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The attitudes of EFL teachers towards the effect of implicit grammar teaching approach

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Abstract

Grammar is one of the components of language that holds an important place for learners. In recent years, approaches to teaching grammar have gained a high speed. As an alternative way to the deductive application of rules, implicit grammar teaching has become common among practitioners. According to Krashen's natural acquisition hypothesis (1981), students learn a language only through unconscious acquisition and there is no need for conscious awareness. According to this theory, implicit method in grammar teaching is getting common in terms of second or target language. This study attempt to show the opinions of newly qualified English teachers towards teaching implicit grammar. It also focuses on their positive or negative perceptions towards teaching implicit grammar. In the following steps, these opinions are collected with the help of the questionnaire prepared by the researcher. The questionnaire which consists of 25 questions is used to English language teachers. Lastly, the results gained will be evaluated after the questionnaire conducted.

Keywords: explicit, teaching, methodology, implicit, communicative activities. Concious and unconcious

1. Introductions

Teaching Grammar is still a controversial issue in English language teaching and teaching methodology. It has been of great interest for the researchers and teachers to find an effective way to teach grammar. Based on traditional approaches of teaching grammar, for language competency, learning grammar structures has prominent role in language usage . But this phase consists of some steps. These steps could be ranged as understanding grammatical form, memorizing target grammatical rules and using these rules in real life activities. However, Some incompatible views to traditional grammar approaches have appeared about how these processes should go ahead. In general, two basic understanding about teaching grammar could be mentioned currently being in English language educational settings. While one is explicit grammar, the other one is implicit grammar. Explicit grammar refers to a conscious learning of language rules with the help of some demonstrations used in teaching these grammar rules. Depending on this kind of system, teachers ignore the communicative side of language by using only explicit way in teaching grammar. Beside, this approach restricts students and pressures their thinking and questioning abilities towards grammar rules.

To explain, a student who is fossilized about using grammatical rules pays attention just using properly correct grammar rules while speaking. Aithough, meantime, he could not use target language in a right context because of focusing only the grammar rules of target language. On the other hand, implicit grammar referes to grammar learnt by exposure to target language. For instance, a teacher loudly reads a story in target language for students. This story also includes some specific grammar structure. From this level students already pay attention to the structure in the story and they start to think and interrogate the structure. In such process, analyzing the grammatical form also sets in students' minds. Thus, students struggle to understand it by interrogating grammar sturcture as implicit grammar approach suggests.

1.1 What is the alternative? Implicit Grammar instruction

Learning through Implicit instruction is "learning without conscious attention or awareness" (Brown, 2007, p.291). It is very obvious that implicit learning happen unintentionally and without awareness of what has been learned. The implicit grammar instruction should be supported by activating the mind of learners with the help of teachers. Teachers should

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activate discovery skills of learners towards implicit grammar rules which means to understand and determine an important element from a whole complexity. As an example, a teacher tries to present "Used to" as the target grammar rule to show past habits. He or she shows an old picture of a person who played football some years ago and says to the class "He used to play football when he was young" following some concept checking questions (CCQs). He will ask "Did he play football in the past?" and "Does he play football now?" In this way, learners develop some logic about target grammar rule. At least, a student could understand "used to" is a grammar rule that shows past habitual actions that do not happen anymore now. The students will talk about their past habits with their peers in pairs and groups. These pair and group activities are all in real life context that encourage students to learn the target grammar rules unconsciously or implicitly. All these happen without direct teaching and demonstration of the target grammar rule as it is called explicit instruction. In the usage phase of the lesson the students use the grammar structure in real sentences and questions without any awareness of the grammar rule that are implemented in these sentences. It can be concluded that the focus of Implicit learning is initially meaning in a context. Thanks to this, students do not carry the worry of using proper grammatical rule in their productive skills such as in writing and speaking as well.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Most of the English teachers specially new qualified teachers have problem teaching grammar and in many cases they are confused applying different grammar teaching methods. English language teachers have different opinions about teaching grammar implicitly or explicitly. Some teachers believe that the explicit method is more effective than implicit grammar instruction and some others believe the opposite. The researcher of the following study attempts to reveal the distinction between implicit grammar instruction method and the explicit grammar instruction method. Actually, the researcher tries to find out the effectiveness of implicit grammar instruction method in respect to explicit grammar teaching method.

