic processes (Skehan, 1994).

> *"Grammar is the backbone of the language. In our case, students are not acquiring English but they are learning it. So, for teaching a foreign language the teaching of grammar is necessary."* **- Naresh**

> *"The teaching of grammar is necessary for primary, secondary and tertiary levels because it is the system of a language. It enables people to use language properly."* **- Deepak**

> *"It is the grammar that makes language meaningful. Grammar is the skeleton of language and knowledge of grammar enables learners to communicate effectively."* **- Gopal**

> *"Grammar brings accuracy in language and it develops fluency as well."* **-Shyam**

> *"Grammar governs language use. So, the teaching of grammar is essential."* **- Anju**

> *"Grammar is the basic unit of language teaching. We should teach grammar so that we can develop fluency and accuracy in our language. Language should be situationally appropriate and grammatically accurate. Therefore, the teaching of grammar is necessary."* **- Pravin**

From the views of these participants, it can be inferred that the teachers view the teaching of grammar as very important, and grammar knowledge as a requirement to develop accuracy as well as fluency as it functions as the backbone of language development.

Role of context in grammar instruction

Contexts in grammar instruction play a vital role. Students hardly get enough exposure to the foreign language outside the class. So, they do not get the opportunity to pick up language subconsciously in a natural setting. Therefore, they should be made conscious of L2 structures in their appropriate contexts.

> *"Well, the teaching of grammar should be context-dependent. However, only it is not sufficient if we do not teach grammar in context."*- **Mahesh**

> *"In foreign language teaching contexts, exposing learners to target language and teaching grammar both should be done."*- **Bishal**

> *"We should not focus on the teaching of grammar in isolation. Instead, we should create an appropriate context in class and teach grammar communicatively."*- **Bishnu**

> *"We are teaching in EFL scenario, so obviously our students are having very limited exposure and grammar knowledge does not develop in them naturally. So, if we ignore the teaching of grammar in contexts, our learners will not gain meaningful accuracy in language."*- **Anju**

While grammar instruction should never be ignored, it should not be taught without creating appropriate contexts. As learners do not get English exposure outside the classroom, they should be made conscious of grammar rules in contexts that help them differentiate between their L1 and L2 cues. Therefore, relating grammar instruction to an appropriate context is helpful for developing meaningful accuracy.

Attitudes to grammar error correction

There are several views regarding the correction of grammar errors. However, the gravity of error is significant. If an error is not impairing the communication flow, an immediate correction has to be avoided. On the other hand, serious errors should be handled with care in time. For some EFL teachers, immediate correction plays a crucial role in interlanguage development.

> *"I would like to say that grammar errors should be immediately corrected. We are in the EFL scenario and if we ignore the grammar errors, where will they learn from? They get very limited exposure and they hardly get the opportunity to correct themselves. So, grammar errors should be corrected on the spot."*- **Anju**

> *"We should correct the mistakes of the learners but not directly. We can make them correct their mistakes indirectly by giving some examples so that they can improve themselves. Errors should not be ignored."*- **Bishal**

*"Errors should be immediately corrected as feedback. So, errors must not be ignored if we have to teach them correct English."***- Bishnu**

"Errors should be neither ignored nor immediately corrected by the teachers. If one student makes a mistake, the teacher should ask other students to assist him or her. If it does not work, the teacher should correct their mistakes without demotivating them." **- Jamuna**

*"According to behaviourism, language learning is habit formation. So, if errors are not corrected, learners learn the wrong rules. Similarly, mentalism says that people learn language due to innate capacity (i.e., LAD). But LAD also has to be exposed to the correct language before it starts generating language. In foreign language teaching, errors should be immediately corrected because learners do not have English exposure outside the class."***- Gopal**

*"Errors are the gateway to success, no doubt. But, what I think is that errors should be immediately corrected. If learners continue using the inaccurate sentences time and again, then they internalize the wrong rules and wrong habit formation takes place."***- Mahesh**

"Whether errors should be corrected or not depends upon the seriousness of errors. The serious errors should be corrected immediately because these errors hamper the learning process. Ignoring such errors is the main cause of fossilization." **- Naresh**

