

Grammar: An Important Part in Developing Writing Competencies

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Abstract:

Grammar is a branch of linguistics and one of the most important aspects of ELT for learners to learn the target language. Whether it is taught implicitly or explicitly, learners always find it difficult to be assimilated. That is why, one should come back to the previous learning cycles i.e. the middle school and the secondary school ones and see the position of Grammar in the text book curricula and how it influences the learners' writing skills in producing pieces of writing at the end of each file or unit. Time allocated to teaching grammar is also vital to enhance learners' linguistic and communicative competencies. This article will include the importance of the writing skills in EFL learning with relation to grammar and its role in developing those skills. Likewise, some samples of the difficulties in applying grammar rules in writing sentences will be presented. Subsequently, some ideas will be suggested to improve Grammar learning as to reduce the number of grammar lessons per file/unit and increase the number of tasks to allow our learners to practise more grammar structures in writing.

Key words: ELT- writing- grammar- difficulty- competencies- FLL

1- Introduction:

Nowadays, English is considered as the most important language in the world in terms of use; its geographical proliferation is for many observers an on-going process. This prominent position owes certainly much to a number of factors. As the world we live in has grown, particularly with the development of science and technology, the language has 'imposed' itself as a means through which news on almost everything about man and his environment are exclusively communicated. For this reason, our government devotes significant attention to the learning of this language in the educational system.

English language communication won't be understood unless one uses its grammar rules correctly. Grammar is a significant aspect of the language, it is also the most effective way to express any thoughts and concepts that people want to share. Speaking or writing in a grammatically incorrect manner can be just as confusing as trying to understand a foreign language. It is important to use your words properly in order to get your point across effectively and practising good basic grammar can also add credibility to what you say and to what you write. So, the problematic that is raised in this subject is: which problem stands as a handicap behind the difficulty of applying some grammatical rules in a piece of writing? We may hypothesize that: students do not think thoroughly when they produce sentences or paragraphs.

2- The Importance of the Writing Skills in EFL Learning:

The writing skill has always been important in education as it has been the core of research of many linguists as Harmer (2001). Writing has to be learnt at school, it is not innate as speaking which is acquired as a result of being exposed to it. Writing has to be taught on the basis of some rules and conventions. Harmer (2001) confirms that learners need:” *to know some of writing's special conventions (punctuation, paragraph construction just as they need to*

know how to pronounce spoken English appropriately. Part of our job is to give them that skill.

Harmer (2001: 80)

Furthermore, writing has to be taught for several reasons that are stated by Murray (1973):

1- Writing is a skill which is important in school and after school.

2- Writing for many students, is the skill which can unlock the language arts.

3- Writing is thinking.

4- Writing is self-discovery. It is an individual process in which each person attempts to find the meaning of his life.

5- Writing is an art, and art is profound.

Murray (1973:1235)

It is obvious that not all students will benefit from the above reasons but according to their needs, they should know how to write letters, how to write reports.....To achieve that, English learners have to use words and put them in the correct order to get good grammatical sentences.

3-The Role of Grammar in Developing the Writing Skills:

Richards Nordquist¹ states Constance Weaver's Principles for Teaching Grammar²:

1- Teaching grammar divorced from writing doesn't strengthen writing and therefore wastes time.

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2- *Few grammatical terms are actually needed to discuss writing.*

3- *Grammar options are best expended through reading and in conjunction with writing.*

4- *Grammar conventions taught in isolation seldom transfer to writing.*

5- *Grammar conventions are applied most readily when taught in conjunction with editing.*

6- *Grammar instruction should be included during various phases of writing.*

7- *More research is needed on effective ways of teaching grammar to strengthen writing.*

Grammar has to be taught correctly from the first stages of the learning process as it helps our learners develop their writing skills. Hence, through writing students may learn more grammar structures to make his piece of writing clear and avoid at least the fundamental mistakes such as verb-tense agreement. Ur (1988) stated that “*grammar should be a long term learning process in order for learners to be able to master the grammar rules and the language as a whole.*”

Be it taught inductively or deductively, our foreign language learners often feel frustrated by the disconnect between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply them in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

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1- Richards Nordquist, PhD. In English, is a professor emeritus of rhetoric and English at Amstrong Atlantic State University and the author of two grammar and composition textbooks for College freshmen, Writing Exercises (Macmillan) and Passages.: A Writer's Guide (St Martin's Perss).

2- Constance Weaver: Dr. Connie Weaver is a professor of English at Western Michigan University, where she specializes in teaching teachers of language arts (reading, writing and grammar). She is nationally and internationally known as an author, teacher, educator and speaker.

