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Revisiting Grammar Pedagogy in Bangladesh: A Study of Secondary School Practices

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Abstract: The current study examines the techniques employed for teaching grammar in English language classrooms at the secondary level in Bangladesh. The researchers aimed to evaluate the situation and provide feasible means of improving grammar teaching in secondary schools. The study was conducted in a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative tools across six secondary schools in Dhaka city, Bangladesh, to achieve this goal. The researchers used a standardized survey questionnaire to collect data from the teachers of the selected secondary schools. Three consecutive classrooms of the same lesson were also observed in those schools. Later, a methodological triangulation was applied to analyze and present the findings. The study shows the strategies used by the schools in grammar teaching and their efficacy in raising academic performance. Efforts in policy should inspire trainees in this domain by emphasizing hands-on learning methods and organizing workshops for teacher training.

Keywords: Elementary education, teaching strategies, grammar, ELT methods

Introduction

Grammar has long been an essential aspect of language acquisition and instruction, shaping students' ability to communicate effectively. In Bangladesh, the history of grammar teaching dates back to the colonial period, with English education first introduced by the British (Awal, 2021). Since then, grammar instruction has evolved, influenced by various pedagogical approaches. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was initially the main method of grammar instruction in Bangladesh's schools during the colonial period (Kabir, 2021; Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

However, as global trends in language teaching have shifted, new approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have emerged, offering more dynamic and interactive methods of grammar instruction (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). The CLT approach was introduced in Bangladesh in the late 1990s (Khan et al., 2020). Despite this shift, many teachers in Bangladesh still rely on traditional methods like GTM, even after the introduction of more modern approaches like CLT (Abedin, 2012; Rasul, 2015). This persistence in using older techniques raises questions about the effectiveness of grammar teaching practices in secondary schools today. While grammar instruction plays a fundamental role in students' overall language proficiency, it remains a significant challenge.

According to Ellis (2002), without effective grammar teaching, students often struggle to achieve high levels of grammatical proficiency, which is essential for academic and professional success. In secondary schools, teachers employ a range of methods, including the Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, Total Physical Response, Audio-Lingual, and Communicative approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Each of these methods offers distinct ways of teaching grammar, yet not all are equally successful in the context of secondary education. As Hossain

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and Ahmad (2022) note, choosing the right grammar instruction technique is crucial, as each has different outcomes in terms of student engagement and academic performance.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the current techniques used in grammar instruction in secondary schools in Bangladesh. Specifically, it aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods, identify the strategies teachers find most successful, and determine how these approaches impact students' grammatical proficiency.

In light of these factors, the present study aims to examine the grammar teaching techniques employed by teachers in Bangladesh's secondary schools, evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies, and identify which approaches are most successful in enhancing students' English proficiency.

Review of Literature

Grammar plays a crucial role in language learning as it helps students understand how words and sentences fit together, which is essential for speaking and writing effectively. Debata (2013) states that grammar knowledge helps students understand individual words and sentences. Khansir and Pakdel (2016) also highlight that grammar is key to verbal communication, allowing students to comprehend how they speak. Freeman (2003) emphasizes that grammar is a central topic for both linguists and language teachers, as it helps learners communicate clearly and accurately. Ur (1996) defines grammar as the way words are arranged to form correct sentences, and students who are proficient in grammar are better able to identify and correct errors in their writing (Debata, 2013).

While grammar is widely recognized as essential, there is some debate over how it should be taught. Some researchers argue that explicit grammar instruction is necessary for students to understand the rules of language, while others believe it can be learned more naturally through context (Bose, 2005). Anani (2017) found that many students struggle to apply grammar knowledge in real-world tasks, such as writing essays or speaking. This suggests that grammar teaching should focus on practical application, rather than just memorizing rules. Rao (2019) adds that grammar helps students understand how to structure sentences accurately and clearly.

In Bangladesh, there is limited research specifically focused on grammar teaching at the secondary level. Khan et al. (2024) found that teachers often use traditional methods like GTM, with little student interaction. Despite curriculum reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education, which shifted towards CLT, many teachers still struggle to apply these modern methods effectively (Karim et al., 2018). Talukdar et al. (2022) also noted that while schools in Bangladesh may have better physical facilities, the quality of teaching remains lower compared to NGO-run schools.

In conclusion, while grammar instruction is acknowledged as vital, there are still significant challenges in applying modern teaching methods in Bangladesh's secondary schools. This study aims to explore these challenges and provide recommendations for improving grammar pedagogy.