Three different lines of thinking emerge from the teachers' voices given above. The first of which may be termed as the traditional approach which recommends errors to be corrected immediately otherwise there is a danger for them to be fossilized. If errors are not corrected in time, learners fossilize at some point in their interlanguage (IL) development. The second line of thinking suggests that errors must be handled with care and done implicitly rather than explicitly. Direct error corrections may do more harm than good. The third view, however, advises that the technique of error correction may be different according to the gravity of errors, situation, learners' personalities and styles. Appropriate error correction techniques can not only be a best pedagogical strategy to motivate the learners but also to foster their capacity to generate a new language.

Accuracy versus fluency

Whether to focus on accuracy or fluency is highly debatable. As it is noted in the sections above, some researchers contend that accuracy should be the primary goal of teaching English in the EFL contexts (Tonkyn 1994) It does not, however, mean that fluency should be ignored. Once learners are aware of the target structures, they should be given some proceduralization activities to developing fluency in the target language.

*"I focus on accuracy because if their language is not accurate, the listeners may have difficulty understanding the meaning. If the intended meaning is not conveyed, there is no point in speaking. So, I focus on accuracy."***- Deepak**

"I focus on fluency but I do not ignore accuracy at all. When they communicate with their friends or with me, they can get indirect feedback and develop accuracy as well. But, if they never take part in communication, focusing on rules is meaningless."- **Gopal**

"Well, I focus both but I believe that their grammar should be correct. I do not mind if they commit pronunciation mistakes as this is the era of world Englishes but if they are making mistakes in grammar, I worry. So, I focus on familiarizing the learners with accurate sentences and at the same time I focus on fluency."- **Jamuna**

"In spoken English, fluency is my focus. I encourage them to speak English so that they can communicate with each other. I note their mistakes and plan to deal with those mistakes sometime later in another class so that they will realize their mistakes. In this way, what I think is that they can develop accuracy as well."- **Bishal**

"Actually, I focus both but I focus on accuracy more. When my students make mistakes, I correct their mistakes because if students learn correct grammar, they can improve their performance and fluency later. If they do not learn accurate grammar in time, their fluency will be adversely affected later on." - **Mahesh**

"My focus is on fluency. Actually, if we just focus on forms, students may get discouraged and they do not like to do grammar tasks. So, in the very beginning, I focus on fluency and later on I make them aware of the formal aspects. In this way, what I think is that they can develop accuracy as well."- **Naresh**

As can be deciphered from the teachers' comments above, none of the teachers see to sacrifice one for the other. When some teachers focus on accuracy more and others emphasize fluency, they are not doing one at the cost of the other. Some teachers start with fluency and move towards accuracy while others do the opposite. This is because their students are at the different points of the accuracy-fluency continuum.

Use of grammar: For introducing language items or for remedy

Grammar instruction can be done for both preemptive targeting of errors (Cowan, 2008) and for remedial teaching. Preventive measures make learners aware of the possible errors before they commit them. As the teacher introduces language items, h/she makes the learners notice the possible gray areas. Remedial teaching is done to correct the mistakes after they have been committed. James (1994) claims both prophylactic teachings, which are done before the learners make errors, and remedial teaching, which is done after the learners have committed mistakes, play important role in an EFL milieu.

"The teaching of grammar should not only be done for language correction but also for introducing language items."- **Anju**

"In my opinion, at first they should be asked to do their work and exercises themselves. If they make mistakes, remedial teaching is necessary." **- Bishal**

"Language and grammar are not different things. Language teaching involves vocabulary teaching, pronunciation teaching, the teaching of grammar, and so on. So, it depends, you see." **- Bishnu**

"Grammar should be used in remedial measures as well but it should be used in the language class from the time of introducing language items to show them the right path." **- Deepak**

"First we should teach grammar so that they will remember the structures which they can use for language practice. If students are unaware of the structures, the intended meaning may be lost and communication breaks down." **- Gopal**

"I think we should focus on the teaching of function, and while practicing various functions, they use various forms. So, I say that form derives from function. In case learners have problems in using correct form, grammar help can be used as a remedial measure." **- Naresh**

From the opinions expressed above, what can be drawn is that both prophylactic and remedial measures are useful in language teaching. In foreign language teaching, if learners' consciousness of the potential breaches of grammar rules is not raised; wrong learning may take place. So, students should be given the opportunity to notice the structures of the target language. This approach helps them to be aware of the ways language elements are structured into meaningful units of the language.

