



Senior Secondary School Teachers' and Students' Perception of the Teaching and Learning of English Language Grammar in Ogun State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Grammar in any language is always the core and its teaching has been well studied, but there exists a gap in the literature as regards teachers and students' perceptions on grammar teaching. This study therefore examined the perception of teachers and students of grammar teaching in English language. The population for this study comprised 136 students and 24 teachers from four senior secondary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. A questionnaire tagged "Perception of Grammar teaching in Secondary School (PGTSS) was the instrument for the study and the data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and Chi Square. The findings revealed that although from similar cultural and educational backgrounds, the perceptions of students' and teachers on grammar teaching varied widely. Their different perspectives were based on their previous language learning experiences, their language proficiency, current academic needs, and future career choices. The information gathered is of significant value to ESL teachers who intend to meet students' needs as well as reduce conflicts caused by different perspective between teachers and students regarding grammar teaching in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of communication that is peculiar to human race which could be spoken and heard or written and read. Language makes one to belong to a certain community or a group of people, without it a person is an outsider to every aspect of modern life. It is the vehicle with which knowledge is transferred. Language is the anchor to which acquisition of knowledge and information is ensured. No wonder, Awoyale (2004) observes it as the cement that holds the curriculum together. Language plays an important role in cognitive processes, perception, concept, memory of the learner. In Nigeria English language has come to established itself as official language. The importance of it in Nigeria educational system is best described in the following quotation of Olopoenia (2004) "English is the life blood of the whole educational system at

the secondary level, if students lack language linguistic skill and achieve poor results in English, then there will not be students capable of undertaking a meaningful contribution in any discussion."

Odebunmi (2001) also affirmed that English is the sole medium of instruction from primary to tertiary institution. In view of all these, one can boldly assert that English language is the most important subject in Nigerian educational system today. The nature of the subject and the way it is taught are very important and relevant to peoples' perception. The developers of curriculum noted that the general objective of any systematic instruction in any language, especially in a second language situation, is to enable learners to acquire a working knowledge of the rule of grammar and structural patterns of the language as an aid

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towards developing their skills in speaking and writing.

Ayodele (1988) reviewed some research project conducted by language scholars to view how Nigerian Youths are coping in the use of English language. The teaching of English language no doubt requires a wide range of skills as the knowledge of the subject promotes learning in the other subjects being taught in the secondary school level. English is a determinant of education progress students cannot get admission into the universities in Nigeria. It was confirmed that performances are generally determined by students' mastery of the language of instruction.

However, the poor performance of students in English has already become a household song of lament, since without a credit in it. Olaofe (1991) laments the alarming rate at which students fail in English in public examination citing 1989 O'level IJMB English exams as his evidence while Agbaje (2001) also gives a more pathetic report on the rate at which standard of English is failing in Nigeria. He cited the WAEC result of Nigerian candidates in English between 1991 and 1996 as evidence. It needs to be realized that things have changed up till now. The Chief examiner's report on the 2002 and 2003 SSCE English reported that there were some illiterate compositions.

Researchers and educators have defended or challenged the use of focus on form. Much research has been conducted on the place of explicit focus on form in language teaching and learning, and addresses what researchers and educators believe are the best methods to accommodate students' needs. Since WAEC started to test the grammatical functions of Words, the argument between psycholinguist and the sociolinguists (Chomsky 1965, 1992 and Hymes 1972) as to whether or not to emphasise the teaching of grammar has not been too strong as before. On the possibility of studying language from diverse perspectives, Okoh (2003:241) comments as follows: "One school typified by Noam Chomsky and other scholars working vigorously in the domain of Transformational-Generative linguistics, is concerned predominantly with the structure of language. In

contrast to this approach, which focuses on the knowing aspect of language, the systemic linguistics (typified by say, Halliday's analysis) emphasizes social context." Clearly, Chomsky took a mathematical view of language as his sentences" a definition which explains the term generative", which is used to described this kind of grammar.

Grammar is the bedrock of any language, no matter the school or approach one subscribes to, it is a term that conveniently covers a wide range of phenomena. For example, grammar can be viewed as the systematic description or study of language in which attention is focused either on morphology and syntax, or on such other domains as semantic, phonology, orthography, even pragmatics. It could be view as a set of perspective statements about what is considered right or wrong in the language: in a sense what forms (forms is, structure) are acceptable and possible in a given language. Grammar is a valuable part of an integrated approach to language teaching its teaching has positive effects on students with either low or high language proficiency Osoba & Adenuga (2006). It is interesting to note that a better understanding of grammar would lead to better writing as it enhances the choice of vocabulary the and the right word."

