Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language Teaching
- Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi -
Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo
- Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali
Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo
- Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig -
Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi
- IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi
- Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo -
Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi
- Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa
Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language
Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa
iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta
Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo -
Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo
- Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi
- Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig
- Journal for Language
Teaching - Ijenali
yokuFundisa iLimi -
IJenali yokuFundisa
iiLwimi - Ibhuku
Lokufundisa Ulimi
- Tšenale ya tša
Go ruta Polelo -
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- Ijenali Yekufundzisa
Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u
Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala   yo
Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig
- Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali
yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi -
Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta
Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya
Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya ya
u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi
- Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language
Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali
yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi -
Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo -
Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi
- Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa
Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language
Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa
iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta
Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo - Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo -
Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi - Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo
- Jenala yo Dyondzisa Ririmi - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig -
Journal for Language Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi
- IJenali yokuFundisa iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi
- Tšenale ya tša Go ruta Polelo - Buka ya Thuto ya Puo -
Jenale ya Thuto ya Dipuo - Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi
- Jena?a ya u Gudisa Nyambo - Jenala yo Dyondzisa
Ririmi - - Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig - Journal for Language
Teaching - Ijenali yokuFundisa iLimi - IJenali yokuFundisa
iiLwimi - Ibhuku Lokufundisa Ulimi - Tšenale ya tša Go ruta

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A qualitative exploration of the management of grammar structures by English language curriculum advisors in concert with FET educators

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the management of grammatical structures by the Limpopo Province (LP) English First Additional Language (EFAL) Curriculum Advisors (CAs) in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. The majority of English language learners' language proficiency and accuracy are not at an acceptable level and this brings into close scrutiny the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in English language classrooms, and in particular, the effectiveness of teaching grammar structures in EFAL. The research design is exploratory and the approach is qualitative. A selected number of EFAL CAs in the LP participated in the exploration. The paper is underpinned by an integration of Behaviourism, Mentalism, Cognitive and Universal Grammar theories. Findings indicate that educators need more systematic support regarding addressing grammar structures since interlanguage, grammar permeability, and the inappropriate handling of grammar structures appear inherent.

Keywords: English Language; FET; qualitative; exploration; Educators; Curriculum Advisors; Learner grammar; Interlanguage; Methods

1. Introduction

Grammar structure challenges are experienced by English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners at different phases of their learning. These are also experienced by educators at different levels of their teaching. Educators in this context can either be in-service, at school level or at advisory level. The context nonetheless depends on synergies in the teaching fraternity and how much effort educators are prepared to invest in identifying, sharing and handling grammar problems as well as in solving the problems they experience in concert with English Language Curriculum Advisors (ELCAs), to the benefit of the EFAL learner.

2. Contextualising EFAL grammar

The inability of a majority of English language learners to express themselves in grammatically correct English is generally a cause for concern for educators, educational authorities, academic institutions and employers in the world of work. This situation paints a dismal picture as far as English language learner proficiency is concerned, particularly regarding learners who have obtained their Senior Certificate (SC), that is, their Grade 12 certificate. Their language proficiency is expected to be at an acceptable level. This problem also brings into close scrutiny the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in English language classrooms, and in particular, the effectiveness of the grammar taught in EFAL.

According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the EFAL FET grammar section falls under Section C of Paper 1. This section is concerned with knowledge of English grammar and conventions. It is about knowledge and the application of grammar structures as well as conventions for grammar aspects such as nouns, determiners, concord and modals (CAPS, 2011: 46), which should be taught in the context of reading and writing (IBID, 2011: 51). Further, the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999: 812) refers to grammar as 'rules for language' and a 'particular set of language rules'.

A Diagnostic Report (DR) on Grade 12 results presented at the beginning of each year is usually released by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The main focus of the DR is the analysis of Grade 12 examination results and, as a consequence, the grammar section has been identified as the most difficult section of the entire paper. A large number of candidates fail to answer some basic language convention questions (Diagnostic Report, 2017: 10; Diagnostic Report, 2021: 12). Hence, the aim in this paper is to explore the handling of EFAL grammar structures in the FET phase. The phase is not only the highest in the DBE structure, but it also culminates in Grade 12, which is the exit level in basic education. It is, therefore, a yardstick with which grammar learner performance could be measured by the DBE.

Krashen (2002) posits that every learner has a built-in syllabus which enables the acquisition of rules on condition that there is access to comprehensible input (cf. Methodology). Therefore, EFAL learners can acquire grammar rules when there is access to comprehensible input.

A learner can construct a system of abstract linguistic rules which underlies comprehension and production of L2 (Ellis, 1997: 33). So do EFAL grammar learners in the process of constructing the rules which underlie comprehension and production of L2. This system of rules is viewed as 'mental grammar', and can also be referred to as an 'interlanguage'. The concept of interlanguage offers a general account of how L2 acquisition takes place (ibid, 33). It is against this background that a general account of EFAL educators' handling of grammar structures will be given.

