

ESL/EFL Students' Perceptions of Grammar Teaching Methods: A Brief Study

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Abstract: *ESL/EFL students frequently believe that grammar is essential to language competency. Learning grammar is highly valued by many English language learners. Mastering grammar enhances students' language accuracy, promoting successful communication. Students, academics, and practitioners, particularly, ESL/EFL teachers have focused on the fundamentals of grammar. Grammar describes the rules that govern language; and language does not exist without grammar, since all languages are characterized by the grammar components: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics or meaning. The deductive approach is a teacher-introduced method that saves class time and gets right to the point, whereas, the inductive approach is the student-centered approach, taking more time and results in fewer subjects being covered. The majority of research support different approaches to teaching grammar to students and highlight the significance of grammar studies. Grammar is, therefore, extensively regarded as the center or backbone of structure of language.*

Keywords: EFL, ESL, Grammar Education, Language Competency, Teaching Methods

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Introduction

Learning grammar is highly valued by many English language learners. They believe that successful communication and grammatical accuracy are related, and they link good grammar to social acceptance by native speakers, job and career prospects, and the achievement of educational objectives. Since its beginning in the 1970s, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners and researchers have shown a great deal of interest in language learning techniques study (Zhang et al., 2019).

The history of teaching and learning foreign and second languages has been greatly influenced by grammar. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are the four skills that learners must master when studying any language. As a subskill, grammar is just as crucial as the other language abilities, and speech is ineffective sans it. Additionally, mastering grammar helps students create and write coherent sentences because their language growth would be severely limited without a solid grasp of grammar.

Jean and Simard (2011) claim that mastering grammar enhances students' language accuracy, which promotes successful communication. Effective grammar instruction is still a problem for many educational establishments. Despite the fact that many studies teach English in a conventional manner (Le Van Canh & Barnard, 2009), EFL students continue to struggle with grammatical knowledge. However, the communicative approach, which encourages EFL students to talk without focusing any attention to grammatical errors, lowered the function of grammar instruction.

Grammar is often seen by ESL/EFL students as crucial to language proficiency, and they strongly choose explicit instruction—rules followed by examples—over strictly implicit approaches. Therefore, students frequently prefer teacher-led explanations and organized, contextual practice while endorsing communicative approaches.

Students, academics, and practitioners—particularly ESL/EFL teachers—have focused on the fundamentals of grammar. This is due to the fact that successful language learning requires mastery of the target language's grammar (Mart, 2013). For ESL/EFL students, grammar is essential for both learning the target language's structures and using it appropriately (Richards & Reppen, 2014).

Background Study

Since grammar is a tool for constructing meaningful sentences, teaching grammar is an essential part of teaching English as a second language (ESL). Grammar describes the rules that govern language; hence language and grammar are connected. According to Musumeci (1996), "language does not exist without grammar, since all languages are characterized by the grammar components: phonetics, phonology,

morphology, syntax, and semantics or meaning." Grammar is misinterpreted because it is ambiguous. This indicates that the word "grammar" is ambiguous and can be misinterpreted in a variety of ways. As a result, different authors define grammar in various manners.

Although grammar has always been important in EFL classes, teaching strategies have changed dramatically. According to Hall (2011), the shift in teaching approaches is a reflection of the new ideas and the spirit of the times, including linguistic interests and social values. Teachers may use a variety of grammar teaching techniques in EFL classrooms, including explicit and implicit grammar training, the deductive approach, the inductive approach, and the eclectic approach.

There have been numerous conversations on grammar in language instruction. As a result, varying perspectives on the function of grammar result in various approaches. In this regard, Thornbury (1999) believes that the grammar controversy has actually consumed the attention of theorists and practitioners more than any other topic, and the history of language instruction is largely the history of arguments for and against grammar instruction.

In other words, there are two perspectives on teaching grammar: some believe it is an essential part of learning a foreign language, while others think it is unimportant and pointless. There is no question that mastering a language requires an understanding of grammatical rules, whether explicit or implicit, according to Ur (1988).