In a nutshell Grammar is described as a set of rules governing the formation of sentences in a language, that is, the structure of a given language (focusing, say, on the very principles underlying word and sentence formation in the language). In this case, grammar can be considered the study of how a language arranges itself into smaller units such as phrase, affixes and roots within larger constructions such as clauses and sentences. In all this, meaning remains a crucial consideration.

The role of grammar has been the subject of the significant controversy in the field of language teaching and learning (Ellis 2006; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Ozokwo (2007:305) also points out that "No aspect of English teaching and learning has generated as much controversy in Nigeria educational institutions as English grammar". Oluikpe (1979) also shares similar

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opinion in his book titled "Will knowledge of grammar make us better writers? However, the literature rarely touches upon students' beliefs regarding grammar teaching in language learning.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The students' poor performance and level of achievement in English language have been the major concerns of experts in language and the interest of intervention has been acknowledged by all the stakeholders. Studies have shown the recent trend in students' performance in the subject and have lent more credence to the reality of continued decline in students' performance. One of the numerous contributive factors associated to mass failure in English examinations is the teaching of grammatical aspect of the English language. It should be noted that grammar, as an aspect of language, is crucial and central to language learning and acquisition. Interestingly, this paper is prompted primarily by the reaction of some scholars on the performance of students in English Language. It also examines how perception of both the teachers and students of grammar teaching could enhance good performance.

Research Questions

1. What are the perception of teachers and students about grammar in English?
2. Do they find the teaching of grammar interesting?
3. Which aspect of grammar do they find easy?
4. Which aspect of grammar do they find difficult?
5. Is there any significant relationship between teacher's and student's perception of grammar.

Significance of the Study

This study will bring to limelight the perception of senior secondary school teachers' who intend to meet their students' needs and students' perception as regard grammar teaching in the classroom. It improves students' interest in learning of English Language Grammar in

schools, most especially among secondary school students in Ijebu-Ode Local Government area of Ogun State, Nigeria. It will enrich the knowledge of grammar teaching among English language and teachers and learners. It will also widen the horizon of teachers and students of the importance of teaching language and grammar in particular. Learners stand to enjoy the learning of grammar that is often dreaded. Data obtained from this study served as a basis for further work in related spheres.

RESULTS

Table 1: Students perception on difficulty of Grammar as a topic

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	90	72.6
Agree	34	27.4
Total	124	100

From the above table, it is clear that majority of the students find Grammar in English Language to be difficult to learn.

Table 2: Students perception on method of teaching Grammar in English

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	83	66.9
Agree	37	29.8
Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
Disagree	3	2.4
Total	124	100

The responses from above table show perception of students on the method of grammar teaching. Majority of these students agree that teachers should very his/her method of teaching in Grammar lesson.



Table 3: Sufficient practices must be given to Grammar teaching every time.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	42	33.6
Agree	69	55.2
Strongly Disagree	6	4.8
Disagree	8	6.4
Total	125	100

The above reveals student's perception on the type of practice that must be given to Grammar teaching every time.

Table 4: Student should be correct whenever they make mistake in the class

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	66	53.2
Agree	36	29
Strongly Disagree	7	5.6
Disagree	15	12.1
Total	124	100

From the above table, it is indicated that teacher should correct whenever mistake are made by students in the class.

Table 4.1 I like grammar more than any other aspects of English Language

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	16	12.9
Agree	27	29.8
Strongly Disagree	20	16.1
Disagree	61	49.2
Total	124	100

Above table reveals the majority of students who do not like grammar more than any other aspects of English Language.

Table 5: Perception on lexis and structure as the aspect of grammar that is mostly done in class

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	44	35.2
Agree	37	29.6
Strongly Disagree	15	12
Disagree	29	23.2
Total	125	100

The responses from above table shows that majority of students agree that they do much of much of lexis and structure in grammar.

Table 6: Perception on resources available in school for teaching and learning of grammar

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	29	23.4
Agree	50	40.3
Strongly Disagree	24	19.4
Disagree	21	16.9
Total	124	100

The table shows that majority of the students perceived that their schools have enough resources for the teaching and learning of grammar.

