

ELT Candidate Teachers' Cognition of Grammar

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Abstract

Issues related to language teaching methodology have gained momentum with the advance of innovative approaches. Therefore, In EFL settings, attitudes determining the role and place of grammar bear vital importance. Because of the misconceptions that Communicative Language Teaching favors fluency over accuracy, arguments over grammar itself have emerged, let alone the mode of delivery or the amount of input. Therefore, grammar related issues have become controversial [1] [2] [3]. It is a fact that prospective EFL candidate teachers should be equipped with a sound PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) [4]. In this sense, the aim of this research is to describe the cognitions of candidate teachers as for teaching grammar. The study also aims to disclose the underlying notions upon participants' hearing "grammar" to determine the conceptual maps evoked in their minds due to their early learning experiences. The results suggest implications for the prospective teachers.

1. Introduction

Related research in EFL and ESL contexts around the world have implications that teachers and students feel the need for the knowledge of grammar or the use of grammatical terminology [5] [6] [7] [8] for a sound linguistic accuracy. Due to the fact that grammar related issues have become controversial [1] [3], there arises a need for the sketch of the current picture as for the prospective EFL candidate teachers' cognition of grammar teaching. Crandall [9] states that prospective teachers are expected to become "aware of their own beliefs about effective teaching and learning," and they need chances to obtain the modes of thinking which typify being a part of the language teaching society. In this sense, the aim of this research is to describe the pedagogical knowledge of the candidate teachers with the concern that they need to be equipped with a sound PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) [4]. The research has been conducted with the participants attending an ELT Department. With the assumption that 3rd graders should have shaped their pedagogical decisions of grammar teaching, the study aims to find out whether the participants who have practiced teaching in the real sense have different cognitions from those who have merely followed the theoretical courses in ELT.

This article tries to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How is grammar defined by ELT teacher candidates?
2. What is the cognition of the second grade teacher candidates' grammar teaching?
3. What is the cognition of the third grade teacher candidates' grammar teaching?

2. Methodology

The participants of this mixed-methods research design are 60 teacher candidates currently attending Second Grade and Third Grade at Mersin University Education Faculty ELT Department. The participants have been appointed through the purposive sampling procedure [10] to identify their current PCK to reveal their cognition (belief, knowledge and thought) of teaching grammar [11]. The data have been collected through a semi-structured questionnaire, and for research question 1, the participants have been asked to write their cognition of grammar as a metaphor, after which time their responses have been analyzed qualitatively with the content analysis "to obtain descriptive information about a topic" [10]. For questions 2 and 3, the inductive approach has been used to discover the themes, out of which the abstractions have been categorized as comments, and the numerical data have been analyzed according to the frequency of the responses as percentages.

3. Findings and Discussion

The responses of the teacher candidates have been abstracted as themes at Table 1 below:

Table 1. *Teacher candidates' cognition of grammar*

Set Statement	Participant Responses	Thematic comments
Grammar is...	the basement of a building. the foundation of a structure. the infrastructure of a building. the system of a language. the sun of a language, without which it is flu. a big ocean with little drops in it. the soul of a language.	The part and the whole
	head of a society. the chairperson of a conference. the sculpture of the mud.	The lead actor
	the cheese of a pizza. a coat hanger in a wardrobe. the safety belt of a car. the legs of a chair. the wheels of a car. a part of the body. the engine of a hi-tech car. a building block for a construction.	An essential component
	a tool that helps me make accurate sentences. the by-product of teaching. a distant relative you don't really like, but you have to see frequently.	A side role

Additionally, the participants have uncovered their cognition through the following descriptions:
"Grammar is the seed and language is a tree. For the seed to grow into a tree, we need to water it very often." p.3

"Grammar is the water for life. Life would not exist without water. Equally, skills would not survive without grammar". p.1

"Grammar is the skeleton of the body. If meaning is considered to be the flesh, nerves and muscles, without a skeleton, it wouldn't stand upright in an accurate sentence." p.15

"Grammar is the yeast of yogurt. As the yeast determines the quality of the yogurt, so does the grammar determine the quality of a sentence." p.6.

"Grammar is the furniture for an empty room. It completes the room and makes it functional." p.1

"Grammar is a maze. You may get lost easily without much effort and careful planning. However, once you get out, you achieve your aim." p.47

"Grammar is the salt of a meal. It depends on the user's choice." p.27

"Grammar is the spice in a meal. You need to strike a balance." p.22

"Grammar is a big ship which has the skills as the passengers. For the skills to survive, the ship must be strongly built." p.51

"Grammar is a part of an apple, whose other part is composed of the four skills. In other words, they are inseparable." p.23

"Grammar is a compass, a light which leads to our path in the dark." p.5

"Grammar is a navigator. We can find our way thanks to it." p.35

"Grammar is our map to find our way." p.9

These statements indicate what grammar means to teacher candidates as recent language learners, each participant evaluates grammar from a different point of view. The participants tended to choose metaphors that imply the vitality of grammar for language teaching.