1.3 The purpose of the study

This study attempts to show the opinions of newly qualified teachers about teaching grammar through implicit method. It also focuses on positive or negative perceptions of the teacher towards teaching grammar implicitly.

The researcher is trying to find answers to the following questions:

1. What kind of attitudes do students have about grammar?
2. How are the effects of implicit grammar teaching method and explicit grammar teaching on learners' achievement of linguistic items?
3. Does implicit grammar teaching method have positive effect on students' productive skills?

1.4 The significance of the study

The research in this field, on the effect of Implicit Grammar Teaching approach is very important because its result is going to be helpful to all the teachers in EFL classes. In the present study the researcher aims to reveal the

effectiveness of implicit grammar instruction method through a survey using a questionnaire. Applying the implicit grammar instruction method is an effective approach in teaching grammar rules. In fact many English teachers apply the explicit grammar teaching method which is a conscious way of grammar learning. Teaching grammar through this approach limits or deprives the students of using target language and target grammar structures in their real life context. On the other hand applying the implicit grammar teaching method provides opportunities for the students to use grammar purposefully and in real context.

1.5 Review of Literature

A great number of studies in teaching grammar are available in ELT field. In one research, it is pointed out that implicit grammar is an unconscious learning in learning of grammatical rules. Based on Ellis (2009), implicit instruction attempts to provide learners with situations under which they can infer the grammatical rules unconsciously or without awareness. This reveals that grammar is not taught by memorizing rules but internalizing target grammar rules. As an example, an English learner who has difficulty in using correct grammar rules can not dare speaking because he considers that grammar rule as everything of target language and he believes that he is not able to speak the language without mastering the proper rules. It emphasizes that students need to interrogate and to think about the grammatical rules. In one other research, it emphasizes that monitoring gives an opportunity about questioning the rules. According to Terrell (1991) learners can have access to 'monitoring', as Krashen suggests, when they have enough time to think about applying the grammatical rule to the output. By means of monitoring, students start to think about grammar rules and their use in a real context.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects of the study

This study involves 60 young teachers who are teaching in English language institutes in Kabul. A questionnaire is administered to this group. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions measuring the attitudes of teachers about grammar and implicit grammar as well.

2.2 Instrumentation

A questionnaire is administered to this group. It has a staging system: start from stage "5" that represents strongly agree; stage "4" which represents agree; stage "3" which represents no opinion; stage "2" that represents disagree; and finally stage "1" that represents strongly disagree. Teachers selected a point for each question about grammar in general.

3. Data Collection and results

The results achieved in this study were analyzed based on the components of implicit grammar instruction and participants' opinions toward the questions. The study results show that 70% of the participants have positive opinion about implicit grammar teaching while 30% of the participants have negative attitude toward implicit grammar instruction. Detailed results were given below with some of the critical questions' analysis.

Table 1: Elicitation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	15	25,0	25,0	25,0
	disagree	29	48,3	48,3	73,3
	no opinion	5	8,3	8,3	81,7
	Agree	10	16,7	16,7	98,3
	strongly agree	1	1,7	1,7	100,0
	Total	60	100,0	100,0	

Table 1 shows the elicitation. The question was “Teacher should not direct students to find the grammar rules by themselves”. Based on the questionnaire, 73% of the

participants disagreed while 18% of them agreed. 9% of the participants were indecisive about the question.

Table 2: Interaction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	1,7	1,7	1,7
	no opinion	8	13,3	13,3	15,0
	Agree	36	60,0	60,0	75,0
	strongly agree	15	25,0	25,0	100,0
	Total	60	100,0	100,0	

The second table shows the interaction component of implicit grammar teaching. The question was “While teaching grammar sts-sts interaction is important”. Given in

the table above, 85% of the participants agreed and 1,7% percent of them disagreed. 13,3% chose to answer as no opinion.

