

Pakistani ESL Student's Attitude towards English Language Grammar: A Case Study of University of Education Lahore

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Abstract

Over the years incorporating communicative competence has become the focus of English language teaching which emphasizes more on speaking skills than grammatical skills. In this perspective, this paper intends to investigate Pakistani student's attitude towards English language grammar. For this purpose 100 students studying Functional English I and Functional English II courses in BS programs at University of Education Multan Campus were randomly selected as a sample and a questionnaire consisting of 15 items was used to get their responses in order to study their attitude towards English grammar. The analysis of the data shows that majority of students like to learn the rules of grammar as they consider it important to learn grammar in order to communicate effectively in English language and view it as a basic skill to develop language proficiency. Moreover they are more interested to learn grammar deductively than by the inductive methods. The results of the study show that students have a positive attitude towards grammar.

Keywords: Communicative competence, grammar, attitude, ESL learners

Introduction

Language learning is an inevitable process in childhood. The learning of a second language is creditable rather than accomplishment. Some only can acquire it well, although millions of people, world over, every year, start learning a language. It is the habit pattern with the first language that creates an obstacle to learning a new language. Therefore in order to learn a second language, it is necessary to know the correct grammatical rules used in that language.

Different theories of grammar teaching are at the disposal of English language teachers which suggest different ways to approach grammar teaching. Recently the focus of second language teaching has changed to develop communication skills. In this scenario it is important to know students' attitude towards grammar and learning of grammar rules in order to understand the place of grammar in second language teaching and learning. This particular study therefore, aims to explore students' attitude towards English grammar in Pakistani ESL classroom and will be helpful for English language teachers to understand students' attitude towards grammar, the difficulties they face in learning it and the areas of grammar which they find interesting.

Research Questions

1. What is students' attitude towards English language grammar?
2. What are the factors influencing students attitude towards grammar?
3. Which teaching methodology they prefer to be used in class to teach grammar?

Literature Review

Teaching and learning of grammar is the key aspect in learning a second language. During the 19th century Grammar translation method was mostly in use to teach foreign language which focused on grammar rules and translation (Richards & Rodgers 1986:2). However in 1960's Chomsky's emphasis on cognitive approach in language acquisition brought a revolution in language teaching. As a result of Chomsky's theories, in 1980's the locus of language teaching shifted to teaching of grammar explicitly but by providing the exposure of target language to enable the language learners to acquire grammatical rules and vocabulary of target language inductively which led to negative attitude in language learners towards grammar teaching and learning.

Krashen (1982) was of the view that exposure to target language helps to acquire the target language by instilling the grammatical skills in language learners. Krashen's concept of input Hypothesis is applied to second language acquisition and teaching grammar is considered necessary for acquisition of English as a Second language. Dell Hyme's (1972) concept of communicative competence has become the center of attention in second language teaching and learning which resulted in lack of emphasis on grammatical skills. Larsen-Freeman (1991) emphasized on the centrality of grammar in developing the accuracy in language use and to develop communicative competence. As a result of this approach teaching grammar is emphasized English language classroom in order to develop effective communication in language learners.

Currently there are very few studies in the realm of students' attitude and perception towards grammar

instruction. Foord (1965) devoted a significant part of his dissertation to investigate eight grade pupils' attitude towards formal grammar. Foord (1965) suggested that either the grammar items were disliked or the method used to teach grammar by most or nearly all of the forty seven teachers stimulated a dislike. But it was found that pupils liked the other subjects taught by the same teachers. Manley & Calk (1997) conducted a study to know the significance of grammar instruction and adult foreign language learners' attitude towards English Grammar Instructions. The analysis of the result indicated that majority of the students "felt that grammar instruction they had received in the class was helpful in writing better compositions" (1997:80).

Paraskevas (1993) also conducted a survey to find out her college students' attitude towards grammar. The result of the study indicated that 17 out of 25 juniors and seniors in the advance grammar class believed that grammar is the collection of rules that should be followed in order to speak and write properly. Some of the students believed that improving their grammar will automatically result in improved writing. However half of them believed that studying grammar is a "tedious task".

