

Perception and Practices of Teaching Grammar in Higher Secondary Schools in Bhutan.

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Abstract

This paper reports a survey of Bhutanese teachers' Perception and Practices of Teaching Grammar in Higher Secondary Schools in Bhutan. The teaching of grammar in Bhutanese school is predominately guided by curriculum, whereby context-based teaching is mostly encouraged. The descriptive analysis based on quantitative findings of the study indicated that Bhutanese teachers generally believed that the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language. The study also showed that grammar is generally believed to be best taught explicitly, inductively or deductively, but not implicitly. Moreover, the teachers' remark on the importance of systematic practice of grammatical features and detailed error correction suggests that there is a preference for more extensive treatment of grammatical issues. The findings of the present study also indicate that, like the teachers reported in the 2002 and 2008 studies, teachers in Bhutan appreciate the centrality of grammar in their language teaching. This descriptive analysis based on quantitative findings would be beneficial to the curriculum developers, teachers, and lecturers in developing students' grammar skills and providing professional development to teachers for effective delivery of grammar lessons.

Keywords: *Context-based, Isolated units, Explicitly, Implicitly, Focus on form.*



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INTRODUCTION

Canh and Barnard (2009, p. 246) state that the teaching of grammar continues to be a matter of controversy in the field of applied linguistics and second language teaching. Increasingly, the beliefs and attitudes of practicing teachers are being sought to shed light on theoretical concerns in the teaching of grammar. Grammar is rules of a language. "Grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraint" (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). In foreign language acquisition accurate understanding of the language structures is the key part. English holds an important place in Bhutanese education system. In Bhutanese schools, English is considered as an academic language and it is the medium of instruction across all subjects from pre-primary to college. However, having learnt English for almost 13 years (Pre-Primary to class XII), the college students as well as general students seems to be below average in English communication especially with poor grammar. Nowadays a good command over English both in written and spoken is considered as an asset.

The teaching of grammar in Bhutanese schools is predominately guided by curriculum, whereby context-based teaching is encouraged. In context-based teaching of grammar, teachers are required to teach grammar lessons through other literary texts. It is believed that teaching grammar in context will help learners to acquire nature of the language which will facilitate their understanding of the language. However, some studies state that teaching grammar lesson in

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isolation or deductively have been preferred by instructors as well as learners. Burgess and Etherington (2002) “cumulated evidence from research in grammar learning and Second Language Acquisition suggests that some conscious attention to form is necessary for language learning to take place” (p.435).

The introduction of New English Curriculum in 2006 in Bhutanese education system has itself been a great achievement. It has made a huge stride in promoting and improving the standard of English in Bhutanese schools. The new curriculum is also one of the best ways to teach language through literature. However, according to teachers’ experiences, the teaching and learning of language aspects especially grammar has been made ambiguous without proper guidelines and directives. As stated earlier the grammar lessons are mandated to be taught in context-based teaching, however most teachers still prefer to teach grammar in isolation units, which contradicts the mandate of the ministry. Therefore, the perception and practice of teachers teaching grammar in schools has become an issue. To make the matter worse there aren’t any provision for grammar texts prescribed for different levels of classes. Hence, examining the difficulty of teaching grammar with minimum clarity and the pedagogical issue as context-based teaching, the challenges of grammar teaching has become an important academic discourse. Grammar lessons in Bhutanese schools are taught with context-based with Language and Writing (English-I) and Reading and Literature texts (English –II). This is as per the definitive curriculum mandated by Royal Education Council’s (REC). Therefore, teachers across the country teach grammar using literature and writing rather than full-blown, isolated units to teach grammar.

Therefore, the objectives of this study is to determine the perceptions and practices of teachers teaching grammar in Higher Secondary School in Bhutan. It is also intended to find out teachers’ beliefs with their pedagogical practice (context-based or isolated) while teaching grammar lessons in the classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Of particular relevance to the present study are two surveys. The first (Burgess & Etherington, 2002) sought to identify the attitudes of 48 teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in British universities. The findings indicated that these teachers considered that grammar was important for their learners, and they favoured discourse-based approaches, rather than decontextualized presentation of grammar items, with an inclination towards the use of authentic, full texts and real-life tasks for practice. The authors claim (Burgess & Etherington. p.450) that the use of texts, rather than isolate structures, to introduce grammatical features suggests a tendency for these teachers to adopt an approach based on FonF principles. However, the emphasis placed by the British teachers on the systematic practice of grammatical features and the correction of errors suggests that there is also a clear attention to the explicit and detailed treatment of forms rather than strict adherence to essential principles of FonF. and some of the points made will be considered in the final section of the paper.

