Embedding Grammar while Developing Communicative Competence in English: Relevant Cultural Contexts and Teaching Approaches

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Abstract

This article examines Arab-heritage learners' preferences on how grammar is taught in English classes with a communicative competence focus, serving as a basis for developing principled teaching practices and teacher-training. Data was collected via a questionnaire from 336 adult learners that attend a private teaching facility using primarily Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods. In the study, learners were pooled into lower-level, or higher-level groups depending on their Common European Framework (CEF) language level. Data was collected on learners' preferred teaching/learning strategy choices including (i) deductive or inductive approaches, (ii) embedding grammar in local or 'international' cultural contexts, (iii) use of tasks and exercises or activities, and (iv) immediate or delayed teacher intervention. Results indicate Arab learners' overall preference of grammar instruction practices based on deductive approaches, conditional to teaching practices being embedded in meaningful contexts. Lower-level learners prefer local cultural contexts, while higher-level learners prefer Western/international ones. Very few Arab-heritage learners prefer methods based on guided inductive approaches using tasks and exercises with periodic teacher-intervention, and almost none chose the deep-end CLT inductive approach. Conversely, shallow-end inductive approaches, with contextualized tasks, activities and delayed teacher intervention are almost as popular as contextualized deductive approaches. This study indicates the importance of meaningful cultural contexts for embedding grammar instruction, reappraising contemporary deductive methods, and the balanced use of shallow-end CLT and inductive approach. These results should therefore help teachers and teacher-trainers realign popular Western beliefs about English teaching and teacher-training when operating in Arab-heritage communities.

Keywords: Arab heritage learners, communicative competence focus, cultural contextualization, embedding grammar, inductive and deductive approaches, teacher-training.