Keeping in view these previous research works about grammar and pupils attitude toward it in different context, this particular study will focus on Pakistan English language learners' attitude, their experience of studying grammar and how much important it is for them to study grammar.

Research Methods

This is a quantitative type of research. For this study a questionnaire consisting of both open and close ended questions was used to collect data about students' attitude towards English grammar. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items. In order to collect data random sampling technique was used to select 100 students studying language courses i.e. Functional English I and Functional English II in BBA (Hons) and BSIT programs at University of Education Multan Campus.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The responses of the students for each question is presented in the form of pie chart and is analyzed further to highlight their attitude and perception about teaching of grammar in English language classroom.

Figure 4.1 shows that 90% of students consider that language must be taught by focusing on grammar and just 10% students don't agree with this. The results clearly reveal that most of students think that grammar is central to language teaching as well as learning which highlights that they are well aware of the place of grammar in second language learning.

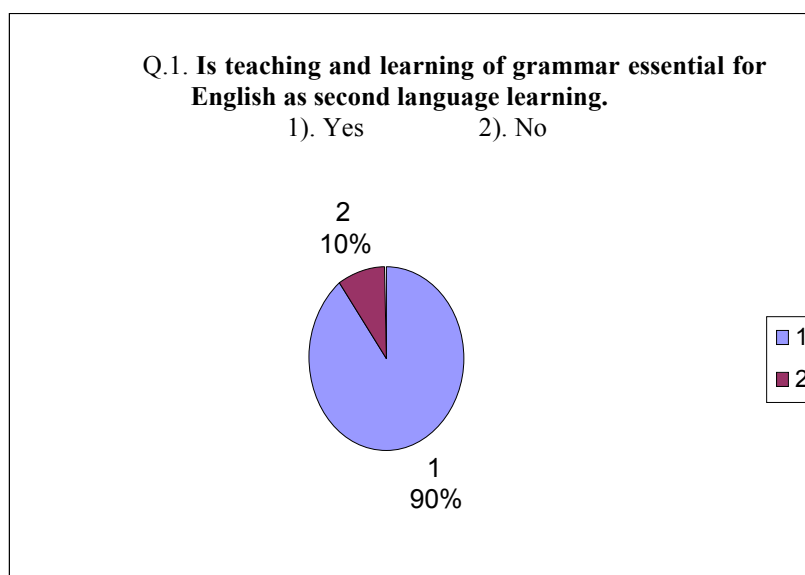


Figure 4.1

Again figure 4.2 shows the students' attitude towards the importance of grammar. 60% students consider it very important to study grammar, 30% consider it important but 10% do not think that it is important to study grammar in order to learn second language. So the result clearly highlights that majority of the students think that it is very important to study grammar.

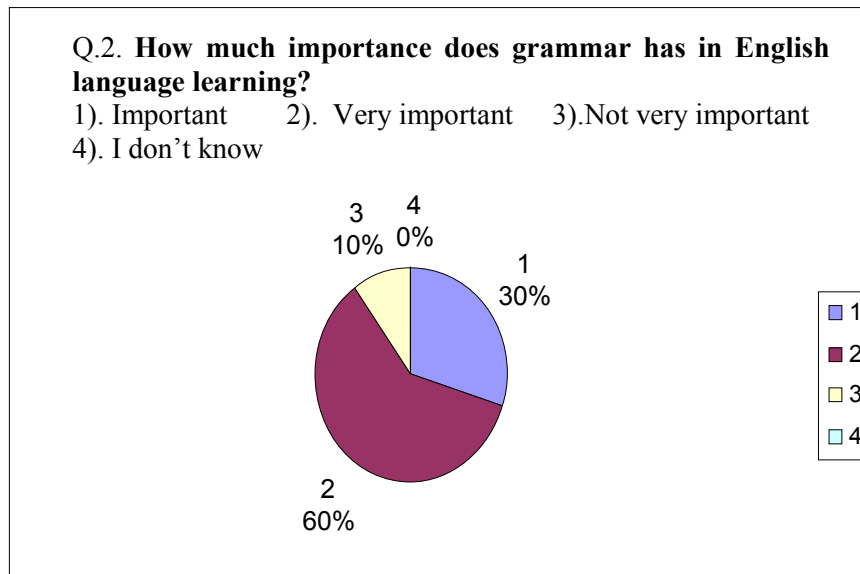


Figure 4.2

Result in figure 4.3 shows students definition of grammar. 60% students consider grammar as the base or the foundation stone of language, 20% consider it as the structure or the outline of language and 20% students define grammar as the rules of language.

