

*Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria*  
*Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research*  
*ABOU-BAKR BELKAID UNIVERSITY-TLEMCCEN*  
*Faculty of Arts, Human and Social Sciences*  
*Department of Foreign Languages*  
*Section of English*

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE TEACHING OF  
GRAMMAR  
AT TLEMCCEN UNIVERSITY  
WITH REFERENCE TO FIRST-YEAR EFL  
STUDENTS**

*Thesis submitted to the department of foreign languages in candidacy for  
the degree of Magister in Applied Linguistics and TEFL*

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**2004 - 2005**



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RESEARCH

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SECTION OF ENGLISH

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*To my Mother, my husband and my  
children: Charif, Flyas and Djawad.*

*To my brother and sisters.*

*To my family.*

*To all my friends.*



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## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to give a clear picture of the teaching of grammar to first-year E.F.L students in the English Department of Tlemcen University. The problem is that Algerian university students, and especially those of the first-year, who have received at least five years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in the ability to use accurately and coherently the language, and consequently to understand its use in communication, whether in the spoken or written mode. This is mostly due to a deficiency in grammar knowledge. In effect, students' results in classroom activities, activities done as homework and examinations, make it clear that their grammar is far from satisfactory. Then the present work investigates the current teaching of English grammar at university and aims first, at identifying first-year English students' grammar deficiencies; second, discovering the causes behind these deficiencies and finally finding out possible solutions to help students improve their grammar proficiency level.

This work comprises four chapters; each chapter develops on the basis of specific objectives.

Chapter one illustrates most of the theoretical points concerning grammar. It provides an overview of grammar, its historical background as well as its teaching. Besides, it presents the importance of grammar in language learning as well as its importance in relation to the other skills. In addition, some teaching tendencies are also highlighted such as the traditional approach and other contemporary teaching approaches.

The second chapter is devoted to an overall description of the English teaching / learning situation in Algerian universities, with regard to first-year English learners at Tlemcen University. It restates the research questions and hypotheses, describes the research instrument (the questionnaire), gives the profile of the informants and describes the research procedure.



The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of two questionnaires administered to teachers and students. It sums up the quantitative results of the undertaken study which allows the identification of the grammar teaching problems and the causes that lead to these problems.

Finally, the fourth chapter gives advice, recommends and suggests some activities which are hoped to contribute to improve the grammar proficiency level of first-year Algerian university students. The suggested activities are mainly intended to help both teachers and learners achieve the stated objectives with respect to language learning in general and grammar learning in particular.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**A.F:** Absolute Frequency

**C.L.T:** Communicative Language Teaching

**E.F.L:** English Foreign Language

**E.L.T:** English Language Teaching

**R. F :** Relative Frequency

**TEFL:** Teaching English as a Foreign Language

**T. L :** Target Language

**8°. A.F:** Huitième année fondamentale (Eighth year of the basic school)

**9°. A.F:** Neuvième année fondamentale (Nineth year of the basic school)

**1°. A.S :** Première année secondaire (First year of the secondary school)

**2°. A.S :** Deuxième année secondaire (Second year of the secondary school)

**3° A.S :** Troisième année secondaire (Third year of the secondary school)



## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The teaching process has been and is still a subject of hot debate and discussion among researchers. Language, as the core of this human and social concern, is apparently constituting the central problematic to this kind of investigation. It is obvious therefore, that language as a means of communication and a vehicle of information would in all probabilities be a delicate item to deal with, and thus transmit its various and different aspects. Grammar as one of its axes reveals some specificities quite complex to grasp and make use of, if not an explicit knowledge and an appropriate approach to the situation at hand is devoted to its teaching. This is why, it has been the study that goes back to the time of the ancient Greeks, Romans and Indians, and from its earliest days has caught the interest of the learned and the wise.

Following the work of Cunninsworth (1987) Evaluating and Selecting E.F.L Materials, Wilkins (1976) Notional Syllabuses and Woods (1995) Introducing Grammar, it was recognized that grammar has gained importance in language teaching. It is the fundamental organizing principle of language. After studying grammar, students should be more alert to the strength, flexibility and variety of the language and thus be in a better position to use it.

Before attending university, grammar is taught, implicitly, in the Algerian schools for at least five years ( two years in the Middle school and three years in the Secondary school). It has been and is still an important component in both secondary and university curricula. Yet, in spite of such a long period of grammar learning, the grammar use of many university entrants is far from satisfactory. It is admitted that many Algerian learners who have completed their five-year course of English language and begin their first year course instruction at university are unable to understand this language and make use of its grammar. They show deficiency in using grammar properly whether in writing or in speech.

With regard to such a disheartening outcome of a quite lengthy language learning process in general and grammar learning in particular, one cannot but question the suitability of the present teaching methodology since the school is largely responsible for producing non-competent language performers and consequently weak grammar users.

The main concern of the present work is to call into question the current teaching of grammar. To put it in a different way, the aim of this study is to locate deficiency or deficiencies in grammar teaching at the level of first-year students of the English Language Section at Tlemcen University in order to propose some useful teaching strategies to help the learner better cope with the English language grammar. The present study is based on the following issues:

- 1- Why do first-year students show deficiency in grammar use whether in writing or in speech?
- 2- Is first-year students' grammar failure related to inadequate teaching?
- 3- Is it related to a lack of coordination between the grammar course and the other skill-oriented modules?
- 4- Is it related to students' negative attitudes to English grammar?
- 5- How can students improve their proficiency in grammar?

These research questions can be combined into two broad hypotheses: first, there is an effect of grammar teaching (methodology, lack of students' practice, lack of materials, inadequate timing and lack of coordination between the skill-oriented modules) on students' proficiency in grammar. Second, there is an effect resulting from students' attitudes towards the English grammar on their grammar proficiency level.

Thus, in order to identify the causes of first-year English students' failure in grammar, to find out possible solutions to help students improve their grammar



proficiency level, and also to steer the right course, the researcher devised two questionnaires; one for university grammar teachers and another for first-year university students of the Department in question. Teachers and students were asked to answer a series of questions on their reactions to grammar teaching and use at university. Therefore, by means of the collected data, the present study will try to identify the problems which learners encounter when using grammar.

A variety of factors affecting negatively students' grammar proficiency in the Algerian University will be examined. Some external non-linguistic factors such as the Algerian E.F.L learner, his motivation and attitudes towards the teaching of grammar as a subject in the university curriculum will be discussed. More importantly, the variables such as the teaching methodology, the lack of materials, the time devoted to grammar teaching and other equally important variables will also be tackled throughout this study since they are seen to be highly involved in learners' failure as far as grammar is concerned.

The first chapter draws a quick sketch on the theoretical background. It defines the key concepts of this study, then displays the historical background of the grammar study. Besides, it presents the importance of grammar in language learning as well as its importance in relation to the other skills. In addition, some teaching tendencies in grammar are given such as the traditional approach on the one hand and other contemporary teaching approaches on the other.

The second chapter describes the teaching / learning situation of the case under investigation before it provides the research questions. Then, it describes the research instrument: the questionnaire, and gives a detailed account of the informants' profile and research procedure.

The third chapter provides the quantitative results of the undertaken study, that is numerical figures which permit the identification of the grammar difficulties encountered by first-year students and the causes of these difficulties. This chapter is also concerned with the analysis of two questionnaires administered to teachers and students.

The fourth and last chapter is concerned with what might be favourable as pedagogical implications to remedy the target situation. It attempts to give some pieces of advice and suggests some possible activities dealing with the most problematic areas as revealed by the study.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND



## **1.1. Introduction**

## **1.2. Definition of Key Concepts**

### **1.2.1. What is Grammar?**

### **1.2.2. Historical Background of the Grammar Study**

### **1.2.3. Grammar Teaching**

## **1.3. Grammar Importance in Language Learning**

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### **1.6.1. Grammar and the Traditional Approach**

### **1.6.2. Grammar and the Contemporary Teaching Approaches**

#### **1.6.2.1. The Grammar Translation Method**

#### **1.6.2.2. The Direct Method**

#### **1.6.2.3. The Oral Approach**

#### **1.6.2.4. The Audio-Lingual Method**

#### **1.6.2.5. The Communicative Approach**

## **1.7. Conclusion**

## **1.1. Introduction**

This chapter will introduce some important concepts in foreign language teaching related to grammar. It will not be just a historical survey, but will also deal with some fundamental theoretical issues. After explanation of key concepts and definition of key words, the present chapter reports how grammar gained importance as a field of research and how it contributed to second and foreign language areas. As long ago as 1921, Palmer pointed out the important difference between understanding how a language works (i.e. grammar) and learning how to use it. Since then, a great many effective techniques have been developed to enable students to learn a foreign language in general and grammar in particular. That is why many theories and methods have been utilized or revised in order to arrive at an adequate way of teaching. Then, it will also present an overview of the major approaches and methods used in grammar teaching.

## **1.2. Definition of Key Concepts**

Our centre of interest in this study is the teaching of grammar to first-year E.F.L. students at university level and its elaboration towards better learning. Grammar, the skeleton of language, to use Crystal's terms (1990) deserves its fair share of specific attention in language teaching. Yet, to have a clearer idea about the subject matter discussed, key words definition is first provided.

### **1.2.1. What is Grammar?**

Grammar, in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, refers to: "the study or science of rules for forming words and combining them into sentences". This is the general definition of grammar, while in the field of education Bishop Lowth (1762) explains that:

*The principal design of a grammar in any language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that language and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction whether it be right or not.*

(Quoted in Crystal 1995:79)

Likewise, the definition given in an English grammar for the use of schools presents grammar as:

*That science which teaches the proper use of letters, syllables, words and sentences; or which treats the principles and rules of spoken and written language.*

(Quoted in Woods 1995:1)

It follows from these definitions that grammar is that set of rules and principles we should know and become acquainted with because it helps the learner to form words and combine them into sentences as well as it enables him to use structures and sentences correctly and appropriately.

However, other definitions of grammar have offered a new perspective on the subject which relates grammatical structures systematically to meanings, uses and situations. In this context Wilkins defines grammar as:

*....the grammar is the means through which linguistic creativity is ultimately achieved and an inadequate knowledge of the grammar would lead to a serious limitation on the capacity for communication.*

(Wilkins 1976: 66)



The object of grammar then, is to teach those who use the language to express their thoughts accurately and correctly, either in speaking or writing.

### 1.2.2. Historical Background of the Grammar Study

The study of grammar began with the ancient Greeks, who engaged in philosophical speculation about languages and described language structure. This grammatical tradition was passed on to the Romans, who translated Greek names for the parts of speech and grammatical endings into Latin; many of these terms (nominative, accusative, dative) are still found in modern grammars. But Greeks and Romans were unable to determine how languages are related. This problem spurred the development of comparative grammar, which became the approach to linguistic science in the nineteenth century.

Early grammatical study appears to have gone hand in hand with efforts to understand archaic writings. Thus, grammar was originally tied to societies with long-standing written traditions. The earliest extant grammar is that of the Sanskrit language of India, compiled by the Indian grammarian Panini. This sophisticated analysis showed how words were formed and what parts of words carried meaning.

The Greek grammarian Dionysius Thrax wrote *Arts of grammar*, upon which many later Greek, Latin, and other European grammars were based. By the middle ages, European scholars generally knew, in addition to their own languages and Latin, the languages of their nearest neighbours. This access to several languages set scholars to thinking about how languages might be compared.

The revival of classical learning in the Renaissance laid to fit all languages into the structure of Greek and Latin. In the eighteenth century less comparison began to be made, culminating in the assumption by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz that most languages of Europe, Asia, and Egypt came from the same original language—a language referred to as Indo-European.

In the nineteenth century scholars developed systematic analyses of parts of speech, mostly built on the earlier analysis of Sanskrit . The early Sanskrit grammar of Panini was a valuable guide in the compilation of grammars of languages of Europe, Egypt and Asia .This writing of grammars of related languages using Panini's work as a guide, is known as Indo European grammar, a method of comparing and relating the forms of speech in numerous languages. The Renaissance approach to grammar, which based the description of all languages on the model of Greek and Latin, died slowly, however .Not until the early twentieth century did Grammarians began to describe languages on their own terms.

Noteworthy in this regard is the handbook of American Indian languages (1911), the work of the German –American anthropologist Franz Boas and his colleagues and the studies by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen ,a *Modern English Grammar*, (1909-1931), and later the *Philosophy of Grammar* (1924).

Boas's work formed the basis of various types of American descriptive grammar study. Jespersens' work was the precursor of such current approaches to linguistic theory as Transformational Generative Grammar (Chomsky 1957-1965). Boas viewed grammar as a description of how human speech in a language is organized .A descriptive grammar should describe the relationship between speech elements in words and sentences .Given impetus by the fresh perspective of Boas, the approach to grammar known as descriptive linguistics became dominant in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

Jespersen, like Boas, thought grammar should be studied by examining living speech rather than by analysing written discourse .Descriptive linguists developed precise and rigorous methods to describe the formal structural units in the spoken aspect of any language.

The approach to grammar that developed with this view is known as structuralism .A structural grammar should describe what the Swiss linguist Ferdinand

de Saussure (1916) referred to by the French word "langue". A structuralist grammar therefore describes what relationships underlie all instances of speech in a particular language ; a descriptive grammar describes the elements of transcribed speech .

By the mid twentieth century, Chomsky who had studied structural linguistics, was seeking a way to analyse the syntax of English in a structural grammar model. This effort led him to see grammar as a theory of language structure rather than a descriptive of actual sentences .His idea of grammar is that it is a device for producing the structure, the ability to produce and understand sentences in any and all languages (competence). His universalise theories are related to the ideas of those eighteenth and early nineteenth century grammarians who urged that grammar be considered as part of logic, hence the key to analysing thought. Universal grammarians such as the British philosopher John Stuart Mill, writing as late as 1867, believed rules of grammar to be language forms that correspond to universal thought forms.

### **1.2.3. Grammar Teaching**

Teaching is a very personal activity, and therefore many individual teachers bring to teaching very different assumptions and beliefs about the nature of effective teaching. A general definition of teaching is provided by Corder who explains that:

*The simple term teaching is too vague in its meaning. In its popular use it refers most often to the activity of the teacher in the classroom in his interaction with his students.*

**(Corder 1973:11)**

Teaching is referred to in this way as too indistinct and not clearly identified though it is considered as the usual interaction of the teacher with his students in the classroom. Indistinct because the science of language teaching has not reached the point of being able to consistently demonstrate the suitability of one methodology over another for all teachers and all students and all settings.



However, a great and specific attention is given to grammar in language teaching. Cunningsworth contends that:

*Few, if any, writers on language learning would disagree that the internalisation of grammar rules is central to language learning and that any teaching programme which omits grammar is not really teaching language in the full sense of the word.*

(Cunningsworth 1987: 18)

In the same line of thoughts, Crystal (1990) regards grammar as the skeleton, and Rivers (1991) the framework within which language operates. As we are dealing with grammar teaching in this work, an additional definition seems to be useful.

*The teaching of grammar is intricately bound up with the teaching of meaning .It is not sufficient merely to enable the learner to produce grammatical sentences; he must know when and how to use them.*

(Corder 1973: 335)

It appears from Corder's definition that the teaching of grammar cannot be divorced from the teaching of meaning ,in that ,there is now an insistence on understanding the meaning of grammatical forms in order to know when and how to use them .