The second (Barnard & Scampton, in press) adapted Burgess & Etherington’s questionnaire to survey 32 EAP teachers in New Zealand; in this case, the questionnaire was followed up with email interviews of a sample of the respondents. Like the British teachers, those in New Zealand favoured the treatment of grammatical features in complete texts, rather than in isolation. Consistent with this view, the New Zealand EAP teachers rejected a strictly forms-focussed strategy with a pre-determined grammatical syllabus and emphatically preferred to deal with grammatical issues as they arose from texts used to develop generic EAP skills. To this extent, their approach may be regarded as generally reactive, although there were some instances where they adopted

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forms-focussed strategies – for example, by devising grammar worksheets for systematic treatment in subsequent classes. However, it is clear that their treatment of the emerging grammatical issues was generally far from the „transitory“ remediation suggested by many proponents of a FonF strategy. Again like their British counterparts, they paid much attention to extensive practice and both they and their students attached importance to the explicit correction of formal errors.

As no studies have been identified that have investigated the attitudes of Bhutanese teachers regarding form-focused instruction, it was decided that a survey of a group of these teachers' attitudes would complement previous studies, and add to academic and professional understanding about what a group of EAP teachers believe about key aspects of grammar teaching.

2.1 Teaching Grammar

Language teachers have debated for years over which methods of instruction are the most effective for teaching grammar. Decades ago, the skill and drill, or "drill and kill" as it has come to be known, was the method of choice (Hoffman, 2006). Today this method is also called "*teaching in isolation*" or "*isolated units*." This essentialist practice allowed teachers to introduce a topic of grammar or usage, and then have students practice the rules over and over until supposedly they understood it. Then the students would be quizzed and/or tested on the rules. In textbooks, grammar is very often presented out of context. Learners' *context* are given isolated sentences, which they are expected to internalize through exercises involving repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation. These exercises are designed to provide learners with formal, declarative mastery, but unless they provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical structures in context, they make the task of developing procedural skill—being able to use the language for communication—more difficult than it needs to be, because learners are denied the opportunity of seeing the systematic relationships that exist between form, meaning, and use. Therefore, several linguists and professors concluded that systemic functional grammar is "fundamentally flawed" (Yates & Kenkel, 2001). They believed that the goal of sentence analysis must be descriptive adequacy, not arbitrary names of the parts.

Many teachers combine both methods, and more modern teachers only instruct in a more progressive, holistic way by connecting grammar to literature they are studying in class or student writing. Grammar has been pushed by the wayside, and topics such as drama, composition, literature and rhetoric have taken center stage (Hausmann, 2003). The debate on instructional methods continues to divide the profession (Hoffman, 2006). Many teachers feel they must teach grammar in isolated units because the standardized testing calls for students to have those skills (Thomas, 2001). Many teachers agree that meta-language must be taught and then at least mini-units on grammar should accompany lessons in the context of literature and writing (Hoffman, 2006), asserting that the progressive method does not work without the essential background.

2.2 Teaching Grammar in the Context of Literature

One of the main problems with teaching grammar in the context of literatures is the amount of time it takes (Sipe, 2006). Teachers have trouble finding the time to teach all the literature that is required. Therefore, many teachers have decided to use required literature as a source of grammar instruction. Doniger (2003) wrote, "as teachers of literature, we can help students investigate the connection between this grammatical resource and the work in question" (p. 102). One downfall to using literature as a resource for grammar reported by Doniger (2003) is that students don't know the meta-language (i.e. what a preposition, etc is) making discussion about sentence parts difficult. This often ends up taking more time because the teacher has to spend extra time teaching the meta-language, which, ironically, is basically teaching grammar in isolation.