Methodology

The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative questionnaires and classroom observations to gather comprehensive data. This approach allows for a broader exploration of the research questions, where qualitative data can offer deeper insights beyond what quantitative data alone can reveal (Shakori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2003). The research was conducted among the 14 selected secondary schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study population included both teachers and students from these schools. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure statistical inference and avoid sampling bias.

A structured questionnaire was distributed among 30 teachers, comprising 14 males and 16 females from the selected schools. The questionnaire contained 21 closed-ended items with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree (5)* to *strongly disagree (1)*. The items focused on different aspects of grammar teaching techniques. Later, classroom observations were carried out in six secondary schools, covering three consecutive lessons in each. Researchers acted as non-participant

observers (Punch, 1998) and used a structured observation checklist to gather authentic classroom data.

The study data were collected in the period between February 2024 to April 2024. The researchers administered the survey using the Google Form platform. Quantitative data from questionnaire survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and findings were presented through tables, charts, and graphs using Excel. Qualitative data from classroom observations were analyzed using pattern-based approaches identifying recurring trends, instructional behaviors, and teacher-student interactions during grammar instruction (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

Findings and Discussion

Findings from the Teachers' Questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire included 21 items aimed at understanding English teachers' attitudes and classroom practices related to grammar instruction in Bangladeshi secondary schools. The responses of the teacher participants are presented in the table 1 below.

Table 1. Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire

SL	Teaching and Learning Methods	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I am aware of the methods those are used while teaching English language.	20%	10%	0	70%	0
2	I use various teaching methods to engage students in grammar lessons.	0	30%	0	70%	0
3	I think mastery of grammar is more important than communication.	50%	20%	10%	20%	0
4	I use Bangla more as a medium of instruction while teaching English.	40%	10%	30%	20%	0
5	I think activities that boost communication is the best and accurate way of learning grammar.	40%	20%	30%	10%	0
6	I use supplementary materials (online resources, workbooks) to teach grammar to my students.	10%	20%	20%	40%	10%
7	I often use real life examples or context to teach grammar rules.	50%	20%	10%	20%	0
8	I provide additional support or enrichment for students who struggle or excel in grammar.	40%	20%	20%	20%	0
9	I encourage students to present their own ideas, fostering autonomy and critical thinking ability.	50%	20%	30%	0	0
10	I incorporate technology effectively into my grammar instruction.	20%	20%	30%	30%	0
11	I provide timely and constructive feedback on students' grammar errors.	30%	40%	30%	0	0
12	I use a variety of assessment methods (e.g., quizzes, written assignments) to evaluate grammar proficiency.	30%	30%	30%	10%	0
13	Teaching grammar is challenging due to student resistance or disinterest.	60%	20%	20%	0	0
14	Limited class time and curriculum constraints make it difficult to cover grammar thoroughly.	10%	10%	20%	60%	0
15	I have received adequate professional development opportunities related to grammar instruction.	40%	40%	20%	0	0
16	I actively encourage student engagement and participation in grammar lessons.	30%	40%	30%	0	0
17	I use strategies that make grammar lessons interesting and relevant to my students.	40%	20%	30%	10%	0
18	My class size is appropriate for effective grammar instruction.	0	20%	10%	50%	20%
19	I feel confident in my current approach to teaching grammar.	10%	30%	40%	20%	0
20	Students in my class generally show enthusiasm for learning grammar.	20%	20%	60%	0	0
21	I believe that students understand the importance of grammar in effective communication.	20%	20%	20%	40%	0

In statement 1, only 30% of teachers reported being aware of English teaching methods, while 70% disagreed with the statement, suggesting a gap in basic pedagogical knowledge. 70% disagreed with using varied teaching methods (statement 2), pointing to a reliance on traditional approaches. A majority (70%) felt that grammar mastery is more important than communication (statement 3), reflecting a form-focused mind set. Half of the respondents said they use Bangla as the main instructional language (statement 4), which may limit students' English exposure. Despite this, 60% believed that communicative activities are the best way to learn grammar (statement 5), showing some openness to learner-centered methods. However, only 30% reported using supplementary materials

like online resources (statement 6). There were some positive trends also. 70% replied that they used real-life examples in teaching (statement 7), and 60% provided extra support for students with different learning needs (statement 8). 70% encouraged students to share ideas and think critically (statement 9). Still, only 40% felt that they used technology effectively in grammar teaching (statement 10).

