

# **Teachers' Methodology and Techniques in Teaching Grammar in Yemeni Colleges**

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## **Abstract**

The teachers' methodology and techniques used in teaching grammar in Yemeni Colleges remain relatively unexplored. The current research paper throws light on the actual practices and techniques used in teaching grammar classroom with reference to the first year students of Yemeni Colleges of Education. Three instruments used to collect the required data of this study. Teachers' questionnaire was used to collect data on teachers' practice and opinions about teaching grammar. Structured classroom observations were used to observe the teachers' actual practices in classroom to compare between what have been stated in teachers' questionnaire and the real teachers' practices in classroom. Students' tests were used to evaluate whether the teachers' methodology and techniques which were followed to teach grammar subjects help students to acquire knowledge of grammar or not. The findings of the study reveal that the teachers' practices and techniques which are followed to teach grammar are outdated methods and procedures. The results of students show that they are weak at grammar. Eventually, recommendations of the study are offered to implement effective teaching methods and techniques in teaching grammar.

**Keywords:** teachers' practices, techniques, deductive, inductive, teachers' opinions.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 The Place of Grammar in Major Teaching a Foreign Language**

Understanding the status of grammar in language teaching has been influenced by recent development in the fields of linguistics and psychology. In the field of linguistics, the structural school with its emphasis on the description of observed verbal behavior, surface structure, performance, etc. gave way to generative transformation school of linguistics with its emphasis on deep structure, explanation, etc. Similarly, in the field of psychology, the school of

behaviorism which emphasized stimulus-response, repetition and reinforcement was seriously challenged by cognitive psychology which considers meaning, understanding and knowing to be significant data for psychological study. Brown (1994: p. 4) indicates that 'instead of focusing rather mechanistically on stimulus-response connections, cognitivists try to discover psychological principles of organization and functioning...(and) by using a rationalistic approach instead of a strictly empirical approach they have sought to discover underlying motivations and deeper structures of human behaviour'.

In this regard, a wide variety of methods of teaching has resulted from the influence of these changes in the fields mentioned above. These methods were varied regarding explicit grammar and its role in SL/FL teaching instruction in classroom. Thornbury (1999 : p. 21) points out that in the last century the language teaching methods have been pre-occupied with two basic design decisions concerning grammar. One of them is as follows: Should the rules of grammar be made explicit?

Here are the methods of teaching English language in the light of their approach to grammar teaching:

### **1.1.1 Grammar Teaching in the Grammar Translation Method**

This method is also referred to as explicit grammar teaching. Lists of words and grammar rules were typically used in the classroom. The point of departure in grammar was the sentence. Larsen-Freeman (2000: p. 20) has revealed that the GTM claimed that grammar rules are presented with examples. Once students understand a rule, they are asked to apply it to some different examples. The aim of this method is that abstract grammar rules were taught deductively, i.e. the rules were presented before practical examples of the rules were given. According to Mohammed Aslam (2008: p. 23), the GTM was replaced by structural theory through the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method and the Situational Language Teaching, in addition to the Communicative Method. All of them have different views of the GTM.

### **1.1.2 Grammar Teaching in the Direct Method**

Larsen-Freeman (2000: p. 28) indicates that one principle of the Direct Method is that 'grammar should be taught inductively. There may never be an explicit grammar rule given'. In supporting this point of view, Mohammed Aslam (2008: p. 40) points out that some objectives of the

Direct Method are the use of every day vocabulary and structures and grammar is taught inductively.

### **1.1.3 Grammar Teaching in the Audio-lingual Method**

Thornbury (1999: p. 21) reveals that audiolingualism derived its theoretical base from behaviourist psychology which considered language simply as a form of behaviour to be learned through the formation of correct habits. Larsen-Freeman (2000: p. 44), the major objective of language teaching should be for students to acquire the structural patterns; students will learn vocabulary afterward. Sentences were put into substitution tables and practised over and over again, preferably in language laboratories, in order to let the learners listen to their own pronunciation as well. In a substitution table, learners could easily observe the grammatical functions of words after oral practice of the sentences.