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Teaching grammar solely using literature and reading without teaching the meta-language first is a very progressive idea because it does not allow students the tools they need for standardized testing, and therefore gaining culture capital (Joseph, 2000).

2.3 Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing

Since correct writing and speaking are the goals of grammar instruction, it makes sense to many instructors to use grammar instruction in the context of writing. Weaver (1996) wrote an entire book on this topic called Teaching Grammar in Context. The language arts teachers of these students taught grammar in the context of writing. Weaver's conclusion was that the students' writing was far better than it had been before because students were focused on content, not grammar rules. In the conclusion of her article Weaver (1996) stated: No matter how students are taught grammatical concepts, syntactic constructions and stylistic devices, or language conventions and editing concepts, they will not automatically make use of these in their writing. However, the relevant research confirms what everyday experience reveals: that teaching "grammar" in the context of writing works better than teaching grammar as a formal system. (p. 22). Lacina (2005) noted that "skill and drill" rule instruction does not lead to using the rules in writing. Her research found that "unlike other content areas, practice does not make perfect" (p. 249). She admitted to teaching "mini-lesson" in grammar; however, she only used student writing as a springboard for discussion. However, Sams (2003) realized that teaching grammar in the context of writing was not helping her students at all. She noted:

As I explored the reasons behind students' difficulties with organization, coherence, and revision, and as I developed strategies for addressing the root causes, I found I was teaching grammar—not usage—but grammar, the relationship between structure and meaning. Furthermore, as my students and I explored together the relation between structure and meaning, I realized why twentieth century researchers concluded that direct instruction in grammar had no impact upon writing. Quite simply, the grammar instruction in these studies was not related to writing. It merely taught prescription (usage and rules) and description (noun, verb, prepositional phrase), the naming of parts. I realized also why the "in-context" approach to grammar instruction advocated today has negligible impact upon writing. It consists of little more than guided application of rules that teachers seem mysteriously to pull out of a hat in order to correct errors they detect in a piece of writing. (p. 58)

2.4 Teaching Grammar in Isolated Units

Teaching grammar in isolation may be an old idea, but many teachers still submit that it is the most effective way. Michael Thompson (2002), editor of Our Gifted Children magazine, is a major proponent of teaching grammar in isolation. His research discussed how Math and Latin are not taught with a focus on real-life use, and like those subjects, grammar has "a complicated system of interlocking subsystems," (p. 63) and large amounts of time should be given to its instruction. He continued with, "prescriptive grammar instruction is correct" (p. 65). It is his contention that students will be expected to observe language standards within the professional world, and teachers are doing students a disservice not preparing them to meet these standards. Thompson's (2002) focus was on gifted children because he felt that isolated units are particularly necessary for them. The high-level intellectual components have to be in place before they can link them to language. Other researchers who do not focus on gifted students also discovered that "form-focused instruction is needed to improve learners' accuracy" (Larsen-Freeman, 1997 p. 66). Nunan (2005)

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stated that teachers must explain to kids why the rules are important (mainly to focus on their use as tools), but teachers still need to teach the rules. She continued that native speakers of English learn a lot through generalizations of the rules; unfortunately, English has many exceptions to the rules, so students cannot be expected to learn the exceptions on their own. She noted, "Grammar rules are fixed and must be learned because patterns of speech reflect education, class, even morality" (p. 72). Hagemann (2003) said that when education shifted its center of writing to content, we forgot grammar's contribution to meaning. In other words, when a writer doesn't pay attention to proper form and structure, the meaning of the content may be lost.

Kratzke (2003) said that grammar should be approached through principles rather than rules; however, he noted that students need to start with a basic knowledge of the eight parts of speech and then move on to more functional uses of grammar. Another proponent Hunter (1996) considered grammar as a mandated part of district curricula once again. He reported on several studies that show the link between formal grammar instruction and higher-level writing skills. Isolated units need not always be teacher-led either. Breznak and Scott (2003) put their students into groups to teach each other the grammar rules. They became actively engaged, but their focus was still on the rules and practicing them. This essentialist method of grammar instruction is necessary to give students cultural capital (Joseph, 2000).