Resources for teaching grammar

For the effective teaching of grammar, we need to exploit various resources like poems, songs, rhymes, games and problem-solving activities. The use of such resources makes the class lively and interesting. Furthermore, it is sheer fun for students to learn grammar where they are not fully attending to grammatical aspects of the language. As is stated in the comments, using various resources breaks the monotony of the learners and adds variety to the class.

"It depends upon the situation. If there is a large class, I sometimes break the class into two or three groups. I then use poems in one group, games in another group, and problem-solving activities in the next group to teach the same grammar item. It takes time so the next day, I invite the group leaders to present what they have learned. If the class is small, I bring some scripts of drama and ask the students to act out." **- Shyam**

"I generally use puzzles, games, and melodramas to teach grammar." **- Pravin**

> *"Sometimes I use online resources and different books written by various scholars to teach grammar."-* **Naresh**

> *"To teach grammar, I use various resources. Sometimes I use poems, sometimes I crack jokes, and sometimes I sing songs."-* **Mahesh**

> *"I use games, authentic videos of English L1 speakers, and extracts from some movies."-* **Gopal**

> *"Dictionary is one resource I use. Sometimes I also take help from online resources."-* **Deepak**

> *"Sometimes I use songs, poems and rhymes."-* **Bishnu**

> *"Some grammar books and these days I also use online resources."-* **Bishal**

The teachers seemed to use different sorts of resources to make their teaching fruitful. They suggested that the resources aided them significantly to teach better.

Challenges in teaching grammar

In the EFL context, teaching grammar is a challenge mainly due to the differences in L1 and L2 forms. If L1 and L2 cues are similar, learning of L2 is facilitated whereas the differences in the cues result in L2 errors. The theory of L1 interference applies here as learners mind is full of L1 structures when they start learning L2. This is the main challenge though, as the teachers' remarks below show, other challenges may also exist.

> *"If you see the prior knowledge of the students of government-aided schools, it's very difficult to teach. They don't know English vocabulary; they don't have the knowledge of norms and rules of grammar; they are very weak. So, a secondary level English teacher faces a lot of problems. Besides this, students with multiple intelligences, multiple linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are a great challenge for a teacher because it's very difficult to fulfill their needs, desires and demands."-* **Naresh**

> *"In private English medium schools, we face fewer challenges as the students are getting English environment and somehow, they are fluent in English. But, they don't have deep knowledge of grammar rules, so some of them lack accuracy. Sometimes, they use their own structures which are not target-like. Sometimes, they use double negation, sometimes, double marking of tenses, and so on"-* **Pravin**

> *"I have found my students overgeneralizing the rules. Teaching all the rules and exceptional cases is not possible and students overgeneralize what they have learnt. L1 interference is another problem. My students try to speak English but they use L1 kind of structures. Comprehension problem is another problem."-* **Shyam**

*"The challenge I am facing is addressing the heterogeneous class. Due to learners' L1 differences, some items are difficult for me to explain."***- Mahesh**

*"My students speak English but their English is not accurate."***- Anju**

*"Sometimes, I find it difficult to teach inductively through examples and sometimes, I find difficulty in teaching deductively through rules. So, choosing the correct methodology is my challenge."***- Bishal**

Both the government-aided school teachers and private school teachers face challenges in teaching grammar. In government schools, the main problem for a secondary level English teacher is that learners' level of English is poor. Students lack command in all areas of the language such as accuracy, fluency and comprehension. As the comments above suggest, in private schools, students are somehow fluent and can comprehend but they are not accurate in terms of grammar. Helping students overcome errors caused by L1interference and overgeneralization is another challenge for the teachers.