### **1.1.4 Grammar Teaching in the Communicative Method**

Thornbury (1999: p. 22) explains that the development of the Communicative Language Teaching in 1970s was motivated by developments in the new science and sociolinguistics, and the belief that communication competence consists of more than simply the knowledge of the rules of grammar. The CLT in the shallow –end version at least did not reject grammar teaching out of hand. Thornbury (ibid) adds that in fact, grammar was still the main component of the syllabus of the CLT courses, even if it was addressed up in functional labels.

To conclude, most of the methods of language teaching up to 1970s adhered the grammar syllabus; however, after 1970s the status of grammar teaching in the various methods of teaching differed from a method to other.

## **1.2 Methods to Grammar Teaching**

English language Teaching is interested with a task of helping students to acquire grammatical knowledge. The teachers have the responsibility to develop the students' knowledge and skills of grammar by using appropriate strategies and effective methods to teach grammar. But what is considered appropriate and effective remains elusive as teachers are not given well-defined

guidelines to teach grammar. Therefore, the absence of any clear guidance on how to approach grammar necessitates teachers making their own interpretations and following various methods in teaching grammar and different views of grammar in language teaching methods. Here are some methods of teaching adopted by teachers of grammar in their practices of teaching in classrooms.

### **1.2.1 Teaching Grammar Deductively**

Thornbury (1999: p. 29) states that 'deductive approach to grammar teaching, which is often called rule-driven learning starts with presentation of rules and is followed with examples'. This is the approach used in the Grammar Translation Method where teaching begins with presentation of grammar rules and proceeds to practice of the rules involving the translation into and out of the students' first language. Dealing with the teaching of grammar, the deductive approach maintains that a teacher teaches grammar by presenting grammatical rules, and then examples of sentences are presented. Once learners understand rules, they are told to apply the rules given to various examples of sentences. Giving the grammatical rules means no more than directing learners' attention to the problem discussed. Nunan (1991: p. 158) reveals that in dealing with any grammatical point in English, two basic approaches are possible. One of them is a deductive approach in which teachers give explicit attention to the differences in form.

### **1.2.2 Teaching Grammar Inductively**

Singh (2008-p 109) indicates that in this approach learners are exposed to a lot of language data but are not given explicit rules. According to Thornbury (1999: p. 29), 'this approach can be called a discovery learning approach since it starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred'. Richards et al ( 1985: p. 73) as cited in Nunan (1991: p. 156) indicate that 'with inductive learning or learning by induction, learners are not taught grammatical or other types of rules directly but are left to discover or induced rules from their experience of using language'.

### **1.2.3 Teaching Grammar Focusing on Form or Focusing on Forms**

It is necessary to define as clearly as possible exactly what these terms mean, form and forms. Long and Robinson (1998: p.23) explain that focus on form as 'an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and one or more students triggered by perceived

problems with comprehension or production'. Ellis (2001: pp. 1-2) defines focus on form as 'any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form.

#### **1.2.4 Teaching Grammar Focusing on Meaning**

Focus on meaning is an approach where the main concern is the communication of meaning without any attention given to the forms used to convey this. The Natural Approach of Krashen and Terrell (1983) and other so-called noninterventionist approaches are examples of this option. The starting point of focus on meaning is not the language, but the learner and the learning processes. It is believed that second language acquisition is essentially similar to first language acquisition; therefore, creating similar conditions should be necessary and sufficient for second language acquisition.