Table 7: Perception of students on teachers' attitude and method on the teaching of grammar in the class before given out exercise for practice.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	60	48
Agree	33	26.4
Strongly Disagree	21	16.8
Disagree	11	8.8
Total	125	100

The perception of the students on teachers' attitude and method on the teaching of



grammar in the class before given out exercise for practice reveals that their teachers lead in grammar class before given out the exercise for practice.

Table 8: Notes on grammar are kept for weeks with my teacher and returned to me unmarked

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	2	1.6
Agree	9	7.2
Strongly Disagree	82	65.6
Disagree	32	25.6
Total	125	100

The above tables reveals that the respondents disagree that their notes are not kept for weeks with their teachers and returned to them unmarked.

Table 9: I do more exercises in grammar than other aspect of language

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	16	12.8
Agree	16	12.8
Strongly Disagree	46	36.8
Disagree	47	37.6
Total	125	100

Table 10: Am more comfortable with other exercises in English language than grammar exercises?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	33	26.4
Agree	48	38.4
Strongly Disagree	16	12.8
Disagree	28	22.4
Total	125	100

The responses from the above table show that majority of students are more comfortable with other exercises in English language than grammar exercises.

Table 11: Grammar ought to be excluded in WAEC/NECO examination because of its difficulty

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	20	16
Agree	26	20.8
Strongly Disagree	51	40.8
Disagree	27	21.6
Total	124	100

From this table, it is clear that the students disagree that grammar should not be excluded in WAEC/NECO examination.

Analysis of Teacher's Questionnaire

SECTION A

Table 12: Years of Teaching Experience

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
0 – 5	1	4
6 – 10	5	20
Above 10	19	76
Total	25	100

This table shows the years of teacher's experience. One (4%) of respondents has less than 5 years teaching experience in English language, five (20%) of respondents have about 6 - 10 years of experience, nineteen (76%) of respondents have more than ten years of experience in teaching.

Table 13: Qualifications of Teachers

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
NCE, B.ED/B.A (English)	9	36



	Frequency	Percentage (%)
B.ED (English)	7	28
B.A. (English) and PGDE	3	12
B.A. (English)	3	12
Others	3	12
Total	25	100

It shows the qualification of teachers. Nine (36%) of respondents have NCE, B.ED./B.A., seven (28%) of respondents has B.ED, each of the respondents have three (12%) in B.A/PGDE, B.A. and others in English Language.

Section B: TEACHER'S RESPONSE

Table 14: Teacher's area of specialization in English Language is?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Language	12	48
Literature	3	12
Both	10	40
Total	25	100

Table 14 shows areas of teacher's specialization. Twelve (48%) of English teachers specialized in Language, three (12%) specialized in Literature, while ten (40%) of the teachers specialized in both language and literature teaching.

Table 15: Teacher's major area of interest in English grammar

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Morphology	44	44
Syntax	36	36
Semantics	20	20
Total	25	100

Table 15 reveals teacher's major area of interest in English grammar. Forty-four (44%) of teachers have interest in morphology, thirty-six

(36%) of teachers' interest are in syntax, and twenty (20%) of teacher's interest in semantics.

Table 16: The population of the class

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20	2	8
30	1	4
35	1	4
40	1	4
44	1	4
45	7	28
50	1	4
60	1	4
66	1	4
70	1	4
75	2	8
100	2	8
137	1	4
200	1	4
300	1	4
459	1	4
Total	25	100

This table reveals the densely populated class teachers faced on every occasion of teaching grammar with the average population of students in class is 45.

Table 17: The number of grammar exercises do you think you can give out and mark in a week considering your class size

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
2	9	36
3	2	8
4	2	8
5	8	32
7	2	8
10	1	4
50	1	4
Total	25	100

This table reveals that majority of teachers admitted they give two exercises to students considering the class size.



Table 18: Do you make use of teaching aids for teaching English language grammar?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	5	20
No	20	80
Total	25	100

80% of teachers do not use teaching aids to enhance teaching of grammar while 20% of teachers do make use of teaching aids.

Table 19: Do you have enough resources (audio/visual materials) for the teaching of grammar?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	8
No	23	92
Total	25	100

Majority of the teachers do not have resources for the teaching of grammar.

