

Study on Senior High Students' Perceptions of English Grammar Learning and Pedagogic Implications

-----Within the Domain of English Key Competences

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Abstract. This study aims to explore senior high students' perceptions of grammar learning. The results are as follows: Students have positive attitudes and clear aims towards English grammar learning; they rely more on teachers' lecturing in class than autonomous learning like text-based study and lack in the integrated study of extensive materials and online study; they require context-based, systematic lecturing and interesting ways of grammar practice. Therefore, senior high school teachers need to implement the idea of key competences and take guided discovery method in teaching. They also need to present grammar items in rich and real contexts, reinforce the systematicity, relevance and fun of grammar teaching, and cultivate student's ability in solving problems independently.

Keywords: English Grammar; Perceptions of grammar learning; Grammar-teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

According to the National English Curriculum for Senior High School (2017:23) , English key competences are composed of four dimensions: language competence, cultural awareness, thinking disposition, learning capacities, and the basis for developing them is the course contents which include six key elements. Among them, as the unity of "form-meaning-usage", grammatical knowledge is closely connected with phonetics, vocabulary, discourse and pragmatic knowledge, and directly influences the accuracy and appropriateness of language comprehension and expression. Therefore, grammar learning plays an important role in one's English study. But what's the present situation for students' grammar learning and how do they view it? Answers to these questions will contribute to the implementation of the New Curriculum and effective grammar teaching.

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Subjects

The survey takes 142 freshmen from English department in Liaocheng university as the subjects of research. They are from 7 provinces—Shandong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, Liaoning and Jiangxi, and just finished their high school education. They were taught by different English teachers with various grammar teaching methods. Therefore, this survey can be representative in understanding students' perceptions of English grammar learning.

2.2 Research Questions

The survey aims at investigating the present situation in high school students' grammar learning, and accordingly it mainly focuses on three questions:

- 1) What are the students' attitudes towards English grammar learning?
- 2) What are the students' styles in learning English grammar?
- 3) What teaching methods are favored by students?

2.3 Research Instrument

Questionnaire is used in this survey. It is made up of two parts---closed questions and open questions. The closed questions mainly focus on three aspects: attitudes towards grammar learning, styles of grammar learning, and the favored grammar teaching methods. The open questions include

the English teachers' methods of teaching and the students' suggestions for grammar learning. The questionnaire was edited based on previous research and then published through the online platform—SOJUMP. (from <https://www.wjx.cn/pq/16825348.aspx?t=636872085002944591>) Students all submitted effective questionnaire. The statistical analysis is provided by the platform and analyzed in the form of percentage. The qualitative data of open questions are objectively described and further analyzed.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Attitudes Towards English Grammar Learning

According to the data, most students think that grammar learning is very important for all kinds of examinations (95.78%), so they like to learn grammar (82.39%) and are quite confident that they can learn grammar well (86.62%). They devote considerable time and energy to study grammar (75.35%), but commonly express the feeling that grammar learning is boring (70.42%). Yet, they will actively explore the suitable grammar learning methods (92.25%). It is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Attitudes towards English grammar learning

	Items of question	All Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally disagree
1	I love studying English grammar.	10.56%	40.14%	31.69%	15.49%	2.11%
2	Grammar is important.	51.41%	28.17%	16.2%	4.23%	0%
3	More time and energy on grammar	13.38%	39.44%	22.54%	24.65%	0%
4	Study hard to learn well.	23.24%	30.99%	27.46%	16.9%	1.41%
5	Confident in learning well.	22.54%	36.62%	27.46%	13.38%	0%
6	Learning grammar is boring	9.15%	28.17%	33.1%	25.35%	4.23%
7	Explore ways of learning	42.25%	33.1%	16.9%	7.75%	0%

As can be seen, students maintain interest and self-confidence in grammar learning. They have clear goals and motivation, and determine to learn English well and overcome all difficulties. This is consistent with the requirements on the first level of learning ability in English key competences. However, most students feel that grammar learning is rather boring, so appropriate strategies and methods for grammar learning are extremely important.