2. 5 Teachers' Perceptions about Grammar Teaching

The ways grammar should best be taught differ from teacher to teacher, researcher to researcher, and methodologist to methodologist. Currently in second language literature, two approaches to grammar teaching that are often discussed are Focus on Form and Focus on Forms. The former refers to an approach to teaching grammar whenever errors occur during a meaning-focused activity, whereas the latter refers to teaching grammar in isolation. Long (1991) specified that Focus on Form "overtly draws students' attention to language elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45- 46). To clarify the point, Long and Robinson (1998) pointed out that "focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). Focus on forms, as Ellis (2008) indicated, refers to the type of instruction that seeks to isolate linguistics forms in order to teach them one at a time as when language teaching is based on a structural syllabus. In addition, Doughty and Williams (1998) noted "(T)o be clear, it should be borne in mind that the traditional notion of forms always entails isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or from communicative activity" (p.3).

Besides teaching methodologies and approaches, teacher education in grammar teaching also seems to play an important role in preparing teachers to teach grammar effectively and confidently. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) reasoned that teachers will better be prepared to meet students' learning needs when they have a firm grounding in the grammar of the language they teach. Therefore, it is likely that in order to teach well teachers first need to master the grammar of the language themselves. These two authors also indicated that teachers can teach grammar explicitly by giving students rules and exercises with the right grammar terminology or they can do it implicitly. Moreover, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman pointed out, grammar can be looked at from three dimensions: form, meaning, and use; therefore, students need to learn how to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. Clearly, grammar may be taught in various ways such as explicitly (rules are clearly stated and pointed out to the students), implicitly (rules are not pointed out but they are expected to be understood implicitly through various forms of exposure), deductively (telling the rules to the students first), inductively

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(students examining many examples to find out patterns), separately (grammar points or structures are taught in isolation), or integrated (grammar is taught together with other learning activities). There seems to be no single optimal approach to grammar teaching that could apply in all contexts to all kinds of learners and teachers (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002)

RESEARCH METHOD

Theoretical Paradigm

The study is quantitative in nature because the data were obtained by administering a set of questionnaire which were administered to teachers teaching English in higher secondary schools (XI and XII). These teachers were selected from different higher secondary schools located across the country. A total of 138 (73 male + 65 female) teachers participated for the study. Based on the statistics provided by respective principals of their schools, the researchers selected the participants on the basis of random sampling. Sample chosen randomly is meant to be an unbiased representation of the total population.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to elicit data for this research study is a questionnaire (see Appendix I) designed by the researchers based on the questionnaire developed by Schulz (2001). The questionnaire consists of two sections, one collecting biographical data and another collecting the main data for research questions. The section for demographic data asks the participants to provide their gender, age, teaching experience, and the degrees they possess. The main questionnaire section is made up of 38 items that require the participants to respond with their level of agreement. The items are on a four-point Likert-scale (4=strongly agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree).

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data will be analyzed by using descriptive analysis which will yield some statistics for comparison and establishment of nature of relationship between variables. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Together with simple graphics analysis, they form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of data. Descriptive statistics help us to simplify large amounts of data in a sensible way. Each descriptive statistic reduces lots of data into a simpler summary.

Demographic information

Demographic variables like age, gender, education and number of teaching experiences have been selected and questions were framed which are shown below, so that readers can get an idea of the respondents before analysing the research.

Table 1. Showing Demographic variables

Variables	Indicators	Nos.	Percentage
Age	20-25	4	2.9
	26-30	39	28.3
	31-35	43	31.1
	36-40	36	26

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	41-45	9	6.6
	46-50	2	1.4
	51-55	5	3.7
	56 & above	0	0
	Total	138	100
Gender	Male	73	52.9
	Female	65	47.1
	Total	138	100

Table 2. Showing professional qualifications of the teachers.