CAPS (2011: 46) stipulates the grammar structures that need to be covered in the Grade 11 EFAL FET phase and these are the intended focus of this study. The grammar structures include word classes, tense, concord, modals, conditional sentences, voice, speech, punctuation and spelling. It is incumbent on EFAL FET educators to provide, by means of suitable and effective methods, adequate input of the prescribed structures of grammar in order to facilitate interpretation and assimilation by learners.

3. Grammar challenges

Learner grammar is permeable in that it is open to external influence directly through input from educators, and indirectly from ELCAs. However, it can also be influenced from the inside (Ellis, 1997: 33; Supakorn, Feng & Limmun, 2018: 35). Grammar is also transitional as learners change their grammar from one time to another by unconsciously adding rules, by deleting them or by restructuring the whole system, leading to an 'interlanguage continuum'. Thus, learners construct a series of 'mental grammars' as they gradually increase the complexity of their L2 knowledge (Ellis, 1997: 33; Saaristo, 2015: 306). Similarly, FET learners are expected to construct a series of mental grammars as they increase the complexity of their EFAL knowledge.

While some researchers argue that learners tend to have competing rules at any stage, others argue that interlanguage systems are homogenous, and variability reflects the mistakes learners make upon trying to use their knowledge to communicate. Thus, researchers regard variability more as an aspect of performance rather than competence (Ellis, 1997: 33). By extension, LP FET EFAL learners' grammars tend to reflect variability due to their diverse educational backgrounds.

To this effect, the different kind of errors that learners commit would inadvertently be manifested in their attempts at different learning strategies. Learners tend to employ various learning strategies to develop their interlanguages. For example, omission errors would suggest that learners are in a way simplifying the learning task by ignoring

171

grammatical features that they are yet to process (Ellis, 1997: 34). EFAL learners in the FET phase also employ different learning strategies in a bid to develop their interlanguages.

Furthermore, learners' grammar is likely to fossilise. A negligible percentage of learners develops the same mental grammar as native speakers. Thus, the prevalence of backsliding, that is, the production of errors representing an early stage of development, is typical of fossilised learners, and this is unique to L2 grammars (Ellis, 1997: 34). This implies that a considerable percentage of EFAL learners will not develop the same mental grammar as native speakers.

It is important to point out that the Limpopo Provincial Department of Education (LPDE) employs ELCAs whose responsibilities include training and providing support to educators in terms of teaching strategies that they can use especially in teaching difficult topics including grammar across its districts. However, due to challenges such as inadequate human and material resources, and the vastness of the districts that curriculum advisors are expected to service, envisaged support of EFAL educators is essential.

Furthermore, traditionally, learners' exposure to grammar in schools has been pedagogic in the sense that such grammar exercises were designed for teaching purposes. This implies that grammar classes were restricted to grammar textbooks and the use of sentences having little or no communication benefits for anyone (Heinemann, 2004: 80). However, grammatical items often indicate an opinion, make a point as well as have a grammatical function (Tomlinson, 2018: 7). It is against this background that the researcher explored EFAL grammar structures.

Modes of grammar delivery encapsulate approaches and methods. Thus, Richards and Rodgers (1986: 19) assert that methodology as a concept incorporates both approaches and methods of teaching.

4. Approaches

Teaching approaches deal with the nature of language and language learning, and serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching. Piccardo and North (2019: 241) aver that an approach implies that educators are called on to play a multiplicity of roles such as that of decision-makers, planners, evaluators and strategic coaches. Therefore, an approach informs methods, procedures and techniques of teaching and assessment. Examples of approaches include the Audio-lingual, Communicative, Text-based and Process approaches. These will be discussed briefly below (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 16).

Audio-lingualism is a grammar teaching approach which utilises techniques such as drilling, and involves imitation, repetition and memorisation of language practices aimed

at conscious and unconscious learning of particular grammatical structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 59).

On the other hand, the Communicative Approach (CA) can be considered the direct opposite of the Audio-lingual Approach in that it claims to emphasise the need for language production which is uninhibited by language correction. Facilitation of communication, rather than correctness of the grammar structures, in context (Mkatshwa, 2017: 9070).

Furthermore, the Text-based Approach involves listening to, reading, viewing, and analysing texts. Learners acquire skills of evaluation, where authentic texts, and not just teacher-created grammar sentences, are interpreted for meaning by the learners, while simultaneously learning or acquiring grammar rules and conventions (CAPS, 2011: 16).