To sum up the aforementioned definitions, one may say that some teachers from traditional educational systems sometimes react negatively to attempts to teach communicatively .They feel that grammar is the proper focus of a language course and everything else is just waste of time while other teachers think that what matters most in any language programme is to develop in the students the ability to communicate.

### **1.3. Grammar Importance in Language Learning**

Language is involved with almost everything we do as human beings. We cannot live without language, and grammar is the fundamental organizing principle of language. Our grammatical ability in language learning is probably the most creative ability we have. There is no limit to what we can say or write, yet all of this potential is controlled by a finite number of rules; hence, the importance of grammar in language learning. In this context, Cobbett (1819) states:

*Grammar teaches us how to make use of words; that is to say, it teaches us how to make use of them in a proper manner, as I used to teach you how to sow and plant the beds in the garden; for you have throwed about seeds and stuck in plants of some sort or other, in some way or other, without any teaching of mine; and so can anybody, without rules or instructions put masses of words on paper; but to be able to choose the words which ought to be placed, we must become acquainted with certain principles and rules; and these principles and rules constitute what is called grammar.*

(Quoted in Wood 1995: 2)

According to Cobbett, grammar provides a basis for learning a language. After studying grammar, we should be more alert to the strength, flexibility and creativity of the language and thus be in a better position to use it and to evaluate others' use of it.

### **1.4. Grammar Importance in relation to the Other Skills**

When we teach grammatical structures, we should not be getting our students to learn grammar separately, but we should be getting them to learn quite a large number of different, though related, bits of knowledge skills: how to recognise the examples of the structure when spoken, how to identify its written form, how to understand its meaning in context and how to produce meaningful sentences when it comes to its use.

If we consider grammar and writing, for example, one may say that grammar is the first prerequisite for effective writing. Integrative teaching (i.e. the teaching of language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing in conjunction with each other) of grammar and composition (writing) will increase student' motivation and improve performance in writing. This integration will enable students to produce accurate and appropriate various well-formed structures.

Besides, it should be noted that grammar in relation to reading aims to recognise the written forms and provide the basis for achieving different levels of discourse analysis. The first level is understanding of the text, while the second is evaluation of this text. In short, grammar provides not only insights into the meaning and effectiveness of a text, but also the framework and devices for text and discourse analysis. The relevance of grammar to the teaching of advanced learner's reading can be shown in the following aspects:

- Its basic orientation of going "from general to specific".

- Its emphasis on meaning and function.

- Its description and analysis of thematic structure, information structure and cohesion provide a useful model and means for analysing different types of discourse and for interpreting, evaluating and appreciating different types of text.

The following table shows how grammar teaching can be of paramount importance in the acquisition of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).



<b>Skills</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>Listening</b>	Perception and recognition of the spoken form of the structure.	Comprehension of what the spoken structure means in context.
<b>Speaking</b>	Production of well-formed examples in speech.	Use of the structure to convey meaning in speech.
<b>Reading</b>	Perception and recognition of the written form.	Comprehension of what the written structure means in context.
<b>Writing</b>	Production well-formed examples in writing.	Use of the structure to convey meanings in writing.

***Table 1.1. Aspects of the teaching of grammar structures in connection to language skills (UR, 1988: 6)***

It should be mentioned at this level, after a fair observation of this table, that the teaching/ learning process of grammar is rather concerned with different aspects of the four skills at two distinct levels namely, form and meaning.

Therefore, it is well-agreed among didacticians (Ur 1988; Murphy 1985; Thomson and Martinet 1960), that the teaching of the different types of grammar structures is in all probabilities related to a systematic knowledge of the four skills and what they fulfil. In this sense it would be clearer first, to consider two types of skills, the receptive and the productive ones. Listening and reading largely recognised as being an ability to perceive and recognise as good as possible the adequate forms of both the spoken and the written structures. While speaking and writing should be conceived by both teachers and learners as an ability to produce accurately and appropriately various well- formed structures in speech as well as in writing.

In addition to this, and at a different level, the teaching/ learning process is also to take into account the aspect of contextualisation where comprehension of structures is quite necessary to what is received according to its context. However, the production of both spoken and written forms on the basis of specific grammar structures requires awareness and capacity of how to make use of these structures (systemic competence) in order to convey a particular message or meaning appropriate to its context.

To sum up, one may say that grammar should not be taught separately and in isolation i.e. a module on its own right, but it should go hand in hand with the four different skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).

### **1.5. Grammar Learning and Motivation**

Motivation is believed to have an impact on students' grammar performance. But before going any further, it is worth giving a definition of motivation. Harmer defines motivation as:

*.....some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action. If we perceive a goal and that goal is sufficiently attractive, we will be strongly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reach that goal.*

(Harmer 1984: 3)

This motivation can be either beneficial to the student when it is moderate, or inhibiting when its level is too high or too low as will be explained below.

The correlation between low or non-existent anxiety and low marks is explained in terms of motivation by Ziv and Diem (1975). When there is a lack of motivation the level of anxiety is low. Consequently, the student will not put in many efforts which result, generally, in bad results. While a very high level of motivation will generate a

very high level of anxiety and will in the student's paralysis of his mental capacities which will lead him to get bad results. Finally, in the middle when anxiety is at its optimal level it works as a motivation leading the student to intensify his efforts, ameliorate his performance, avoid errors and get good results. Then, according to Ziv's and Diem's (1975) model, motivation has an impact on anxiety and therefore on students' performance. This is why it is worth considering this effective variable and looking at the relationship it may have on grammar achievement. A motivated person is defined by Gardner and Macintyre as the one who:

*.....wants to achieve a particular goal, devotes considerable efforts to achieve this goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal.*

**(Gardner and Macintyre 1993: 2)**

In fact, people have different motives for learning a language in general and grammar in particular; Gardner and Lambert (1959) distinguished two kinds of motivation: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The former is the desire to achieve proficiency in the TL in order to take part in the life of the target community. The learner who is integratively motivated shows interest not only in the language, but in the culture as well. He sees himself as a potential member of the TL group. Whereas, instrumental motivation is the desire to achieve proficiency in the TL for utilitarian reasons such as getting a job.

In literature, many investigations have shown the relationship between motivation and achievement in L2. Yet, while first studies (Gardner and Lambert 1959) assumed that integrative motivation was more important to language achievement than instrumental motivation; subsequent studies showed that instrumental motivation could be superior to the integrative one, where the practical value of the TL is high and its use frequent and necessary (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Nevertheless, what seems to be agreed on is that the two kinds of motivation



are positive for language learning and proficiency achievement, as Gardner and Macintyre state:

*...it is not so much the orientation that promotes achievement but rather the motivation. If an integrative or instrumental orientation is not linked with heightened motivation to learn the second language, it is difficult to see how either could promote proficiency.*

(Gardner and Macintyre 1991: 208)

Another important consideration is that the two kinds of motivation do not exclude each other i.e. learners may be instrumentally and integratively motivated.

If the case of the grammar exam situation is displayed, it is believed that most examinees are at least instrumentally motivated because they want to get a good mark; this motivation is favourable to their performance as many studies have shown. However, if Ziv's and Diem's (1975) assumption proves to be true a very high level of motivation turns to be an inhibiting factor as explained above. Conversely, Gardner and Macintyre assert that a high level of motivation lessens one's anxiety:

*....high levels of motivation result in low levels of anxiety because the student perceives the experience positively and tends to be successful- both of which decrease anxiety.*

(Gardner and Macintyre 1993: 7)

In conclusion, it can be said that motivation (whatever its orientation) as well as a mild anxiety are beneficial for students' performance in grammar; while a very high level of anxiety, a very low or nil anxiety, and a nil motivation can be harmful for students' grammar performance and result in failure in grammar use.

## 1.6. Approaches and Methods in Grammar Teaching

Throughout the history of language teaching, many theories, methods and approaches have been utilized or revised in order to arrive to an adequate and successful way of teaching .A brief idea about what an approach and what a method is, is first provided.

An approach is the sum of assumptions course designers make about language .This term gives a description of the many ways psychologists and linguists look at language .Anthony (1965) defines it as:

*A set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning .An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught .It states a point of view, a philosophy, an article of faith-something which one believes but cannot necessarily prove .It is often unarguable except in terms of the effectiveness of the methods which grow out of it.*

(Quoted in Allen and Campbell 1965:94)

It follows from this definition that an approach is combined with a theory, involving both language and learning process .Each approach sees and defines language differently.

On the other hand, a language teaching method is a set of techniques or procedures that usually follow a systematic scheme .Unlike an approach, a method needs not be tied to a particular theory about language or learning, but may simply be claimed as successful in practice. According to Anthony, this term describes the way of presenting language materials to students. It deals with the practical side of language teaching .Besides, it lists the strategies derived from a particular approach.

An approach can have several methods which are dependent on the nature of students, their age, their cultural background, their previous experience in English and the like. The method, according to Anthony, is

*....An overall plan for the orderly presentation of the language material ,no part of which contradicts ,and of which is based upon ,the selected method .An approach is axiomatic ,a method is procedural .Within an approach, there can be many methods.*

**(Quoted in Allen and Campbell 1965:95)**

In our work, we are dealing with grammar which has generally been perceived and practised as a highly serious subject of study with the aim of continuing the tradition which began with classical Greek grammarians.

However, the teaching of grammar involves criticism and seems to create a controversial issue among teachers, applied linguists and syllabus designers .This controversy gives rise to different approaches in teaching grammar: the traditional approach on the one hand and other contemporary teaching approaches on the other.

### **1.6.1 Grammar and the Traditional Approach**

The traditional approach is the oldest approach .It was advocated in the sixteenth century .At that time, the most taught foreign language was Latin. The aim of this approach is to make the students understand the grammar. The emphasis is made on accuracy not fluency. This approach emphasized:

- The memorization of rules of grammar and lists of words
- The development of the writing skill

In thinking about the teaching of grammar according to this approach, two areas should be mentioned: grammar as rules, and grammar as form. If we consider, first of all, grammar as rules, we will notice that learning grammar often means



learning the rules of grammar. Learners are required to have an intellectual knowledge of grammar. The belief here is that this will provide the basis on which will act as the generative base.

The definite article, for example, is not only used to mark the phrase it introduces as definite, but it has also other uses related to some particular rules as shown in the following examples:

-That is **the** man I saw at the museum → The definite article is used here to specify.

-Men have walked on **the** moon → The definite article is used here for something unique.

-He is **the** funniest teacher → The definite article is used with superlatives.

-Spring is our most beautiful season → Here the definite article is not used before names of seasons. It is also not used before names of countries, days, months, meals, abstract and uncountable nouns.

-We travel to Spain → Here the definite article is not used before names of countries.

-Men fear death → The definite article is not used before abstract nouns.

-We have breakfast at eight → The definite article is not used before names of meals.

For many students, therefore, prescribed rules give a kind of security. We have only to look at the success of such grammars as A Practical English Grammar by

Thomson and Martinet (1986) or English Grammar in Use by Murphy (1985) to see this is so.

On the other hand, considering grammar as form, many see it as the form of the structure. This includes the ordering of words, the correct addition of suffixes and prefixes and the correct use of the article. Many people can, in fact, make sense of what is said even if there are mistakes in the form used. As far as simple information is concerned, this can be the case.

The student saying, for example, "*I hitted him*" will have communicated information successfully, albeit grammatically incorrect. The danger is that in identifying grammar with form, the recognition of what is right and what is wrong stays at the level of subject-verb agreement, plural markers, possessive markers, tense formation etc.

This approach has proved to be deficient in some respects. The result of such grammar learning has been an obvious inability of the learners to make sensible use of the grammar knowledge they have acquired until the communicative approach took hold in 1970s. Grammar was at the core of foreign language learning / teaching. Views of grammar teaching were not the same in different methodologies.

The main concern, however, was to consider what methodology would be appropriate for helping students to understand and use grammar effectively to communicate their messages. No method or approach should be considered to be completely wrong or completely right. Each of the different methods we are going to deal with below has its strengths and weaknesses.

## 1.6.2. Grammar and the Contemporary Teaching Approaches

### 1.6.2.1. *The grammar Translation Method*

The teaching of grammar during the first half of the century was dominated by the grammar-translation method. The emphasis in this method is on the organisation of language at sentence level in terms of parts of speech, such as verb, and also the types of word, such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb. Its goals were based on the idea that the purpose of learning a foreign language was to read its literature. Translation was as a way of studying and analysing the rules of the language. Its focus was on rules; and the grammar class came to be seen as the class teaching the rules of grammar.

Though this method was aimed to study and analyse the rules of the language, it has proved to be deficient in some respects. Thereafter, another method has been proposed below to help learners make use of their grammar knowledge.

### 1.6.2.2. *The Direct Method*

The direct method, sometimes known as the natural method, was based on the belief that a language could best be taught by its active use in the classroom. There was no translation; and the focus on explaining and analysing the rules of grammar was replaced by actual use in the classroom. In this way, learners would be able to induce the rules of grammar. The emphasis was on spoken language.

The purpose in this method was to focus on the use of grammar in communication. This method was very similar to the following one where educationalists attempted to situationalize the grammatical structures.



### *1.6.2.3. The Oral Approach*

The oral approach may seem to be very similar to the direct method in that the emphasis was on the spoken language but it was based on a much more systematic view of language.

In the work of applied linguists such as Palmer and Hornby, there had been attempts to analyse English and classify its major grammatical structures into sentence patterns. These structures were often situationalized to provide a context to help the learners, but even so the exercises stood alone and the only relevance was that they presented a pattern for students to practice. The organisation for a lesson would be:

Presentation → practice → consolidation → testing → free stage

This method, too, has not proved very efficient; this is why another method has been proposed where learners were required to practice and form correct sentences by means of drills through the audio-lingual method.

### *1.6.2.4. The Audio-Lingual Method*

The audio-lingual method was based on a behaviourist approach to language learning. The language was broken down into grammatical structures, which learners practiced by means of drills which were concerned with giving students practice in forming correct sentences. An example of such a drill is:

Robert runs ten miles everyday

.....walks.....

Jane.....

..... to work.....

.....to school

According to T. Huebener this approach was based on the following assumptions:

*...the language is the everyday spoken utterance of the average person at normal speed...the spoken language is purely an instrument of communication, used in given situations. Hence the dialogue should form the basis of every language lesson.*

*In the approach to any language, listening and understanding come first. Almost immediately oral utterance follows.*

*Speech comes first; reading and writing come later*

( Huebener 1965: 13-14)

Initially, the problem here was that all the grammar work was done out of context. Attempts were made to overcome this by putting the practice into situations. At the time small books were published which listed situations that could be used with the appropriate grammatical structure. The student was encouraged to produce as many sentences as possible using the form:

They had to have the door repaired

.....the roof.....

.....the garden .....

The main points put forward by this approach were that:

- The language skills should be presented in the following order: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.
- Use of intensive pattern-practice and oral drills was advocated.
- The learners should try to practice the language as much as they can in order to develop automatic speech habits through memorisation of dialogues.
- The learning by heart of entire sentences should be encouraged.

