

## **The Beliefs and Practices of Bhutanese English Teachers in Teaching Grammar in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classroom in Bhutan**

**Pema Dendup**

Yadi Central School, Bhutan

[peeedendup@gmail.com](mailto:peeedendup@gmail.com)

### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

**Received:** 01/04/2020

**Accepted:** 20/07/2020

### **KEYWORDS**

**Inductive; Deductive;  
Approaches; Practices;  
Beliefs**

### **Abstract**

*This research aims to study the beliefs and practices of the Bhutanese English teachers about teaching English grammar in the Bhutanese ESL (English as Second Language) classrooms. English in Bhutan plays a vital role as a working language in offices, as a language of international communication, and a medium of instruction in the Bhutanese education system. Considering these multiple roles and its significance as a medium of instruction it is important to study the standard of English in Bhutan and work towards upholding its standard. Therefore; in this study, the teaching of grammar is considered as one essential aspect of teaching and learning English in schools. This study addresses questions on the Bhutanese teachers' approaches to teaching grammar and their beliefs and practices in the classrooms. It also discusses some matters concerning the English curriculum besides focusing on grammar. To study and identify the Bhutanese English teachers' beliefs about teaching English grammar, a total of 50 teachers from various schools from Bhutan were involved in this study. The findings from this study indicate that the Bhutanese teachers employ diverse approaches to the teaching of grammar, and among the various approaches most of the Bhutanese teachers follow the deductive method, followed by the inductive method, and there is a minority of teachers who still employ an obsolete method of teaching called lecture method. It is also worthy of note that some teachers in Bhutan are also aware of communicative approaches to language teaching and learning. The study also reflects the negative attitude of English teachers in Bhutan, especially in viewing English as a subject more challenging than other subjects.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Recent research by Tayjasant and Robinson (2014), found that “English is playing indispensable role in Bhutanese curricula” (p.108). It is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects except for Dzongkha (National language), and it plays a vital role as a working language in almost all offices in Bhutan. In addition, Van Driem (1994) also mentions that English is a language of diplomacy. Since English is being used in various domains in Bhutan, and more importantly in schools, it is very important to conduct studies related to the teaching of English. The findings of this paper, therefore, are based on the responses from 50 teacher participants, from various levels of schools which include Primary, Lower Secondary, Middle Secondary and Higher Secondary schools in Bhutan, who participated in the questionnaire survey and the interview. Grammar is one essential component of any

language, and good language learning requires a sound knowledge of the grammar of the target language. Schools are considered as an important agent for spreading change, where students are groomed into responsible citizens and leaders of tomorrow; the findings from this research will be relevant to the issues pertaining to pedagogy and the English curriculum, particularly related to teaching of grammar.

The expectations are high from teachers, parents, and students to excel in English, as good marks in the subject determines promotion to higher classes, but students are found lagging behind in the subject. English teachers in Bhutan are also not so confident in teaching grammar, and they consider English as a more challenging and difficult subject. Hence, an empirical study of the teacher beliefs and practices into the teaching of grammar has been conducted to study their methods of teaching and identify their pedagogical beliefs related to teaching grammar which would enable the teachers to use appropriate approaches to teach grammar.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1. Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching Grammar***

According to Ward (2012), the earliest influence on language teaching in the West was the formal study of Latin and Greek in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It started with introduction of the grammar rules of the written language, which were learnt off by heart. This traditional method of language teaching, known as Grammar-Translation Method became the basis for language teaching throughout the world as European empires grew and their education system developed on their colonies (Richards and Rogers, 1986 cited in Ward, 2012). Teaching grammar following this method is, however, still prevalent in EFL classrooms. It is taught deductively (Widodo, 2006, p.123). This approach was challenged in the 1950s with the growing influence of behaviorism on language teaching methodology, which was thought to be based on sound scientific principles. Language was seen as a set of patterns that had to be turned into habits. The habit development was through drills that were focused on the spoken language (Larsen Freeman, 1998, cited in Ward 2012). According to Larsen Freeman in „Teaching Grammar“ in traditional grammar teaching, it is a form- based approach, which uses structural syllabus and lessons composed of three phases: Presentation, Practice, and Production (or communication), often referred to as the PPP approach.

Le Van Canh (2012) in his qualitative case study on „Vietnamese secondary school teachers“ beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction“ states that “the place of grammar instruction remains controversial in the field of second-language teaching, as consensus has not yet been reached regarding whether grammar instruction helps learners gain proficiency in a second language” (p.90). Marton (1988) also points some common faults in teaching grammar, which he calls obvious pedagogical mistakes. Firstly; it is with introduction of new grammatical rules without proper planning. Secondly, teachers do not take enough trouble to ensure that the learners fully and clearly understand the meta-linguistic concepts and terms necessary for understanding the verbalization of a given principle. Thirdly, which Marton

considers as a serious fault is, mismatch of techniques in terms of providing pedagogically justifiable sequences of exercises. There is lack of pedagogical efficiency in assigning exercises, which is a haphazard combination. Finally, there is a lack of knowledge and skill transfer from the grammar lesson, in production of spontaneous reconstructive tasks. Teachers believe that once a given grammatical rule has been presented and some exercises performed, their business of teaching grammar is finished.