It is important to note that the emphasis on grammar has shifted since the communicative approach to language learning and instruction emerged. This is because it has been suggested that teaching grammar rules by itself is insufficient to enable learners communicate. Grammar is still a crucial component in teaching and learning languages. In reality, if students have a positive attitude toward the learning process, they will be driven to learn and master a language.

The Emergence of Grammar Education

The history of language instruction has been dominated by the argument over the importance of grammar in instruction. The subject of whether grammar training benefited students in becoming proficient in a second language dominated discussions throughout the most of the preceding century. According to Gascoigne (2002), the numerous responses to this question might be arranged along a continuum with extremes at either end. Highly explicit methods of teaching grammar are at one extreme, while implicit methods that avoid discussing form are at the other.

This is a summary of the brief history of grammar education in language instruction given by Hinkel (2002). Although there is a huge variety of historical methods for teaching grammar, some are well-known for their impact. One of the first of these, the grammar translation approach, was marked by a lack of real communication activities and mechanical memorization of rules.

The direct method emerged at the start of the 20th century as a result of behaviorist psychology and linguists' structural descriptions of world languages. Grammar was learnt by oral practice, drills, and repetition rather than memorization and textual manipulation of clear rules, according to proponents of this approach, which held that pupils should learn a second language in the same manner that they learned their first. However, fundamental principles of structure continued to be the foundation of language learning. Another structural approach that shared this implicit approach to grammar was audiolingualism.

Inspired by Chomsky's theory of universal grammar and the ensuing emphasis on syntax, cognitive approaches to instruction gained popularity by the 1960s. However, the pendulum swung back toward the implicit in the 1970s with the introduction of humanistic approaches, especially communicative language teaching, which emphasized meaningful interaction and authenticity in learning activities and maintained that communication should be the goal of instruction. Cognitive techniques marked a return to more explicit grammar education, motivated by Chomsky's theory of universal grammar and the consequent emphasis on syntax. But with the introduction of humanistic methods, especially communicative language instruction, in the 1970s, the tide turned once more in favor of the implicit. These methods maintained that communication should be the main objective of instruction and placed a strong emphasis on authenticity and meaningful participation in learning activities.

An exclusive focus on either extreme hinders adult learners' acquisition of English, according to current studies on the benefits of the implicit and explicit approaches mentioned above. The shortcomings of a purely communicative approach have also been addressed, while the shortcomings of a traditional concentration on language structure alone are widely established.

Deductive and Inductive Approaches

In general, educators are constantly experimenting with innovative strategies and changing the way they educate. The inductive and deductive approaches to teaching are two nearly diametrically opposed approaches. The teacher's function is the main difference between these two very diverse and diametrically opposed teaching strategies that have potential advantages. Thornbury (1999) defines inductive and deductive methods as follows: an inductive approach (rule-discovery) begins with some examples from which a rule is inferred, whereas a deductive approach (rule-driven) begins with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied.

The deductive approach and the inductive approach are the two methods that scholars consistently use when teaching grammar (Nunan D., 2015). The deductive approach is teacher-centered, meaning that once the teacher explains the principles to the class, the pupils practice applying them. The deductive method reduces student participation in class since it saves time and goes right to the point. Though, the deductive method separates grammar instruction from meaning, it encourages students' self-assurance in their ability to master grammar.

The inductive approach, on the contrary point of view, is learner-centered and requires students to examine language samples, identify, and recognize the rules on their own. With the inductive approach, students create the rules and participate more in the teaching process. As a result, this procedure evaluates their growth. Because the inductive technique requires more time, fewer topics are covered. In the end, neither the deductive nor the inductive methods are better than the other; rather, they are complementary. While some students benefit from the deductive technique, others learn best through the inductive approach.