Moreover, the Process Approach (PA) involves teaching grammar structures only during the last stage of the language learning process. The learners would, for example, in a class on writing, first learn the format, types of essays and the conventions of writing the essay, including the planning, drafting and revising stages prior to directing their attention to learning grammar structures. Grammar structures are learned during the editing stage of the writing process. Thus, instead of solely learning grammar structures such as verbs and articles, the learners learn these as part of the editing stage of the writing process (Watkin-Goffman & Berkowitz, 1991: 21). Further, the use of approaches such as the PA recognises the importance of knowing and correctly applying grammar rules, as any written text with too many grammar errors is considered difficult to understand and distracting (Watkin-Goffman & Berkowitz, 1991: 21; Watson, 2015: 3). Therefore, EFAL educators are at liberty to use approaches that would suit their contexts.

5. Methods

An approach and a method are distinct. The latter is an overall plan which creates an orderly presentation of language material to learners, and which is aligned to a selected approach. A method, therefore, is informed by an approach (Anthony, 1963: 63). Thus, approaches and methods EFAL educators choose could serve as indicators of how ELCAs can support and monitor the success of teaching grammar structures.

There are a number of methods of teaching grammar, ranging from what is considered traditional such as the Audio-lingual, Grammar-translation and Communicative Language Teaching to the novel 'designer methods' including the Silent way, Community Language Teaching and Suggestology or Suggestopedia (Celce-Murcia et al., 2013: 2).

The Grammar-Translation method, which evolved from the teaching of classical languages such as Latin, is a method in which learners could learn a language by first analysing its grammar rules, in detail, followed by the translation of words and sentences from the second language (L2) into the first language (L1). In a South African context,

this method could entail the educator asking learners to read words or sentences in EFAL, then to translate them into their L1 (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 4; Wang, 2010: 315).

Derived from the Audio-Lingual Approach, the Audio-Lingual method is largely an oral-based method which focuses on teaching grammatical structures of a language. These language structures could be taught through memorisation and repetition of dialogues designed by the educator. Learners are not explicitly exposed to the grammar structures, but it is assumed that through repetition and memorisation of correct dialogues, language patterns will be acquired or inferred (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 45; Wang, 2010: 315).

The Communicative Language Teaching method is premised on the Communicative Approach, and focuses on making communicative competence the goal of language teaching. Language structures and forms are taught communicatively, that is, as part and parcel of authentic language use. The educator who uses this method presents various opportunities for learners to speak the target language, and grammar errors that could occur are largely ignored (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 127; Chen, 2016: 618).

Methods help the educator to be conscious of his or her thinking regarding the manner in which he or she intends to present the lesson. Thinking about the lesson tends to influence the educator's actions in class. This implies that educators should also know their method preferences and acquire the knowledge base of teaching and understanding. Using different methods is likely to enhance the educator's repertoire of techniques (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 3). Therefore, knowing methods would call for conscious attention and adequate planning on the part of the educator. Otherwise he or she may attempt to implement poorly understood methods which may inhibit learners' understanding of grammar. (cf. Watson, 2015: 4; see Appendix). It is against this background that Fabian (2017: 184) argues that educators are key figures in education and in developing critical thinking for a number of reasons. This includes the handling of grammar structures in the context of this paper.

6. Methodology

This paper followed a qualitative exploratory design that focused on the level of support offered to EFAL educators by ELCAs. Leedy and Ormond (2013: 32); Kumar (2011: 35) and Fredricks (2019: 110) opine that an exploratory design aims to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social phenomenon such as the handling of grammar structures by EFAL educators. Additionally, this paper is underpinned by an integration of the Behaviourism, Mentalism, Cognitive and Universal Grammar theories.

Behaviourism explains behaviour by observing responses of learners due to particular stimuli because stimuli can produce haphazard or regular responses from a learner (Ellis, 1986: 20). Thus, the behaviour of educators in the FET, implicitly including that

of the learners regarding grammar structures, can be deduced from the interviews held with ELCAs (see Appendix).

Mentalism is associated with the belief that knowledge is formed from inborn mental processes. According to this theory, every learner is predisposed to learning a language, and this takes place when their inherent thought processes are activated (McLaughlin, 2006: 128). Therefore, EFAL FET learners in LP are similarly endowed with the capacity to learn and know grammar structures provided their thought processes are activated and fully engaged.

The Cognitive view regards the learner as an active processor of information (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 43; Chen, 2016: 618). Thus, EFAL FET learners should apply their mental powers to generate workable grammar rules from input presented by educators and indirectly by ELCAs.

The Universal Grammar (UG) theory asserts that a human brain is able to learn a language. The human brain can be thought of as a partially configured machine dependent on its innate ability to learn a language and be fully configured due to comprehensible input in the form of teaching (cf. Pinheiro, 2016: 34; Rast, 2019: 179). Thus, according to UG, EFAL learners have a similar chance of learning EFAL grammar. However, EFAL learners need to be sufficiently exposed to language structures prior to their assimilation of the target language.

Furthermore, the interview enabled the researcher to engage in conversations with the ELCAs to explore, by means of a set of questions, the required data which was the level of support that ELCAs' gave to EFAL grammar educators (cf. Miles & Gilbert, 2005: 65; Appendix).