- The emphasis should be put on habit formation through conditioning analogy.

However, the problem that arose here was that grammatical structures did not fit conveniently into anyone situation and the whole exercise became very artificial. What we had very often were little more than rather sophisticated forms of drills, which many learners still found boring.

Though some linguists and didacticians considered this method as useful, its validity has been questioned with a consequent shift towards a semantically-oriented approach, i.e. the communicative approach.

#### ***1.6.2.5. The Communicative Approach***

To make language learning relevant and interesting, at the outset of the communicative approach there was a determined movement away from grammar as the centre of a language-learning course. The aim was that the use of language should be the dominant feature.

This is why there has been growing concern for specifying a language syllabus in terms of the communication needs of the learners. In spite of the fact that the basic assumption of the structural approach is to teach language for communication in actual situations, teachers tended to aim at the development of linguistic competence in the learners, with reference to the language items specified in the syllabus. It is widely recognised that:

*The view of language as communication could not easily be adequately contained in the form-oriented, sentence-based linguistics of the time.*

**(Candlin 1978:vii)**



Similarly, Allen and Widdowson claim that the time has come that:

*The language should be presented in such a way as to reveal its character as communication....*

(Allen and Widdowson 1976: 59)

From the above quotations, one may understand that language is more than the knowledge of lexis and grammatical patterns, more than an awareness of how sentences are formed. Language is no longer perceived as a school subject but as a means of communication, so as to meet the demands of present-day society. Learning a language is not just a matter of learning how to fit linguistic forms together to make correct sentences.

Learning a language involves learning to use such forms to perform communicative acts of one kind or another. A learner cannot be said to know the language until he can manipulate the formal devices for the purpose of conveying messages in real-life situations. In other words, he has to know what variety of language to use in a particular situation and how to vary the style according to whom he is addressing.

It is, of course, of no avail to dismiss the teaching of grammar. This is to state that grammar deserves its fair share of specific attention in language teaching. Language teaching should be viewed as a double-fold objective process: (1) to develop in the learner grammatical competence in the Chomskyan sense, in other terms, the mastery of the formation rules of the language, and (2) to inculcate in him what is socially appropriate and accepted, i.e. what Hymes ( 1972 ) has labelled "the speaking rules".

Furthermore, communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Unlike the audio-lingual method of language teaching which

relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can leave students in suspense as to the outcome of a class exercise, which will vary according to their reactions and responses. The real life simulations change from day to day. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

Berns, an expert in the field of communicative language teaching, writes in explaining Firth's view that

*Language is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context (what is uttered before and after a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational, context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have come together to speak).*

(Berns 1984: 5)

Communicative language teaching began in Britain in the 1960s as a replacement to the earlier structural method, called Situational Language Teaching. This was partly in response to Chomsky's criticisms of structural theories of language and partly based on the theories of British functional linguistics, such as Firth and Halliday, as well as American sociolinguists, such as Hymes, Gumperz and Labov and the writings of Austin and Searle on speech acts.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a cover term for a number of approaches that developed in the 1970s in critical reaction to audio-lingual teaching methods and their unsatisfactory results. They all criticize the mechanistic nature of audio-lingual pattern drills which fail to prepare learners for a productive use of the target language in the many different communicative situations of every day life.

The common goal of communicative approaches is communicative competence. CLT approaches criticize older teaching methods for being too teacher-centred and form-oriented; they propose, instead, a learner-oriented and meaning-focused approach. Students should be encouraged to say what they want (mean) to say rather than docilely reproducing what the syllabus, textbook prescribe and teachers expect them to say. CLT argues that language teaching should practice error tolerance and focus on fluency rather than formal accuracy of speech.

With regard to teaching methods, CLT stresses that languages can be learnt only by their use, not by theoretical talk about them. This is why in CLT the target language is the medium of communication.

A communicative teaching of grammar is a new kind of grammar. It is a fresh departure in grammar writing in that it employs a communicative rather than structural approach. The emphasis is made on fluency rather accuracy. The communicative approach avoids terms like rules, system, and structure speaking about speech, discourse and communication. It is then a new perspective on the subject since it relates grammatical forms and structures systematically to meanings, uses and situations. In this context Wilkins (1976: 42) states: *What people want to do through language is more important than the mastery of language as an unapplied system.*

In this approach, we speak about grammar as resource which helps us to communicate, and choosing the correct form is as important as choosing the most appropriate lexical item. While form is important here, we are looking at how grammar relates to what we want to say and how we expect our listener or reader to interpret what we are saying and the focus of what we are saying.

So, where are the parameters of grammar? In written language, the organisation of the sentence is possibly more important than in the spoken language. In spoken language the full meaning of the message can be promoted by the manner in which it is said. The pitch and stress used in utterances are also important in conveying meaning or intention, and that is why some grammarians would include phonology



within the sphere of grammar. In this respect Leech and Svartvik (1975: 35) state: *You will need some knowledge of English intonation patterns, if you are to understand English grammar.*

Grammarians would also include other aspects of language summarised in four sections representing a rational progression from the most limited and detailed sphere of meaning to the most inclusive.

Type of meaning or meaning organisation	Type of formal unit
A: Concepts	Word, phrase or clause
B: Information, reality and belief	Sentence
C: Mood, emotion and attitude	Utterance
D: Meanings in connected discourse	Discourse or text

*Table 1.2: Aspects of language included in the sphere of grammar*

This suggests that grammar incorporates all aspects of language; and while most people would probably separate phonology from grammar in the same way they do with vocabulary, all three clearly integrate to give meaning to utterances and to our interpretation of the utterances. Such an approach presents a number of advantages.

- It serves the communicative needs of the learners.
- It is more realistic and more relevant to the learners.
- It gives the learners a sense of achievement.
- It views the grammar learning as a means of communication and not as an end in itself.

-It focuses on function rather than on form and communication rather than grammaticality.

-It stresses value rather than signification.

So, the role of the teacher is that of responding to the developing communicative needs of the learner and to help the learner relate the structures learnt to the communicative functions a language performs.

### **1.7. Conclusion**

Considering the case of first-year university students, both the teaching objectives and pedagogical instructions aim at getting the learners to have a lot of practice in all the four skills, yet with an emphasis on grammar being an essential component in language learning.

Unfortunately, it is noticeable among Algerian learners that after many years of grammar study, they still find themselves unable to make use of it effectively and accurately. Although grammar is introduced in middle and secondary schools and remains compulsory in all lessons, and despite the fact that most young people manage to pass the required examination in which they have to deal with syntax, they are unfortunately neither able to write accurately, nor to conduct a simple conversation in English where they can use their grammar knowledge.

Indeed, after studying grammar for at least five years, the majority of students are not equipped to write or speak correctly, let alone to function in an English milieu. The difficulties that students encounter when using grammar effectively and appropriately will be identified in the following chapter by means of two questionnaires: the first one is designed to teachers and the second one to students.

# CHAPTER TWO

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND SITUATION ANALYSIS



**2.1. Introduction**

**2.2. Description of E.F.L Teaching/ Learning Situation**

**2.3. Research Questions**

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**2.6. Methodology of the Questionnaire**

**2.6.1. Teachers' Questionnaire**

**2.6.2. Students' Questionnaire**

**2.7. Conclusion**

## **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter is aimed to present the research design and procedure. It first starts by describing the teaching situation under consideration, then highlights the research questions, describes the instrument used and gives the profile of the subjects in question .

The research questions have been translated into two questionnaires: one addressed to university grammar teachers and the other to first-year E.F.L university students. The methodology of each is described in the present chapter.

## **2.2. Description of E.F.L Teaching/ Learning Situation**

English in Algeria is a foreign language studied at school (two years in the middle school, i.e.8AF and 9AF and three years in the secondary school, 1AS, 2AS and 3AS). It is not involved in societal functions, although it is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade and tourism. In, a foreign language setting the learner can rarely have the opportunity to practice the language outside the classroom. Richards, for instance, is in favour of this context because:

*In a foreign language setting there is always an effort to acquire an overseas standard form of English and not some local form of English.*

**(Richards 1972:87)**

Learners of English as a foreign language compared to those of English as a second language are most of the time more motivated and their motivation is generally integrative, that is, they want to identify themselves to native speakers. This fact is significant for the language learning process as a whole and the learning of grammatical structures in particular, because learners will not be satisfied with their interlanguage until it becomes as close as possible to that of a native speaker.

At university level in Algeria, the Department of Foreign Languages (the English Section) prepares students for a “Licence”<sup>1</sup> degree in English language. The time spent for this purpose is four years. This degree leads to a teaching career in the lower levels of education (Middle and Secondary schools) provided that the graduate students pass a newly introduced regional examination for access to the available teaching jobs. In addition to being a professional qualification, the “Licence” offers opportunities to outstanding students to carry out post-graduate studies.

During the four years the focus is on the four skills. In addition to the teaching of the language oriented skills, i.e. grammar, written expression, oral expression and reading comprehension, other subjects like linguistics, literature, civilization, teaching English as a foreign language (henceforth T.E.F.L), and educational psychology are studied. Concurrently, students receive a course of Arabic.

The English Department of Tlemcen University was first opened in 1988. In 1994, the Institute of Foreign Languages, consisting of French and English sections, became autonomous and by the end of 1999, the Institute of Foreign Languages lost its autonomy and then became part of the Faculty of Arts and Human and Social Sciences. There are fourteen permanent and some five part-time teachers in the English language section. However, the teaching situation is not that enviable. The lack of teaching materials, teacher’ training and the rare use of the laboratory and audio- visual aids are factors which hinder the teaching/ learning process.

Furthermore, teachers are required to provide their own material, this is why the syllabus has become flexible (within the lines drawn by the national syllabus) to suit the situation.

### **2.3. Research Questions**

Though first-year English students have studied English for at least five years (two years in the middle school, i.e.8 AF and 9AF and three years in the secondary school, i.e. 1AS, 2AS and 3AS), they still show deficiency in their grammar use.

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<sup>1</sup> - The licence in Algeria is roughly equivalent to the English/ American B.A.



Students find real difficulties to make use of the grammar structures they have learnt whether in writing or in speech. Students often make errors at the level of subject-verb agreement, plural markers, tense formation, use of prepositions, use of modifiers, etc. This is a serious problem for these students because such grammatical inaccuracies may prevent them from conveying their message and result in erroneous answers. This situation has led us to ask the following research questions:

1°- Why do first-year English students show deficiency in grammar use whether in writing or in speech?

2°- Is this related to inadequate teaching? (i.e. teaching methodology, lack of students' practice, lack of materials, inadequate timing)

3°- Is this related to a lack of coordination between the grammar course and the language skills courses?

4°- Is this related to students' negative attitudes to English grammar which hinder its learning?

5°-How can students improve their proficiency in grammar?

These research questions have been formulated as two hypotheses:

1-There is an effect of grammar teaching (methodology, lack of students' practice, lack of materials and inadequate timing) on students' proficiency in grammar.

2-There is an effect of students' attitudes towards the English grammar on their grammar proficiency level.

With these hypotheses in mind, we have aimed at the following objectives. First, to identify first-year English students' grammar deficiencies, second, to discover the causes behind students' grammar deficiency and third to find out possible solutions to help students improve their grammar proficiency level.

## 2.4. Research Instruments

### 2.4.1. Questionnaire

Richterich and Chancerel state that:

*Questionnaires are structured instruments for the collection of data which translate research hypotheses into questions.*

**(Richterich and Chancerel 1980: 59)**

In fact, the questionnaire is a widely used means of collecting data. This structured instrument translates hypotheses into questions and enables the researcher to collect data in field settings; the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discursive data. It is a written and "one way" (i.e. non interactive) information instrument which has many advantages. First, a questionnaire is a cheaper form of enquiry than interviewing. It also allows wider sampling and asks everybody the same questions. Besides, it provides anonymity.

Moreover, the questionnaire gives more time to think about the answers and may prove easier to analyse. However, it can also have some drawbacks. In general, the questionnaire presents difficulties in making questions clear and unambiguous. It also lacks flexibility and is often completed in a rush. In addition, the questionnaire may be affected by low response rates as it may allow the possibility of collusion between respondents

The construction of a valid and reliable questionnaire which tells what one wants to know is difficult and time-consuming. It is important, to be very clear about the objectives of the study. Likewise, it is particularly important that the researchers do not reveal their own attitudes through leading questions. The questions should not be complex and confusing, nor should they ask more than one thing at a time. The questionnaire can consist entirely of closed questions, entirely of open questions, or a mixture of both closed and open questions. While responses to closed questions are easier to collate and analyse and can readily be quantified, one often obtains more

useful information from open questions. It is also likely that responses to open questions more accurately reflect what the respondent wants to say.

A combination of data sources seems to be useful in this research; this is why, two questionnaires were submitted to both teachers and students to elicit their experience, beliefs and perceptions. In this context Weir and Roberts state that:

*A combination of data sources is likely to be necessary in most evaluations because often no one source can describe adequately such a diversity of features as is found in educational settings.*

(Weir and Roberts 1993: 137)

The two questionnaires include four types of question:

- Open questions
- Closed questions
- Mixed questions
- Graded questions

As far as the first set of questions is concerned, one can say that such questions (i.e. open questions) give the informant more freedom when expressing himself/herself.

Example: What do you suggest to your students to overcome their grammar difficulties?

Indeed, as mentioned previously by Richterich and Chancerel:

*Open questions do not call in advance for ready-made answers and therefore allow the person questioned more freedom of expression.*

(Richterich and Chancerel 1980: 59)



In the second series of questions (i.e. closed questions), the informant is no longer free to suggest anything. Rather, he/she has to choose from the many possibilities proposed.

Example: Which type of grammar teaching approach is most used actually?

- a- Structural approach (giving priority to usage)
- b- Communicative approach (giving priority to use)
- c- Both approaches

As for the third type of questions, it is more a combination of both closed and open questions.

Example: Do you think that the actual way of teaching grammar should be reconsidered?

- yes

- no

If yes, how.....

The fourth type of questions (graded questions) allows to classify the informant's answers proposed and also to know his / her point of view and attitudes vis-à-vis the subject matter.

Example: What are the main weaknesses that you have observed in the first year students' grammar performance? (put 1 for the most and 8 for the least, in order of importance).

- Inadequate use of tenses.
- Inaccurate sentence construction.(word order and patterns)
- Inappropriate use of subject-verb agreement.
- Inadequate use of articles.

- Inaccurate use of plural markers.
- Inappropriate use of pronouns.
- Inappropriate use of prepositions.
- Use of adverbs instead of adjectives.
- Other, specify.....

The four samples of questions have been taken from the teachers' questionnaire included in this research.

To conduct a questionnaire is not an easy task for two main reasons. The first one is that this activity requires much care and objectivity. The second reason is that the researcher should be as accurate and concise as possible in formulating his/her questions in order to avoid confusion and also not to influence the informants when answering. Indeed, it is generally assumed that the manner in which a question is put influences the answer. For this reason the researcher preferred to pilot both questionnaires prior to their administration.

#### ***2.4.2. Piloting the Study***

Piloting the study is important to try out the research instrument and find out whether it needs readjustment. The questionnaire should be piloted with a small sample of subjects before being used. This gives the researcher the opportunity to find out if the questions are yielding the kind of data required and to eliminate any questions which may be ambiguous or confusing to the respondent.

