

Exploring Problems in Teaching and Learning Grammar in EFL Context: A Review Paper

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Abstract: This review paper is aimed at exploring problems EFL teachers are facing when teaching and learning the English grammar in the EFL context. Initially, we have critically discussed the importance of teaching and learning grammar and types of grammar teaching. Further, the challenges and obstacles in teaching and learning the grammar, and significant problems that EFL teacher is encountered with their daily life have also been explored with details. The data has been collected from the most reliable online resources such, Elsevier, Wiley, Science Direct, Research Gate, Academia, Google Scholar, and SemanticScholar. After collecting data for the title, then we have screened the most significant publications and articles that best supported the title of this research, and later discussed critically. The result of the review revealed that teaching grammar is the essential requirement of learning any foreign language. The legendary types of grammar indicated in this study are descriptive grammar, prescriptive grammar, and universal grammar, functional grammar, and structural grammar, explicit and implicit instruction. Besides, the most challenging problems within instructing and teaching English grammar in EFL context are the lack of encouragement, teaching and learning have historically been dominated by the grammar-translation process, where the mother tongue of the learners have been used widely. Teaching through Implicit/explicit way instruction, grammatical learning difficulties and linguistic features are problems in teaching and learning the English language. On the other hand, the prominent problems and challenges that EFL teachers are facing are teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar, problems of handling large classes, problems of handling mixed background classes, problems of time limitation, lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning for the place of grammar in the curriculum, Lack experience, lack of knowledge on understanding students' needs, Teachers' low proficiency levels, or their lack of confidence in their ability, and teacher' declination in recognizing and reconciling prescriptive and rhetorical conceptualizations of grammar.

Keywords: Problems, Instructing, Learning, Grammar, EFL Context

1. Introduction

Grammar is the representation of linguistic competence. In order to understand a language, we must understand the grammar of that language (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2003). Grammar illustrates the primary function of languages, such as sounds, words, sentences, and all about the preferred meaning (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2003). Grammar is the system of language for altering the structure of words and combines them into the language (Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary, 2010). On the other hand, current literature identifies numbers of grammar types. Nevertheless, the common ones are descriptive grammar, prescriptive grammar, universal grammar, functional grammar, structural grammar, explicit and implicit instruction (Quirk, 1972).

Grammar plays an essential part in grasping and producing spoken language because learning grammar is considered fundamental in acquiring the correct utterances of the language (Corder, 1988). There have been many developments in the field of language over the last two decades (Yule, 2010). Grammar helps the students in a sentence, passage and text to understand the relation between sentences. In relation, the use of grammar rules often helps students to arrange their ideas in precise phrases in order to acquire effective communication in writing (Yusob, 2018). (Harmer, 2008) states that two popular methods of grammar are contrasting: inductive and deductive. Students are given an explanation or grammar formulas for the deductive approach to learning grammar.

However, English Language Teaching (ELT) experts start to debate in how grammar, for example, explicit, implicit, or classical grammar, should be applied to language learning in the future (Swan & Widdowson, 2005). Grammar studies are neither obligatory nor optional for the learning of a language (Ur, 2011). In contrast, it has been pointed out that grammar is regarded as the most significant and exceptional aspects of the language (Cook, 2013). Improving an English language grammar affects the skills of writing. Grammar would seem to be a subject that must be carefully studied in the widespread linguistics. Grammar is necessary for students ensuring that they are properly learning a language (Effendi, Rokhyati, & Rachman, 2017). Previous studies indicate that main problems faced by grammar teachers are including a lack of

experience, student expectations, a shortage of resources, a negative perception of grammatical teaching and the preparation of grammatical lessons (Yusob, 2018).

English language literature has identified several urgent challenges for young learners. One is that English is sometimes introduced to primary school as a compulsory subject, regardless of who will teach it. There has been a severe shortage in some countries of qualified English primary school teachers (G. Hu, 2005; Y. Hu, 2007; Nunan, 2003; Nur, 2003). Therefore, teachers will instruct English without proper preparation for young learners in general or train young students in a particular situation in poor or rural areas severe (Copland et al., 2014).