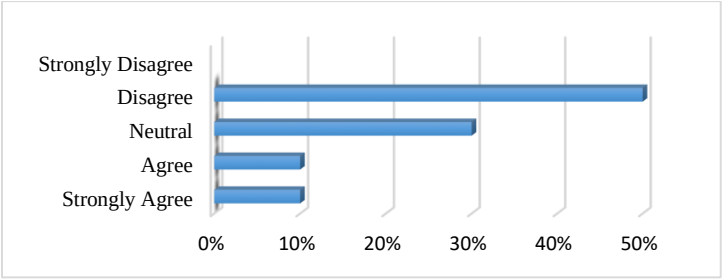


Figure 1. Incorporation of technology into grammar instruction

Feedback and assessment practices were relatively strong: 70% gave timely feedback (statement 11), and 60% used a mix of quizzes and written tasks (statement 12). Yet, student disinterest (80%, statement 13) and time or curriculum limitations (80%, statement 14) were seen as major obstacles.

Encouragingly, 80% had received professional development (statement 15), and most encouraged classroom engagement (70%, statement 16). Statement 17 revealed that 60% used strategies to make grammar engaging and relevant. Regarding classroom size, 70% of teachers (50% disagreeing, 20% strongly agreeing) felt their class sizes are not suitable for effective grammar teaching (statement 18).

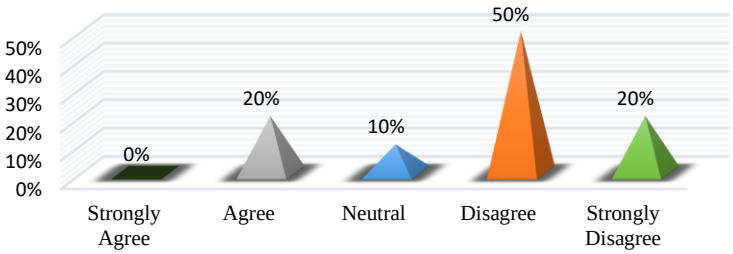


Figure 2. Teachers' responses to appropriacy of class size (Statement 18)

Still, confidence levels were mixed. Only 40% felt confident in their teaching approach (statement 19), and few felt their students were enthusiastic or fully appreciated grammar's role in communication (statements 20–21).

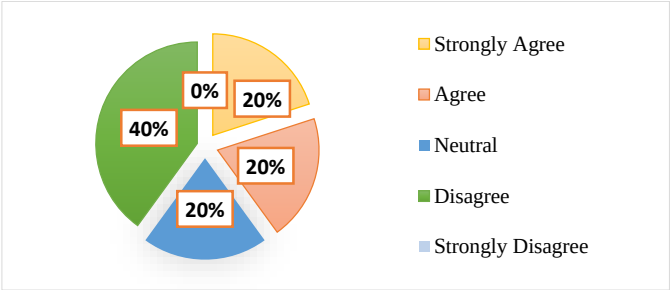


Figure 3. Belief in students' understanding of the importance of grammar in effective communication

Classroom Observation Report

To triangulate and possibly extend the findings of the present study, classroom observation was conducted in six schools from the selected institutions. An observation checklist was applied during the collection of observation data.

Table 2. Pattern-based classroom observation data

Observed Patterns/Themes	Description
Classroom Setting	The classrooms were spacious. However, there were enough students in each classroom. A variety of vibrant posters were used to beautify the area. The classrooms have exquisite paintings. There was a peripheral classroom setting throughout those classes. A class had at most sixty students. A few benches were still vacant even after the students took their seats.
Lesson Plan	Government guidelines require teachers to follow lesson plans, so they glanced over their lesson plans before class started. Three sections comprise the lesson plan: greetings, practice, and production. Students were assigned homework that was part of the class plan.
Teachers' Linguistic Competency	Out of six teachers, two had good English proficiency. Their background was in English. Only for English subjects were they employed. The other instructors demonstrated a moderate level of competency.
Teaching Methods	Secondary school instructors employed inductive approaches as they learnt during their training. Additionally, the teachers combined the grammar translation technique, CLT, and task-based technique with other integrative methodologies.
Classroom Language	English was not utilized by secondary school teachers on a regular basis. They communicated in their mother tongue for most of the class. They only spoke in English during the greeting session. However, they try to use English based on what the students are able to understand.
Focused Features, Error Correction, Feedback	As researchers observed in the classroom, teachers in secondary schools were focused on correcting errors when students needed it. They focused on both fluency and accuracy. They are giving feedback to the students. By giving feedback to the student, teachers try to help them speak and write. Two teachers out of six gave feedback to the students with the help of other students.
Student's Engagement	Teachers at secondary schools assist students in responding when they attempt to interact with them. Teachers teach grammar concepts through a variety of ways, and occasionally they use some quick games or play music that allows the students to freely interact. However, most students felt shy during interaction.
Resources and Materials	The classrooms had a variety of instructional tools, including projectors and smart boards. The schools also received government funding for their resources. However, such materials were not being used by the teachers. Teachers mostly use the *English for Today* textbook and do not use any other teaching resources.
Skill Focused Activities	The teachers tried to focus on four skills of the English language such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening which were added because of government instruction. Moreover, the lessons were taught using both inductive and deductive approaches.