Piloting allows the researcher to see whether the method of collecting data is suitable and whether the questions are adequate in terms of clarity, and so on. The efficiency of the instructions, the adequacy of the response categories, and the analysis of the data can all be evaluated.

The students' questionnaire in this study was piloted with ten (10) first-year students from different groups. The teacher questionnaire was also piloted with two (2) teachers. Then, on the basis of pilot results, the investigator refined some

questions so they came closer to producing the information required. Reviewing the data produced by the pilot questionnaire helped the researcher omit unnecessary questions and clarify ambiguous ones to obtain the needed information.

## **2.5. Informants' Profile**

### **2.5.1. Teachers' Profile**

The teachers who answered the questionnaire all hold the degree of "Magister". Some of them have been recently recruited. They post graduated from different universities (i.e. Tlemcen, Oran and Sidi Bel Abes universities) and were specialized in different fields. It is worth noting that the majority of the existing grammar teachers in the Department of Foreign Languages at Tlemcen University have prepared their "Magister" in Applied Linguistics. Only one of them is specialized in Phonetics. These teachers have received theoretical training but not a practical one. In other words, the gap between what they learn at university and what they actually have to do with the learners is a huge one. Moreover, new teachers are sometimes at a loss because they have to design their own courses. Different situations call for different materials, different methods and different activities. This makes the task of university teachers including grammar teachers a difficult one.

### **2.5.2. Students' Profile**

The subjects of this study are first-year English language students at Tlemcen University. These students are the promotion of 2004- 2005 and count 360 students. In the present research, we dealt with only sixty (60) students chosen at random from different groups of the first year. These students, who are in the age group of seventeen to twenty years, all come from government schools. They are Baccalaureate holders from literary and scientific streams as well as a number of transferred students from other departments, especially, Exact Sciences and Biology. They have been oriented to the English section in the Department of Foreign Languages according to the grades they obtained in their Baccalaureate exam. What is striking is the high proportion of female students (nearly 80%) compared with that of males (20%).



These students have almost identical language learning backgrounds. Their mother tongue is Algerian Arabic, while standard Arabic and French are respectively the first language, and first foreign language.

Before attending university, the students have learnt English as a foreign language for at least five years in Middle and Secondary schools, where teachers follow the communicative language teaching approach principles. These students are oriented to the English Language Section in order to carry on their studies and obtain, normally after a duration of four years a, "Licence" in English studies.

The programme of first-year students aims at consolidating the basis of the language already acquired in the previous years. This is why the "modules" they are concerned with deal mainly with the teaching of the language: grammar, oral and written expression, phonetics, linguistics, reading comprehension in addition to Arabic. The following table provides the allocation of time over the cited "modules".

<b>Modules</b>	<b>Number of hours per week</b>
Grammar	3h
Written Expression	3h
Oral Expression	3h
Reading Comprehension	1h30
Phonetics	1h30
Linguistics	1h30
Arabic	1h30

*Table 2.1: First-year curriculum modules*

## **2.6. Methodology of the Questionnaire**

### **2.6.1. Teachers' Questionnaire**

The researcher designed a questionnaire for teachers (see appendix A) in order to find out their opinions and beliefs concerning some points of interest for the present

study. It tried first, to see how teachers assessed first-year university students' proficiency level in grammar. Second, it attempted to find out teachers' opinions about the existing grammar course. In other words, it sought to obtain information about teachers' viewpoints concerning the time allocated to the teaching of grammar, the approach used for this purpose and the activities that can help the students improve their grammar use.

The questionnaire also asked teachers to identify the difficulties that students encountered in grammar and to explain the causes of these difficulties. Finally, it invited teachers to give some suggestions to overcome students' weaknesses and help them improve their grammar use whether in writing or in speech.

The questionnaire was addressed to six (6) grammar teachers. All the informants are teaching at the English Section of the Department of Foreign Languages at Tlemcen University and three of them are teaching the subject students. The questionnaire included thirteen (13) questions which aimed at eliciting teachers' opinions, beliefs and perceptions of the current grammar course and eventually provide some suggestions to improve students' proficiency in grammar. These questions are of four types: open, closed, mixed and graded questions (see appendix A).

Question one asks about the importance of grammar in E.F.L university studies. It tries to obtain information about teachers' viewpoints concerning the reasons that make grammar important

Questions two to five require teachers to assess the grammar proficiency of first-year students and their weaknesses in productive skills, and provide the possible reasons for these weaknesses.

Questions six to nine are concerned with the teaching methodology. They ask about the current grammar course, its timing, the teaching approach used and its coordination with the other language skills courses.

Questions ten and eleven ask about the frequency of grammar exercises done during class time, and those given as assignments.

Questions twelve and thirteen invite teachers to provide suggestions on how to improve the grammar course and help students overcome their grammar difficulties

### **2.6.2. Students' Questionnaire**

The general aim of this questionnaire addressed to the subject students is to identify the difficulties they encounter when applying grammar in writing as well as in speech. The researcher has designed a questionnaire to students in order to have their viewpoints concerning the present teaching of grammar. She tried to see whether students found grammar courses interesting or boring, likewise, she wanted to know if these courses helped them write and speak.

The questionnaire aims also at seeing if the time devoted to grammar courses at the first-year level is sufficient, as it tries to have some ideas about the frequency of grammar exercises given to students during class time and those done as homework.

Thereafter, the researcher wanted to identify the weaknesses students had when they made use of their grammar and tried to find out the reasons that made them unable to write and speak accurately and effectively. Finally, this questionnaire invited students to provide some suggestions to modify the present teaching of grammar for a better performance.

The questionnaire was submitted to first-year English students by the middle of the second term of the academic year 2004 - 2005. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the questionnaire was guided by the researcher; she explained every question carefully using Arabic and French besides English, and clarified every point allowing students to use whichever language they liked in order to answer the questions.



Sixty students from different groups answered the questionnaire which consisted of eleven (11) questions of different types: closed, open and mixed questions (see appendix B).

Questions one to three seek to obtain information about students' attitudes regarding the present grammar teaching.

Question four is designed to see whether the time allocated to the grammar course (three hours weekly) is sufficient.

Questions five and six are intended to ask about the frequency of grammar exercises given to students.

Questions seven and eight aim to identify the difficulties students have in grammar, and the kind of activities they dislike.

Question nine is intended to provide the possible reasons for the grammar difficulties encountered by students.

Questions ten and eleven invite students to give some suggestions on how to improve the grammar course so as to overcome their difficulties.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

This chapter was concerned with the description of the research design. It first, described the E.F.L teaching/ learning situation, restated the research questions and hypotheses then presented the research instrument: the questionnaire. The latter was addressed to both teachers of grammar and first-year E.F.L students in order to find out learners' grammar weaknesses and the pedagogical inadequacies.

The following chapter proceeds to analyse the data and discuss the problems identified by the teachers and students questionnaire.

# CHAPTER THREE

# DATA ANALYSIS

**3.1. Introduction**

**3.2. Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire**

**3.3. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire**

**3.4. Summary and Discussion of the Results**

**3.5. Conclusion**



### **3.1. Introduction**

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, two sources of data were used in this study: a student questionnaire and a teacher questionnaire. This chapter is concerned with the treatment of the data obtained from the two questionnaires. First, the teacher questionnaire is analysed. Each question is dealt with separately. Then, following the same steps, the student questionnaire is also analysed. Finally a summary and discussion of the results emerging from the two questionnaires allows us to draw the main conclusions.

However, it is worth noting that one may not obtain one perfect and agreed response from the questionnaires. Different and even divergent accounts may be recorded as Weir and Roberts explain:

*Different stakeholders are not at all likely to provide perfectly matching accounts: their interest, responsibilities and contact with the programme or project diverge and so a single agreed truth is unlikely to emerge. There should however be discernible trends or patterns in these accounts which the external evaluator can identify.*

(Weir and Roberts 1941:141)

### **3.2. Analysis of the Teachers' Questionnaire**

The present section is devoted to the analysis of the data collected from the teachers questionnaire. Each question will be dealt with separately as stated previously.

Question 1: The reasons for grammar importance in E.F.L. university studies

The results concerning the importance of grammar in E.F.L. university studies are gathered in the following table. It should be noted that some teachers ticked more than one answer.

Reasons for grammar importance	A.F.	R.F.
Aid to learning language skills	7	77,7%
Reinforcement of language proficiency	8	88,80%
Requirement for communicative needs	6	66,60%

**Table 3.1.: Possible reasons for grammar importance in E.F.L. university studies**

As shown in the above table, most teachers, i.e. 88.8% think that grammar is important because it reinforces the learner language proficiency. Seven teachers (77.7%) estimate that grammar is an aid to learning language skills, while six teachers (66.6%) believe that grammar is important to fulfil communicative needs.

Consequently, in the light of the figures obtained, one may deduce that according to the concerned teachers, the three reasons suggested to highlight the importance of grammar in E.F.L. university studies (i.e. aid to learning language skills, reinforcement of language proficiency and requirement of communicative needs) are almost of equal importance.

Question 2: The proficiency level of first-year students in grammar

Regarding the teachers' assessment of the grammar proficiency level of first-year students, the following results were obtained.

First-year students' grammar proficiency	A.F.	R.F.
Very good	0	0%
Good	0	0%
Average	2	22,20%
Weak	7	77,70%

**Table 3.2: Proficiency level of first-year students in grammar**

The above results clearly show that most teachers, that is, seven out of nine (77.7%), report that students are rather weak when using the grammar structures and patterns they have learnt. Two teachers, that is, the ratio of 22.2%, stated that students are average and none of them assessed the students' grammar proficiency as good or very good.

Question 3: The productive language skills in which students have grammar difficulties

The results obtained are presented in the following table; it should be noted that some teachers ticked the two answers.

<b>Students' grammar difficulties</b>	<b>A.F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Writing Discourse	9	100%
Speaking Discourse	7	77,70%

**Table 3.3: Students' grammar difficulties in the productive skills**

All teachers that is, 100% have answered that students have real difficulties to cope with grammar when writing. Seven of them (i.e. 77.7%) have reported that students also have grammar difficulties when speaking. From these results, it is noted that students' grammar difficulties lie in both productive skills (i.e. writing and speaking), but these difficulties are more frequently recorded in writing as reported by 100% of the teachers.

Question 4: Students' weaknesses in grammar use

According to teachers, the major weaknesses in grammar displayed by first-year student are as follows. Most respondents ticked more than one answer.



Students' weaknesses	A.F.	R.F.
Use of tenses	9	100%
Subject-verb agreement	7	77,7%
Use of propositions	7	77,7%
Use of articles	6	66,6%
Word-order	6	66,6%
Use of adverbs instead of adjectives	5	55,5%
Plural markers	3	33,3%
Use of pronouns	3	33,3%

**Table 3.4: *First-year students' grammar weaknesses***

The weaknesses teachers noticed in first-year students' grammar use are manifold. First, all teachers (100%) agree that students do not know how to use tenses properly. Second, seven teachers out nine (77.7%) note that first-year students have difficulties in using patterns related to subject-verb agreement and prepositions. Third, six teachers (66.6%) have recorded students' difficulties in the use of articles and sentence construction (word order). Finally, students' problems related to the use of plural markers and pronouns were reported by only three teachers (33.3%).

#### Question 5: Causes of students' grammar weaknesses

The following table summarizes the causes of the weaknesses observed in the first-year students' grammar performance as reported by teachers:

Causes	A.F.	R.F.
Insufficient grammar practice	8	88,80%
Language Transfer	6	66,60%
Insufficient time devoted to grammar teaching	5	55,50%
Lack of materials	5	55,50%
Student's negative attitudes towards grammar	5	55,50%
Inadequate teaching	4	44,40%
Difficult nature of grammar itself	1	11,10%

**Table 3.5: *Causes of first-year students' grammar weaknesses***

According to the above results, insufficient grammar practice and language transfer appear to be the main causes of first year students' grammar weaknesses, since they represent the highest ratios, 88.8% and 66.6% respectively. The time allocated to grammar teaching, the lack of materials and the students' negative attitudes towards grammar learning are also reported to be involved in students' grammar weaknesses but by only five teachers (55.5%). As for the item related to inadequate teaching, it appears to be an important cause of student failure in grammar as it was ticked by four teachers (44.4%).

In addition to the causes listed above, it seems interesting to note that only one teacher assumes that students fail in using grammar because of the difficult nature of the English grammar itself.

Question 6: Informants' opinion on the time allocated to grammar teaching

The results concerning the time allocated to the teaching of grammar for first-year students (3 hours per week) are gathered in the following table:

<b>Time allocated to grammar teaching</b>	<b>A. F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Sufficient	02	22.2 %
Insufficient	07	77.7 %

**Table 3.6: *The time allocated to grammar teaching.***

Most teachers, that is, seven out of nine (77.7%) have answered that the time allocated to the teaching of grammar (i.e. three hours per week) is insufficient. These teachers were asked to propose the number of hours that should be allocated to the teaching of grammar to first-year students in order to have better performance. First, three of them thought that six hours a week (as drawn by the national curriculum)

Would be enough for an adequate teaching. Second, two teachers believed that the time allocated to the teaching of grammar should be increased to four hours. Third, two other teachers stated that the time allocated to the teaching of grammar should be

between four and six hours a week in order to allow students to practise more and consequently improve their grammar level. Finally, it should be noted that two teachers made no proposition concerning the time of the grammar teaching. They simply said that it was sufficient.

Question 7: The current approach to grammar teaching

Teaching approaches	A.F.	R.F.
Structural approach	05	55.5 %
Communicative approach	01	11.1 %
Both approaches	03	33.3 %

**Table 3.7: The current approach to grammar teaching**

From the above results, it is noted that five teachers (55.5%) focus on the use of the structural approach to teach grammar, while one teacher on the communicative approach. Yet, three teachers, that is, 33.3% note that they use both approaches in grammar teaching.

Question 8: Suggested approaches to teach grammar

Teachers have given different answers regarding the most appropriate approach to teach grammar to first-year students. These answers are gathered in the following table.

Approaches	A.F.	R.F.
Structural approach	04	44.4 %
Communicative approach	01	11.1 %
Both approaches	04	44.4 %

**Table 3.8: Suggested approaches to teach grammar**

Four teachers out of nine, that is, the proportion of 44.4%, consider that the structural approach is most appropriate for first-year students' grammar teaching. They think that usage is indispensable at this level because they are negatively



affected by grammar mistakes. Four other teachers are in favour of both approaches (i.e. structural and communicative approaches) in the teaching of grammar. According to them, a combination of both usage and use is necessary for a better knowledge of grammar.

Finally, one teacher (11.1%), believes that the communicative approach should be used in grammar teaching for a better grammar performance.

#### Question 9: Coordination between courses

All teachers agree on the coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses and explain that courses should be complementary. They also give some specifications on the way to coordinate the grammar course with the other language skills courses: first, by designing lessons in written expression, oral expression and reading comprehension which deal with the points tackled in the grammar course. Second, by practising the points seen in the grammar course in writing because mastering grammatical rules enhances effective writing; likewise writing consolidates grammatical rules and reinforces their understanding.

