

Teachers' Perception on the Present Method of Teaching Grammar in Constructing Grammatical Concepts among Secondary School Students of Kerala

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Abstract: The role of grammar instruction in an ESL/EFL context has been for decades a major issue for students and teachers alike. Researchers have debated whether grammar should be taught in the classroom and students, for their part, have generally looked upon grammar instruction as a necessary evil at best, and an avoidable burden at worst. This paper reports a study undertaken to investigate how far the presently using methods of teaching in an English classroom is helping the secondary school students of Kerala to understand and use grammatical concepts. The study also focusses on the difficulties English teachers face in teaching grammar to ESL students as well as those faced by students in learning it, in the teachers' perception. The study aimed to find out whether there are significant differences in teachers' perceptions of difficulties in relation to their gender, qualification and teaching experience, thus providing insights into their own and their students' difficulties. Percentage analysis and t-test were used to interpret the data. The main findings are reported with implications.

Keywords: English teachers, grammar, ESL students

INTRODUCTION

According to Azar the role of grammar is to "help students discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear, and write intelligible [1]" . As Azar stated, without grammar, people would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body language to communicate meaning. Moreover, effective grammar instruction can help students use this knowledge as they write. Through the connection from oral language into written language, teachers can explain abstract grammatical terminology to help students write and read with better proficiency and confidence. Calkins suggested, the most helpful way to improve students' command of grammar in writing is to use students' writing as the base for teaching grammatical concepts [2]. The Role of Grammar research also indicated that it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety, and sentence patterns in the context of writing than to access the topic by teaching unorganized skills. Hillocks found that grammar instruction that is separate from writing instruction is unable to enhance students' writing competence [3]. In other research, Weaver proposed a similar approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing [4]. Weaver also mentioned five grammatical

concepts that enable students to show progress in sentence revision, style, and editing.

Teaching grammar as such it is a debatable one and more discussions have been undergone regarding the issue. Even the word grammar itself is creating a feeling of boredom and disinterest among learners. Whatever methods have been used to teach grammar there is not much change in the attitude of learners towards learning grammar. As far as students are concerned, they consider that there is no need to study grammar and still under the notion that grammar is a dry store house. English teacher is often portrayed as an "unattractive grammar mongers whose only pleasure in life is to point out the faults of others [5]. For the most part, within the classroom, any mention of grammar causes the student moments of discomfort and sometimes even terror. Many teachers have tried to make grammar teaching a non-threatening, imaginative and useful activity within the English curriculum.

Grammar is the pillar of English language and making grammatical errors in communication either written or oral will never convey proper meaning. It is absurd that there is no need to learn grammar. Then there arise the question - why using grammar in mother tongue? There grammar is used unconsciously and

people are not bothered about it. But while speaking in a second language like English, we are more serious about grammar and since it is not acquired, we find it difficult to use. It is this difficulty that compels most of us to say that grammar is not necessary for communication. The investigator ponders the question that if there is no need for grammar then why hesitating to attend an interview in front of a panel of experts or why seeking help of language experts even to write a simple request letter? It is just because you are not confident or afraid of grammatical errors. Whatever the arguments are; the necessity to learn grammar and its importance in the present situation could not be neglected. Grammar can be taught traditionally or contextually, but student perception should be considered by teachers in the decision-making process. Students need to feel confident that educators have met their needs and educators should be willing to consider the perceptions of students when making decisions about how to teach grammar.

The present method of teaching English grammar in secondary schools have been developed and are meant to be transacted in tune with social constructivism and critical pedagogy. Construction of knowledge has to take place at all levels of learning and in all domains of knowledge. This implies that we cannot stuff the learners with lots and lots of information pertaining to grammar. Grammatical concepts are to be constructed by the learners by analyzing a certain body of linguistic data available from the discourses and categorizing them in specific ways. The general processes of the constructivist

classroom will be retained intact for facilitating concept attainment in the realm of grammar.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out how far the present method of English language teaching is helping the secondary school students in constructing and using grammatical concepts perceived by teachers.
2. To find out the English teachers' perceptions of the difficulties they face with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL context using the present method of instruction.
3. To find out the difficulties faced by the secondary school students in learning and using grammar from the teacher's perspective.
4. To find out whether significant difference exists in the perception of difficulties teachers face in teaching grammar using the present method of teaching.
5. To find out whether significant difference exists in the teachers' perception of difficulties faced by students in constructing grammar using the present method of teaching.

METHODOLOGY

Sample:

The present study was conducted on a sample of 66 secondary school English teachers selected through stratified random sampling technique from Malappuram, Thrissur and Kozhikode districts of Kerala. The profile of the subjects is given below in Table-1.