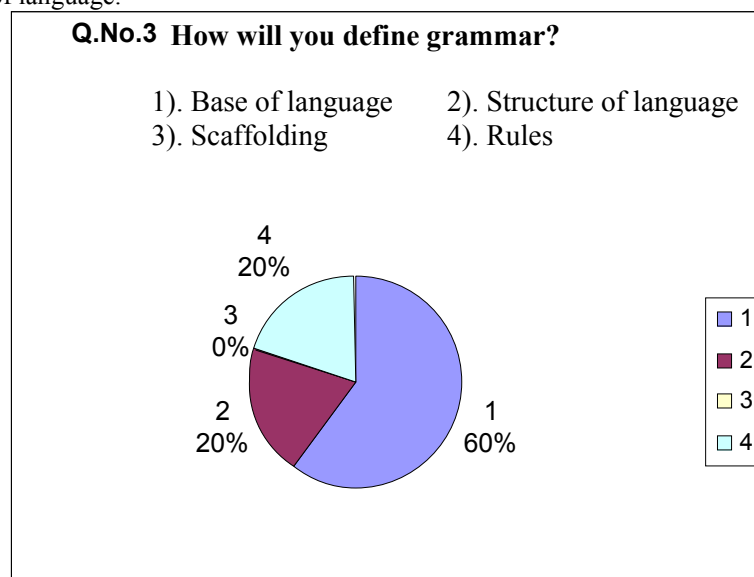


Figure 4.3

Figure 4.4 shows students' response about the way they were taught grammar? According to 50% of the students in the schools grammar rules were explained to them in by the teachers in their English language class and then they were asked to use these rules in different examples in the exercises. 30% of the students were taught grammar along with their use and 20% students were taught through communicative practice followed by grammar rules.

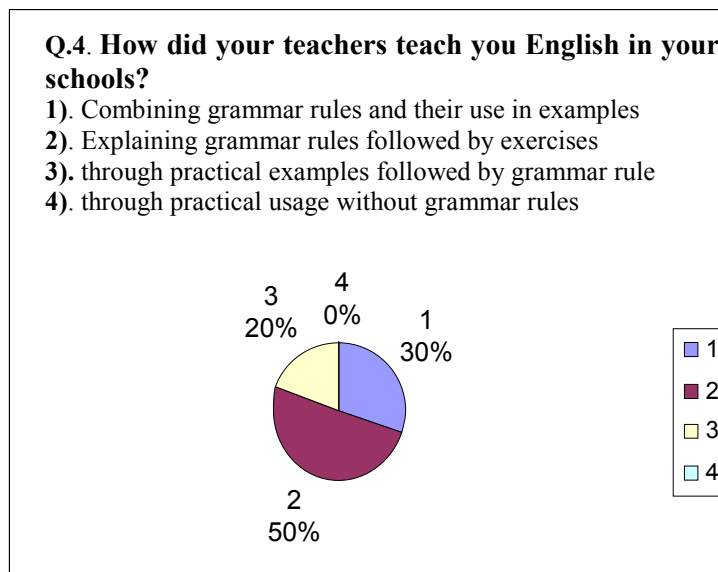


Figure 4.4

Figure 4.5 shows 40% students find it boring to study grammar as one of the students said “it is boring because of so many rules and regulations”. Moreover students also find it boring and complicated because they there is lack of motivation to study grammar as there is no proper methodology used to teach grammar to them. 60% students don’t agree with this as they find it really interesting to study grammar and enjoy it. One of the students said “grammar is not boring because it enhances the skill of speaking and communication”. Another students said that “grammar is not boring subject because we learn basic things about language which make language learning interesting”.