4- The Difficulty of Applying the Grammar rules:

Teaching English at different levels -Middle school and Secondary school- is meant to combine and complement different objectives in addition to the acquisition of L1, i.e. Classical Arabic, that may not only facilitate the English learning process: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, but also make learners autonomous to use their linguistic competencies. However, what is actually noticed at both levels: middle and secondary schools is that the programmes are overloaded, hence, too many grammar rules are assigned within the same unit/file and the time allocated for grammar instruction is not enough: two or three hours throughout the unit. This makes us say that learners will never be able to assimilate all the rules and apply them appropriately notably when writing sentences or paragraphs despite the variety of structures taught.

Let us take some concrete examples: 4th year Middle school grammar programme comprises many points as: tag questions, sequencers with imperatives; conditional with: when +if; when + until; as soon as; while; future +conjunctions+ present; used to; didn't use to; if type two; remote possibility and uncertainty. When examining the above grammar aspects, they are actually prominent for building sentences i.e. learners should know how to put those elements in the right order to get grammatically correct propositions. Nevertheless, the majority of the students are unable to assimilate all the grammar structures devised for them in the curriculum above all that the same problem persists at the secondary school. Subsequently, the learners get bored when applying the rules in sentences and paragraphs and some of them definitely refrain from writing.

5- Methodology:

After dealing with the past simple tense: lesson and practice, second year secondary students were required to write a paragraph about how they spent the previous holidays- spring holidays- it is understood that the tense that must be used is: the **past simple** beside other elements as: articles, adjectives, adverbs... Learners still suffer from the misuse of the target tense owing to lack of practice, lack of revision. The examples that may be cited here are as follows:

When we arrived, the receptionist take us to the room....

This sentence contains a double problem: the first one is “s” for the third person singular where she/he would say: the receptionist takes us to the room. The second problem is the one of the past simple as we were talking about **last** spring holidays: the sentence should then be: *the receptionist took us to the room.*

The other recurrent problem is the one of the misuse of the infinitive:

..... to relax and enjoyed; in order to enjoyed.....

In such sentences, students still hesitate when using the infinitive. This may be due to the lack of concentration when writing sentences or paragraphs. The sentences will certainly be:

To relax and enjoy; in order to enjoy.....

The rule states that *and* is a conjunction that shows that something is repeated or continuing.

Another example may be shown:.....*I decide to went.....*, in this sentence, the learner is unable to distinguish between the infinitive and the simple past. He still meets difficulties to use

them, yet lessons, activities and home works were achieved. Moreover, another sample may be cited: *the food didn't delicious*. The problem that is raised in this sentence is that the learner does not know whether to use the verb "to be" or "did" knowing that "delicious" is an adjective which should be preceded by the verb "to be". The right sentence is: *the food was not delicious*.

There are some students who really fail in constructing sentences notably when it comes to produce personal pieces of writing; either sentences or paragraphs.

Likewise, there are other problems in the grammar context among which one might cite the agreement problem as: *...there is no friends; we visited a beautiful places...*

During their learning process, learners were instructed that the indefinite article "a" is used with singular nouns. However, plural nouns are not used with articles unless they are defined by the article "the" as: the USA. In spite of drills, activities, learners still find difficulties with regard to the use of articles. The correct way of the above sentences will be: either: *there is no friend; or there are no friends*. As for The following sentence: either: *we visited beautiful places; or we visited a beautiful place*.

In this case the student may define the place by giving its name for instance.

After gathering all types of mistakes, the teacher classified them into categories: verb tense, word order, agreement, article use...and did a collective correction with the intention to involve all her learners reminding them each time of the grammar rules.

Following what was stated previously, one can deduce that there may be a lack of motivation in the learning process as a whole on the part of learners or an absence- minded when

writing. A good communication depends strongly on the right use of sentence elements.

6- Recommendations:

Research strongly suggests that the most beneficial way of helping students improve their command of grammar is to use students' writing as the basis for discussing grammatical concepts. Researchers agree that it is more effective to teach punctuation, sentence variety and usage in context of writing than to approach the topic by teaching skills (Calkins, 1980; Distefano and Killion, 1984; Harris, 1962).

When students are writing and revising their productions, the teacher may provide them with grammar instruction that may direct them to identify their difficulties and correct them by asking some questions and drilling to mark time. Further, the teacher could also devote more writing sessions to allow his learners to produce more.

In other words, through practising writing, the learner is offered the opportunity to apply the grammar rules to make his piece of writing clear and avoid at least the fundamental mistakes. Besides, the learner needs to feel self- confident when writing to produce a correct piece of writing, in this context, Lawrence (1974) quoted that” *during a writing session, the teacher should provide a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom to allow his learners to learn how to write.*”

7-Conclusion:

To end up this paper, it is worth noting that grammar teaching is strongly linked to writing. Writing skills won't be developed as long as the grammar problems are raised. Nevertheless, our learners need lightening grammar syllabuses at both middle school and secondary school levels so as to be able to assimilate the lessons. They also need to be provided with more sessions of teaching grammar as well as

writing. Further investigations seek simpler ways to teach grammar and enhance writing skills to avoid boredom and frustration in the classroom.

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