Research questions 2 and 3 try to find answers to some issues related to grammar teaching. To the statement related to error correction through explicit teaching of grammar, 3rd graders opted to make the correction when errors emerge (40%) while 2nd. graders tended to be so cautious (40%) as to make the correction before the error is made. Moreover, teaching grammar before skill classes is favored by the majority of the 2nd.graders (70%), while grammar incorporation into the syllabus is

regarded to be a more appropriate pedagogical option by the 3rd. graders (41%). Similarly, teaching grammar inductively is the choice of both groups; however, 3rd. graders prefer more (88%) than 2nd. graders, some of whom would rather have deductive instruction (30%). As for the input provision, the 2nd. graders seem confused (45%, 55%) about implicit input unlike 3rd. graders, who think otherwise.

Table 2. *Teacher candidates' responses to set statements related to grammar teaching*

Set Statements	2nd. Grade	3rd. Grade
I would use grammatical explanations at higher levels.	70%	75%
I would use grammatical explanations at lower levels.	30%	25%
I would change my instruction for the level.	98%	100%
I wouldn't change my instruction for the level.	2%	0%
I would focus on form while teaching grammar.	2%	2%
I would focus on meaning while teaching grammar.	8%	5%
I would focus on both form & meaning.	90%	93%
I would teach grammar explicitly when errors emerge.	20%	40%
I would teach grammar explicitly after errors emerge.	40%	42%
I would teach grammar explicitly before errors emerge.	40%	18%
I would teach grammar before skill classes.	70%	41%
I wouldn't teach grammar before skill classes.	30%	59%
I would teach grammar deductively.	30%	12%
I would teach grammar inductively.	70%	88%
I would teach grammar explicitly.	45%	19%
I would provide implicit grammar input.	55%	81%

As a conclusion, the responses of both groups have shared commonalities. The variations could take their roots in micro-teaching classes, which mature the language teacher to a certain extent.

Table 3. *Teacher candidates' responses to open-ended statements related to grammar teaching*

Open-ended statements	Participant Responses	Thematic comments
I had an explicit grammar instruction, so...	it helps me a lot when I use the language. I learnt it well. I don't make mistakes. I can understand texts easily.	Self- reliance
	I didn't learn grammar easily. I forgot all the rules.	Obstacles
I had an explicit grammar instruction, but...	I think it should be implicit. it does not make me a good learner. it isn't a good way of teaching. it is useful for the rules, but not for use.	Counter arguments
	it isn't long lasting in memory. you can't see grammar in context.	Problems encountered



I would teach grammar, because...	it is part of the syllabus. good language skills require knowledge about grammar. first students learn the form, and then they practice it with skills.	Requirements Skill based concerns
	input becomes more comprehensible with grammar. meaningful sentences require knowledge of grammar.	Meaning based concerns
	a good grammar knowledge enables students to understand the sentences. students feel secure thanks to grammar.	Self-reliance
I would not teach grammar, because...	grammar is incorporated into language language is learnt through exposure.	Incorporation of grammar
	language is not merely grammar. other skills remain in the shade. skills are needed for the grammar to exist.	Other components of language
	avoidance of errors slows down production. while Ss watch accuracy, they lose fluency.	Threats and pitfalls
I would teach grammar deductively, because...	students don't get confused. seeing the rule first secures learning.	A clearer path
	it is a more effective way of learning grammar. I was taught in the same way.	Learning experience
	it is permanent and long lasting.	Knowledge retention
I would teach grammar inductively, because...	students learn better when they discover rules themselves.	Discovery learning
	rules are remembered more easily. formulas become more permanent.	Knowledge retention
I would teach grammar explicitly, because...	Ss must understand the rules of grammar. I want Ss to learn every detail in grammar. rules are important for a learner. rules offer security and comfort. grammar is the infrastructure of languages.	Security
	structures are important to comprehend a language. Ss cannot figure out meaning without rules.	Focus on meaning
	otherwise, students may get confused. this is the easier way to teach. I prepare my Ss for formal exams.	Practicality
I would give an implicit instruction of grammar, because....	Ss learn the rules step by step.	Knowledge retention

The findings in the form of thematic comments for each statement reveals that participants' conceptual preferences are for teaching grammar explicitly, but inductively though they fall into disagreement over deductive or inductive teaching as for knowledge retention. Moreover, explicit instruction is stated to provide security and self-confidence for the exams, as well as the concerns that meaning focused tasks are carried out more effectively in this way.

4. Conclusion

The research, which aims to unveil the current cognition of grammar teaching of a group of teacher candidates has yielded significant implications. Unlike what is recently suggested in EFL settings,



most of the participants put forward that grammar should take place in the curriculum, and that it must be a part of the instruction. According to their responses, they also consider grammar as an irreplaceable tool for the form-meaning mapping in language classrooms. This can be traced back to their personal experiences with language learning, the basic implication lies in the suggestion that grammar should be taught explicitly, but in an inductive way. This suggestion introduces a new dimension to language teaching, which makes grammar the focus in a more pleasurable and motivating way. The research has described candidate teachers' pedagogical decisions before they teach in their actual classrooms, where their cognitions might change under the real circumstances.

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