#### **1.2.5 Teaching Grammar by Combining Forms and Meaning Based Instruction**

There are clear advantages and disadvantages of the above mentioned approaches to an extreme focus on either instruction, i.e. focusing on forms or meaning. According to Van Lier (1988: p. 276). ), the traditional grammatical pedagogy is out-of-date and teaching grammatical forms in isolation does not lead to successful development in using forms communicatively. The middle way, covering form and meaning, accuracy and fluency, would seem to be the most sensible way to proceed, and indeed there currently appears to be a general consensus that it is unwise to neglect either area. According to Fotos (1998: p. 302), that early communicative approaches to foreign language teaching for such instructions can be conducted in two main ways: The first one is based on the fact that '... learners should be able to notice, then process linguistic structures which have been introduced to them within purely communicative contexts'.

#### **1.2.6 Teaching Grammar Using Task-based Approach**

Task- based approach to grammar instruction that is more meaning- focused than ruled focused has been appeared in the field of teaching. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001: p. 151), "task- based teaching can be regarded as a recent version of communicative methodology". This method is a learner centered approach. According to this approach, the need for introducing a certain grammatical rule arises in the first place because of the need of the learner to communicate. This model of teaching grammar, as Thornbury (1999: p. 129) explains, adopts a fluency to accuracy sequence, put simply the learning cycle begins with the meanings that

learners wants to convey. Nunan (1989: p. 10) defines a communicative task as ' a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. Thornbury (1999: p. 129) reveals that task- based approach has its own problems such as the selection of tasks, the ordering of tasks and the evaluation of tasks. Due to these problems tasked-based teaching has had a mixed reception. Nevertheless many teachers are finding ways of marrying elements of a task-based approach with traditional syllabus. Carter and Nunan (2001: p. 174) point out that in task-based approach language development is prompted by language use, with the study of language form playing a secondary role.

### **1.3 Teaching Grammar in Yemeni Colleges**

The status of English grammar teaching in the Departments of English in Yemeni Colleges is as follows: three courses of grammar are taught in the Departments of English in the Colleges of Education, i.e. Essentials of English Grammar 1 at the first level in the first semester, Essentials of English Grammar 2 at the first level in the second semester and Communicative Grammar in the second semester of the second year of the diploma programme. The major aims of Grammar 1 course are to give students grounding in grammar of English. It will provide them with description and understanding of word classes: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, etc. Grammar 1 will also highlight the various grammatical forms and their grammatical functions. The content of the syllabus focuses on the structure of sentences and specific grammar terminology forms. The teaching methodology which is recommended to adopt by teachers of Grammar 1 involves: lecture, group work and pair work. Grammar 2 is a continuation course of Essentials of English Grammar 1. The content of the syllabus focuses on the sentence process. The teaching methodology which is recommended to adopt by teachers of Grammar 2 is the same like methods of teaching in Grammar 1. Communicative Grammar is a course in the Departments of English, diploma programme. The major aim of this course is to help students develop the skills that they will need in coping with grammar requirements in their respective fields of research. The focus of the content of this course is on the teaching of communicative aspects. The teaching methodology which is recommended to adopt by teachers of Communicative Grammar involves: lecture, group work and pair work.

### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

There are various pedagogical issues that influence teachers' practices while teaching grammar and they play an important role in teaching English in general. Such issues are teachers' opinions on their instructional practice, teachers' experiences and qualifications and teachers' opinions about approaches of English teaching as well as the context where the teaching process is implemented. Such factors influence teachers' choice of the ways of teaching grammar. It may or may not help students to acquire the knowledge of grammar.

There is no well-defined approach to teaching grammar because of the different views of teaching grammar in English. The conflicting views about how grammar should be taught are generally wavered between language analysis and language use. When new teaching approaches appear to rectify the inadequacy of the previous approaches, teachers of grammar who are the implementers of new teaching approaches reserve their views and practices in teaching grammar. Therefore, the absence of well-defined guidelines about how to teach grammar leads teachers of grammar to follow various practices in implementing grammar courses in the Departments of English in general. It is also true about the Departments of English in Yemeni Colleges of Education.

The present study has made an investigation regarding the influence of teachers' practices on grammar teaching. It has tried to see whether they help Yemeni students at the tertiary level to acquire the knowledge of grammar or not.

