

An inquiry into grammar pedagogy: perspectives from Sri Lankan secondary school teachers and students

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis examines the grammar teaching practices employed in the Sri Lankan secondary schools and teachers' and students' beliefs about these practices. To date, little research has been conducted in the Sri Lankan context on the practices of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and their beliefs about these practices. In many cases, failure in ESL is attributed to methods employed in teaching grammar which is also a controversial issue in many contexts around the world. Hence, this thesis examines teachers' practices, and their beliefs about these practices and other pedagogical principles employed in teaching English grammar. To obtain a more elaborate picture, the thesis also investigates students' beliefs about learning grammar and the methods employed in the classrooms. Finally, the study examines possible suggestions for improving grammar pedagogy from the perspectives of the teachers and students.

The study collected data cross-sectionally using the mixed methods approach employing quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, data were obtained from 61 surveys from teachers, 96 surveys from students, 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with teachers and 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews with students, and 22 classroom observations of grammar lessons. The survey results were analysed quantitatively, quantitatively and grounded theory was adopted in analysing interviews and observations. The results from the surveys, the interviews and observations were triangulated to arrive at the findings.

The findings demonstrate that learning and teaching grammar is a multidimensional process that cannot be described under the umbrella of one particular pedagogy. Teachers adopt the Eclectic Approach and context-based pedagogy (Bax, 2003) in teaching grammar. There seems to be agreement in the students' and teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of grammar lessons, the techniques employed and the

use of metalanguage. The majority of the teachers adopts the deductive method in teaching grammar and both groups of participants advocate its effectiveness in this ESL context. Moreover, the students find grammar lessons interesting when they are informed about their usefulness in their learning, and also favour oral activities and games. Both participants offer useful suggestions and discuss effective teaching methods for grammar teaching. These insights are used to provide recommendations for teacher training and ESL curriculum design in the Sri Lankan secondary schools and other ESL/EFL contexts.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BA	Bachelor of Arts
CBA/ CBLT	The Competency Based Approach / Competency Based language teaching
CBI	Content Based Instruction
CEO	College of Education
CLT	The Communicative Language Teaching Approach
CR	Consciousness- Raising
EA	The Eclectic Approach
EFL	English as a Foreign language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
G.C.E. (O/L)	General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level)
G.C.E. (A/L)	General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)
ISA	In-service Teacher Advisor
L1	Mother tongue or the first language
L2	Second language
MOE	The Ministry of Education
NIE	National Institute of Education
PELP	Primary English Language Project
PPP/3P	Presentation, practice and production
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TBA	Task Based Approach
TCs	Training Colleges
TESOL	Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages