

STRATEGIES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR EFFECTIVELY IN NIGERIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategies of teaching and learning English grammar effectively in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools. The paper also reveals the importance of grammar in effective communication. Basically, the paper recommends the functional teaching of grammar which is a practical method rather than the formal teaching of grammar which involves mere memorization of the grammatical rules.

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Introduction

Improvement in language teaching and learning should not only be of paramount interest to those who are involved with the educational planning, administration and implementation but to everyone in the society. As a matter of fact, every member of the society should be concerned about the quality of language education in schools.

The essence of teaching English language is to enable the learner to use English for communication in real life situations. Therefore, English grammar must be taught and learnt effectively. This is because "grammar is the totality of language description" (Osisanwo 2008:1).

The Concept of Grammar

Grammar has always been the soul of any language without which that language cannot exist. Grammar determines the rules of a language. It also refers to a body of descriptive rules about how a language should be used. Olujide (1999:49) says "grammar can mean an individual's knowledge of a language which is exhibited through the utterances that he produces". In other words one's knowledge of grammar determines his fluency in the language.

In modern linguistics, when the word grammar is used, it refers to the rules which an individual has developed which enable him to understand, produce and make statements about the sentences of a language. Oyetunde & Muodumogu (1999:38) citing Elkins (1974) say grammar may also be seen in terms of the quality of the knowledge of a language possessed by a speaker as inferred from the nature of his utterances. It also has to do with the body of prescriptive statements about usages that are acceptable and those that are considered unacceptable.

Teaching English Grammar

Nigeria happens to be one of the contexts in which English language has been firmly entrenched; and it cannot be overstated that the English language is an auspicious and providential colonial linguistic legacy (Babatunde, 2002).

Before and shortly after the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria had a good number of native English teachers. Then the standard of English language teaching and learning was said to be high. With worsening economy, the Nigerian school system could no longer afford teachers of native English countries, except perhaps a few privately owned schools. Gradually the teaching and learning of English has continued to decline.

Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999:40) identify two approaches to the teaching of English grammar. These are formal and functional teaching. According to them, some of English grammar teaching actually goes on in schools. However, the general complaint is that grammar teaching is "formally" or mechanically done. As a result, students know a lot about English but cannot use it effectively. It has been discovered that in some classrooms, grammar hardly receives any instructional attention because teachers do not really know how to teach it. This suggests that the problem may not actually be with the teaching of grammar but the strategies to teach grammar in a way that will help learners communicate effectively.

Teaching English Grammar Formally

Teaching English grammar formally involves teaching the students the rules of grammar without necessarily teaching them the applications. Formal teaching of grammar ensures that the students only memorize the rules and recite definitions. For example, a teacher who intends to teach the continuous tense in English should go beyond telling the students that the continuous tense is derived when auxiliary verbs and the 'ing' are added to a lexical verb within a structure. Rather he should make the students understand that the continuous tense indicates an action that goes on or an action that continues at a particular time either in the present, past or future. The formal teaching of grammar only ensures that grammar is taught for the sake of teaching.

Teaching English Grammar Functionally

It is important for every English teacher to note that his job is not only to teach grammar for the sake of teaching but to ensure that his students are able to speak and write English grammatically. In other words, teachers should ensure that grammar is taught in such a way that the skills needed for effective communication in English are developed by the students. Therefore, English grammar should be taught functionally.

The functional teaching of grammar involves teaching the students not only the rules of the language but also the application of these rules. Mohammed

(1995:137) says "if grammar is not functionally taught, it may lead to confusion and greater anxiety on the part of the learner". Williams (1991:96) lists a few steps that have been found useful for teaching grammatical items.

Step I: Initial presentation of the structural unit or pattern. Here, the teacher presents the aspect of grammar he intends to teach using actions. For example, a teacher who intends to teach lexical verbs may begin by performing a number of actions.

Step II: The second step the teacher takes is the explanation of the rule governing the particular usage. Here, the teacher demonstrates and explains the rules of the aspect he intends to teach, citing many relevant examples.

Step III: Structural drill/pattern practice. Here, the teacher makes sure that he gives the students repeated exercises on the aspect of grammar he has taught. Through practice, the learners are expected to internalize the rules which they have been taught.

Step IV: Repetition/repeated practices. It is important to note that functional teaching of grammar involves the use of situational drills, dialogues or substitution tables. However, it is important that drills are made as meaningful and varied as possible so that the students will not have any difficulty transferring what they have learnt to similar situation that he will encounter outside the classroom.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Basically, the sole aim of teaching grammar should be to enable the learners to use English effectively for communication in real life situations. Therefore, grammar should be taught functionally. This implies that grammar teaching must go beyond the formal memorization of rules by students. Grammar teaching should be within the context of communicative activities. The students should be able to apply what is

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learnt in the classroom when they are outside the classroom.

The teacher's knowledge of grammar must go beyond mere definition of terms. He is required to teach grammar within the context of communication tasks. In other words, grammar must be taught in meaningful contexts. This ensures the functional teaching of grammar.

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