The sample was purposively obtained to fulfil the purpose of the researcher (Maree & Pieterson 2007: 178). To achieve that, a sample comprising of 5 ELCAs was selected from the population of 9 ELCAs in LP.

Data was collected through semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix) and analysed through Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). The findings are presented and interpreted narratively in line with TCA below.

7. Presentation and interpretation of findings

In line with the interview questions for ELCAs, the findings are discussed under the following themes: personal information, planning, training, content, methods, materials, assessment, evaluation and improvements (see Appendix).

Personal information

The five ELCAs interviewed were appointed as CAs in different years; 2 in 2008, another 2 in 2009 and the last one in 2016.

ELCAs academic qualifications ranged from Bachelor of Arts (BA) to Master of Arts (MA) degrees. One participant holds a BA degree, another one a BA Honours (BA Hons), an additional one a Bachelor of Education Honours (B Ed Hons) and two had a Master of Arts (MA) and a Master of Education (MEd) degrees, respectively. The ELCAs' qualifications varied widely. It would seem the employment selection criteria needs to be refined.

Two ELCAs' highest professional qualifications were BA (Ed) degrees, one an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), another one had a Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) and the last one had a Higher Education Diploma (HED). Further, 3 ELCAs specialised in language, one in literature and one in both language and literature.

Moreover, one ELCA had never taught at secondary school level while the other 4 did. Of the 4 who taught at secondary level, one taught Grades 8 to 12, 2 taught Grades 10 to 12 and another one, Grades 10 and 11. This suggests that the ELCAs had some experience of teaching at FET level before.

One ELCA worked in all the circuits of the Capricorn District and another one in the Sekhukhune District's circuits of Phokoane, Eensaam and Glen Cowie. However, the 3rd ELCA worked in the Vhembe District's Soutpansberg and Hlanganani circuits while the 4th one in Mopani District's Makhutswe, N'wanedzi, Xihoko and Nkowankowa circuits. The last one worked in all of the Waterberg (Mogalakwena) District circuits.

The roles of ECLAs are to assist educators to carry out their instructional roles and support them in implementing the curriculum. This task is carried out by means of deliverables such as conducting teacher training workshops, supplying teachers with support materials as well as conducting school visits (Tatana, 2014).

The total number of schools in the circuits serviced by the ELCAs range from 30 to 169. Two (2) ELCAs advised 30 schools each, one advisor 31 and the other two 103 and 169, respectively. All the 5 ELCAs stated that they supported educators in the teaching of language and literature. This implies that the workload of ELCAs differed from one ELCA to another.

One ELCA supported educators through school visits, content workshops, School-Based Assessment (SBA) and one-on-one sessions. The other one used workshops and guidance to support educators. The 3rd one employed training workshops and school visits. The 4th one used methodology workshops, one-on-one sessions and formal term school visits. The 5th one employed content workshops, school visits and one-on-one sessions. This suggests that educators were supported in various ways by ELCAs who used different support mechanisms.

Planning

One ELCA mentioned that he visited schools once a week, 2 said three times a week and another one said 4 times a week. The last one visited schools 4 to 5 times a week. Therefore, the school visits appeared not to be regulated.

One ELCA conducted teacher workshops twice per annum and another one did so once in a quarter for the first 3 quarters. One visited the schools once in a quarter and another one said 4 times per annum arranged thus, twice in the first quarter and once in the 2nd and 3rd quarters respectively. However, one ELCA visited the schools only when there was a need that was determined by the circuits or district.

Three ELCAs visited the schools once in a quarter, four times per annum and another one did so when the need arose, respectively. All ELCAs stated that the number of school visits conducted was determined by the district. However, 1 ELCA's decision to visit schools was informed by learner work analysis activity and how the need for an intervention would be conceived. The other ELCA's school visits were influenced by the need to support teachers on the work covered during the teacher workshops.

Moreover, 2 ELCAs' workshops involved a discussion of English grammar. One discussed English grammar in two workshops, in quarters one and two. The other 2 discussed English grammar in every workshop.

Two of the ELCAs planned to involve all schools by conducting workshops at the circuit and cluster (groups with similar characteristics) levels, respectively. The other 3 ELCAs indicated that all the schools always participated in the organised workshops. It would therefore seem that ELCAs do not have a uniform plan of implementing their day to day responsibilities.

Training

Three ELCAs stated that all the educators attended workshops while 2 of the participants stated that most teachers did attend. This corroborates that educators attended workshops run by ELCAs.

One ELCA stated that educators attended the workshops and that the attendance was not regular but intermittent as this depended on the need for educators to attend other workshops for other subjects which they also taught at their schools. The other 2 participants indicated that the evidence of names in the attendance registers and educator realisation of the importance of workshops in their line of duty were reasons for the regular attendance. Two ELCAs stated that most educators did attend workshops and further noted that at times some of the educators were required to attend two workshops at the same time. Hence, some of them just signed the attendance registers and then excused themselves from the workshops (cf. Appendix).