#### Question 10: Frequency of grammar exercises in the classroom

The frequency of grammar exercises done in the classroom according to teachers is represented in the table below:

<b>Exercises as a class activity</b>	<b>A.F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Frequently	06	06.6 %
Sometimes	03	33.3 %
Rarely	00	0 %
Never	00	0 %

**Table 3.9: *Frequency of grammar exercises as a class activity***

The above table shows that the majority of teachers, that is, six (66.6%) give frequently grammar exercises to their students during class time. Three teachers, that

is, (33.3%) give sometimes grammar exercises in the classroom to their students. In sum, all teachers report giving practice and drill work in class to help their students improve their grammar proficiency.

Question 11: Frequency of grammar exercises done as homework

The teachers' answers about the frequency of grammar exercises given to students as homework are presented below:

Frequency of homework exercises	A.F.	R.F.
Frequently	01	11.1 %
Sometimes	06	66.6 %
Rarely	02	22.2 %
Never	00	0 %

**Table 3.10: Frequency of grammar exercises done as homework**

Question eleven was designed to measure the frequency of grammar exercises done at home. As displayed in the above table, six teachers, that is, 66.6% report to give sometimes grammar exercises at home. Two other teachers (22.2%) consider that students should rarely do grammar exercises at home. According to them, at home students do not have the opportunity to feel involved and to invest themselves in the learning experience. Finally, only one teacher answers that he frequently gives grammar exercises as homework.

Question 12: Reconsideration of the current grammar teaching

All teachers agree on the reconsideration of the present way of teaching grammar. They provide the following suggestions:

- Grammar is to be taught in a communicative way so that students get involved in the learning process (coordination between grammar and oral expression).
- An alternative way of teaching grammar should be adopted (i.e. introducing new techniques; especially the ones that motivate the students).

- The grammar course should be coordinated with the language skills courses.
- Teachers should insist more on practice by intensifying exercises during class time. In so doing, students will improve their grammar performance.
- University students should be taught grammar during the four years of study. The first three years would be devoted to the teaching of English grammar, while in the fourth year students should be taught grammar teaching techniques according to middle and secondary school syllabi.

#### Question 13: Teachers' suggestions and remarks

Since teachers are the ones who are permanently in touch with students and their problems, they can be a good source of suggestions concerning the treatment of students' grammar weaknesses. They have made various and interesting suggestions and remarks on the way to cope with students' problems in grammar:

- All teachers highlight the importance of reading to help students improve their grammar use.
- Practice is also recommended in both writing and speech with emphasis on the grammatical structures previously learnt.
- Link theory to practice through exercises for each grammar point seen in the lesson.
- Induce students to use the grammar books available in the library.
- Ask students to revise the grammar lessons at home on a regular basis.
- Ask students to take notes during the lessons, then try to summarize the most important points once at home.
- Induce students to identify and enrich the structures dealt with through songs, poems and games.



- Encourage students to use the internet and look for web sites containing simplified versions of lessons or theories.

This section has analysed the teachers' questionnaire and revealed teachers' viewpoints regarding the teaching of grammar and the difficulties encountered by students in grammar use. However, the teacher is not the only partner who needs to adjust him/herself to the situation to reach successful results, adjustment from both sides is needed. Thus, the following section presents some students' involvement concerning the teaching of grammar in order to overcome their weaknesses and reach a better performance.

### **3.3. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire**

The present section is devoted to the analysis of the data collected from the students questionnaire. It should be noted, however, that regarding the number of students dealt with, sixty questionnaires were submitted, but only fifty four were handed in. For methodological convenience, each question will be treated separately.

#### Question 1: Students' attitudes towards grammar

In the first question, students have been asked to say whether grammar is an interesting subject of study or not. It appears from the answers provided that the number of students who consider it as interesting represents fifty one, that is, 94.4%. Only three students (5.5%) find it boring and annoying

When justifying their answers, the majority of the students have stated that grammar is the skeleton of the language without which language does not operate. They have also said that it is an essential component for language learning as it helps them write and speak correctly and fluently. In sum, they have reported that grammar helps them improve their language proficiency and overcome the difficulties encountered when writing and speaking.

#### Question 2: Usefulness of grammar in the productive skills

The data analysis reveals that forty eight students, that is, 88.8% have asserted that the present teaching of grammar helps them speak and write English. Whereas Only six students (11.1%) do not share the same opinion and answer that the grammar taught does not help them.

#### Question 3: Students' opinion on the present teaching of grammar

According to the answers provided, a large number of students, thirty nine, that is, 72.2%, state that they are satisfied with the current teaching of grammar. They find the lessons easy and clear. They also report that what is being done during grammar courses (i.e. the choice of the items dealt with) meet their needs. According to them, they consolidate and reinforce the grammatical structures learnt in the middle and secondary school. On the other hand, twelve students, that is, 22.2%, are not satisfied with the way grammar is taught presently. They consider the current teaching inadequate since it does not help them speak and write correctly. They also report that they lack practice and are not involved in the learning process. Finally, three students have given no answers to this question.

#### Question 4: Informants' opinion on the time allocated to grammar teaching

As far as the time allocated to grammar teaching is concerned, the data collected reveals that the majority of students, that is, thirty seven (68.5%) have found the time allocated to the teaching of grammar insufficient. According to them three hours a week are not enough to learn grammar. On the other hand, seventeen students (31.4%) state that three hours of grammar per week are enough for first-year university students.

Nevertheless, the results gathered show that time allotment is viewed by most informants as an important factor in the teaching of grammar which, may either hinder or improve grammar learning.

Question 5: Frequency of grammar exercises in the classroom

The frequency of grammar exercises done during class time as reported by students, is represented in the following table:

<b>Exercises as a class activity</b>	<b>A.F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Sometimes	38	70.3 %
Frequently	10	18.5 %
Rarely	06	11.2 %
Never	00	0 %

**Table 3.11: *Frequency of grammar exercises as a class activity***

The table shows that the majority of students, thirty eight, that is, 70.3% assert that they sometimes have grammar exercises in class. Ten other students (18.5%) note that they frequently do grammar exercises during class time, while six respondents, that is, 11.1% have answered that they rarely have exercises in class. It should be noted, however, that no students ticked the frequency item “never”.

Thus, it appears that practice does not often occur in the classroom and students do not have frequently the opportunity to consolidate in class and make use of what they learnt during grammar courses.

Question 6: Frequency of grammar exercises done as homework

The results which concern the frequency of grammar exercises as an out-of-class activity are indicated in the table below:

<b>Frequency of homework Exercises</b>	<b>A.F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Sometimes	32	59.25 %
Frequently	05	09.25 %
Rarely	14	25.92 %
Never	01	1.85 %

**Table 3.12: *Frequency of grammar exercises done as homework***



According to the above results, the percentage of students who have answered that they sometimes have grammar exercises as homework is the highest 59.25%. On the other hand, the ratio concerning the frequency item “rarely” is, to some extent, important since it represents 25.92% of the students. The ratio which concerns the frequency item “frequently” represents only 9.25%. With regard to the item “never”, only one student, that is, 1.85% state that he never has grammar exercises at home. It should be noted, however, that two students have given no answer.

#### Question 7: Students’ anxiety in guided and free activities

As far as students’ anxiety in guided and free activities is concerned, the answers given are summarized in the table below:

<b>Students anxious in</b>	<b>A.F.</b>	<b>R.F.</b>
Guided activities	19	35.1 %
Free activities	33	61.1 %

**Table 3.13: Students’ anxiety in guided and free activities**

From the above results, over half of the students (61.1%) admit being nervous in free activities while nineteen students, that is, 35.1% feel uncomfortable when being given guided activities. On the other hand, one student states that he feels nervous in both activities. Finally, another student has given no answer to this question.

From the answers provided, one may deduce that most of the students prefer the teachers’ guidance in the sense that it helps them feel secure and comfortable. They consider free activities as difficult and feel lost when being given this kind of activities.

#### Question 8: Students’ difficulties in grammar

According to the students’ answers, the main difficulties they encounter in grammar are indicated in a decreasing order of importance in the following table:

Students' difficulties in grammar	A.F.	R.F.
Use of adverbs instead of adjectives	31	57.40 %
Sentence construction	19	35.18 %
Use of articles	19	35.18 %
Use of prepositions	15	27.7 %
Use of plural markers	14	25.9 %
Use of tenses	13	24.04 %
Use of pronouns	09	16.6 %
Subject verb agreement	08	14.8 %

**Table 3.14: Students' difficulties in grammar**

According to the results obtained in table 3.15, students have reported that they encounter difficulties in all areas. The use of adverbs instead of adjectives (57.4%), sentence construction and use of articles (35.18%), use of prepositions (27.7%), the use of plural markers (25.9%) and the use of tenses (24.04%) seem to be the most problematic areas for students. The remaining items, i.e. the use of pronouns (16.6%) and the subject-verb agreement (14.8%) seem to be less problematic to students.

Question 9: Causes of grammar difficulties

The causes of grammar difficulties whether in writing or speaking as reported by students are presented in the following table:

Causes	A.F.	R.F.
Insufficient grammar practice	31	57.4 %
Lack of grammar materials	20	37.03 %
Insufficient time devoted to grammar teaching	25	46.29 %
Inadequate teaching	09	16.6 %

**Table 3.15: Causes of grammar difficulties**

From the results obtained from the above table, it is clear that thirty one students, that is, (57.4%), state that the principal cause of grammar difficulties is the insufficient practice. According to them, they do not have enough exercises (oral or written) in class or at home in order to improve their grammar proficiency level; hence, the failure in grammar use. On the other hand, twenty-five students who represent (46.29%), believe that the deficiencies in grammar are rather due to the insufficient time devoted to its teaching (i.e. three hours per week). Another factor, which is also important since twenty students mention it, is the lack of materials. Lesson and exercise grammar books are generally not available at the Department Library. Finally, for nine students, that is (16.6%), the teaching of grammar is inadequate.

#### Question 10: Students' suggestions to the teacher

This question has been devised to ask students to suggest changes in grammar teaching. Thirteen students have suggested no change on the way to teach grammar. They only say that the current teaching of grammar satisfies their needs. While forty one students, that is, (75.9%), put the blame on teachers for the deficiencies students have when applying grammar rules. They report that the teaching methodology and techniques presently used are inadequate and do not meet their needs. For this, they have suggested some changes and given the following proposals to teachers:

- To maintain a friendly atmosphere in class and have a good relationship among students in order to facilitate learning because communication based on mutual respect makes the process of teaching and learning a very fructuous one.
- To speak and explain slowly.
- To write all the difficult words and expressions on the board.
- To give more exercises, grade the exercises done at home and even take the grade as part of the exam in order to oblige students work more.
- To design special activities sessions and encourage group work.



- To use the language laboratory and audio visual aids.
- To use songs and make students identify the grammatical structures learnt during the grammar course.

#### Question 11: Students' suggestions to their classmates

To improve their grammar proficiency, students have suggested to their classmates to meet at the library, to work in groups (i.e. to help each other and exchange viewpoints on the grammar difficulties they encounter) and to use the available grammar exercises books related to the lessons dealt with. Furthermore, they strongly recommend practice at home and in class with a focus on oral grammar exercises done in class under the guidance of the teacher. In so doing, students hope to improve their communicative competence.

In addition, informants have made suggestions concerning students attitudes towards grammar learning. They recommend their classmates to attend all the grammar courses, pay close attention to what is being said during the lecture and ask questions whenever they have difficulties. Finally, they recommend their classmates to follow their teachers' instructions in order to improve their grammar proficiency and to reach their aims.

### **3.4. Summary and Discussion of the Results**

The questionnaires administered to teachers and students were intended to discover the causes behind first-year English students grammar difficulties, find out possible solutions to overcome students' weaknesses and help them improve their grammar proficiency level.

With these objectives in mind, the researcher tried to verify her research hypotheses which state that:

1° There is an effect of grammar teaching methodology (i.e. lack of students' practice, materials, timing and coordination between language skills courses) on students' proficiency in grammar.

2° There is an effect of students' motivation and attitudes towards English grammar on their grammar proficiency level.

As far as the teacher questionnaire is concerned, two parts were administered. The first one was aimed to draw the profile of the teachers (their specialisation, teaching experience and training) while the second was concerned with the subject under investigation (grammar teaching).

First, the emerging results revealed that students encounter real difficulties in grammar use as initially highlighted by the researcher. Seven teachers out of nine assessed first year students' grammar proficiency as weak and believed that the grammar difficulties lay in both productive skills, i.e. writing and speaking (see questions 2, 3, and 4 in teachers questionnaire). Concerning what types of difficulties are encountered by students, different viewpoints were collected on the part of the teachers. Yet, all of them agreed that students' most problematic areas in grammar use lay in the use of tenses, subject- verb agreement, use of prepositions, use of articles and sentence construction. Likewise the data obtained from the students' answers (see question 8) revealed that they encountered difficulties in many areas; especially in the use of tenses, use of adverbs instead of adjectives and use of articles and prepositions. It can be said, however, that teachers and students reach a common ground on the grammar difficulties encountered by first-year students. These results provide evidence for the existence of serious grammar difficulties for first-year students.

With regard to the first research hypothesis, interesting results were obtained. As far as the teaching methodology of grammar is concerned, four teachers out of nine answered that students' grammar deficiency was affected by inadequate teaching. It should be noted that five teachers out of nine answered using the structural approach to teach grammar, one teacher the communicative approach and three teachers answered using both approaches. Teachers who were in favour of the structural

approach insisted on grammatical correctness and therefore believed that usage was indispensable at first year university level. They also considered that students who would be future teachers in few years had to have a sound basic knowledge of grammar. However, that priority given by these teachers to the structural approach might lead students to assume that grammatical accuracy is far more important than the ability to understand and communicate a message. To avoid such erroneous view, it should be made clear for students that grammatical correctness is not enough for successful communication if not coupled with relevance and acceptability of content. In fact, using the structural approach, when teaching grammar will not help students make use of their grammar knowledge as they will not be induced in communication.

On the other hand, the teacher who thought that the communicative approach was most appropriate for first-year university students and should be used in grammar teaching seemed to consider language as a means of communication and not as an end in itself. He believed that this approach might serve the communicative needs of learners, might give them a sense of achievement and might be more realistic and more relevant to them. However, this approach often emphasizes the “know-how” (the use of grammar) aspect to the detriment of the “know-that” (the knowledge of grammar). This may lead students to focus on how to express themselves and how to convey their messages without having a practical mastery of what they have been taught in grammar. They may think that fluency is important as it helps them achieve the communicative needs they encounter in real life and neglect accuracy which remains a necessary part of use namely as these students will be future English teachers.

One may deduce that both approaches are equally important and should be taken into consideration in a very balanced way. In this context, Widdowson (1978: 18) states that: *A knowledge of use must of necessity include a knowledge of usage.*

Thus, according to Widdowson, usage is a necessary part of use. It is not enough to know the sentence patterns and a large vocabulary if this fails to equip the learner with the ability to use language for different purposes. This is clearly shown in the



teachers' answers (see questions 8 and 12) where they agree to use both approaches in order to enable students master the basic structural patterns of the language on the one hand and be involved in communication on the other as they agree to change the method and reconsider the current way of teaching grammar.