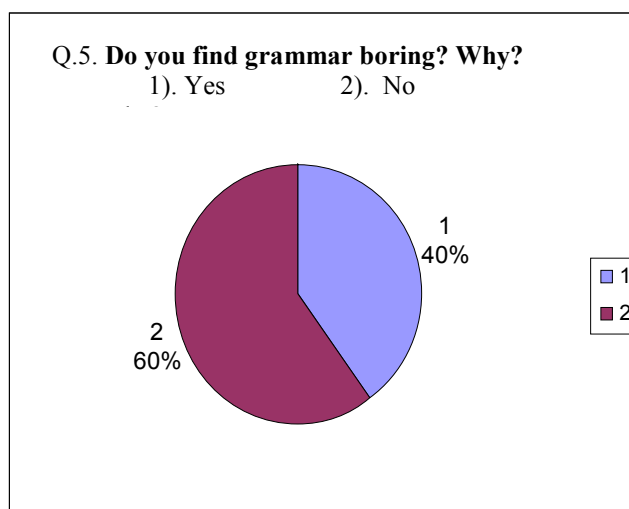


Figure 4.5

Figure 4.6 highlights that majority of the students (63.6%) think that grammar should be learnt by learning the rules first and then the use of these rules in practical examples. 27.3% students are in favor of reading a lot of examples and guessing the rules, 9% consider building new sentences by using a pattern and 9% believe that translation to and from English as the best way to learn grammar.

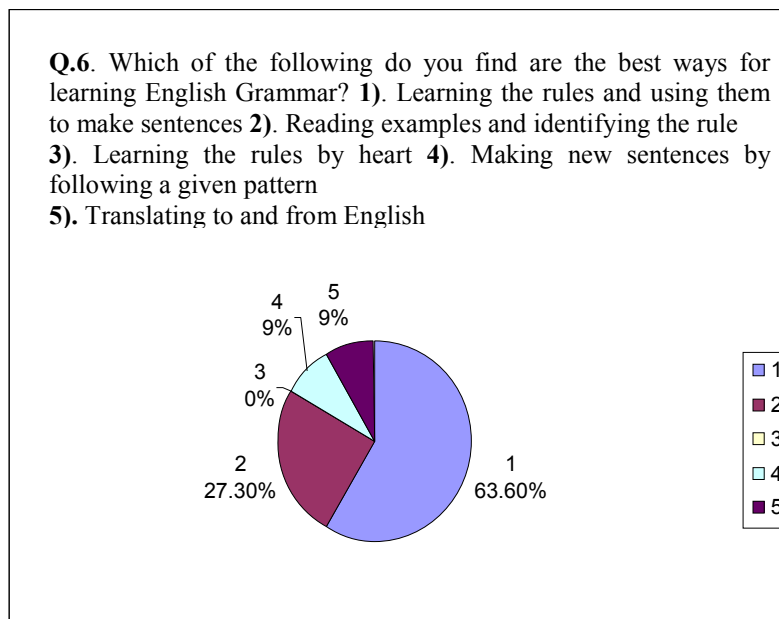


Figure 4.6

Figure 4.7 shows that majority (50%) of the students want to study grammar in order to have good communication skills, 30% want to focus on grammar in order to be professionally competent as these students were very much aware that society often stigmatizes people who make grammatical mistakes, and categorizes those who are not proficient in English as uneducated and worthless (Paraskevas, 1993). 20% wants to study grammar because they feel that they will be confident in speaking English language if they know the rules correctly.

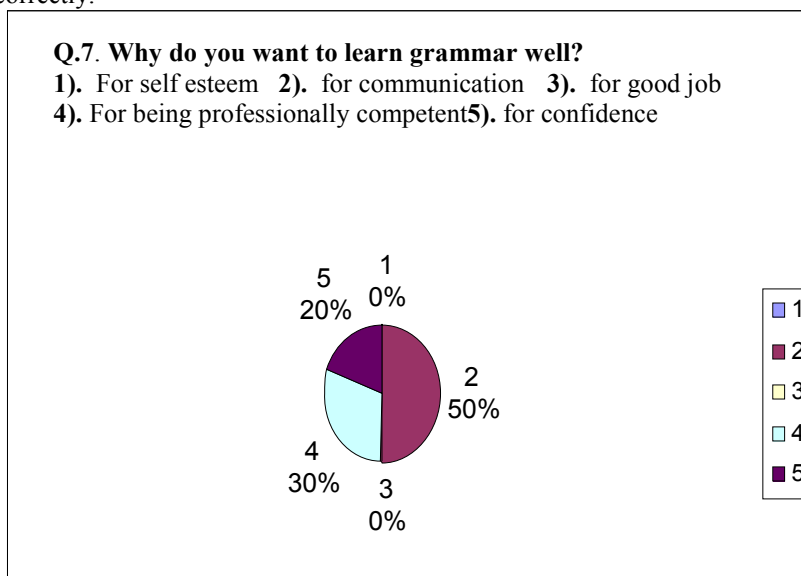


Figure 4.7.