Variables	Indicators	Nos.	Percentage
Professional Qualifications	B.Ed	37	26.8
	PGDE	55	40
	PGCE	5	3.6
	M.Ed	5	3.6
	M.A	24	17.4
	PhD	0	0
	Others	12	8.6
	Total	138	100

Table 3. Showing number of teaching experiences (CI-XI & XII)

Variables	Indicators	Nos.	Percentage
Number of teaching Experiences	0-5 yrs	70	50.7
	6-10 yrs	50	36.2
	11-15 yrs	12	8.8
	16-20 yrs	5	3.6
	26 & above	1	0.7
	Total	138	100

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

The Centrality of Grammar in Language Teaching

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The survey results focus only on the items of the questionnaire that were considered the most relevant to the centrality of grammar in language teaching. It should be noted that the responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The results are presented in the table (refer to table 4)

Sl.No	Questionnaire Items	1	2	3	4
1.	The role of grammar in language is as a framework for the rest of the language - a basic system to build everything else on.	0	2	36	100
2.	The formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language.	1	1	53	83
3.	Formal instruction helps learners to produce grammatically correct language.	2	8	58	70
4.	Explicit discussion of grammar rules is beneficial to learners.	4	10	46	76
5.	My students expect teachers to present grammar points explicitly	1	1	52	84
6.	A lack of explicit grammar teaching leaves my students feeling insecure.	3	24	55	56

Table.4 The Centrality of Grammar in Language Teaching (N=138)
Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

It is evident that most Bhutanese teachers agreed that the role of grammar *as a framework of a language* (1) is important and has to be taught explicitly. They also believed that *the formal study of grammar* (2) is imperative for the mastery of foreign languages. There is also a high preference of learning grammar explicitly by students, which indicates the importance of grammar in language learning. Therefore, that above table shows the centrality of grammar teaching is necessary in any language classroom.

Grammar as Rules: Linking Beliefs to Practices

The teachers believed that explicit discussion of grammatical rules in the classroom is crucial in helping students to acquire grammatical accuracy. Grammatical accuracy is highly expected from students and it could be developed through explicit discussion of grammar rules, frequent practice of structure, conscious knowledge of grammar, consciously aware of a structure's form and its function, and productive practice of structures. From these linking beliefs to practices of grammar lesson in the classroom, it indicates that the teaching of grammar in isolation (explicitly) is still prevalent and preferred by most of the teachers in higher secondary schools in Bhutan. They also believed that grammar consists of rules of sentence formation and the use of accurate tenses. In terms of teachers' belief about the importance of grammatical rules, it is evidently shown that a clear preference for a more traditional approach of explicit teaching of grammar, where rules and sentence structures are first taught to the students. This preference clearly correlates with their set of beliefs on the *Centrality of Grammar in Language Teaching* seen in table 1. There is often a focus on both forms and meaning as demonstrated in their responses to items 2, 3 & 5 (refer to table 5).

Table 5. Teachers' beliefs about the importance of grammatical rules (N=138)

Sl.No	Questionnaire Items	1	2	3	4
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1.	Explicit discussion of grammar rules is beneficial to learners.	4	10	46	76
2.	Grammar is best taught through a focus on individual structures.	1	15	66	56
3.	Students can improve their grammatical accuracy through frequent practice of structures.	1	4	33	100
4.	Students need a conscious knowledge of grammar in order to improve their language.	1	8	48	81
5.	Students need to be consciously aware of a structure, form and its function before they can use it proficiently.	2	7	48	81
6.	Productive practice of structures is a necessary part of the learning process.	0	4	62	72

Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

Teachers’ practices related to the teaching of grammar

However, in terms of teachers’ classroom practices, the data (refer to table 6) shows an interesting finding where 65 teachers strongly agreed and 47 of them agreed on the statement *I mostly prefer to teach grammar in context rather than in isolation* (1) and only 24 teachers strongly agreed and 38 of them agreed on the statement *I mostly prefer to teach grammar in isolation rather than in context* (2). It can be deduced that Bhutanese teachers have strong belief on the importance of grammatical rules, however when it comes to pedagogical practices and how grammar lessons are taught, the teachers claimed they often teach grammar in integrated manner where grammar is taught together with other language skills like speaking and writing, and reading and literature. Nonetheless, there is a strong contentions of teachers likely to teach grammar explicitly as they hold strong belief on the importance of grammar in language teaching and learning process.