Two ELCAs stated that they allocated 30 to 40 minutes to grammar in each training workshop. The 3rd participant did not have a definite time allocation. The 4th one stated that 1 hour was allocated while the 5th one allocated the entire 3 hours of the workshop period to the teaching of grammar. Thus, the time allotted to grammar varied; it generally ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours.

Furthermore, ELCAs explained that reasons for the allotment of workshop time to grammar were determined by different circumstances. Two ELCAs cited equitable allocation of time to all three papers in one workshop. Another 2 ELCAs' allocation of time was informed by the needs of the learners deduced from the annual DR. The other ELCA's allocation of time was decided by the authorities at the district level.

Moreover, 4 ELCAs considered the time allocated for grammar as adequate. One stated that this time allocation was never definite as it depended on the needs of the learners and therefore its adequacy could not be determined. The educators were implicitly satisfied with the time allocated for grammar.

Explanations indicating whether the time allocated to grammar was adequate or not were as follows: 2 ELCAs stated that grammar content could not be covered in the allocated time, 1 mentioned that grammar was a difficult topic, another one mentioned that the time allocation was inadequate as there were other sections that needed to be catered for and the 5th stated that the allocated grammar time during workshops was adequate. Interestingly, 3 ELCAs never dedicated the whole workshop to grammar while 2 did so occasionally. This suggests that ELCAs need to be more disciplined when dispensing grammar structure support.

Content

CAPS (2011: 12) corroborates that there is definitely a need for direct teaching of the basics of grammar. As much as it is encouraged that educators should play a supportive role in language learning, CAPS stresses the need for explicit teaching of structures, particularly if the learners keep on committing errors in their language learning endeavours. It is therefore incumbent on EFAL FET teachers to provide (by means of suitable and effective methods), adequate input of the prescribed structures of grammar in order to facilitate interpretation and assimilation (cf. 2.6).

One (1) ELCA described an EFAL grammar learner as someone who is not a native speaker and who uses English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). Another ELCA stated that an EFAL grammar learner is someone who is able to demonstrate language competency and show an interest in the language. Two ELCAs asserted that this is a learner who is not a native speaker but is willing and dedicated to learn English. The last one stated that an EFAL learner is someone who struggles to grasp the basics of English grammar as a non-native speaker. Therefore, it could be deduced that EFAL learners were perceived differently by ELCAs.

Aspects of English language covered in the workshops were as follows: 1 ELCA mentioned visual literacy and editing, another one grammar rules, sentence transformation, parts of speech, comprehension passages as well as language structures such as concord and synonyms. Two ELCAs stated that they focused on what the teaching plan prescribed for them to cover while the last ELCA focused on language editing, voice, speech and concord.

Furthermore, the reasons for the choice of aspects to cover in the workshops included poor learner performance in those sections, being informed by the DR, the prescriptions of the teaching plan, the fact that those sections chosen embodied what needed to be grasped as language basics as well as analysis of learners' performance which identified these as the challenging aspects of English language learning.

Moreover, all the 5 ELCAs admitted that they sometimes handled grammar in the workshops. The first one tackled summary and visual literacy as grammar topics in the workshops, the 2nd one dealt with parts of speech, irregular verbs, tense, sentence transformation rules, language structures, word building and vocabulary. The 3rd ELCA focused on voice, speech and tense while the 4th one dealt with concord, voice and speech. The last one focused on voice, speech and tense. Apparently, grammar structures deserve much more management.

The reasons for choosing these grammar topics ranged from the failure to teach these topics in classes, the poor performance in these sections by learners, being informed by the analysis of learners' work, the topics being predominantly asked in the examinations and that the learners' knowledge of the sections made the writing of Paper 1 in the examination an easier task.

Eastwood (1994: 8) summarises grammar as comprising of grammatical units such as words, phrases, clauses and sentences, word classes, sentence elements and identification of the special features that the English language possesses when compared to other languages. The latter involves a study of English language peculiarities such as the endings of words in plural, the uniqueness of English language word order, complexities of verb phrases and use of prepositions in literal and figurative language. This would imply that a number of many other aspects of grammar structures could be included.

Methods

OpenLearn (2017: 18) views pedagogic grammar as grammar aimed at assisting the facilitation of the learning of English by learners to whom English is a second or even third language. It combines features of both prescriptive and descriptive grammars by prescribing the rules of language while allowing a lot of practice in the language, in order to expose non-native English speakers to the correct 'standard' model of English (see Methodology).

Based on the interpretations of pedagogic grammar that have been presented, pedagogic grammar is the grammar that most learners, past and present, were exposed or rather subjected to. Heinemann (2004: 80) opines that this type of grammar teaching could possibly account for the generation of young people to whom the word grammar holds unpleasant associations. Thus, it is every English teacher's prerogative to employ such grammar methods and approaches that have the maximum potential to minimise or eradicate these negative perceptions with which grammar is considered.