Q.No. 8. Do you think about grammar rules while you write or speak in English?

To this question almost 80% of the students responded that they think about the grammar rules while writing and speaking and while writing they usually revise their writing and during their speech thinking about the correctness of their English does affect their fluency.

Q.9. What is your opinion about role of grammar in English/second language teaching?

Most of the students think that grammar has an important role for effective language teaching. One of the students said that:

“Grammar plays an important role in making sentences to convey appropriate ideas.”

So they feel that for effective communication grammar plays an important role. Another student said that:

“Grammar helps us to learn the basic rules of English which we follow in language learning (in speaking, listening, reading and writing)”.

Just 10 out of 100 students said that grammar has no role in language teaching which indicated that for them language can be taught/learnt without teaching or learning the rules.

Q. 10. Can we communicate effectively in a language if we don't know the grammatical structure of the language?

To this question most of the students said that we cannot communicate effectively if we don't know the grammar of the language because this is the basic part of knowing a language. According to most of the students' knowledge of grammar rules provide the basics for effective communication as with the help of grammar rules we are able to write and speak correctly and effectively.

Q.11. What do you like about grammar?

Students responded to this question that they like learning parts of speech and tenses and to practice them in different activities in classroom. This shows that they have interest in the basic elements of grammar and they enjoy learning and using them in language.

Q.12. What don't you like about grammar?

To this question students responded quite differently. Some of them said they dislike grammar when it gets too complicated and difficult but they didn't specify any particular aspect of grammar which they find complicated and difficult. Some students said tenses as very difficult so they don't like them and feel it difficult to learn and use them.

Q.13. Do you have good memories about your grammar class?

When students were asked about their feelings and memories about their grammar class, there were mixed responses. Some had good memories as they found the teaching methodology quite motivating and interesting, others said that they don't have good memories about their grammar class in school and they had no interest and motivation to attend the English language class during their school days because they were not comfortable with the teaching methodology.

This is very important to note here that it is the teacher and teaching methodology which can develop the interest of the students in the class and can motivate them to learn and use grammar in their language.

Q.14. How do you feel about your grammar being corrected in writing or speech?

Almost 50% students said they don't like it if someone corrected their grammar specially in speech and they feel insulted, awkward and embarrassed as one of the students said, "*whenever teacher or anyone else corrects my grammar mistakes, I feel embarrassed*". But others said they feel it good when a teacher corrects their grammar as they feel that this correction will make them better and effective speaker of language. One student said, "*We feel pleasure when someone corrects grammar in our speech*".

Q.15. How much time was given to grammar in your English language class?

According to students' response almost one hour daily was given to grammar in their language class. They also suggested that maximum time should be given to grammar in order to improve students' grammar and to make them effective language users.

Conclusion

Analysis of students' responses to the questionnaire developed to study students' attitude towards grammar indicate that students have positive attitude towards teaching and learning grammar as majority of the respondents believe that language must be taught by focusing on grammar as it is very important to learn grammar to communicate effectively and correctly in writing and speech. Their positive attitude is also quite clear as majority of them would like to study grammar if they were given the choice, and grammar is considered as useful because it helps them to be professionally competent and it makes them confident user of English language in the society which shows that they are well aware about the social and economic value of English language as in our society if someone is not able to speak correct English we consider that person as incompetent or uneducated. Some students also found grammar as boring and complex mostly because they were not satisfied with the teaching methodology in grammar class. Majority of the students suggested that grammar should be taught deductively i.e. by explaining the grammar rules and then their use in examples and communicative practice and they also believed that more time should be given to teaching of grammar in class.

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