Table 6. Teachers’ practices related to the teaching of grammar (N-138)

Sl.No	Questionnaire items	1	2	3	4
1.	I mostly prefer to teach grammar in context rather than in isolation.	3	23	47	65
2.	I mostly prefer to teach grammar in isolation rather than in context.	26	50	38	24
3.	Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the teachers’ preference	12	16	68	52
4.	I teach grammar lesson based on the grammar questions given in the Board Examinations. (past papers)	16	52	46	24
5.	My students are motivated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar	0	9	49	49

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6.	De-contextualized practice of structures has a place in language learning.	1	21	45	45
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Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

The use of authentic texts

With regard to the introduction of grammatical features in complete texts (*refer to table 7*), rather than in isolated sentences, 64 teachers strongly agreed and 53 teachers agreed that their *students learn grammar more successfully if it is presented within a complete text*. (1) Similarly 62 teachers strongly agreed and 49 teachers agreed that *a lack of authentic grammar text (prescribed) makes difficult to teach grammar lesson*. (2) However, majority of the teachers strongly agreed on the statement that *a grammar text for different levels would be beneficial for both teachers and students*. (4) This clearly testifies the important placed upon the need to grammar texts. Although there was more strong agreement than disagreement on this issue however, only 39 teachers strongly agreed that *teachers find it difficult to produce tasks of a suitable level from authentic texts*. (5)

On the whole, the responses of the teachers about the use of authentic texts matter a lot in terms of selecting and delivering authentic content while delivering grammatical lessons. Hence, the need of authentic grammar texts for different level of learners are felt necessary by the teachers as well as students.

Table 7: The use of authentic texts (N-138)

Sl.No	Questionnaire items	1	2	3	4
1.	Students learn grammar more successfully if it is presented within a complete text	4	17	53	64
2.	A lack of authentic grammar text (prescribed) makes difficult to teach grammar lesson.	5	22	49	62
3.	My students find difficulty to learn grammar without authentic texts.	3	21	48	65
4.	A grammar text for different levels would be beneficial for both teachers and students.	4	9	38	87
5.	Teachers find it difficult to produce tasks of a suitable level from authentic texts	4	29	66	39

Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

The correction of errors

There was clear evidence that most of the teachers agreed with statement 1 in (*refer to table 8*) that correction of language forms helped learners. The majority of teachers did not find it difficult to correct students written errors. However, there is a general agreement with statement

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3, that most of the teachers found it difficult to correct learner’s speaking mistakes. Therefore, “it could be concluded that teachers experience more difficulty in correcting students’ spoken error rather than written communication” (Burgess & Etherington, 2002).

One implication that can be drawn is that many teachers in this setting correct their students even when there is no communication breakdown. If this assumption is correct, then it would seem that these teachers take a more rigorous attitude towards errors than is consistent with a Focus on Form (FonF) approach. This implies that teachers take rigorous attention in correcting students’ error whenever necessary, which actually promulgates the explicitly of teaching grammar lessons.

Table 8. The Correction of Errors (N-138)

Sl.No	Questionnaire items	1	2	3	4
1.	Form-focused correction helps students to improve their grammatical performance	1	12	82	43
2.	Teachers find it difficult to correct student errors of grammar within a written communicative context.	13	53	53	19
3.	Teachers find it difficult to correct student errors of grammar within a spoken communicative context	14	53	60	11
4.	Teachers should only correct language forms which hinder communication.	9	55	54	12

Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

4.6 Students’ abilities

When it comes to students’ ability to comprehend and transfer their grammatical skills, most of the teachers found out that the learners are not able to transfer their knowledge of grammar into communicative language. (refer to table 9). In other words, some students still struggled with speaking and writing grammatically correct sentences in their productive use of the language. Therefore, despite explicit preference of grammar teaching in the classroom students find grammar concepts difficult, hence its recommendable that teachers need professional development trainings and pedagogical courses to address the issues of teaching grammar lesson effectively.