Three ELCAs concurred that educators taught the grammar section in the curriculum while one did not. Further, another ELCA stated that grammar was not taught optimally.

Two ELCAs identified the Communicative method as the method educators generally use to teach grammar, one identified the use of the Text-based method, another one stated that educators depended on methods prescribed by the CAPS document and the last one identified the method where educators used examples of grammar without actually teaching it.

The grammar teaching methods recommended were as follows: 2 ELCAs recommended the use of examination or test question papers to teach grammar, the aim thereof being to teach question-response skills and the 3rd one recommended Text-based as well as Process methods to provide learners with opportunities to engage with grammar learning. The 4th one recommended the Explicit-structure method to ensure learner ability to identify rules and structures of grammar whereas the 5th recommended the use of the Direct-method to give learners exposure to the rules of grammar.

To this effect, Richards and Rodgers (2001: 28) assert that the role of educators in grammar teaching depends on the methods, some of which are totally dependent on the educators as a source of knowledge and direction. However, others consider the educator's role to be that of a catalyst, consultant, guide and model for learning, which learners should imitate.

Materials

Materials that ELCAs used for training educators were the CAPS document and rubrics; laptops, projectors and screens, flipcharts, training manuals; Power Point presentations and diagnostic reports, internet sources and books. It was also found that 2 ELCAs always had adequate training materials, another 2 responded that this was not always the case and the last one did not have adequate training materials.

Moreover, the grammar sources they used were the CAPS document, media materials, grammar textbooks and dictionaries, training manuals, Power Point presentations,

diagnostic reports, textbooks and self-developed manuals. Further, the materials they provided to the educators ranged from teaching plans, training manuals, worksheets, Power Point presentations to self-developed guides.

With respect to the recommendations of materials educators could use at schools, the responses were as follows: one ELCA considered it unethical to recommend particular materials, another one recommended the use of study guides, newspapers and magazines as these provide authentic language teaching and learning opportunities, 2 recommended good textbooks as these contain relevant examples and activities which are accessible and developed by language experts and the last one recommended a source named 'Student Companion' which was considered to be a good language book.

To this effect, it is worth pointing out that knowledge can be given to learners externally by books and educators. However, awareness can only be developed internally by the learners themselves (Tomlinson, 2019: 27).

Assessment

According to 3 ELCAs, common aspects of grammar that educators assessed were, comprehension, visual literacy and language editing; rules of grammar, sentence transformation, parts of speech, comprehension, contractions, articles, concord, question tags, homophones and homonyms. However, one ELCA considered comprehension passages relevant for teaching common grammar aspects, another indicated that language editing was relevant for teaching grammar items such as tense and concord while the last one mentioned voice, speech and question tags as the most common aspects.

The methods that educators employed to assess grammar ranged from formal and informal tasks, educator -, self -, peer - and group assessment, oral questions and answer methods, written tasks of language activities with memoranda as well as class work and home work.

Grammar should be taught in context (cf. Hewings & Hewings, 2006: 14; CAPS, 2011: 51) and by extension be assessed in context. However, ELCAs recommended the following grammar assessment methods: self- and peer- assessment, the use of all methods of assessment, methods that allow learner explanations of grammar rules, role play and peer assessment as well as methods that assess learners' knowledge of grammar rules.

One ELCA reckoned that the challenges that educators experienced regarding assessing grammar were a lack of understanding of grammar by the educators as a result of inadequate qualifications. Another one identified lack of resources, overcrowding, work overload and inadequate training due to the changes in curricula as the main challenges. The 3rd one asserted that educators struggled with knowledge and application of grammar

rules while the 4th raised the challenge of educators' presumption that learners know the language structures and rules, and hence merely glance over them. The 5th ELCA stated that since the educators did not adequately cover grammar content, they ended up not assessing it sufficiently.

Educators' assessment of learners' knowledge of English grammar included them using formative- and summative assessment, question and answer methods as well as oral questioning. Two ELCAs believed that grammar content which was not adequately taught led to very little assessment being done.

All the 5 ELCAs provided feedback on learners' formative grammar performance. This was done in a range of intervals; the 1st ELCA provided feedback during School Based Assessment (SBA) moderation sessions, the 2nd at the start of a lesson that was to be observed, the 3rd and 4th did so during the school visits while the 5th ELCA provided feedback during item analysis reporting.

Feedback on summative learner performance was always given and it occurred as follows: 1 ELCA gave feedback at the beginning of the year during briefing sessions and another at the end of observed lessons at the schools. The 3rd ELCA did so after performing formal tasks and administering examinations, the 4th during item analysis and the last one after every examination such as the mid-year, trial and end-of-the-year ones.