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study (needs modifications)**

The research aims at investigating the methods of teaching English grammar in Yemeni colleges. It aims:

1. To identify the actual methods followed by teachers in teaching grammar in Yemeni colleges.
2. To identify to what extent teaching methods influence on the process of teaching grammar whether they help students to acquire the knowledge of grammar or not.
3. To reveal how teachers of grammar are influenced by several factors that determine their choice of various practices ways in teaching.

This research tries to answer the following main questions:

1. What are actual teaching methods of English grammar followed by teachers?
2. How do these methods influence on students whether they help students to acquire the knowledge of grammar or not

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **Definition of Teaching Grammar**

Teachers' methodology in this article means the practices which are the customary actions or ways of teaching in a classroom. Singh (2008: p. 182) defines teaching practices as 'a systematic organized activity under the guidance of experienced monitors/supervisors'. 'Practice' means what actually happens in a classroom rather than what should happen'. When new teaching methods of grammar emerge to rectify the inadequacy of the previous approach, teachers who are the implementers of the new teaching methods may reserve their views and perceptions about teaching grammar according to the previous teaching methods. This is especially so when teachers are advocates of the previous teaching methods either through their experience as language learners or language teachers. These views and perceptions play a crucial role in choosing the teachers' practices to teach grammar.

Historically, grammar has played a central role in language teaching by often being the only activity in language classrooms. Rutherford (1987: p. 27) indicates that 'for most of the 2,500-year history of language teaching ...grammar teaching and language pedagogy were ...virtually synonymous'.

Singh (2008: p. 98) points out that the teaching of grammar is the teaching of the rules of grammar as part of language education. In the context of the second language instruction, the teaching of grammar is generally aimed at imparting the learners' knowledge and ability to use the language grammatically correctly. Larsen-Freeman (1991: p. 280) also defines the teaching of grammar as 'enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately'. Azar (2007: p. 3) has explained that one important aspect of grammar teaching is that it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e. language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear and write intelligible. Without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body expressions to communicate meaning. Grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric.

Thornbury (2001) summarizes some rules regarding the teaching of grammar: (1) the Rule of Context—teaching grammar in the context, i.e. teaching grammatical forms in association with meanings. The choice of one grammatical form over another is always determined by the meaning the speaker or writer wishes to convey; (2) the Rule of Use—teaching grammar in order to facilitate the learners’ comprehension and production of real language, rather than as an end in itself; (3) the Rule of Economy—to fulfill the rule of use, be economical, economizing on presentation time in order to provide maximum practice time; (4) the Rule of Relevance—teach only the grammar that students have problems with, starting off by finding out what students already know, and don’t assume that the grammar of English is a wholly different system from the learners’ mother tongue; (5) the Rule of Nurture—teaching doesn’t necessarily cause learning, language learning is more often than not a process of gradual approximation. Instead of teaching grammar, try to provide the right conditions for grammar learning; (6) the Rule of Appropriacy—interpret all the above rules according to the levels, needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the students. Grammar gains its prominence in language teaching, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL), inasmuch as without good knowledge of grammar, learners’ language development will be severely constrained. Practically, in teaching of grammar, learners are taught rules of language commonly known as sentence patterns. According to Ur (1999), in the case of the learners, grammatical rules enable them to know and apply how such sentence patterns should be put together.

Teaching of grammar should also ultimately centre attention on the way grammatical items or sentence patterns are correctly used. In other words, teaching grammar should encompass language structure or sentence patterns, meaning and use. Doff (2000) says that by learning grammar, students can express meanings in the form of phrases, clauses and sentences. Long and Richards as cited in Eisenstien (1987) add that it cannot be ignored that grammar plays a central role in the four language skills and vocabulary to establish communicative tasks.

Celeste Kinginger (1998) reveals that good teaching happens when competent teachers with non-discouraging personalities use non-defensive approaches to language teaching and learning, and cherish their students.

