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ATTITUDE OF LEARNERS TOWARDS TEACHING OF GRAMMAR AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract:

Teaching grammar both at school and college level is challenging. To make grammar classes interesting, teachers have to teach innovatively and creatively. In general, teachers rely on either implicit or explicit teaching of grammar. The communicative Approach which is very popular nowadays is in favor of the implicit teaching of grammar. Meanwhile it is necessary to explore what learners think about grammar and the manner of teaching grammar. In other words, a study on the attitude of learners towards the teaching of grammar will throw light on the expectations that are needed in teaching techniques that will ensure the effective teaching of grammar. Lambert (1973) defines attitude "as an organized and consistent manner of thinking, feeling, and reacting to people, groups, social issues or, more generally, to any event in the environment."

KEY WORDS:

Attitude, Grammar, Techniques, Researcher, comprehensive knowledge.

INTRODUCTION:

Sample for the study

For this study, the researcher chose randomly 75 learners studying in the first year B.E. degree courses of College of Engineering, Andhra University. They were given a questionnaire having certain statements related to the teaching of grammar. Simple percentage attitude of these learners. The sampling that was adopted here was random sampling. In addition to the questionnaire device. Informal interview with these selected learners was also held for this study.

Syllabus and Course books

The grammar items that have been prescribed in the English syllabus for the B.E. degree course are: Adverbs, Adjectives, Prepositions Conjunctions, Gerunds, Modal verbs, Relative pronouns, present participles, past participles, Tenses, Imperatives, Infinitives, Direct and indirect Speech, if clauses, Question formation, subject – verb agreement, and Active and Passive Voice.

The course books like 'English for Engineers and Technologists' published by Orient Longman and 'Learning to Communicate' by Dr.V.Chellammal are in favour of the implicit teaching of grammar. The aim behind such attempts is that teachers should not explain the grammatical rules directly but they should

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make learners grasp rules while doing various grammar activities. At the same time there are some clear explanations for important grammar items in these books that help learners acquire rules easily and quickly. This kind of integrated or eclectic approach to grammar teaching ensures high level of motivation on the part of learners and better learning process.

Attitude of Learners towards Teaching of Grammar

The table given below depicts the statements related to teaching of grammar and the percentage details about learner's responses towards these statements. On the basis of the analysis of learner's responses, suggestions have been given for better teaching-learning situations.

Sl. No.	Statements related to teaching of grammar	Learner's Responses	
		Agree	Disagree
1.	Adequate knowledge in grammar is essential for speaking and writing in English without mistakes.	83%	17%
2.	Grammar lessons in the classes are uninteresting	58%	42%
3.	Implicit teaching of grammar is helpful to the learners.	63%	37%
4.	Teacher's direct remarks related to the learner's errors shatter learner's confidence.	74%	26%
5.	Learners find it interesting when grammar is taught as an integral part of usual language lesson.	71%	29%
6.	Grammar exercises based on contexts alone arouse interest among learners.	70%	30%
7.	Innovative techniques adopted by teachers make the learners show due attention to the grammar lessons.	93%	7%
8.	Grammatical labels used by teachers frustrate the learners.	64%	36%

i) Importance of grammar lessons

As far as the importance of grammar lessons is concerned, 83 percent of learners say that grammar lessons are essential for speaking and writing in English without mistakes. They add that these lessons boost their confidence level and make them perform well in the interviews, group discussions and in different situations they come across in daily life. One the remaining percentage of learners possess the view that grammar lessons are not necessary since they feel that they are able to speak and write well without much exposure to grammar. They think that comprehensive knowledge about grammar rules is in no way useful to them. However they are not sure about the significance of grammatical accuracy in their speech and writing.

ii) Grammar lessons – fun or uninteresting?

Majority of the learners feel that grammar lessons are uninteresting despite their awareness about the usefulness of grammar lessons. However a considerable number of learners agree with the view that grammar lessons are interesting. An informal interview with that group constituting the majority of the learners reveals that elaborate explanations for grammar rules, the use of grammatical labels and lack of interaction between the teacher and learners are some of the reasons for the monotony of grammar lessons. It is understood that the teachers of English have to adopt new techniques to make grammar lessons much more interesting and lively. This constructive measure will revolutionize the teaching of grammar.

iii) Implicit and explicit teaching of grammar.