As far as the lack of students' practice is concerned, it should be noted that the information provided by teachers reveal that most of them, that is, six out of nine teachers have answered frequently giving grammar exercises to their students (see question 10). They also report giving practice and drill work to help their students improve their grammar proficiency whether in writing or in speech. Drills are supposed to train the student to talk by helping him/her to master the basic structural patterns of the language. Drilling does not mean that teachers spend time explaining grammar (i.e. rules) but training students to speak grammatically. According to King:

*No formal study of grammar however thorough and searching can take the place of this practice.... It is not enough simply to understand how the grammar works.....the student has to practise all the common patterns.*

(King 1959: 13)

However, contradictory results were obtained in question 5, since eight teachers out of nine related students' deficiency in grammar to lack of practice. This is confirmed by students' answers which reveal that they lack practice (see questions 5, 6 and 9). They report that grammar activities do not often occur and consequently they do not have frequently the opportunity to make use of the points seen in the grammar courses. It should be noted that there is a difference between teachers and students' reports. Teachers may have asserted giving practice a lot to justify a good teaching. Then, it appears that students lack practice in grammar activities which affect their proficiency providing some evidence for the researcher's first hypothesis.

The lack of materials is another important factor in students' weak grammar proficiency (raised by the first hypothesis) as reported by both respondents i.e.

teachers (in question 5) and students (in question 9). Lesson and exercise grammar books are generally not available at the library of the faculty. There is a small number of books for a huge number of students. Moreover, tape recorders and language laboratories exist in the English language section but unfortunately not used in grammar teaching. Very often, the only accessories a teacher uses are a blackboard and a piece of chalk. This seems to confirm the researcher's hypothesis stating that lack of materials has also an effect on students' proficiency in grammar.

With regard to timing, both respondents, i.e. teachers and students agree on the insufficient time devoted to the teaching of grammar (see question 6 in teachers questionnaire and question 4 in students questionnaire). According to them, three hours a week are not enough to learn grammar and make use of it appropriately. Teachers have proposed to increase the number of hours allocated to the teaching of grammar to four or six hours a week in order to allow students to practice more and have a better performance. Timing is then an important factor in the teaching of grammar which may either hinder or improve learning. These findings seem to join the researcher's hypothesis which states that timing affects the grammar teaching and therefore students' proficiency by cause and effect relationship.

As far as the teaching methodology is concerned, another important factor is raised in both respondents' answers i.e. teachers and students: the lack of coordination between courses. Both respondents (i.e. teachers in questions 9 and 12 and students in question 10) agree that there should be a coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses by designing, for example, lessons in Written Expression, Oral Expression or Reading Comprehension which deal with the points tackled in the grammar course. This is believed to help students make use of the learned structures and improve their grammar proficiency level. This is why the lack of coordination between the aforementioned courses is believed to affect negatively students' proficiency in grammar.

Regarding the second hypothesis which relates students' motivation and attitudes towards English grammar to students' grammar proficiency, interesting results were



obtained. The majority of teachers, that is, five teachers out of nine have answered that one cause of their students' grammar weaknesses is their negative attitudes towards grammar. They explain that students show low motivation towards the grammar course and this may be due to the fact that the first-year syllabus is a review of what has been studied in the previous years and therefore boring. Nevertheless, we notice a different answer on the part of students as the majority of them, that is, (94.4%) consider grammar as interesting and think that the present grammar teaching answers their needs. Yet, it should be pointed out that students' answers may have been shaped by the fact that the researcher is a first-year grammar teacher. Then, it appears that students' attitudes towards English grammar affect their proficiency level providing some evidence for the researcher's second hypothesis.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

Interesting results were achieved in this chapter. It has been shown that the linguistic variables as well as the affective ones can affect the teaching of grammar. From such a discussion, one can understand that such variables can contribute to the success of an E.F.L enterprise as much as they can contribute to its failure. English grammar presents quite a number of problems in the Algerian University classroom. Such factors as out-of-class stimuli, time needed to learn, a well-prepared classroom teacher and the method all have to be taken into account by both teachers and administrators

With regard to grammar, the study has revealed that the linguistic factors affect negatively the teaching process. Grammar being taught in isolation and out of context, the learners do not have the opportunity to make use of their grammatical knowledge orally as well as in writing. Besides, it was found that even the non- linguistic variables are, to a great extent, involved in learners' failure in grammar such as the method, time constraints, learners' motivation etc.

Thus, on the basis of the results obtained in the present chapter, the next and last chapter will be entirely devoted to suggestions and recommendations which are hoped to contribute to improve students' grammar proficiency.



# CHAPTER FOUR

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

#### **4.1. Introduction**

#### **4.2. Preparation of the Grammar Teacher**

##### **4.2.1. Teacher training**

##### **4.2.2. Teacher's Role**

##### **4.2.3. Teacher's Accountability**

#### **4.3. Teacher-Learner Relationship**

#### **4.4. Classroom Management**

#### **4.5. Teaching Methodology and Techniques**

##### **4.5.1. Cyclical Teaching**

##### **4.5.2. Re-Teaching**

##### **4.5.3. Eclecticism**

##### **4.5.4. Concord of Modules**

##### **4.5.5. involvement of Learners**

#### **4.6. Suggested Activities**

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

The present chapter is entirely devoted to some possible recommendations and suggestions regarding grammar teaching which are hoped, may help overcome the problems identified in the previous chapters. The results of this study indicate that grammar learning at university level is affected first, by students' low motivation towards English grammar. Second, by inadequate teaching methodology, lack of students' practice, insufficient time devoted to grammar teaching, and non-existence of coordination between the grammar course and the other skill-oriented modules. Therefore, the present recommendations and suggestions will focus on these aspects. The first section will speak about some recommendations regarding the teacher, his training, his role as well as his accountability.

Further recommendations, concerning teacher-learner relationship, will be provided in the second section. The third section will be concerned with some recommendations regarding classroom management. Then, in the hope to eradicate or at least minimize most existing problems encountered in grammar by first-year English students, the researcher will endeavour to suggest a more adequate way of teaching grammar. She will try to give some proposals regarding the teaching methodology and techniques such as cyclical teaching, eclecticism, concord of modules and other related aspects.

Finally, in the fifth section, some suggested activities which might be of help to grammar teachers to bring positive changes in their teaching process have been advanced in this chapter.

#### **4.2. Preparation of The Grammar Teacher**

Although the emphasis in education today is on the learner as the focus of learning, it must be remembered that the teacher is still the person especially trained to guide the learner and create a positive classroom environment. The teacher, however,



is a facilitator of learning in the sense that today's grammar teacher must manipulate much more information in different areas of knowledge. In other words, he must know how to use his knowledge of grammar, psychology, sociology and pedagogy to help his students learn grammar and use it appropriately and effectively.

In fact, the teacher is an important element in the whole process of teaching/learning; indeed, he is highly involved in the teacher-learner scheme. Therefore, some considerations such as teacher training, his role, accountability and techniques should be highlighted.

#### ***4.2.1. Teacher Training***

Today, although the process of teaching is more learner centred (i.e. the learner is the first element involved in the process and therefore deserves much attention), the teacher plays a crucial role in the whole process. It is worth mentioning first, that in order to prepare prospective teachers adequately, it may be time to create and organize teacher training programmes during the last year of "Magister" because these would be teachers at university level with no teaching experience and no training at all. Training will encourage them to adopt a developmental perspective and will enable them to improve their teaching as well as their social skills, attitudes and self-awareness.

In addition, the extent, nature and quality of the teacher training will crucially affect the quality of teaching. Teacher training should focus its attention on classroom practice, and should have as its primary goal the improvement of the teacher's practical efforts to bring about effective learning on the part of the learners. Practical techniques should be developed. Such techniques are both those common to all branches of teaching and those that are specific to grammar teaching. These techniques include an adequate command of the "module" (grammar course), a teacher will have to teach. Also, information component, in which the teacher draws in the very considerable body of knowledge about education, teaching, sociology, psychology, etc, (Stevens 1980). When there is some form of teacher preparation, there should be a relationship between

the nature of the programme and the real needs of future teachers. Therefore, the researcher recommends that initial training programmes should be obligatory and have a strong bias towards the practical side.

Finally, it is important to stress the teacher's crucial role in society. This can be demonstrated by, for instance, supplying in-service help, providing incentives such as scholarships, travel grants or else. Also sending encouraging circulars to teachers from time to time, as reminders that they are not forgotten, would be a good way to make them retain a sense of commitment to their profession.

#### **4.2.2. Teacher's Role**

Using the audio lingual method, the teacher's role was that of: *Combination drill sergeant and orchestra conductor*, as was ironically expressed by (Silberstein 1984)

It was a relatively easy role to play since most activities were prepared and well programmed beforehand. Today, however, at university level and taking into account first-year grammar courses, neither the lectures nor the activities are programmed and prepared in accordance with a prescribed syllabus. The grammar teacher has to design his own syllabus and activities.

It would be clearer, first of all, to consider the role of the teacher as being an essential component in the teaching / learning process. Today' grammar teacher should be aware of the learners' needs which constitute a major source of information for his course design. What do the learners want and need to get from the grammar course? Have they chosen to have the course or are they here simply because it is required? Do they need grammar to write, to speak or both?

These are all important questions the teacher should discuss with his students at the beginning of the course for two main reasons. First, this will help him select and present materials in the most appropriate way. Second, by voicing their needs, learners

will clarify them in their own minds and be able to formulate concrete goals to work towards. Then, being aware of the learning preferences of his students, and having his own preferred way of instructing, the teacher can make adjustments to accommodate the learners needs (Boylan 1984). The more a teacher knows about the learners' personal approaches and personal concepts, the better he will adapt his teaching strategies to his learners. In so doing, teachers can promote and foster successful learning.

To sum up, the role of the grammar teacher is to employ the adequate grammar teaching strategies in order to raise learners' awareness of the target language. In addition, his role is also to use the appropriate processes (i.e. the way to plan, organize, manage and carry out a grammar teaching programme) in order to have motivated students on the one hand, since motivation goes hand in hand with the positive attitudes towards a good and successful learning (Harmer 1984), and successful results on the other.

#### **4.2.3. Teacher's Accountability**

To achieve an atmosphere of interest, confidence, enthusiasm and mutual support in one's classes is not easy. It is energy and time-consuming. It involves failures and successes, and an acceptance of each individual strengths and weaknesses, including one's own. But before all, the teacher must be willing and eager for learning to be an exciting and creative experience. This means that he must show respect for all the students' ideas, encourage them to think for themselves and make their ideas essential to the lesson. He must promote positive learning interactions among students.

Besides, it is advisable for a grammar teacher to be aware of individual differences among the learners such as age, sex and attitudes. Since the learners differ in the value they place upon education, in their aspirations and the response they make to particular teachers and methods, it is thus recommended to the teacher to take the responsibility of reconciling these attitudinal variations among the learners.



It is also important for the grammar teacher to attempt to create a positive attitude towards himself by showing some fairness, friendliness firmness and a strong belief in teaching. Indeed, it is generally assumed that a learner who develops a negative or a positive attitude towards the teacher will inevitably develop the same attitude towards the taught subject; which either deters or promotes the learning process.

### **4.3. Teacher- Learner Relationship**

It is important for a language teacher and especially for a grammar teacher to be fair, democratic but not authoritarian. While being fair, however, he has to be firm. In other words, the teacher has to impose a certain measure of control over the class, according to the type of activity and the size of the group.

It is also advisable for a grammar teacher not to be indifferent or distant in interest or feeling. On the contrary maintaining a friendly atmosphere in class is strongly recommended. Providing opportunities for mutual, open, free and emphatic communication between the learners and himself seems to be of great interest. To do this, the teacher needs to have genuine trust and acceptance of the other person (i.e. the student) as a valuable individual.

Furthermore, grammar is used for a purpose. Consequently it has a place in all courses (see 1.4). Yet, it is the democratic teacher who can actually give equal opportunities to each individual in class (i.e. providing the best as well as the weakest students with the chance to express themselves). This means that the aim of a grammar teacher must be to try and make the weak learner realize his potential (i.e. reaching a good level of proficiency), without doing the learner an injustice. In other words, in such instances, the grammar teacher is expected to find ways of making the task more manageable for the weak student. However, this must not be done to the detriment of the good learner. Said differently, the latter has not to be neglected on account of his good level, he, too, has to be helped and trained by the teacher.

In addition, it is recommended to the grammar teacher not to assume superiority and omniscience, i.e. the quality of possessing complete knowledge. This assumption of superiority is unfair to the learners. Today, knowledge of the grammar rules is only one of the requirements of a good grammar teacher. More importantly, it proves indispensable that teachers also have a broad background knowledge of the social environment that influences their students. Grammar is much more than sets of rules. It is not simply a matter of acquiring the rules but it is the way how to apply these rules and have effective communication among individuals in a specific social context. This increased responsibility of grammar learning does not fall entirely on the teacher. The student will also assume some part of responsibility for the learning process.

Nowadays, the learner is no longer a passive receptacle into which the teacher pours knowledge. On the contrary, he is required to participate actively in the learning process, assimilate grammar and allow it to become involved in the other skills. Teachers can only facilitate this process, using ways to stimulate the learners (such as games, songs, poems, tapes films, etc) and other various techniques to enhance students' motivation. Unfortunately nothing is done. First, in their environment, students have no opportunity to use the grammar knowledge they have acquired. Once they are outside the classroom, they speak either French or Arabic with their classmates and even with their English language teachers. Another cause which enhances their motivation is the way grammar is taught. Apart from the set of rules prescribed by the teacher and some activities to illustrate them, the students do not have the opportunity to use other techniques to learn grammar (laboratories, songs, films, etc). Students will certainly enjoy the grammar learning if such a material is used because it will serve their communicative needs as well as it will give them a sense of achievement.

#### **4.4. Classroom Management**

The classroom can be defined as a place where more than two people gather together for the purpose of learning, with one having the role of teacher. The teacher has certain perceptions about his role in the classroom. This perception, of his role as

the key player, results in him, dominating the classroom talk. Teachers also have certain expectations about how business should be conducted in the classroom. In other words, they have certain ideas about how the lesson should proceed, what kinds of question to be asked, what kinds of activity they want students to do, and what they expect students to get out of the lesson. Lessons are judged as good or bad on the basis of whether they turn out the way they were planned and whether the expected outcome is achieved.

However, all teachers know there is often a gap between what they want to achieve and what actually happens; because there are many factors that affect classroom interaction. Besides, one may say, that the students' expectations of the teacher are as important as the teachers' expectations in determining the way a lesson proceeds. In addition students who see the teacher as the giving end of knowledge and themselves as the passive receiving end may not welcome the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. Such expectations cannot be ignored since they impinge on the classroom atmosphere which systematically affects classroom interaction. As Allwright and Bailey point out:

*The success of the interaction between the elements in the classroom cannot be taken for granted and cannot be guaranteed just by exhaustive planning.*

**(Allwright and Bailey 1991: 18)**

This is because classroom interaction is a co-operative enterprise among participants. Each participant has as much to contribute as every other participant in determining the direction and outcome of the interaction. Allwright and Bailey further point out:



*Interaction, in class or anywhere, has to be managed, as it goes along, no matter how much has gone into it beforehand.....it has to be managed by every one taking part, not just by the teacher, because interaction is obviously not something you just do to people, but something people do together, collectively.*

(Allwright and Bailey 1991: 19)

In sum, one may say that the role of the teacher is as important as the role of the learner in the classroom interaction in that nothing can be achieved without the existence of these two salient elements (i.e. the teacher and the learner).