Table-1: Profile of the Respondents to the Questionnaire

Nature of sample	Sub sample	No: of respondents to each category	Total sample
Gender	Male	11	66
	Female	55	
Qualification	Master degree	43	66
	Bachelor degree	23	
Experience	<5 years	34	66
	>5 years	32	

Tools employed for data collection

The data was collected using a questionnaire, divided in to three parts namely Part-A, Part- B and Part- C. This questionnaire seeks the opinion of teachers regarding the present method of teaching English grammar. Part- A; dealing with questions related to the present method of teaching English grammar. This part seeks the opinion of English teachers about how far the present method of teaching grammar is helpful for the learners to construct grammatical concepts by themselves with the help of

teachers. Part- B makes an attempt to identify the difficulties faced by the learners in learning grammar in the perspective of teachers. Part - C is comprised of questions about the difficulties faced by teachers while teaching grammatical concepts using the present method of teaching English. The subjects responded to each statement on a five-point Likert-type scale (from 5 for 'strongly agree' to 1 for 'strongly disagree'). The respondents also provided personal information on gender, qualification, and teaching experience, for creating their profile in terms of variables.

Statistical techniques used

Percentage Analysis and Mean difference analysis were the statistical techniques used for the present study.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows that, only 50 percentages of secondary school teachers are of the opinion that the

present method of teaching is helping the students in attaining the skill of speaking, and writing. 35 percentages of teachers believe that the use of authentic text for teaching grammar is helping the learners and only 15 percentages of them opined that the current method is helpful to the learners in using and constructing grammatical structures in oral and written communication.

Table-2: Results showing the percentage of English Teachers who opined helpful in the select areas using the Present Method of Teaching.

Areas	Frequency	Percentage
Improvement in Spoken and written communicative skills	33	50
Use of authentic text helpful for grammar teaching	23	35
Construction and Usage of grammatical structures	10	15
Total	66	100

Table-3: Data and results of the English Teachers' perception on the difficulties faced by them with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL context using the Present Method of Teaching.

Areas of difficulties	Frequency	Percentage
Spoken and written communicative skills	20	30
Use of authentic text for grammar teaching	18	27
Construct and use of grammatical structures	28	43
Total	66	100

From the Table 3 it is revealed that 30 percentages of secondary school teachers find it difficult to help the learners to develop spoken and written communicative skills using the present method of teaching grammar. 27 percentages of teachers find it difficult to help the learners construct grammatical

concepts using the authentic text. 43 percentages of the secondary school English teachers opined that they find it difficult to help the learners in constructing and using grammatical concepts using the present method of teaching.

Table-4: Data and results of the perception of English Teachers about the difficulties faced by students in learning and using grammar

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Spoken and written communicative skills	23	35
Use of authentic text for grammar teaching	8	12
Construct and use of grammatical structures	35	53
Total	66	100

35 percentages of secondary school English teachers revealed that students are finding it difficult to develop spoken and written communicative skills using the present method of teaching grammar. Only 12 percentages of them have the opinion that the students

are finding it difficult to construct grammar using the authentic text. 53 percentages of the teachers are having the view that the learners are facing difficulty in constructing and using grammatical structures using the present method of teaching.

Table-5: Result of the test of significance of difference between means of the secondary school teachers' perceptions of the difficulties they face with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL context using the present method of instruction

Category		N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance level
Gender	Male	11	1.23	3.23	3.39	0.01
	Female	55	4.86	3.43		
Qualification	Master degree	43	4.89	3.82	1.41	NS
	Bachelor degree	23	2.89	2.88		
Experience	< 5 years	34	1.01	2.89	3.63	0.01
	>5years	32	3.88	3.56		

The calculated t values for the mean scores of secondary school teachers' perceptions of the difficulties they face with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL context using the present method of instruction for the categories of gender, qualification and experience were 3.39, 1.41 and 3.63. The value

indicates significant difference at 0.01 level for the categories of gender and experience since the value obtained is above the table value for; 0.01 level of significance. But when the perception of teachers based on their qualification is compared the obtained t value is not significant.

Table-6: Result of the test of significance of difference between means of the secondary school teachers' perception of the difficulties faced by the secondary school students in learning and using grammar.

Category		N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance level
Gender	Male	11	1.43	3.86	2.00	0.05
	Female	55	3.99	4.02		
Qualification	Master degree	43	1.44	3.11	2.68	0.05
	Bachelor degree	23	3.86	3.72		
Experience	< 5 years	34	1.65	3.88	2.20	0.05
	>5years	32	3.99	4.72		

There is significant difference in the English teacher's perception of the difficulties faced by the secondary school students in constructing grammatical concepts using the present method of teaching grammar based on the category gender (t=2.00, P>0.05), qualification (t=2.68, P>0.05) and experience (t=2.20, P>0.05).

DISCUSSION

From the study it is revealed that 35 percentages of the teachers believe that totally communicative activities pose great difficulties to students for learning grammar and improving grammatical accuracy, writing activities proving more challenging than spoken ones. Practicing language as communication in real-life tasks might not give sufficient opportunities for students to improve their grammatical knowledge.

The use of texts illustrating authentic communication for presenting grammar is generally seen as posing problems to students. Students' problems with their use arise from difficulties of variety of structures, culture, vocabulary and implicit form-function matches, besides an overall difficulty in handling grammar presented within authentic texts. Only 12 percentage of the teachers agree with this. But

the point that should not be neglected is that the students are motivated by the authentic text and does not find much difficulty in handling grammar presented in the authentic text.