Table 9. Students’ Abilities (N-138)

Sl.No	Questionnaire items	1	2	3	4
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1.	My students find it difficult to transfer their grammatical knowledge into communicative language use.	2	23	61	52
2.	My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a totally communicative writing activity.	1	23	88	26
3.	My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a totally communicative speaking activity.	1	27	78	32

Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Agree; 4 – Strongly Agree

Discussions

The findings of the study strongly indicated that Bhutanese teachers consider grammar to be a central feature of language and a crucial element in their pedagogy. There is also strong correspondence of views regarding the need for explicit grammar instruction, the usefulness of explaining rules, the need for practice of various grammatical tasks and the importance attached to appropriate error correction. These views of having explicit instructions on grammar teaching may be due to less accessibility to an English-speaking environment, and therefore need to learn grammar more consciously. Most of the teachers intrinsically know grammar is important, but they have different perceptions to approach it in their classroom teachings. There is also a section of teachers who treat grammar lesson in context using other literary texts assigned to their respective classes. However, these teachers are of the opinion that the effectiveness of the lesson cannot be ascertained as students still prefer to grammar teaching in isolation. Therefore, there is a need to relook into teachers' teaching style and students' learning style for effective delivery of grammar lessons.

The study has not only identified teachers' beliefs on grammar instruction, it has also provided insights on the influence of those beliefs on instructional practices. Based on the research findings, there is generally a strong correlation between teachers' beliefs on grammar instruction and their classroom practices. Since most of the teachers have strong belief on the importance of grammar in language learning, subsequently teachers tend to spend a fair amount of curriculum time to carry out explicit grammar teaching in their classrooms. Most of the Bhutanese teachers as per their responses in the questionnaire believed in isolated practice of teaching grammar, however when it comes to classroom pedagogical practices they fairly integrated the grammar lesson with other literary texts. This could be due to the mandate of teaching grammar in context rather than the choice of the teachers. So there is a strong mismatch in their belief system and pedagogical practices which might be one of the reasons for ineffective delivery of grammar lesson. Therefore, it is believed that for effective learning outcomes there should be well synchronization of belief system and the practices.

CONCLUSION

The debate between whether context-based or isolation units of teaching grammar is more effective will probably continue forever. However, the present study provides some insights into the beliefs of a particular group of teachers in relation to the role of grammar in language teaching.

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Overall the teachers in this study favoured the treatment of grammatical features in isolation rather than context-based. The finding also suggests that no matter which method a teacher prefers or a school mandates, the teacher has to be professionally trained in order to bring desired outcome in grammar teaching. Second and the most importantly the dichotomy between holistic progressive methods and essentialist isolated methods should not exist. A combination of the two methods would be the ideal for effective delivery of grammar lessons. Students must know the rules of the difficult English language, but they must also know how to apply them in real life writing and speaking. Teachers may incorporate isolated units as a springboard to get the students meditate about grammar.

The findings of the present study also aligned with the picture of grammar teaching reported in the 2008 New Zealand EAP teachers' survey as being one "characterized by regular phases of explicit work, a desire to encourage students to discover rules (without discounting the use of direct explanation), and regular opportunities for grammar practice" (Borg & Burns, 2008, p. 477). Although isolated units may seem to be the most effective method to use, the resources and time required for this method is limited for most teachers. Therefore, professional development programmes for teachers should bring a fitting balance between what is argued from hypothetical positions and indicated from practical studies. Future studies involving classroom observations need to be carried out to find out the teachers' actual classroom practices against what teachers claim, and check whether the practices align with their stated beliefs or not. There is also a need to explore the beliefs of students in order to see the extent to which their respective views coincide with the beliefs of their teachers. Future training could perhaps try to address some of the challenges articulated by the teachers, especially in helping them develop effective and engaging grammar lessons.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study represents merely a one-off snapshot of the views of a small number of Bhutanese teachers, and no firm generalizations from the survey can be inferred. Moreover, the research participants were all practicing professionals with busy schedules and may not have been able to give as much thought as they would have liked. However, these points do not necessarily invalidate the findings. Thus, more fruitful research would seek to identify, and explore, the extent of the convergence and divergence between attitudes, assumptions and knowledge expressed by teachers and their actual classroom behavior. Given the increasing importance of English Language Teaching globally, and the relative lack of studies into teacher cognition in these contexts, the need for systematic research is both necessary and urgent.

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