#### **5. Teaching Methodology and Techniques**

If we consider grammar to be an important part of the language learning process, since it enables the learner to improve his written and spoken skills, the question that arises is the following, what is the methodology which has the best fit, the closest match with all the variables (mainly the learner himself, his profile, his level of proficiency, his motivation and attitudes to learning). It is worth mentioning first, that the individual teacher needs to acquire the widest and deepest understanding of all these variables he is likely to encounter in the grammar teaching/ learning situation. The teacher needs to select, device and operate for any given situation. In this context Finocchiaro (1982: 11) posits: *Language teaching will always remain an art in the hand of enthusiastic, competent, caring teachers.*

It is impossible to decide what appropriate method in grammar teaching is. This highly depends on the relationship which exists between the teacher and the learner and also how the classroom is organized. Therefore, it is the teacher who can decide on the model to follow and how to structure his course having in mind a number of parameters such as the learner' s age, interest and objectives of the course to be achieved.

It is generally agreed that students learn a subject at different rates and with quite different levels of completeness. The teacher is not held responsible for the differences in ability students bring with them into the classroom. He is, nonetheless, responsible for motivating them and ensuring that they become involved in learning.

E.F.L

All persons have preferences for ways of learning. These preferences are called individuals' learning styles<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, it is important for a teacher to be aware of his students' different learning styles, and their preferred way of getting instruction. For this, the teacher needs to select from among a wide range of possible techniques and courses of action, precisely those which are appropriate to the circumstances of the teaching / learning situation. Indeed, it is very important that teachers learn to adapt. In so doing, they can offer their students not a single technique which may or may not be effective, but the best possible choice of instructional mode for the particular variables that operate in each individual learner.

Furthermore, it may be necessary to abandon the day's lesson plan because of unforeseen difficulties raised by the students. The principle is that if, at any point during the lesson, the teacher's pre-arranged lesson and the students' needs are in conflict, it is the learners' needs which should have priority. It may also be necessary to study first the basic patterns (i.e. the simple sentences) because students will not produce satisfactory sentences whether in writing or in speaking unless they first master the simple sentence, hence the importance of going from easy to more difficult and simple to more complex when teaching. Numerous simple sentence patterns can be taught. For instance, it is easy to teach the following: simple subject and verb plus a predicate, object, or optional adverb.

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<sup>1</sup> - Note: Individual learning style: All persons have preferences for ways to learn called their individual learning style. It is believed that when an individual participates in a learning task, the learning is accomplished more rapidly and retained longer if it is presented in ways that the individual prefers.

In learning the above patterns, students learn a number of things about the grammatical structure of English. When the teacher feels the learners have gained some mastery over the basic patterns, he then can move on to more complex activities where the students are asked to expand those patterns.

More importantly of all, it may be necessary to prepare additional practice on particular grammatical points and to study again and again the same grammar item for grammar rules consolidation, hence the importance of the cyclical teaching process.

#### **4.5.1. Cyclical Teaching**

Nowadays, it is believed that grammar teaching should be cyclical. The repetition of items at different levels is highly recommended for grammar rules consolidation. In other words, the same grammar item needs to be studied again and again throughout a course. There are at least three reasons for this:

- Learners forget, so straight forward revision is necessary from time to time.
- Additional uses of a structure need to be studied; for instance irregular past tense forms are needed to form the past simple, but are also needed in many conditional sentences.
- Most importantly of all, and yet the most frequently overlooked reason, is that as learners advance, they need to deepen their understanding of grammar since it is the rules that govern a language system and if teaching is to reflect this, it is recommended to teachers to be prepared to return again and again to examining certain fundamental problems of grammar. Here are some examples to illustrate this point: It may be a good idea to teach the present simple for repeated actions ( such as: I generally get up at seven o'clock) and the present continuous for actions taking place at the moment of speaking (such as: I am writing on the blackboard), however, as learners are likely, to meet uses which contradict that explanation, for example, the present continuous referring to future time (such as: I am playing tennis on Friday), the present simple to refer to momentary actions precisely at the moment of speaking ( such as: Now, I see what you mean), it is necessary to re-



examine all previous study of, in this particular instance, the present simple and present continuous. In so doing, the students can gradually build up a comprehensive view of the underlying difference in the use of these tense forms.

In addition, teachers and learners are well aware that doing exactly the same thing twice is boring. It is therefore of particular importance that teachers recognize that the repetitions within any cyclical teaching are not exact repetitions. Each repetition is rather a development, expansion of previous learned items. Such a procedure can actually facilitate the learning process and also help solve some of the grammar problems encountered by learners at a previous stage. Thus, it is the teacher's responsibility to set up lessons that can hopefully promote the success of learning.

Though cyclical teaching is aimed to reinforce acquired structures and patterns, it may fail to do so. Thereafter, another technique is proposed below to help learners overcome their weaknesses.

#### **4.5.2. Re-Teaching**

There are several remedial techniques a teacher can undertake in order to eradicate or at least minimize grammar mistakes; one of them is re-teaching. When students fail to apply a rule already taught, it implies that they have not completely internalized the rule. Then, re-teaching the same item is necessary. However, if this item is re-taught through the same material, by the same way, and in the same atmosphere, the outcome will remain the same. It will end in failure again. This is why it is recommended to use a different approach and a different method to re-teach the item in question (Corder 1981, Pal 1982). For example, if a teacher teaches a grammatical point by means of an inductive reasoning and sees that his students fail to apply that grammar rule, he can re-teach the item a second time using the deductive reasoning or for a better understanding he can re-teach the item through both processes.

One last consideration is that the teaching of an item in the appropriate time is very important for the learnability of that item. This is why teachers should re-arrange

and re-structure the syllabus when they notice the mislearning of an item because it is too complex at this stage, or it cannot be fully understood until the following item is explained.

In conclusion re-teaching provides a good opportunity for both the learner to revise the rules of his inter language and the teacher to consolidate what has been already taught and correct his mistakes, if he has made any in the choice of the teaching method, the technique or the grading of the item in question. As seen previously learner-centeredness is recommended in each method to raise the learner's motivation. Working in such a way can guarantee success in grammar learning. Re-teaching is not always a successful technique. Though it is aimed to provide a good opportunity for the learner to consolidate his grammar structures, it may fail to do so. This is why another technique is proposed below to help the learners improve their level.

#### **4.5.3. Eclecticism**

It is worth explaining first what eclecticism is. According to Mackey (1965) eclecticism or 'Méthode Active' as it was labelled in France, is:

*.... a compromise between the Direct Method, with its many demands on the teacher coupled with its alleged inaccuracy for the learner, and the more formal methods based on grammar rules and translation. The language skills are introduced in the following order: speaking, writing, understanding and reading. Activities include oral practice, reading aloud, and questions and answers. There is a certain amount of translation with some deductive grammar, and some audio-visual aids.*

*(Quoted in Miliani 2003: 57)*

An eclectic approach allows the teacher to range freely over approaches and methods in order to find or devise techniques appropriate to the often unique nature of

a particular class. Indeed, it is generally admitted that there is no one type of lesson appropriate for teaching, and for teaching all the different classes. A teacher should feel free to develop the style of teaching with which he himself feels most at ease, for it is only by feeling at ease himself that he can make learners feel motivated.

Besides, it is only the classroom teacher who is experiencing daily the interaction with his students. Consequently, only the teacher can actually decide the most appropriate method/ approach to teaching in the local situation according to his students. The teacher like the method should be flexible. In this context Palmer (1964) notes that: **“teaching needs some kind of balance”**. So, this new kind of teaching selects and adopts what is good from other methods and rejects what presents difficulties. As far as grammar is concerned eclecticism helps students understand the difficult structures and patterns. In this context Miliani writes:

*Eclecticism makes provision for grammatical explanation and short definitions or paraphrases in the native language to make the meaning of the difficult words and structures clear.*

(Miliani 2003: 58-59)

Finally, it is also recommended to bridge the gap between grammar and the other “modules”. Grammar should not be taught separately, but there should be a coordination between the grammar course and the other skill-oriented modules. Hence, the importance of concord of modules.

#### **4.5.4. Concord of Modules**

Since grammar is the fundamental organizing principle of language, it is involved in the different skills (i.e. written expression, oral expression, reading comprehension etc). Therefore, students consider it as a complex and difficult subject of study and sometimes even develop a certain fear towards it. This may be due to the non-use of the items and structures that have been taught on one hand, and the absence of



concord of language skills “modules” on the other. To have appropriate grammar knowledge with first-year students, it is highly advisable to deal with grammar in all the other language based “modules”. Then, it is important that teachers work together. Each should be aware of what is being done in the other “modules” in order to ensure concord between these “modules” and coordination between the different skill-oriented modules. In so doing, students will be helped to make use of what they have learnt likewise they will be able to improve their language proficiency.

In reading comprehension, for instance, grammar provides not only insights into the meaning of a text, but also devices for text and discourse analysis. It also helps to convey a particular message or meaning appropriate to its context when speaking.

In sum, one may say that grammar in relation to the other skills (synchronic progression) and in concord of the other “modules” (diachronic progression) enhances students’ motivation, helps them to make use of their knowledge and enables them communicate effectively their messages. This is why the relationship between grammar and the other language skills lies in designing lessons (dealt with in grammar) to be introduced in written expression, oral expression, reading comprehension and other language related courses.

#### **4.5.5. Involvement of Learners**

To involve learners in the learning process seems to be a crucial element in grammar teaching. First-year English students are learning grammar because it is part of the prescribed curriculum. But even in this case, however, students are more likely to enjoy the subject and succeed if they are involved in the learning process, have a chance to influence what happens in class and how it happens. A relationship with and among students is very important and should be built. In a trusting relationship, the threat that students have is reduced, and therefore, learning is promoted. Students can learn from their interaction with each other as well as their interaction with the teacher. A spirit of cooperation, not competition, should always prevail.

Furthermore, the student should be part of the learning process. In other words, he should not be isolated, waiting for the others to do the work for him. Paying attention to everything dealing with the lesson which is being undertaken, participating and asking questions whenever he finds difficulties will be of great help. If, for instance, he notices that a certain point has not been mentioned or clearly explained, the student should stop the teacher and ask for further explanations. Moreover, the student should be allowed to bring additional information concerning the lesson which is dealt with, if ever he has any. He should be encouraged and at the same time guided. Working in such a way, the student may overcome his weaknesses and guarantee success in the learning process.

One may conclude by saying that language learning method / approach is neither learner-centred nor teacher centred, but rather teacher-learner centred, with both being decision makers in the class.

#### **4.6. Suggested Activities**

To acquire a certain knowledge of grammar, the learner works in an environment in which he feels relaxed, secure and at ease and this ensures real learning, in contrast with the kind of situation in which the learner has to protect himself from failure, criticism and competition with fellow learners. Likewise, the learner's motivation should be enhanced, providing the learner with new learning activities which try to give both: usefulness and fun because learners are unlikely to be very successful at learning anything unless they enjoy the process of learning. Some activities which are in fact very useful and at the same time provide fun have been introduced below as a way to raise the learner's motivation.

Instead of written grammar practice, why not make some of the examples amusing. Many learners enjoy solving puzzles. The activity, however, also has a serious purpose. A particular puzzle where the students have to practise both the positive and negative forms could be of great interest. For example:

Student 1: the person who went to Algiers went by plane

Student 2: It was not Ahmed. Ahmed did not go to Algiers by plane, he went by car.

This activity which provides practice of negative and positive forms has a carefully defined structural purpose; but it is still a puzzle and still fun.

Other activities are suggested in this context:

#### Exercise N°1: Grammar Auction.

The game proceeds in exactly the same way as an auction. Students in groups have to buy correct sentences and avoid buying incorrect ones. Each group has a certain amount of money for example 5000 DA to buy as many correct sentences as possible spending as little money as possible. The winning group is the one that buys the most correct sentences. If two groups have the same number of correct sentences, the group which has spent less money is the winner. Here is an example of sentences where prepositions are used either correctly or incorrectly.

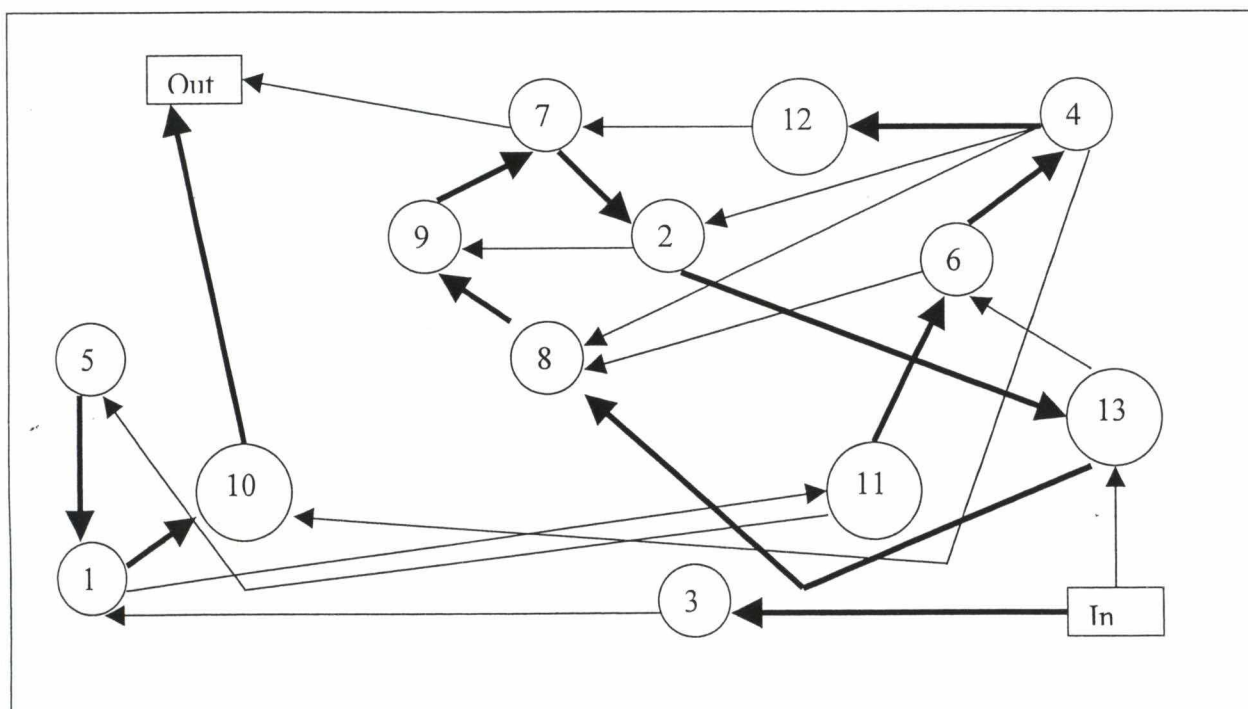
	Right /Wrong	Budget
1. She shows great ability in mathematics.	-----	-----
2. Are you afraid by spiders?	-----	-----
3. I'm not bad at tennis.	-----	-----
4. Congratulations on your new job!	-----	-----
5. I wasn't looking where I was going and crashed into the car in front.	-----	-----
6. .... On the other hand, the scoux were poor.	-----	-----
7. I bought this dress with a ridiculous price.	-----	-----
8. He taught to me how to play tennis.	-----	-----
9. You were not very nice last night.	-----	-----
10. The boss is very pleased with you.	-----	-----



## Exercise N°2: Mistakes Maze

Fourteen sentences are given. The students' task is to start at the IN sentence, visit each number once, and arrive at OUT. First, read the IN sentence. If you think it is correct, follow the bold arrow to sentence (3); if you think it is wrong, follow the normal arrow to sentence (13). The bold arrow is always correct, the normal arrow is always wrong. Continue the same way, following the bold arrow if a sentence is correct and the thin arrow if it is wrong.