3.2 Styles of English Grammar Learning

The data show that students acquire grammar knowledge mainly through teachers' classroom instruction (93.67%) and autonomous learning, while students prefer teachers to impart more grammar knowledge (97.18%). There are three ways for students' autonomous study. The first type is the study at the sentential level based on textbooks. That is, students take notes and review grammar examples (80.98%), recite sentence patterns and finish exercises (85.92%), take multiple choices and error corrections to strengthen their learning (76.76%). The second type is the integrated learning based on extended references. Students reinforce their grammar through reading, listening and writing after class (59.86%), while only quite a few students read English newspapers and magazines to consolidate their grammar learning (31.8%). The third category is online learning based on information technology. Students learn grammar by means of micro-lessons or MOOCS on the Internet (14.79%). The data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Styles of English grammar learning

	Items of question	All Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	Learn grammar through teaching	26.06%	44.37%	23.24%	5.63%	0.7%
2	Take notes and recite examples	22.54%	33.8%	24.65%	17.61%	1.41%
3	Consolidate grammar through exercises and reciting	16.2%	42.96%	26.76%	13.38%	0.7%
4	Consolidate grammar through multiple choice and error correction	16.9%	36.62%	23.24%	21.13%	2.11%
5	Consolidate grammar through reading, writing, etc.	7.75%	25.35%	26.76%	37.32%	2.82%
6	Consolidate grammar by reading magazines	5.64%	10.28%	15.88%	58.08%	10.12%
7	Expect more teaching of grammar in class	43.66%	35.21%	18.31%	2.82%	0%
8	Self-learning by micro-lesson or MOOCS	1.41%	4.23%	9.15%	59.86%	25.35%

First of all, it can be seen that students' acquisition of grammar knowledge still depends more on teacher's classroom instruction, and the consolidation of grammar is mainly confined to the grammar points mentioned in textbooks and the practices of exercises and multiple choices after class. However, they are less aware of improving grammatical competence by means of integrated training of skills. But the more effective way to improve grammatical competence is to improve the integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and to improve individual language competence in oral and written discourses with rich and real contexts.

The New Curriculum (2017:23) clearly points out that English grammar learning in senior high schools should be placed in a richer context. Through various ways of language study and practical activities, students consolidate their grammar knowledge and use it appropriately, and learn to understand the grammatical items in contexts. Only in this way will students' awareness of English grammar be further developed. Therefore, students should improve their ability of autonomous learning, adjust their learning methods, and improve their grammatical competence by means of a large number of comprehensive language practices.

Secondly, students' awareness of using modern information technology to assist English learning needs to be strengthened. At present, the Internet+ and big data era has widened the channels of students' learning. Micro-lessons and MOOCS have provided students with abundant curriculum resources, but the utilization of these resources by students is quite limited. However, the goal of learning ability at the second level of English key competences clearly demands that "students should be able to carry out extra-curricular learning, use network resources and other ways to obtain resources of English learning, and thus broaden the contents and channels of learning."

Meanwhile, the New Curriculum (2017:41) clearly points out the meta-cognitive strategies of senior high school students, "Students can get more extensive information of English through library, computer network and other resources, expand learning resources, and consciously mind and accumulate English expressions used in media." Therefore, students should constantly improve their information literacy and broaden their channels of learning.

3.3 Grammar Teaching Methods Favored by Students

Two open questions are designed to investigate into the grammar teaching methods expected by the students. 1) What methods did your English teacher use in teaching grammar? 2) Which teaching methods do you like best? According to the statistical analysis of qualitative data, the grammar teaching methods that students expected are as follows:

1. Context-based and systematic teaching of English grammar

English grammar involves massive and complicated knowledge points. It is difficult for students to form the conceptual framework and logical relationship of English grammar system if grammar learning is only interspersed in the process of text explanations, after-class exercises and examples. Therefore, students expect that teachers may teach grammar points along with texts first, and finally

consolidate them systematically to offer students a general view. From this we can see that students still approve of explicit grammar teaching. At the same time, students hope that teachers can present grammatical points in meaningful and real contexts, while boring statements and examples will only make them gradually lose interest in grammar learning.

2. Presenting English grammar in interesting and varied ways

The English grammar items are highly theoretical, so it's easy for teachers to fall into pure knowledge explanation. However, students expect more interesting ways of presentation to assist them in comprehension, perception and application of the grammatical items. Some students mention that teachers could change the grammar learning in class into a more vivid one, such as using stories, movie clips, jokes, English songs, or summarizing some grammar knowledge into memorable tips to help them master the specific content.