Based on the literature, several numbers of problems have been indicated within teaching and learning of the English grammar in the EFL context. The teaching of grammar has traditionally been dominated by the grammar-translation method. This method involves translating the target language into the native languages. Richards and Rodgers claim that this method requires learners, for example, the grammar-translation method requires learners to learn grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Referring to some of, grammatical difficulty in teaching comprehension and production (DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996). Some researchers (DeKeyser, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Ellis et al. 2009; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Spada & Lightbown, 2008) consider some linguistic forms (such as English articles) structurally simple. Ellis (2006) distinguishes two senses of grammatical learning difficulty: (1) "the difficulty learners have in understanding a grammatical feature," and (2) "the difficulty [learners] have in internalizing a grammatical feature so that they are able to use it accurately.

Reviewing research studies investigating stated beliefs about teaching grammar (Thu, 2009). Borg (2003) classified research on language teacher cognition in grammar teaching into three groups: research on teacher's declarative knowledge about grammar, research on teachers' stated beliefs about teaching grammar, and research on teachers' cognition as indicated in their grammar teaching practices. Verma and Ahuja (2011:140) talk about the problem of large classes in the Indian context and mentions that in a class of 50-60 students. Problems of handling mixed background classes, Problems of handling large classes, Problems of time limitation, (Chattaraj, 2015). Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012) noted that having a negative perception on language teaching may demotivate not only the English lecturers but the students also have to bear the consequences as a result of the English lecturers' perceptions. Teachers' low proficiency levels, or their lack of confidence in their ability, is consistently identified in the literature (see, e.g., Ahn, 2011; Ghatage, 2009; Kuchah, 2009; Littlewood, 2007). Thus, this review paper is aimed at answering the following questions:

1. What are the challenges that are impeding instructing and learning grammar in the EFL context?
2. What are the major problems teachers are facing when teaching and learning grammar in EFL context?

2. Learning Grammar

Grammar plays an essential role in the achievement and production of oral language because the acquisition of written language correct expressions considers grammar essential (Corder, 1988; Widodo, 2004). Grammar helps students, to learn the correlation between sentences from a paragraph, passages and documents. In addition, the application of grammar rules also allows students to organize their ideas into understandable sentences to achieve effective communication in written form. When a student learns vocabulary, for example, grammar provides students with some pathway for incorporating a lexical element into a sentence to form coherent and communicative statements or expressions (Yusob, 2018).

Grammar enables students to express meaning in the form of sentences, paragraphs and sentences (Doff, 1990). Thus, grammar can't negate its roles in four language skills and vocabulary because it really helps set communicative activities (Long & Richards, 1987). One of the linguistic features is grammar. Therefore grammar lessons are provided to anyone who formally learns a foreign language. This depends, of course, on the needs of the learner. Grammar learning is an important language instruction practice. Grammar teaching is more effective than teaching, which only focuses on meaning, according to a language learning study focused on grammar (form-focused instruction) (Burgess & Etherington, 2002). In support, in the educational system of Turkey, like in many different countries, the role of English as lingua franca in economic, political, cultural and technological development has led to English has been recognized (Kirkgöz, 2009).

Learners face various problems with the use of specific language skills or different linguistic aspects, such as grammar and vocabulary, throughout learning English in diverse situations (Townsend et al., 2012). As a result of pedagogical, socio-economic, political, linguistic, affective and parenting, classifies a variety of obstacles underlying such insufficiency. One of the best ways to learn English is to examine learners perceptions of the challenges that they face while learning English (Khan, 2016). The learning attention is on grammar, which can be divided into by two in according to its length. The forms are the first FOFs and the form-focused FoFs. The first learning model was based on grammar learning. Grammar is taught individually from the

background in this model. The second learning model focuses on the context and grammar of the learned content (Effendi, Rokhyati, & Rachman, 2017).

In the context of grammar education, two common approaches are used, deductive and inductive. Students will receive an explanation or grammatical techniques for the deductive approach. Students then create a paragraph or phrase in the language they have learned based on the explanation. Inductive method is the other way away of deduction approach. With inductive, method students do not understand the formula used in the process of studying grammar, but they are given examples of sentences first through which they find further formulas from the sentences.