Ways to overcome the challenge

The teachers use several techniques and strategies to overcome the problems. Learner motivation, rapport building, group work, pair work, and differentiated instruction, help them to overcome the challenges teachers are facing in teaching grammar.

*"I teach according to situation. For example, when my students overgeneralise, I give several examples that fit the rule and I also provide them some exceptional cases so that they will form less errors. Similarly, when learners make mistakes due to mother tongue interferences, I show them the differences in students' L1 and the TL (target language). In this way I help them internalize the rules and ask them to go for freer practice."***- Shyam**

*"Basically, I emphasize the areas where learners make mistakes in order that they can find out their mistakes. I also repeat the sentence if that is wrong rather than telling them their structure is wrong. When this happens, learners realize their mistakes and start correcting themselves."***- Pravin**

*"Actually, before I start teaching, I take some pre-tests to know the background knowledge of my students, to test their ability and capability. Then I use appropriate techniques to help my students. I also call my students other than the school time and give them extra classes to increase the level of their language proficiency."***-Naresh**

*"I simply repeat the topics so that students can revisit the topics they have already met."***- Anju**

*"Sometimes, I take the help of my senior teachers and sometimes, I use teachers' guide to solve the challenges."***- Bishal**

> *"Students are from heterogeneous groups and I always think of addressing all the students. By which way they can understand is always the focus of my teaching. I always make sure whether they are catching my points or not."***- Mahesh**

Challenges can be overcome by getting ideas from other teachers, trying to better the methodology, exemplifying, revisiting and recycling the topics, taking pretests prior to teaching, and stressing on the learners' problems to make them realize their weaknesses.

Discussion

From the analysis of participants' views on the importance of teaching grammar, it has been found that grammar is the backbone of language which enables language users to use language properly. It is the skeleton of language which enables learners to communicate effectively. This resonates with Ur (1988) that knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language. It is grammar instruction that develops both fluency and accuracy. It is the basic unit of language which governs a language. Therefore, the teaching of grammar is of paramount importance in language classes. This is also highlighted in Chalker (1994) and Willis (1994). Grammar teaching is a must in the EFL context because learners do not get naturalistic exposure, which aligns with Purpura (2014), Saaristo (2015), Zhang (2009) and Cameron (2001). Learners may get English exposure from TVs, radios, movies, documentaries, newspapers but they lack exposure to day to day communication. So, the teaching of grammar should be done in order that they start to communicate using the basic structures of language. Errors should be corrected to prevent the learners from running the risk of fossilization (Selinker, 1972). In the EFL contexts, learners get almost no (or very little) opportunity to test their hypothesis and to amend their interlanguage, so the teacher needs to correct the mistakes using appropriate techniques. If errors are ignored, wrong habit formation takes place and once the habit is set, it is almost impossible to give it up. When learners fossilize, it is difficult to teach them target-like structures However, in the name of correcting mistakes, learners should not be demotivated and discouraged.

According to Cowan (2008) and James (1994), both prophylactic teaching and remedial teaching should go side by side. Whether and to what extent one should resort to the teaching of grammar depends upon several factors. Learner issues, the gravity of error, the complexity of the topic, classroom setting and situation are some of such responsible factors. It was also found that all the teachers face challenges in teaching grammar. The major challenges include how to deal with the problems of L1 interference, overgeneralization, state of having very little (almost no) exposure to the target language, and so on. To reiterate Naresh's words,