Table 20: Do you have a well-equipped library to enhance students' interest in grammar?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	7	28
No	18	72
Total	25	100

Majority of the teachers do not have well equipped library in their schools to facilitate students' interest in grammar.

Table 21: Do you have access to Chief Examiner's Report in English Language?

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	9	36
No	16	64
Total	25	100

The table shows that most of the teachers did not have access to Chief Examiners Report in English Language which could serve as benchmark for the teaching of grammar.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

For effective teaching of structures (grammar), the teacher teaching communicative grammar needs to explain, dramatise and involve the students in extensive practice sessions. The practice may include completion exercises, forming sentences, re-ordering, transforming, substituting, replacing, converting and combining of sentences by manipulating their grammatical structures. However, the following four steps may be employed:

- Step 1: Presentation/Explanation of facts
- Step 2: Practice/Classroom Activity
- Step 3: Reinforcement
- Step 4: Evaluation

Presentation:

You can start the grammar lesson with presentation of facts. These facts should be clearly explained. The following are the guidelines for explaining grammatical items to students:

1. Be simple: Your explanation should not contain too many linguistic jargons.
2. ii. Be systematic: Your explanation should be logically presented (from simple to complex, known to unknown etc).
3. iii. Use ample illustrations: Explanations are better done using charts, diagrams etc for clarity sake.
4. iv. Do it collaboratively: carry along the learners in your explanation. Involve them as you explain to them.
5. v Beware of rigidity: Explanation is not necessarily before practice. You can practice the grammatical item before explanation.
6. vi Give rules where necessary: Do not run away from giving rules. Give rules after thorough explanation and practice.

Practice/ Classroom Activities:

Practice activities that can be used in grammar lessons are too numerous to be exhausted here. Only a few will be mentioned. The teacher can make the students to practice grammatical items through the following:



1. Substitution: they can substitute one grammatical item for another.
2. Replacement: students can replace a grammatical item with another.
3. Transformation: They can transform active sentences to passive ones, direct to reported, statements to questions etc
4. Reordering: They can reorder a positive sentence to a negative one.
5. Identification: Getting the students to identify grammatical items in context.
6. Combining: combining two or more sentences to form one.
7. Completion: Completing a sentence with the correct verbs or nouns.
8. Drilling: Pattern drills of different forms (e.g – substitution tables)
9. Grammar in meaningful contexts e.g market, home, school, church etc

Reinforcement:

Games, dramatization, and other activities can be utilized to reinforce learnt grammatical structures.

Evaluations:

Teacher should give both in class exercises and take-home assignments to provide avenues for further practice.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many studies have been carried out to find out the problem of Nigeria students in English language that should be given prominence. For example, Gbadamosi (1984:20) observes students' negative attitudes towards the learning of English language affect their performance. Communicative or functional as grammar put to use or grammar in practice is a new trend in grammar teaching. This is a means to avoid the boredom of learning the rules of grammar at the expense of proficiency in the language. A cursory look at the English language curricula (J.S.S & S.S.S) by Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (N.E.R.D.C) shows that the grammar components focus more on syntax with little on morphology. In fact, the only aspect of

morphology covered seemed to be word classes (parts of speech) and scanty items on affixation.

Researchers in this study were able to establish the concept of grammar as the study of the systematic account of rules of sentence structure, syntax and semantics of a particular language. They equally establish the fact that grammar is one of the most difficult aspects in any language teaching. These variables relate positively implies that improving competence in one would aid competence in the other syntax is super-ordinate to phonology and morphology. That is syntax subsumes phonology and morphology. Indeed, syntax and grammar are sometimes used interchangeably (Wales, 1989 and Halliday, 1992). In the pedagogical terms, more emphasis should be laid on the teaching of syntax rather than other components of grammar.

In essence, English as a second language (ESL), grammar should be taught in a way to improve the communication skills of learners rather than teaching it in abstract. One may therefore suggest that teachers of English Language must pay adequate attention to its teaching. However, in the process of this study the following were identified as inhibitive factors for grammar teaching: laziness, unavailability of teaching materials for grammar, technicality in grammar, time constraint, infrastructural decay, over population, interest, bad expression and influence of native language etc. All the aforementioned were noticed on both the teachers and students and adequate concerns must be given if a positive change is expected in grammar teaching.

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