### Mistakes maze



IN- The bank in Queen Street has been robbed yesterday.

1- Peter broke a window last night.

2- I have seen John this morning. He has invited me to his party.

3- I have known him since 1960.

4- I have studied hard for years.

5- It has been raining non-stop for three days.

6- She learns English for six years.

7- I go to London about three times a week.

- 8- What are you doing? I read.
- 9- I tried a bit of the cake to see how it was tasting.
- 10- If I were you, I would stay at the Grand Hotel.
- 11- If I will be away, I will get someone else to do it.
- 12- The phone rang while I had dinner.
- 13- She has died three years ago.

Whatever teachers may think of the way students acquire grammar, it remains the case that learners learn best when they are mentally relaxed, open to the learning experience. If learners feel pressured, even if they perform at that moment, they will probably forget. One really retains grammar rules, structures and patterns which he understands and feels involved with while feeling confident and at ease. This is not to deny the value of concentration. However, at this point, it is strongly recommended to provide the learners with a relaxed atmosphere as much as possible, inviting rather than demanding a response.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

This concluding chapter is a sum of recommendations and suggestions regarding the teaching of grammar to first-year university students. Moreover, it is intended to help grammar teachers bring hopefully some positive changes in their methodology with respect to the teaching of grammar.

Since the grammar teacher is considered as a key variable in the whole teaching / learning process, some recommendations have been proposed. Furthermore, to overcome grammar problems the target learners encounter, a number of different techniques have been put forwards to enhance the teaching / learning of grammar such as the cyclical teaching process which is concerned with grammar rules consolidation and which helps the students not to forget these important rules, as well as helps them deepen their understanding of grammar. Likewise, the re-teaching

process which seems to be quite beneficial to students in that, it helps them assimilate and understand the difficult rules.

Finally, some suggested activities have been given dealing with some important grammatical points and showing that grammar should not be seen only as a difficult subject of study since it can be introduced and studied through games and fun.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The present study has attempted to give a clear picture of the current teaching of English grammar to E.F.L students at the Department of Foreign Languages (English Section) of Tlemcen University. It has also attempted to identify some of the grammar teaching problems which lead to students' grammar deficiencies such as the teaching methodology, lack of students' practice, lack of materials, inadequate timing, absence of coordination between the language skills courses and the grammar course and the low motivation of students towards the target language in general and grammar in particular.

It is easily noticeable among Algerian university learners that after many years of English learning i.e. two years in the middle school and three years in the secondary school, they still find themselves unable to use the English language, let alone make an effective use of its grammar. The students find real difficulties to make use of the grammar structures and patterns they have learnt whether in writing or in speech. They often make errors at the level of tense formation, subject-verb agreement, plural markers, use of prepositions, use of modifiers etc. This is problematic because being grammatically inaccurate may prevent them from conveying effectively their messages. This situation led the researcher to ask the following questions:

1° Why do first-year students show deficiency in grammar use whether in writing or in speech?

2° Is first-year students' grammar failure related to inadequate teaching? (teaching methodology, lack of students' practice lack of materials and inadequate timing).

3° Is it related to a lack of coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses.

4° Is it related to students' negative attitudes to English grammar?

5) How can students improve their proficiency in grammar?

These research questions led to the formulation of the following hypotheses:

1° There is an effect of grammar teaching ( methodology, lack of students' practice, lack of materials, inappropriate timing and non-existence of coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses) on students' proficiency in grammar.

2° There is an effect of students' attitudes towards the English grammar on their grammar proficiency level.

We found that students encounter real difficulties in grammar use. These difficulties lie in both productive skills i.e. writing and speaking and are found in many areas such as the use of tenses, the use of articles and prepositions, the use of plural markers etc. This study came out with interesting results. First, the questionnaires revealed that students' grammar deficiency was affected by inadequate teaching methodology. Most teachers opted for a mono-approach. While some of them thought that the approach used to teach grammar should focus on grammatical accuracy because grammatical correctness is indispensable at first-year university level, the others tended to highlight the advantages of the grammatical fluency and believed that this approach may serve the communicative needs of learners as it may give them a sense of achievement. In fact, both approaches are equally important for a successful learning situation and should be taken into consideration in a balanced way because usage is a necessary part of use. In fact, all teachers agree to reconsider the current way of teaching grammar.

Regarding lack of materials, both teachers and students complained about insufficient or even unavailable grammar books at the English library of the Faculty. This was seen by both informants to affect students' proficiency in grammar.

Moreover, the insufficient time devoted to English grammar teaching (three hours a week) shares also a part in students' failure in grammar. All informants, i.e. teachers and students thought that the number of hours allocated to the teaching of grammar should be increased in order to improve students' proficiency.

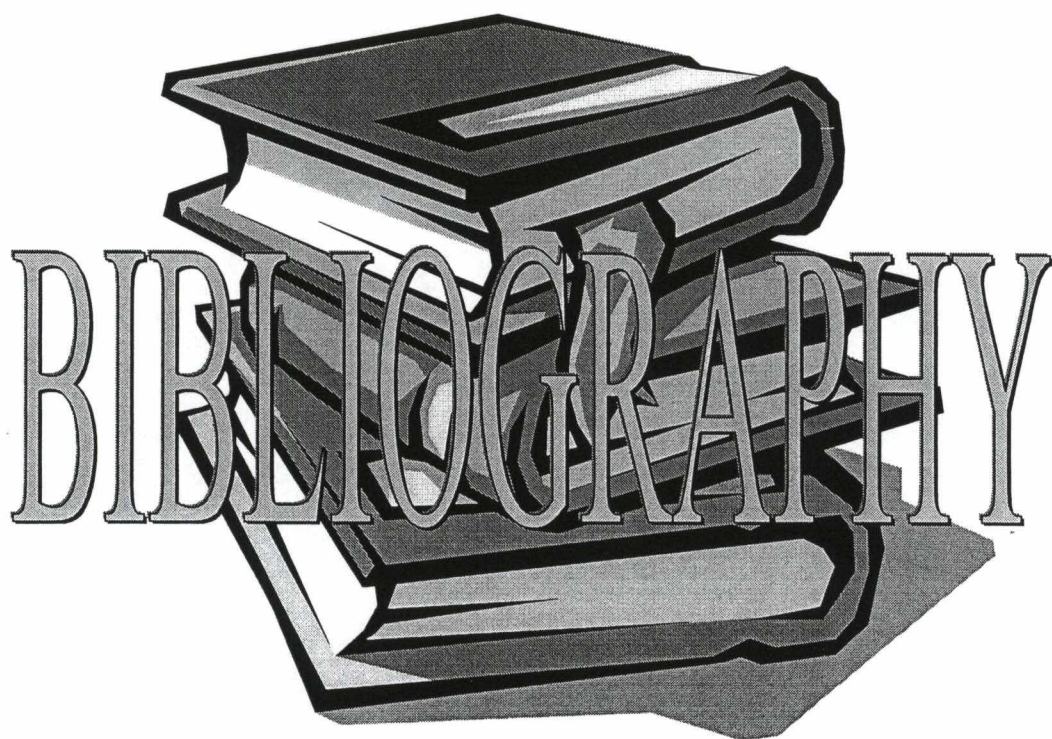
The results obtained also revealed that all respondents agreed on the non-existence of coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses. Yet, this is important to help students make use of the learned structures and have better performance in grammar. In addition, it should be pointed out that another important factor affects the teaching of grammar; that is the lack of students' practice. According to the results obtained, grammar activities do not often occur and students do not have frequently the opportunity to make use of the points tackled during the grammar courses. This was sometimes related to time constraints. All these results seem to confirm the first research hypothesis which states that there is an effect of grammar teaching on students' proficiency in grammar.

With regard to the second hypothesis, although students have asserted in their answers that they find grammar interesting and that the present grammar teaching answers their needs, teachers still consider that one cause of their students' grammar weaknesses is their negative attitude towards English grammar. According to them students are not motivated and what hinders their motivation is the environment which does not help them improve their proficiency in grammar as it is only a grammar class activity. Apart from the three hours a week allocated to grammar, students do not have the opportunity to speak English and make use of its grammar. In addition, students do not have the opportunity to use new strategies in their grammar courses such as songs, games, the language laboratory or the internet where they can look for web sites containing the grammar lessons dealt with in class. This would enhance their motivation as suggested by teachers and help them improve their proficiency level. These arguments seem to provide some evidence for the second research hypothesis which relates students' attitudes towards the English grammar to their grammar proficiency level.



What emerges from the present study is that the current teaching of grammar needs to be reconsidered. Teachers should not remain reluctant to revise their own methods. There is nearly always an opportunity for new ideas, attitudes and techniques. Therefore, it is always worthwhile to try new methods and keep pace with the results of educational research. For this purpose, it is hoped that the suggestions and recommendations made in the last chapter will encourage teachers to try any idea which they think is new or efficient, and to develop their teaching and in turn their students' learning. Yet, it is worth adding that the activities suggested in the last chapter are, but a part of a wide range of many others. They are an attempt to bring together usefulness and fun in one's language teaching leading the students develop a positive attitude towards grammar learning and raising their motivation in the classroom. This would result in a more successful learning situation. Such a proposal does not claim to offer an ideal solution to the existing problems in the teaching of grammar at the level of first- year university students, but it constitutes a necessary preliminary step towards the process of setting up more suitable techniques in the teaching of grammar. Besides, it is essential that the teacher raises students' awareness to both language criteria: accuracy and fluency and explains the importance of both aspects in linguistic productions. In fact, having dealt with the teaching of grammar in this dissertation does not mean that teachers should be obsessed with the way grammar is taught. Teachers need also to develop a pedagogy for success which opens doors to creativity, or at least allow learners to try to quench their thirst for knowledge.

To conclude, one may say that the situation in Algerian education only increases the growing demand for more adequately well-trained teachers as well as the revision of foreign language teaching methodology.



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# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX A: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

**Dear Colleague**

I am presently conducting a research work to identify the problems that first-year teachers and students have in teaching / learning grammar in the English Section of the Department of Foreign Languages at Tlemcen University. I would be grateful if you could help me by completing the following questionnaire.

Thank you for your co-operation.

**Naima BOUYAKOUB**  
**Magister Student**  
**Faculty of Arts, Human and Social Sciences**  
**Department of Foreign Languages**  
**Section of English**  
**University of Tlemcen**

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**Instructions:** Please answer the following questions. If a choice needs to be done, put a cross in the appropriate box (es) which best fit (s) your opinion. From time to time, you may be required to justify your choice.

---

**Part one:**

- 1- Post graduate (field of) Specialisation .....
  - 2- For How many years have you been teaching grammar?.....
  - 3- What do you presently teach? .....
  - 4- Did you receive any training to teach grammar?.....
-

**Part Two:**

1- What is the main reason that makes grammar important in E.F.L university studies?

- Aid to learning language skills
- Reinforcement of language proficiency
- Requirement for communicative needs (writing and speaking),--

2- How do you assess the grammar proficiency of first-year learners?

- Very good
- Good
- Average
- Weak

3- Do first-year learners find difficulties to apply grammar accurately and appropriately?

- |                 |                              |                             |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • When Writing  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • When Speaking | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

4- What are the main weaknesses that you have observed in the first-year students' grammar performance?

- Inadequate use of tenses
- Inappropriate use of subject-verb agreement
- Inaccurate sentence construction (word order and patterns)
- Inadequate use of articles
- Inaccurate use of plural markers
- Inappropriate use of pronouns



- Inappropriate use of prepositions
- Use of adverbs instead of adjectives
- Other; specify.....

5- Are the causes of the above weaknesses due to:

- The difficult nature of grammar itself
- Language transfer
- Teaching time devoted to grammar
- Inadequate teaching
- Insufficient grammar practice whether in writing or in speech
- Lack of materials (lesson books, exercise books)
- Students' negative attitudes towards English grammar learning

6- Do you think that the time allocated to the teaching of grammar for first-year students (three hours per week) is:

- Sufficient
- Insufficient
- If insufficient how many hours would you allocate? .....

7- Which type of grammar teaching approach is most actually used?

- Structural approach (giving priority to usage)
- Communicative approach (giving priority to use)
- Both approaches

8- Which of the above approaches do you think is most appropriate for first-year students?

.....

Please, justify your answer

.....

9- Do you think that there should be a coordination between the grammar course and the other language skills courses?

Yes  No

• If yes, how? .....

10- How often do students have grammar exercises during class time?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

11- How often do students have grammar exercises as homework?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

12- Do you think that the current way of teaching grammar should be reconsidered?

Yes  No

• If yes, how? .....

13- What do you suggest to your students to overcome their grammar difficulties?

.....  
.....

**APPENDIX B :**  
**STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE**



Age: .....

Secondary School Stream: .....

Choice of the degree of "Licence" in English language: Personal

Parents' desire

Orientation

**Instructions:** Please put a cross in the appropriate box when there is a choice to make; otherwise, answer freely.

1- Do you find grammar courses

- Interesting : Yes  No
- Boring : Yes  No

Justify your answer

.....  
.....

2- Does the present teaching of grammar help you speak and write in English?

Yes  No

3- Are you satisfied with the present teaching of grammar?

Yes  No

• If yes; why ?

.....

• If no; why ?

.....

4- Do you find that the time allocated to the teaching of grammar is:

- Sufficient
- Insufficient

5- How often do you have grammar exercises during class time?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

6- How often do you have grammar exercises as homework?

- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7- In which kind of activities, do you feel uncomfortable/ nervous?

- Guided activities (fill in the gaps)
- Free activities (free writings)

8- What are the difficulties you encounter in English grammar?

- Use of tenses
- Use of subject-verb agreement
- Sentence construction (word order)
- Use of articles
- Use of plural markers
- Use of pronouns
- Use of adverbs instead of adjectives
- Use of prepositions

• Other, specify.....

9- Are the causes of the above difficulties due to :

- Insufficient grammar practice
- Lack of grammar materials (lesson books, exercise books)
- Insufficient teaching time devoted to grammar
- Inadequate teaching

10- If your grammar teacher had to change something in his teaching, what would it be?

.....  
.....

11- Are there any suggestions you can make to your classmates to overcome their grammar difficulties?

.....  
.....