3. Teaching grammar to EFL learners

A variety of important problems are identified in English language research for young learners. The other is that English in high school is often adopted as a compulsory subject without knowing who is teaching it. There is a significant deficiency in some countries of English-language higher educational teachers (G. Hu, 2005; Y. Hu, 2007; Nijat et al., 2019; Nunan, 2003; Nur, 2003). Therefore, teachers may either be taught English without proper justification to teach young learners, such situation in remote or rural areas is especially severe (Copland et al., 2014).

Applied linguists believe that linguistic learning mainly focuses on meaning in an overall communication setting. "Now it is clear that the communicative ESL teaching is not capable of fostering high accuracy" (Barnard, 2009). From first, the instructor plans numerous tutorials on those grammar structures, so that: clear grammar comprehension by a variety of means; written & oral lessons may be provided in order to practice the target form and often opportunities to (communicative competence) use the target form.

4. Challenges in teaching and learning grammar in the EFL context

Many scholars have proposed several numbers of challenges and problems when teaching and learning grammar in the EFL context. Teaching English grammar is a challenging task in non-native countries because of a number of factors that are concerned about the lack of encouragement and the emphasis of the learner to acquire English grammar inputs in classrooms (Chowdhury, 2014). Teaching and learning have historically been dominated by the grammar-translation process, where the mother tongue of the learners. Also, Implicit/explicit, grammatical learning difficulty and linguistic features are problems in teaching and learning the English language.

Teaching English Grammar in non-native countries is a tough task due to a number of factors causing the learner's lack of motivation and commitment in acquiring the English language grammar-based inputs in the classroom (Yusob, 2018). Previously, teaching and learning have historically been dominated by the grammar-translation process, where the mother tongue of the learners is used and seen as important in explaining the meaning of the target language. This is done when the target language was translated into the native languages. An example of this has been highlighted by (Allwright et al., 1991; Larsen-Freeman, 2000) who asserted that the method of grammar-translation involves learners to learn the grammar rules and target language vocabulary.

Previously, the explanation of the grammar rules in their mother tongue have been given to the learners. First, examples are given, they are told to memorize them, and then they have been asked to apply the rules to other examples. Since English language teaching was introduced, grammar was perceived as a component that could complement other language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Fithriani, 2019). Referring to some of them, in relation to: understanding and production, grammatical difficulty is considered. Some grammar constructs are simple to understand but difficult to construct, others are easy to create but difficult to understand (DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996).

Furthermore, Some scholars (Atifnigar, Zaheer, et al., 2020; DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Effendi, Rokhyati, Rachman, et al., 2017; G. Ellis, 1996; R. Ellis, 2009; Spada & Lightbown, 2002) find some linguistic types (such as English articles) to be structurally simple yet functionally quite complex, as they perform a variety of different functions (related to the nature of the noun they decide, the context of the situation and the context of discourse). In these examples, the complex function may require a complex description, including using technical metalanguage (as generic/specific reference or countable/uncountable nouns).

A grammatical feature, according to Larsen-Freeman, can be easy relating to one aspect but difficult to another. Passive voice in the English language, for example, is easy to learn, but it is more difficult to use. Therefore, learning to use grammar constructs correctly, meaningfully, and adequately in a given communicative context is difficult for FL learners. Implicit/explicit knowledge: Distinguishes between two types of grammatical learning difficulty: (1) 'the learners have difficulty in recognizing a grammatical function,' and (2) 'the [learners] have difficulty in internalizing a grammatical function so that they can use it correctly in conversation' (p. 88). Ellis argues that it may be challenging to learn a grammatical feature as explicit knowledge but as simple as implicit knowledge, and vice versa (G. Ellis, 1996; R. Ellis, 2009).