Thus, before going on to particular examples or tasks, the deductive method entails giving students clear grammatical rules, principles, or language structures (Harmer, 2007). This strategy is frequently linked to traditional grammar translation methods, in which students are given lists of vocabulary words and grammatical rules to master, followed by exercises or translation assignments. Conversely, learners are first exposed to particular examples or language situations in the inductive method, which is based on inductive reasoning. From the examples, they are urged to deduce patterns or rules.

Grammar As the Backbone of Language

It is broadly speaking that grammar is an essential component of any language and it is regarded as the backbone of a language. Although linguists have defined grammar in a variety of ways, they all generally refer to the rules governing how sentence units are arranged. Grammar always plays a central role in teaching foreign languages, particularly English as a foreign language (EFL).

Grammar instruction has recovered due to the importance of grammar in ESL/EFL contexts. Effective grammar instruction has been shown to be crucial for pupils to acquire high accuracy and fluency in the target language (Ellis, 2003). Effective grammar instruction must assist students in identifying new grammatical rules and practicing such policies to language use in collaboration with instructors and peers, regardless of the debates and disagreements regarding how to teach grammar and what to be aware of when doing so (Ellis, 2006). This study aims to examine how EFL university students perceive successful grammar instruction during the teaching and learning process.

The way that linguists understand grammar differs from one another. According to traditionalists, it's a collection of norms and concepts, just like grammar is the structural list's review of the arrangement and construction of sentences. While some experts of the communicative technique believe that grammar is a feature of language that is in opposition to structural patterns, the transformation list views it as a rule that generates countless sentences and allows the speaker to understand the words they have heard (Giovannelli, 2015). Whatever the theory, grammar is regarded as the base of every language and the core of its organization.

English grammar research is an intriguing subject to think about. Since it is a crucial component that can support the growth of students' understanding and proficiency in the application of effective communication (Srinon, 2019). Numerous studies on grammar have been carried out in recent decades, leading to various grammatical studies (Larsen-Freeman 2003a, Hinkel 2004, Rosa & Leow 2004; Shiu 2011), which showed that learners' abilities were impacted by learning English grammar when they had to study at a higher level prior to that time, and this can be one of the indicators of successful language learning (Srinon, 2019).

Grammar is, therefore, extensively regarded as the center or backbone of structure of language. As the structural framework that controls the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses to produce meaning. It provides the guidelines required for coherence and comprehension, bridging the gap between basic vocabulary and successful communication.

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Conclusion

ESL/EFL students frequently believe that grammar is essential to language competency. Learning grammar is highly valued by many English language learners. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) practitioners and researchers have shown a great deal of interest in language learning techniques study. The history of teaching and learning foreign and second languages has been greatly influenced by grammar. Mastering grammar enhances students' language accuracy, promoting successful communication. Students, academics, and practitioners, particularly, ESL/EFL teachers have focused on the fundamentals of grammar. teaching grammar is an essential part of teaching English as a second language (ESL). Grammar describes the rules that govern language; and language does not exist without grammar, since all languages are characterized by the grammar components: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics or meaning.

Effective grammar instruction can assist students in identifying new grammatical rules and practicing such policies to language use in collaboration with instructors and peers. Numerous studies on grammar have been carried out in recent decades, leading to various grammatical studies, which showed that learners' abilities were impacted by learning English grammar. Grammar is, therefore, extensively regarded as the center or backbone of structure of language. As the structural framework that controls the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses to produce meaning.

There are two methods for teaching grammar: the deductive method and the inductive method. The deductive approach is a teacher-introduced method that saves class time and gets right to the point, which reduces student participation. Conversely, the inductive approach is the student-centered approach, where students participate more in the teaching process and create the rules, which takes more time and results in fewer subjects being covered. Finally, neither the deductive nor the inductive methods are better than the other; rather, they are complementary.

Overall, the study indicates that students' language learning success is significantly influenced by the study of grammar and student viewpoints, grammar teaching strategies, and other relevant issues. The majority of research support different approaches to teaching grammar to students and highlight the significance of grammar studies. Therefore, it is crucial for English teachers to take into account and be aware of how learners perceive grammar when teaching it.

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