### **3. Research Methodology and Participants**

It has been mentioned that the major aim of this research is to investigate the methods of teaching grammar at the first and second year levels of the Departments of English in Yemeni colleges. This section summarizes the instruments and framework employed to conduct the research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted in this research based on reviewed literature. The qualitative data was gathered by using a classroom observation and the quantitative data was collected by using a teachers' questionnaire and students' tests administered to students based on their courses of grammar. By using a questionnaire, a classroom observation and students' tests, the researcher has adopted a triangulation procedure to collect the required data to achieve the objectives of the current research and answer the related questions.

Thirty teachers of grammar (one female and 29 males) have participated to answer the items of the teachers' questionnaire distributed to them in the Departments of English in eight Colleges of Education, University of Aden.

The second instrument used to collect the fundamental data is a classroom observation. Ten Observations were conducted in the field of the research to check what is actually being happened in teaching grammar classes. The classroom observation checklist includes four sections. Section one is designed to obtain background information, section two is designed to record the teacher's practice in teaching grammar in the observation session, section three is about the teaching style and section four is prepared to observe the activities which are used by teacher in grammar classes. The same procedures of designing the teachers' questionnaire are followed in designing the classroom observation checklist.

The third instrument used to collect the required data for this research is students' tests. Two grammar tests were designed; one for the students of the first level of B. Ed. programme, English major and the other is for the students of the second level of Diploma programme, English major. The participants of the second year students' test were 50 students, in the academic year 2009/2010, (i.e. 22 males and 28 females) of the Department of English in the College of Education, Tor Al-Baha, University of Aden, who were selected in a random way to behave as the participants of the test. The participants of the first year students' test were 200 students, in the academic year 2010/2011, (i.e. 145 females and 55 males). They were 50 students from each first level of the four Departments of English in the Colleges of Aden, Saber, Zingeban and Radfan who were selected randomly. The rationale behind implementing such tests on the

grammar courses is to investigate to what extent the students understand the different parts of their grammar courses after being exposed to various teachers' practices. Davies and Pearse (2000: p. 181) explain that "learners' tests are one way to evaluate teaching. Good results should reflect good teaching". A test is any device utilized to gather data for assessment and evaluation purposes. Davies and Pearse (2000: p. 171) state that "tests continue to be the main instruments for evaluation of learning in most teaching situations".

#### **4. Data Analysis**

In the design of this research, elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined. When selecting methods for data analysis, and seeking for explanations of the results variety of techniques were used. The data obtained by the teachers' questionnaire and the students' test was processed statistically and analysed by using SPSS programme. The data are analyzed through calculating the frequencies and percentages that are listed in tables respectively. In this research, the observation instrument has been used in the scope of qualitative approach. The data obtained from the classroom observation checklist has been described qualitatively.

#### **5. Findings and Discussion**

The findings of the current research present that the majority of teachers of grammar (16 /53 %) in Yemeni colleges have a B.Ed. degree major in general English. This indicates that the majority of teachers of grammar who hold the responsibilities of teaching grammar in Yemeni Colleges of Education have no enough training and qualifications. They have little theoretical background in teaching grammar and English language teaching methods. Thus, they lack the awareness of the various trends in teaching grammar, as the B.Ed. degree in English does not qualify them to teach grammar to university students.

The findings of the teachers' questionnaire also show that the majority of teachers of grammar (19/63%) are inexperienced teachers as their experience only ranges between 5 to 10 years. Findings from classroom observations support this fact where it was observed that most of the teachers of grammar had no awareness of the various techniques of various methods of teaching grammar, since they had only been observed disposed to read the lectures from prepared notes or reference books and students listened passively. They inclined to explain some rules and gave examples on board.

The research indicates that the goal of teaching grammar, as teachers considered, is to help students gain information about the structures of language. The findings also show that the majority of teachers of grammar (24/ 80%) believed that students want to know grammar in order to use language accurately.