Common grammar errors committed by EFAL learners were the inability to distinguish among language structures such as parts of speech, sentence transformation and sentence editing; failure to differentiate between homophones and homonyms, problems with concord, spelling and prepositions; punctuation, tense and verbs; punctuation, concord and spelling, tense, voice and speech.

Three ELCAs stated that some educators were confident in tackling grammar errors, 2 asserted that educators were confident and 1 ELCA believed that educators were confident to tackle grammar errors. Their methods of tackling grammar errors included remedial classes, establishing and grouping language errors thence allowing practice on them, corrections of written work as well as oral and written feedback by means of marking symbols.

Evaluation

Two ELCAs indicated that the training approaches they used were not evaluated. However, 3 of the ELCAs indicated how they evaluate: one evaluated by means of an evaluation form, another one through oral feedback by the educators they train and the last one through the Performance Management Development System (PMDS). This implies that evaluation should be formalised and should be part of the support offered to ELCAs during training.

Moreover, efforts to support educators were evaluated in different ways. One ELCA was evaluated during one-on-one sessions with educators, the 2nd one was evaluated by means of checklists, the 3rd one by their immediate supervisors during accountability sessions while the 4th and 5th ELCAs received oral reports from the educators they supported. For example, 3 ELCAs had educators evaluate the support they offered, 1 used a checklist and 2 oral **feedback** from educators.

Additional evaluators included a supervisor, PMDS and the Umalusi Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training. One ELCA stated that there was no other evaluator. Thus, out of the four evaluators, three were external and one was not. The interview question posed was however not applicable to the last ELCA. The frequency of external evaluation could not be determined in the case of 4 ELCAs without external evaluation experience. Only 1 ELCA was externally evaluated once a year.

Improvements

ELCAs reckon that there are various ways in which Grade 11 EFAL formative learner performance in grammar could be improved. These could range from giving informal tasks at least twice a week, determining the pre-knowledge of learners in the aspects of grammar and using that information to improve grammar teaching, teaching rules of grammar, making deliberate efforts in teaching grammar, giving learners extra lessons and improving the standard of formative tasks by pitching them at the level of examination type questions.

Moreover, summative Grade 11 EFAL learner grammar performance could improve if grammar rules could be intensively taught. Educators could provide more individual learner-centred grammar activities and improve the type and quality of summative task questions, and provide individual support to learners through learner profiling.

Collective learners' grammar results should inform future training workshops. All ELCAs responded that these results would help them identify common grammar problems and plan future intervention strategies or workshop topics and determine if they would need experts to assist educators with problems in teaching grammar.

Furthermore, 2 ELCAs stated that they could contribute to the improvement of grammar teaching by inviting experts to guide educators. One indicated that one-on-one sessions with educators would benefit them, another one suggested the clustering of schools in the circuits so that they could tackle common, localised and contextualised grammar challenges. The last one considered various interventions such as developing materials that address grammar issues derived from the classrooms and SBA. These materials can be used in future training workshops.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

It has been revealed that the ELCAs' academic qualifications ranged from BA to MA degrees. The highest professional qualification was a BA Ed (for 2 ELCAs). Further, 1 had an Advanced Certificate in Education, another 1 an HDE and the last 1, an HED. Some ELCAs specialised in language meanwhile others specialised in either language or literature.

Only 1 ELCA had never taught at secondary school level whereas the rest did. Of the 4 ELCAs that taught at secondary school level, 1 taught Grades 8 to 12, 2 taught Grades 10 to 12 and another one Grades 10 and 11. The ELCAs' experiences ranged from 3 -11 years: 11yrs, 10yrs, 3yrs, 11yrs and 10yrs, respectively.

EFAL learner grammar needs urgent and resolute attention. Grammar ought to be taught in line with the CAPS guidelines. Additionally, learners have the capacity to learn grammar (see Methodology). The grammar situation can improve if educators and ELCAs work together to increase the attrition rate of poor performance of EFAL Grade 12 language learners. The learners could benefit from teachers' and ELCAs' application of pertinent language learning theories as well as from their creativity in tackling grammar challenges identified in class and by the LPDE.

What most educators taught was realistic and aligned to CAPS; grammar structures and rules were taught. However, there were indications of interlanguage and learner language that was on the whole permeable. There was also variability in the learner grammar being taught.

Challenges that educators experienced regarding assessment of grammar were a lack of understanding of grammar by the educators themselves due to low qualifications, lack of resources, overcrowding, work overload and inadequate training opportunities due to ever changing curricula. This was further compounded by educators struggling with knowledge and application of grammar rules, the presumption that learners know language structures and rules. Therefore, the educators would merely glance over and not adequately cover the grammar content and eventually not assess it sufficiently.