Discussion

The integration of classroom observation with questionnaire responses provides a deeper understanding of English grammar instruction in the selected schools. Questionnaire results showed that most teachers (70%) lacked awareness of English teaching methodologies and relied heavily on traditional approaches. This aligns with Khan et al. (2024), who also noted teachers' dependence on traditional methods with limited student interaction. Classroom observations partly supported this finding. While some teachers attempted inductive and task-based strategies, these were applied only superficially and often merged with outdated practices such as the GTM.

Language use in the classroom also revealed a clear gap. Half of the teachers admitted in the questionnaire that they relied primarily on Bangla, a pattern directly confirmed in observations. English was generally used only for greetings, after which teachers switched back to the mother tongue. Similar concerns have been raised by Karim et al. (2018), who explained that despite the Ministry of Education's policy shift from GTM to CLT, classroom practice remains rooted in limited English exposure. This lack of engagement may weaken students' communicative competence. Interestingly, while 60% of teachers acknowledged that communication-based activities were ideal for grammar learning, their implementation was inconsistent in practice. Khan et al. (2024) consider communicative strategy must focus on the learner's communication needs and address them.

Teacher competence further reflected this inconsistency. Observations showed that only two of the six teachers demonstrated strong English proficiency, while the rest had weaker backgrounds, echoing the questionnaire finding that only 40% felt confident in their grammar teaching. This

variation in competence is likely to influence teaching quality and student outcomes, as Khansir and Pakdel (2016) highlight the importance of grammar mastery for effective comprehension. Moreover, although schools were equipped with smart boards and projectors, teachers rarely used them, relying almost exclusively on the *English for Today* textbook. This mirrors the questionnaire, where only 30% reported using supplementary materials, highlighting a missed opportunity to enrich instruction through available resources. There were also some positive practices. Both data sources showed that teachers provided timely feedback, supported student autonomy, and used real-life examples to explain grammar concepts. Observations confirmed that some teachers incorporated games and music to encourage participation. However, despite these efforts, many students remained shy and hesitant, limiting the effectiveness of such strategies.

Overall, triangulation of the two data sets reveals a consistent picture such as teachers are aware of modern pedagogical approaches in theory, but their practical application remains weak and inconsistent. Anani (2017) emphasizes that grammar instruction is most effective when taught through practical implementation rather than abstract awareness. These findings underline the need for continuous professional development, stronger English-language preparation for teachers, and more active use of available resources. Addressing these gaps would help create more communicative, engaging, and effective grammar instruction in secondary schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper illustrated the current practices of English grammar instruction at the secondary level in Bangladesh by combining teacher questionnaires with classroom observations. The findings show that, although English is taught as a compulsory subject, the teaching and learning outcomes remain unsatisfactory. Most teachers continue to depend on traditional, grammar-focused methods, and English is rarely used as the main medium of instruction. Even when teachers attempted inductive or communicative approaches, these were applied casually. Moreover, the approaches were often blended with outdated practices. Limited teacher confidence, large class sizes, and low levels of student participation further constrain effective learning. At the same time, some encouraging practices were identified. Teachers frequently provided timely feedback, used real-life examples, and encouraged critical thinking. A majority also reported engaging in professional development. However, the positive elements observed were not enough to overcome systemic challenges such as underuse of technology, lack of supplementary materials, and minimal English exposure in classrooms.

These findings carry important implications for teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Improving grammar instruction will require more consistent training in modern pedagogical methods, stronger English-language preparation for teachers, and the active use of available resources such as smart boards and projectors. Authorities should also ensure supportive classroom environments with manageable class sizes and adequate teaching-learning materials. Teachers, in turn, should adapt their methods to student needs and promote active participation, while students must be encouraged to take responsibility for maintaining a healthy and engaging classroom space.

To sum up, the study highlights that real improvement in English language instruction at the HSC level will not come from policy changes alone. A holistic approach linking teacher development, resource utilization, classroom management, and student engagement is essential for preparing learners to succeed in higher education and beyond.

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