5. Teachers facing Problems in teaching and learning grammar in the EFL context

After reviewing a plethora of researches, we have found numbers of problems that the teachers are encountering when teaching and learning the English language grammar for EFL context. In addition to the great discussing challenge of techniques to grammar instruction, language teachers also find grammar as a problematic aspect of instruction English as a subject (Yusob, 2018). Previous research has highlighted the difficulties of primary school grammar teaching (Sekelj & Riga, 2011), secondary school teaching (Akinbode, 2008; Krutićová, 2015; Pontarolo, 2015), and higher education institutions (Al-Mekhlafi & Naga (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Atifnigar, Zaheer, et al., 2020; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Talcott et al., 2011). In general, students face one of the main challenges in terms of their proficiency (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Mishra, 2010). Meanwhile, The most common challenges are teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar, problems of handling large classes, problems of handling mixed background classes, problems of time limitation, A lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning for the place of grammar in the curriculum, Lack experience, lack of knowledge on understanding students' needs, Teachers' low proficiency levels, or their lack of confidence in their ability, and teacher' declination in recognizing and reconciling prescriptive and rhetorical conceptualizations of grammar.

In order to understand a language, we must understand the grammar of that language. According to Larsen-Freeman, a grammar aspect can be easily relating to one aspect, but difficult to another. For example, the form of the English passive is easy to learn, but it is considered more difficult. It is challenging for FL learners to learn to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately in a certain communicative context (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020).

Recently, education research has endorsed the statement that teachers' classroom activities are influenced by their personal pedagogical belief systems (stores of values, information, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes) (Borg, 2015). The uncertain debate about the best way to teach grammar that feeds the creation of personal pedagogical belief systems for teachers, and hence the development of different practices in grammar and language teaching. For this purpose, research into pedagogical belief systems of FL teachers is essential. It has been examined the views of teachers about the difficulties of teachers and learners in the teaching and learning of EFL grammar (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Farshchi, 2009).

Moreover, it has been indicated that there are three conclusions based on the teachers' belief when teaching and learning grammar to EFL learners. First, it has been found that teachers generally value and promote grammar in their work. Second, when thinking about their views about teaching grammar, they typically refer to the effect of their views on their previous experiences of teaching and learning the language. Third, it has been found that there is typically a broad gap between teachers' and students' views on aspects of grammar teaching. Finally, Borg reviewed research that looked at the activities of teachers in grammar teaching and concluded that the expertise of teachers could have an obvious effect on how they teach grammar and the understanding of their students and of the classroom can also have an influence on what they do. He additionally added that the beliefs and practices of teachers are not always consistent (Borg, 2015).

Likewise, the above findings of these studies reveal that both teachers and students experienced challenges in the perceptions of teachers with regard to EFL grammar instruction and learning. However, teaching grammar can be effective when teachers teach it explicitly rather than implicitly in which the learners preferred explicit grammar teaching due to their aspirations and insecurity feelings, in fact, they had difficulty internalizing grammar rules, although they respected both uses positively; formal instruction and natural exposure of their learners to language through authentic materials. In addition, all teachers believed that grammatical errors should be amended, even if communicative objectives were achieved. Teachers faced greater difficulty in correcting the spoken contact of their learner (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Burgess & Etherington, 2002).

Besides, a study conducted on Albanian EFL teacher and learner showed that both teachers and learners faced difficulties in teaching and learning grammar in the expectations of teachers, which is consistent with recent studies on this subject. Comparing the teachers' perceptions of difficulties with respect to the degree they taught English, university-level teachers usually scored higher than the others, suggesting that both university-level teachers and students encountered more difficulties with EFL grammar instruction (Kaçani & Mangelli, 2013). Generally, based on teachers' perceptions, both teachers and students are habitually confronted with severe difficulties when teaching EFL grammar. Indeed student is more vulnerable to learning grammar compared to the teachers. EFL teachers clearly find such difficulties very challenging, which means that they need to be given serious attention (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011) (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011).