Table 3: Authority

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	6,7	6,7	6,7
	Disagree	22	36,7	36,7	43,3
	no opinion	11	18,3	18,3	61,7
	Agree	22	36,7	36,7	98,3
	strongly agree	1	1,7	1,7	100,0
	Total	60	100,0	100,0	

This table evaluated the participants’ opinions about the teacher authority in the classroom. The question asked whether teacher should be the only authority in the classroom or not. 37% agreed while 42% of them disagreed. 18,3% of the participants were indecisive about the teacher authority.

remarkable element of implicit grammar, elicitation was found to be effective based on 73% of the participants. Furthermore, student-student interaction, and communicative activities were also regarded as significant in implicit grammar teaching. Although, teacher authority had 30% acceptance. This percentage cannot be underestimated. Values were so close to each other and this may emphasize that participants are still under the effect of their previous experiences. Implicit instruction is relatively new concept. Before the implicit instruction, the application of rules through deductive method was commonly used method to teach grammar. In addition, leading students to discover rules on their own may require them too much responsibility and excuse for not preferring the implicit grammar instruction as a teaching method. Moreover, sudden change in classroom authority may demotivate the students. The last component was explaining rules explicitly, which is not appropriate for implicit instruction. 57% of the participants had positive opinion about giving rules directly without letting students to find the grammar structures. Participants were high school students, so this result may change according to the age, but for new or young teachers; they do not completely ignore explicit teaching. It can be claimed that according to the study results, there should be a balance between these two concepts. Further more, it can be suggested that implicit instruction can be used to make learning permanent and explicit instruction for understanding the form. After directing students to get the meaning, teachers can focus on form to teach structure.

Table 4: Implicit grammar teaching components

	Positive	Negative
Elicitation	61%	18%
Communicative Activities	60%	23%
Explicit Grammar Rules	57%	20%
Teacher Authority	30%	52%
Interaction	42%	55%

To analyze the questionnaire results, implicit grammar teaching was examined under 5 main components. Three of the components were explained in table, 1, 2, 3 and other two were examined in accordance with the table 4.

Fourth element of implicit grammar was communicative activities. 60% of the participants agreed about the effectiveness of communicative activities while 18% of them disagreed. On the other hand, explaining grammar rules explicitly took 57% agreement and 20% disagreement.

4. Discussion

As the tables clearly shows, most of the participants found implicit grammar more effective.

Participants had positive opinions about elicitation, which was a satisfying result for the study. As one of the most

5. Recommendations for further study

The study was conducted limited to 60 participants. With a large sample, researchers may get more general results. Also, instead of self-made questionnaire, a reliable and validated assesment instrument can be used for more researches. Moreover, variables like age and gendre can be considered in the questionnaire.

In summary, English language teachers should create a balance and use a mixture of these two approaches. Because language learning not only contain grammar but also other skills like speaking and writing, teachers should consider grammar teaching as the small piece of a big puzzle. Grammar should be integrated into all 4 skills in order to improve teaching English.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the opinions of young teachers about implicit grammar teaching method. Moreover, it tried to reveal their positive or negative attitudes about implicit grammar instructions. This research consisted of three sections, the first section of which mentioned the importance of grammar in a language as a general elements. It also pointed out that teaching grammar differentiated in terms of methods one of which is implicit grammar teaching being so common because it emphasized intuitive learning. According to Cleeremans, Destrebecqz, and Boyer (1998) implicit learning is seen as “the ability to learn without awareness or intuitively” (p.406), “when we acquire new knowledge without intending to do so” (p.406) and “in such a way that this knowledge is difficult to express.” It means that in implicit grammar teaching the target grammar rule is learnt in an unconscious way. In the second section, the term of implicit grammar was explained in a brief way and what implicit grammar covered was clarified in this study. In the following section, it was given some information about the content of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions which were evaluated through the likert style answering system. The sample group of this study contains 60 young teachers who were teaching English in English language institutes in Kabul. In the summary of this survey, the attitudes of teachers to implicit grammar instruction method were analyzed by the researcher in the support of the results obtained from the questionnaire. The obtained esults shows that while 70% of the participants had positive opinion about implicit instruction method, 30% of them had negative opinion about it. Furthermore, results showed that participants did not completely ignore explicit grammar teaching method.

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