"…Students with multiple intelligences, multiple linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are a great challenge for a teacher because it's very difficult to fulfill their needs, desires and demands." Similarly, it was found that due to undue focus on fluency activities in the curriculum, learners' accuracy is getting affected adversely, which has become a great

challenge for the teachers. Badilla and Chacon (2013), therefore, suggest that the teachers combine traditional teaching of the rules and the teaching of communicative activities to make grammar fun and catchy. The teachers are using strategies and techniques that fit the situation and learner-needs to overcome the challenges. They test the students' comprehension level and provide the students with constructive feedback. They show the areas of grammar in which L1 and L2 differ. Similarly, they revisit and recondition learners' learning so that knowledge can go to long term memory and that this knowledge will be available for spontaneous conversation. Using teacher's guides and getting help from other teachers are also useful ideas that the teachers expressed. Their main challenge was to make balanced language development and they have been adapting the ways outlined above to overcome the challenges and to maintain a balance among accuracy, fluency, appropriacy and spontaneity. Teachers have their own ways of critically evaluating their classes. Most of them give tests to their students to check their understanding of the grammar lessons taught. In this way, they use a testing technique to evaluate the effectiveness of their grammar teaching. Some teachers keep the lesson reports while others ask students to express their opinion of the class at the end of the term. Similarly, teachers are also found to be collaborating with each other. The study also found that teachers valued both fluency and accuracy equally. Some emphasized accuracy over fluency and others did just the opposite only to fulfill the learner's needs and expectations. Akin to the findings of Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012), the study revealed that teachers' perceptions of what makes L2 grammar instruction effective are influenced by their experience and situation. The study also found that teachers want to make their grammar classes learning-centered, interesting, and lively and to do so, they exploit a number of resources in their classrooms.

Conclusion

The teaching of grammar has a lot to do with accuracy in communicative proficiency. It is grammar instruction that balances the language development. Learning of English in an EFL context is severely constrained without grammar instruction. Since learners do not have naturalistic exposure to the target language, they do not have sufficient data to work on. Consequently, organic language development does not take place if the teaching of grammar is eschewed. Grammar Instruction keeps learners on the right track and prevents them from fossilization. In the course of language teaching, learners commit several mistakes so learners should be scaffolded with grammar instruction at various stages of learning. Grammar instruction improves with critical reflection and self-evaluation. No method is perfect and subject to the changing context and learner needs. Therefore, teachers should think of appropriating their methodologies in terms of the context, aims and needs. The small-scale study was based on a limited number of interviews. Furthermore, the study has only dealt with the teachers' perception of the role of grammar. What happens in the actual classrooms remains unexplored. Therefore, further research can be conducted to find out whether what teachers say and what they do match. The study employed purposive sampling for the ease and convenience of data generation. Therefore, the study cannot claim to represent the

voice of the wider population of M. Ed graduates who have completed the course. Larger scale research is needed in order to include a larger sampling. On the basis of the findings, the following research and pedagogic implications can be drawn:

- While planning, policymaking, curriculum developing and syllabus framing, it has to be deeply thought about whats, whys, wherefores and hows of grammar instruction in language classes.

- Teachers should use grammaring (Larsen-freeman, 2003) techniques in their classrooms for the effective delivery of their lessons.

- Teachers need to employ SARSing techniques in their grammar instructions. SARS stands for supplementing, adapting, rejecting and substituting.

- At the practice level, teachers should use a bottom-up approach for their professional growth. Sense of professional growth and professional ethics are at the roots of students' progress.

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Appendix

1. Why is the teaching of grammar necessary?

2. How do you teach grammar? Give examples.

3. Some people say that the teaching of grammar should not be focused in EFL classes. Do you agree?

4. Some people say that grammar errors should be ignored whereas others argue for immediate correction. Justify your point of view.

5. How can grammar be taught to enhance communicative competence? Please be

specific.

6.   The teaching of grammar should only be used for remedy, not for introducing language items. What is your opinion regarding this?

7.   What challenges do you face/ have you been facing in teaching English?

8.   How do you deal/ are dealing with those challenges?

9.   Do you try something new or follow the same methods of teaching grammar every year?

10. Have you ever critically looked at the effectiveness of teaching grammar in the classroom? How?

11. What is your viewpoint? Grammar should be taught or not? Explain.

12. Do you think that it is easier to present language items if we teach grammar? Why/ why not?

13. Do you believe that we should make our learners communicate in English no matter whether or not their utterances are grammatically accurate? Why/ why not?

14. Mention some resources that you are exploiting to teach grammar.

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