4. Suggestions for English Grammar Teaching

The English Curriculum (2017) offers requirements of contents in grammar teaching within the domain of key competences and put forward pedagogical suggestions. Senior high school English teachers should carefully implement the theories and concepts involved in the new curriculum and give weight to the following aspects in English grammar teaching.

4.1 Presenting Grammar Knowledge in Rich and Real Contexts

Grammar knowledge is acquired through preliminary perception, overall understanding and practical application of a large number of real data. Instead of confining themselves to isolated explanations of examples and exercises, teachers should also provide students with abundant corpus and scenarios for language performance. As advocated by the English Curriculum (2017:25), views on English grammar teaching is the three-dimensional dynamic one, targeted at "form-meaning-use" and oriented by language use. Grammar participates in the transmission of the basic meaning of a discourse. The choice of grammatical form depends on the pragmatic meaning expressed in specific contexts, such as the speaker's intention, emotion and attitude, and the understanding of participants' role and identity.

Therefore, in the process of language teaching, teachers should attach great importance to presenting new grammatical knowledge in rich and real contexts, and guide students to observe the occasions, forms of expression, basic meaning and pragmatic functions of the grammatical items they've learned in the context. What's more, they should consolidate students' grammatical knowledge through in-class and after-class exercises and activities, and guide students to use language forms accurately and appropriately.

4.2 Using Guided Discovery Method in Grammar Teaching

As was mentioned (Long Xianping 2007:6), most students were more inclined to use an active learning method of discovery and consultation through observation, reasoning, hypothesis, prediction and communication, rather than just passively listen to teachers. Therefore, in guided discovery method, teachers present students with contextualized scenarios illustrating a specific structure first, and students are then guided to discover the underlying rule of the structure as well as its meaning in context followed by explicit teaching and learning of the target structure. Teachers finally provide more data for further application of these grammatical items. In this method, students can think independently, explore independently, and summarize themselves.

As is stated in the New Curriculum (2017:3), senior high school English course advocates autonomous learning, inquiry learning and other learning methods aiming at developing students' key competences so that students can improve their ability in language study and language performance through practical activities.

Therefore, teachers should follow the law of students' cognitive development, organize English grammar teaching with guided discovery method, enable students to perceive, understand, reason and

discover grammar rules independently, and cultivate students' ability to analyze and solve problems independently.

4.3 Enhancing the Systematicity, Relevance and Fun of Grammar Teaching

The English grammar in senior high school covers many knowledge points and language rules, which are implemented in the textbooks with a certain degree of systematicity and relevance. Teachers should change the fragmented and isolated teaching of grammar points in the past. Instead, they need to adopt the constructivist theory of language learning, familiarize themselves with the grammar knowledge involved in all stages of middle school English study, and build the connection between the known and unknown knowledge.

Therefore, it is suggested that teachers use mind map to sort out grammar points and establish connections to help students perceive grammar items in senior high school as a whole. At the same time, in order to enhance the fun of grammar teaching, teachers can add jokes, English songs, movies and so on, so that students can learn grammar knowledge in interesting contexts and maintain long-term interest in learning.

4.4 Cultivating Students' Ability in Solving Grammar Problems Independently

According to the New Curriculum (2017:26), when students encounter grammar problems in their learning, teachers should guide students to solve problems by means of grammar books, dictionaries, Internet and other learning resources in order to improve students' autonomous learning ability. At present, in the student-centered classroom teaching, teachers may carry out their teaching based on the problems raised by students and then solve them, but they neglect the consciousness and ability of students in solving problems independently. Therefore, teachers may arrange group discussions and group members can solve grammar problems independently under the help of all resources before or after class. Thereafter, the group brings difficult problems to class to discuss and solve. This teaching strategy will reduce students' dependence on teachers, enhance students' sense of cooperation and inquiry, and solve grammar problems independently.

5. Conclusion

English grammar teaching is an important part of English teaching, but also a difficult point in teaching. Therefore, teachers need to understand students' attitudes towards English grammar learning, learning methods and favored grammar teaching methods. Combining with the requirements of grammatical competence and teaching suggestions in the New Curriculum, teachers need to update concepts of grammar teaching, optimize grammar teaching methods and improve students' language competence.

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