Sixty-three percent of the learners have mentioned that the implicit teaching of grammar is useful to them. They also feel that it is interesting to identify rules without teacher's direct explanation of grammatical rules. This is somewhat creative from their perspective. One of the students says: "I would like to discover grammatical rules from examples. I hate seeing the list of rules given by teachers." However thirty seven percent of the learners feel that implicit teaching with some direct explanations is also helpful to them. They think that this sort of teaching alone suits their learning strategies.

iv) Error correction

Error correction is an important task that has to be performed by the teachers of English. It is indispensable to see how learners react to the process of error correction. In general, teachers point out the grammatical errors committed by learners in their speech or in writing. It is known that most of the learners feel that their confidence level is shattered by such direct remarks related to their errors. They also say that too much of insistence on grammatical accuracy at the beginning has a negative effect on their language fluency. In this context it is necessary to stress the point that error correction can be done without hurting the ego of learners. Bose (2005) states that present day research shows that learner errors are an evidence of their learning and they can't learn 'without goofing'. He adds that this does not mean that errors should be left uncorrected. It is obvious that they should be corrected tactfully.

v) Grammar as a part of language lesson.

Language teaching experts uphold the view that grammar should not be taught separately but it should be taught as an integral part of the language lesson. Seventy one percent of the learners find it interesting only when the teachers teach grammar along with prose or other materials taken from various sources. However twenty nine percent of the learners argue that grammar should be taught separately and it should not be linked with any other lesson. But an informal interview with them reveals that they do not have valid reasons to support this point of view.

vi) Grammar exercises in the class

The usefulness of grammar exercises cannot be undermined since these exercises give sufficient training in the use of certain structures. Majority of the learners agree with the necessity of doing exercises in the class. But they do not like the kind of grammar exercises that are not based on any context. They are in favor of context-based exercises. The materials for these exercises may be taken from sources like newspapers and magazines. Besides these learners hat the practice of dictating grammar exercises in classes. They feel that it is quite a waste of time and energy and that they want worksheets of grammar exercises from teachers.

vii) Innovative ways of teaching grammar.

Except for a few learners, most of them support the view that teachers should rely on innovative means to teach grammar. Some say that overhead projector and power point presentation can be used for the effective teaching of grammar. They think that such addition features incorporated into grammar lessons sustain their interest throughout the grammar classes. This shows that teachers should rely on innovative ways of teaching grammar lessons so that classes are very interesting.

viii) Grammatical terms and labels.

Majority of the learners have expressed the view that grammatical terms often used by teachers confuse them sometimes. Grammatical labels only frustrate learners. They think that teachers can explain how a particular activity is going to be useful in the process of communicating ideas without mistakes. Gradually they can introduce labels of grammar. This will strengthen learners' favorable attitude towards grammar classes.

SUGGESTIONS

In the light of the attitude of learners towards the teaching of grammar discussed above, it is observed that grammar lessons can be modified to expedite the language learning process. The following suggestions are made.

- 1) Since seventeen percent of learners are not aware of the importance of grammar, it is felt necessary to make them realize its significance. Here teachers have to play a great role in helping learners develop deep interest in grammar lessons.
- 2) The present study highlights the fact that majority of learners do not think that grammar lessons are not interesting. Informal interviews with them have thrown light on reasons for the drawback. It is needless to say that teachers should rely on all pedagogically valuable methods that would render grammar lessons

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very interesting. They have to make sure that grammar lessons do not create the feeling of boredom among learners.

3)The study confirms that a considerable number of learners benefit a lot through explicit teaching of grammar. It can be used to fill the gap caused by implicit teaching of grammar. At the tertiary level, explicit teaching of grammar is admissible in certain demanding situations.

4)Error correction is an important process in language teaching. However teachers should not hurt the ego of learners by pointing out errors bluntly. Instead they may show the right version or they may suggest peer correction.

5)Teachers should teach grammar as a part of the language lesson and they should not teach it separately.

6)In the case of grammar exercises, teachers can give content-based exercises. Instead of dictating these grammar exercises, they can distribute worksheets to save time and energy.

7)To relieve learners from monotony, teachers can rely on the use of modern technological aids, which will definitely ensure that grammar classes offer exciting experiences.

8)Mere grammatical terms will not give the desired effects but confuse learners. The overuse of grammatical labels and terms can lead to bewilderment, especially when the more obscure ones are used. In this context, teachers can explain the usefulness of a particular language item and its relevance in communication.

CONCLUSION:-

The study on the attitude of learners toward teaching of grammar has highlighted certain aspects that deserve attention on the part of the teachers. Due attention should be given to aspects such as the adoption of innovative techniques of teaching, the judicious use of material meant for both implicit and explicit teaching of grammar, error correction without hurting the ego of learners, teaching grammar as an integral part of a language lesson with context-based exercises, and explanations about the usefulness of grammar items. This will certainly create a favorable atmosphere for the effective teaching of grammar.



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