The findings in this paper suggest that EFAL learner grammar remains challenging to educators as well as to the ELCAs in the LP. Working as a team in a systematic and dedicated manner could possibly improve how educators strategize and employ learner grammar strategies while being overseen by ELCAs. Such responsibilities could be more fruitful if they are structured to be perennially informed by both internal and external evaluations carried out annually mainly on how learner grammar can be delivered and assessed.

The veracity of grammar structure challenges experienced by learners and educators call for closer co-operation and collaboration among the EFAL teaching fraternity to the benefit of the learners. Further, closer collaboration of the educators with the ELCAs

can improve the handling of grammar structures especially at FET level when learners will be approaching their basic education exit.

Since learners are predisposed to language learning, the Behaviourism, Mentalist, Cognitive and Universal Grammar theories discussed in this paper afforded the researcher an opportunity to explore how EFAL learners respond to teaching stimuli and the apparent processing of the input provided by educators.

Moreover, the educators' repertoire of EFAL approaches and methods need to be perennially boosted. Educators should be helped to recharge the grammar approaches and methods they choose to employ. These could be intermittently reviewed, upgraded and evaluated as some would be introduced and others rendered obsolete.

To a great extent, EFAL learners' language proficiency and accuracy depends on how well the learners together with the educators can handle grammar structures under the support and tutelage of ELCAs. This implies that EFAL educators together with ELCAs do feature as indispensable custodians of the effective handling of grammar structures in language teaching and learning.

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Appendix: Interviews with ELCAs

1.　Personal information

1.1　What is your highest academic qualification?

1.2　What is your highest professional qualification?

1.3　Did you specialise in language or literature?

1.4　Did you ever teach at a secondary school level?

1.5　Which grades did you teach?

1.6　When were you appointed as a curriculum advisor?

1.7　In which circuit(s) do you work as a curriculum advisor?

1.8　What is the total number of schools in the circuit or circuits that you service?

1.9　Do you support educators in language?

1.9.1　Do you support educators in literature as well?

1.10　How do you support them?

2.　Planning

2.1　How often do you do school visits?

2.2　How often do you workshop teachers?

2.3　How did you arrive at the numbers given above?

2.4　How many workshops involve discussion of English grammar?

2.5　How do you plan to involve all the schools in the circuit?

3　Training

3.1　Do teachers attend training workshops?

32　Do they attend this regularly? Please explain your answer.

3.3　How much time is allocated to grammar in each training workshop?

3.4   How did you arrive at this allotment? Do you think this amount is adequate   to train teachers on this section? Please explain your answer.

3.5   Do you sometimes dedicate a whole workshop to grammar teaching?

*4.   Conten*t

4.1   Describe a typical EFAL grammar learner.

4.2   Which sections/aspects of English language do you cover in training workshops?

4.3   Why do you choose these sections/aspects to train teachers?

4.4   Do you sometimes tackle grammar?

4.5   Which grammar topics do you cover?

4.6   Why do you focus on these topics?

5.   Methods

5.1   Is the grammar section taught?

5.2   Mention the methods that they use in teaching grammar?

5.3   Which grammar teaching methods would you advise teachers to use? Please explain your answer.

6.   Materials

6.1   Mention the training materials that you use when training teachers?

6.2   Do you normally have adequate materials for all the workshops?

6.3   Which grammar sources do you prefer using in training workshops?

6.4   Which grammar materials do you provide for teachers to use in schools?

6.5   Do you recommend any grammar materials that teachers can use? Please elaborate on your answer.

7. Assessment

7.1   Which common aspects of grammar do teachers assess?

7.2   Which methods do they use in assessing these sections?

7.3   Which assessment methods would you advise them to use?

7.4   What challenges are experienced by teachers in assessing grammar?

7.5   How do teachers assess learners' knowledge of English grammar?

7.6

7.6.1 Do you give feedback on formative grammar learner performance?

7.6.2 When do you do it?

7.7   Do you give feedback on summative learner performance?

7.7.1 When do you do it?

7.8   Mention common grammar errors committed by learners in English First Additional Language (EFAL), Grade 12 Paper 1?

7.9   Are teachers confident in tackling grammar errors?

7.10   Which methods do they use in tackling these errors?

8. Evaluation

8.1   How are the teacher training approaches that you employ evaluated?

8.2   How are your teacher support efforts evaluated?

8.3   Do teachers evaluate your training?

8.4   Do teachers evaluate the support that you provide?

8.5   Who else evaluates you?

8.5.1 Is this evaluation internal?

8.5.2 How often does it take place?

8.5.3 Is it sometimes external?

8.5.4 How often does it take place?

8.6   Do you get feedback on the evaluation done?

9. Improvements

9.1 How can the Grade 12 EFAL formative learner performance in grammar be improved?

9.2 How can the Grade 12 EFAL summative learner performance in grammar be improved?

9.3 How do collective learners' grammar results inform future training workshops?

9.5 What contribution can you make to improve grammar teaching?

Thank you for participating.

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