According to the response of the majority of teachers' perception, (50 percent) their students see the using and constructing of grammatical concepts difficult using the present method of teaching. Discourses presented are not sufficient to help them to construct grammatical concepts. Mistakes are common in the areas of concord and syntactic structures. Influence of mother tongue makes it difficult for them in using articles, prepositions and concord. Students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language in a totally communicative writing and speaking activity using the present method of teaching.

From the result it is revealed that 30 percentages of teachers are finding difficulty in helping the learners in written and spoken communicative skills using the present method of teaching. Teachers find it difficult in correcting the mistakes of the learners due to lack of enough time in the written and spoken communication and direct translation from mother tongue to the target language in written communication still exists.

Out of the total sample 27 percentages of the teachers are finding it difficult with the authentic text for helping the learners to construct grammar. Reasons for the arguments are that they find the authentic text time consuming and it is difficult to produce tasks of a suitable level from authentic texts. They find it difficult to catch the attention by creating simulated atmospheres using the present method of grammar instruction.

43 percentages of them are finding it difficult to help the learners to construct and use grammatical concepts using the present method of teaching. Teachers are compelled to take much effort and have to work hard to derive grammatical concepts from the discourses. Lack of proper basic knowledge in grammar makes it difficult for the teachers to introduce new concepts. Teachers are compelled to give marks even when the answers are partially correct in grammar.

The calculated 't' values for the mean scores of secondary school teachers' perceptions of the difficulties they face with regard to grammar instruction in an ESL context using the present method of teaching reveals that significant difference occurs in their perception for the categories of gender and experience.

The study gives us the inference that 50 percentages of the secondary school English teachers find that the present method of teaching English grammar is helping the learners in developing the skill of writing and speaking. It gives opportunities for communication in English language. But still; not sufficient in helping to attain the skill of correct pronunciation and vocabulary. The teachers opined that the learners are far away from attaining the confidence in speaking English language.

35 percentages of the Secondary school teachers believe that the authentic text is helping the learners in constructing grammatical concepts. Grammar is taught in an interesting and flexible way. Proper exposure is provided to the learners which facilitates language acquisition through experiencing a variety of linguistic discourses. Discourses presented make them aware of the structures of the second language. But they declare the fact that the functional

aspect of English grammar is not understood by the learners using the present method of teaching.

Only 15 percentages of teachers find that the present method of teaching is helping the learners in using and constructing grammatical concepts. Learners are able to identify what structural changes are in operation in a given configuration using grammar games. Grammatical concepts are constructed by the learners by analyzing the body of linguistic data and categorizing them. But majority of teachers are in the conclusion that the present method of teaching grammar is not that much helpful in making the learners to follow proper concord, using of prepositions, conjunctions and proper syntactic rules. Learners frequently commit mistakes while translating mother tongue to second language.

Significant difference occurs in the English teachers' perception of the difficulties faced by the secondary school students in constructing grammatical concepts using the present method of teaching grammar for the categories of gender, qualification and experience.

Educational implications

The findings of the present study point to the following implications:

1. EFL Curriculum and material developers should show an understanding of learners' and teachers' difficulties, and provide sufficient guidance and help in the curriculum document and the teachers' book showing how the potential difficulties could be addressed in planning their classroom activities. Teachers may be given examples of mediating tasks, which would mitigate the difficulties.
2. Students need to be taught grammar through various methodologies and approaches to cater to their individual styles of learning, and educators should consider students' attitudes and perceptions when making decisions about how to teach grammar.
3. EFL teachers would do well to understand and address their learners' concerns in planning their lessons and classroom activities, and use supplementary materials, if necessary, to help learners cope with the difficulties.
4. Both in-service and pre-service training programs should be planned in such a way that student teachers and practicing teachers articulate the potential and actual difficulties and discuss ways of overcoming or at least coping with them.

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5. The database relating to teaching English as a second language, including the difficulties of learners and teachers with regard to grammar instruction, should be enriched by more detailed research and analysis, which would enable generalizations across the state.

CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, in teachers' perceptions, both teachers and students invariably face serious difficulties with regard to EFL grammar instruction, students facing them to a greater extent than teachers. It is obvious that EFL teachers consider these difficulties quite serious, which suggests that serious attention needs to be paid to them. There may be generally recommended ways of teaching EFL grammar (for example, the implicit method), but it would not be proper to adopt them universally without looking at the possible difficulties that might go with those methods suggested. While a less favored method might pose fewer problems and hence be more effective, a more favored method might be less effective owing to greater difficulties or problems in implementing it. The difficulties may also be influenced by the context in which a particular method is used. It is, therefore,

necessary to make a detailed study of such difficulties faced by teachers and students in specific contexts, take appropriate steps to overcome them, and adapt the method to suit the actual teaching and learning environment. This is not to suggest 'diluting' a sound approach or method, but only to plan mediating or supplementary tasks to help learners tide over the difficulties.

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