Additionally, the research reflects that most of teachers of grammar (18/60 %) looked at grammar as a set of rules which we must follow in order to use the language correctly. These opinions about grammar influence on the choice of teachers' practices in grammar teaching. In actual teachers' teaching practice, the researcher observed that the vast majority of teachers of grammar (8/80 %) in the Departments of English in Yemeni colleges presented grammar structures at the sentence level focusing on forms. They did not use a meaningful context to present grammar structures

As indicated by the data from the teachers' questionnaire that teachers of grammar believed that teacher of grammar should focus on form, meaning and use, but their actual teaching methods were observed only focused on presenting forms of grammatical structures. This reflects that there is a gap between the teachers' opinions about teaching grammar and their actual practices.

The review of the data gained through the analysis of the teachers' questionnaire indicated that teachers were not consciously aware of the different trends involved in grammar teaching due to their limited qualifications and the lack of up-to date references as well as the influence of their previous experience as students. This is further supported by evidences provided by the classroom observations. As a result, classroom reality is still characterized by traditional practices of the Grammar Translation Method. Additionally, the findings of the current research show that the features of teachers' personal pedagogical knowledge impact on the settings of teaching. Teachers of grammar were observed did not pay attention to the organization of the classes, as the classes observed were over-crowding with students and seemed chaotic, i.e. lacking visible order or organization. The above findings confirm the hypothesis which specifies that teachers are influenced by various pedagogical factors that guide them in determining their practices for teaching grammar.

The current research made a significant contribution as it sought to investigate of teachers' practices on grammar teaching and how such practices impacted on the students' performance in the grammar courses tests scores. The findings of the research have offered an actual evidence of

the inconvenience of employing the traditional techniques, strategies and activities in teaching grammar. The performance of the students' tests scores is weak due to such traditional teaching practices. Therefore, the teachers of grammar should reassess their teaching practices and try utilizing up-to-date methods that enable students to achieve better results. It is hoped that the results of the current research will inspire teachers of grammar to do their best to develop their practices and create and use helpfulness methods in approaching grammar teaching in the future.

## **6. Educational Recommendations**

It is recommended that teachers of grammar should attend workshops, seminars, and conferences that enable them to gain a new knowledge to develop their teaching methodology and may solve their difficulties in teaching grammar. Debates of effective means and methods of teaching grammar should be a major component of such programmes.

The current research shows that there is a discrepancy between teachers' opinions about teaching grammar and the actual teaching practices. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers of grammar should become sensitive to how their views and experiences can shape their teaching practices.

The findings of the current research show that most teachers of grammar in Yemeni colleges follow the deductive approach while teaching grammar. It is true that it is necessary for students to understand the rules in order to develop their grammatical competence. However, it is also highly recommended that teachers of grammar should follow the inductive approach to the teaching of grammar.

It is recommended that teaching grammar rules should not be in isolation and giving examples. Context plays a very important role in the teaching of grammar. It is recommended that students should have chances to practice grammar structures in contexts that help them induce the rules themselves. It is highly recommended that a group work mode should be regularly achieved in the grammar teaching.

The researcher advises teachers of grammar to get skills and abilities of using the different types of up to date teaching aids such as computer, internet, overhead projectors and other audio visual aids. Such aids have a lion's share influence and they should be used in grammar teaching to maintain the students' relevance in the teaching process.

For teachers' practices to become more effective, changes should be implemented at the level of teacher training. Teachers with a clear understanding of descriptions of grammar, grammatical patterns and grammar acquisition processes and with an awareness of a range of teaching methods and techniques can realistically help students improve their grammatical competence and communicative competence.

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NB. Table 1 reveals the means and standard deviations of the participants' results of the four Departments of English

Name of the Departments	The Mean	Standard deviation
Dept. of English, Aden	55.3300	15.57
Dept. of English, Saber	50.690	18.23
Dept. of English, Zingebbar	53.980	18.10
Dept. of English, Radffan	49.260	18.17

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