Classroom size has also been a challenge for the teacher when teaching grammar to their students "Big classes are often resulted to be problematic by teachers (Coleman, 2006)." For instance, Verma and Ahuja (2011:140) talk about the Indian background issue of large classes and note that it is extremely difficult for the teacher to provide personal attention in a time frame of 40-45 minutes in a class of 50-60 students. They state

that the "good students" suffer and vice-versa if the teacher tries to pay attention to the "weak students." They also note that if the teacher wants to maintain a balance in the class by going slow, the syllabus will suffer (Safi & Kumar, 2019; Yoneyama, 2012). A lack of linguistic competence, combined with the lack of a well-theorized, empirically-based pedagogy, has made grammar a specific challenge for teachers (Myhill et al., 2012). The values of teachers are especially important in driving their classroom practice in these problematic areas (Kent et al., 1997).

English teachers have declared that their learners had detrimental perception toward studying grammar in EFL classrooms. It has also resulted that existing of poorer English language is common in each context; therefore, EFL teachers should avoid feeling anxiety in such a situation. There are a growing number of activities in which student can attract or make lessons more interesting and impressive (Atifnigar, Alokozay, Wahidullah, Zaheer, et al., 2020; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Yusob, 2018). As there are many obstacles EFL teachers have encountered during the teaching/learning process, alternatively, approaches to be built to deal with the challenges are essentially required. It has generally been found that quite a few students in the classes are physically present but mentally absent due to potential emotional problems. Being a friendly teacher, a teacher can deal with some sort of such issues if he really wants to (Hidayat & Indah, 2008)

One of the problems that EFL instructors are facing is their proficiency in English language, low level of teaching skills, and lack of confidence in their capability. Many teachers believe that communicative language teaching CLT requires specific teaching method, such as target language teaching, which causes anxiety and leads the teachers to question their skills, especially their speaking and listening skills (Copland et al., 2014). Besides, Teachers and trainee teachers have struggled to understand and integrate prescriptive and rhetorical principles of grammar and found it difficult to provide clear contextualization and explain grammatical terms and structures, e.g. by using theoretical rather than practical meanings (Cajkler & Hislam, 2002; Kershaw et al., 2000; Lefstein, 2009; Zaheer, Alokozay & Atifnigar, 2020). As an example, one may raise the issue that a good number of instructors enter the teaching profession after teacher training, but there are many others in some schools/colleges who do not have in-service or pre-service teaching training but a few years' experiences. These teachers are expected to attend certain educational programmes. They're not really at all interested in joining any ongoing learning program, though, even if they're pressured to, they are just physically active. Consequently, by not attending the workshop of teachers training and do not enhance their experiences then it makes the teachers to be low in their profession and teacher grammar might be difficult and problematic (Chattaraj, 2015).

Finally, a study resulted that the grammar level of Yemeni Students is low. They may be able to state a grammar rule, but when speaking or writing, they often fail to follow the rules and regulation. There is a kind of difference between learning the grammar rules and being able to successfully apply them in basic language skills. Teachers restrict teaching grammar to explicit instruction, and language constructs in practical communicative contexts are not addressed. In addition, the practice of using grammar items is insufficient, and teachers largely ignore the teaching grammar methodology presented in the (Ezzi, 2012).

6. Conclusion

This review paper was aimed to investigate problems EFL teachers are confronting when teaching and learning the English language grammar in the EFL context. We have profoundly described the challenges and obstacles that teachers are facing when teaching and learning grammar and significant problems. This review paper has revealed that teaching grammar is the basic requirement of learning any foreign language. The renowned types of grammar were descriptive grammar, prescriptive grammar, and universal grammar, functional grammar, and structural grammar, explicit and implicit instruction. In addition, the most challenging problems toward instructing and teaching English grammar were the lack of reinforcement, dominance of the grammar-translation process in EFL classrooms. Teaching through Implicit/explicit way instruction, grammatical learning difficulties and linguistic features are problems in teaching and learning the English language. In contrast, prominent problems and challenges that EFL teachers facing were the teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar, problems of handling large classes, problems of handling mixed background classes, problems of time limitation, lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning for the place of grammar in the curriculum, Lack experience, lack of knowledge on understanding students' needs, Teachers' low proficiency levels, or their lack of confidence in their ability, and teacher' declination in recognizing and reconciling prescriptive and rhetorical conceptualizations of grammar.

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