There was a reaction against a particular approach to teaching grammar rather than against grammar such as, making to follow prescriptive rules of rote learning, without any consideration for the communicative functions of language (Hung, 2003, p.41). According to Shoemaker (1991), Krashen's theory on second language acquisition has influenced the

concept of language teaching and has suggested new ideas for communicative techniques and simulation as opportunities to interact and learn language. This approach to grammar teaching, according to Widodo (2006), can make learners apply grammar in writing and speaking. Leng (1997, cited in Kaewsanchai, 2012) considers CLT as “one of the most competent language teaching methods available today” (p.206). Conversely, communicative language teaching (CLT), though it is gaining popularity, it seems there has been some misunderstanding among teachers and curriculum developers (Kaewsanchai, 2012, p.203).

Rivers and Temperly (1978) mention that “at some stage students must learn the grammar of the language. The learning may be approached deductively (students are given a grammatical rule with examples before they practice the use of a particular structure) or inductively (students see a number of examples of the rule in operation in discourse; practice its use, and then evolve a rule from these examples with the help of the teacher; or they see a number of examples, evolve a rule from these examples with the help of the teacher, and then practice using the structure” (p.110). Likewise, Widodo (2006) also proposes five-step procedures for teaching grammar, which among these are deductive and inductive approaches. This approach started in the 1960s as a reaction to behaviourism (Larsen Freeman, 1998 cited in Ward 2012).

Celce-Murcia (2001) gives the development of different approaches to language teaching as reactions to particular approaches. According to her, the order of sequence is, Grammar-translation approach, Direct approach, Reading approach, Audio-lingual and Oral situational approach and four other discernable approaches such as Cognitive approach, Affective-humanistic approach, Comprehension-based and Communicative approach. Celce-Murcia suggests EFL/ESL teachers to learn about the various approaches and methods available with and find out which practices have proved successful.

The Literature covers the oldest to the newest approaches to teaching grammar, though each of the subsequent approaches is a reaction to the previous, all are attributed with advantages and disadvantages and no particular approach has been considered as the best and most successful. Different approaches have been initiated since the start of language teaching in the history.

## ***2.2. Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching English Grammar in Bhutan***

Teaching grammar in Bhutan has been considered central to the teaching and learning of languages since the inception of western education. According to Gajmeer and Maxwell (2009), English grammar was taught based on an Indian curriculum, and Bhutan was completely dependent on India for materials and teachers. The text books were of high standard and grammar was taught rigorously from Classes III to VIII. The general standard of English was understood to be good. Though it mentioned that the grammar teaching was very intensive, nothing had been mentioned on the approaches to teaching grammar at that time, being followed by the Indian teachers. Gajmeer and Maxwell (2009) mention that, by the late 1980s, with the establishment of Bhutan's own Curriculum and Textbook Development Division, the English curriculum contained only selected structures up to class VIII and there was no grammar textbook. By 2000, an open concern regarding the standard of English had been raised and the formal grammar teaching started with prescribed textbooks from class VI onwards (Gajmeer & Maxwell 2009, p.29). The concern at that time was not on pedagogy in teaching grammar but was on having a prescribed grammar textbook.

The action research on „Improving the Use of Articles, Prepositions and Tenses“ of trainee teachers at Samtse College of Education, found answers to how was grammar being taught to students from class VI till XII. According to the report, grammar was taught in bits and pieces using manuals, sight words, pictures, flashcards, drawings and real objects to teach grammatical items till class VI. From class VI till VIII, grammar was never taught separately, but in integration with English and other subjects. A few examples from the texts would be selected and sketchy explanation would be provided. From class IX to XII,

grammar teaching further deteriorated, without any grammar textbooks (Gajmeer & Maxwell, 2009, p.29). If I recall how I was taught grammar, I can't get any vivid picture of a grammar lesson being taught. The English lessons were based on explanation of text, focussed on comprehension of

text rather than teaching grammatical items. If I was taught grammar, it was in preparation for examination, solving the past examination questions and making to learn answers by heart. Similarly, the Curriculum Education and Research Division (2009) found that, there is no clear cut instruction given for grammar activities, and grammar is taught much less often in the higher classes, leaving vast areas uncovered. In "Teacher's Perception about the New Curriculum: Reflections and Insights from the Classroom" by CERD (2009), it is stated that, a prescribed grammar for class XI and XII has not been developed leaving the learners lost and searching for subject materials.

This section states that there was no particular approach to teaching grammar, followed by the Bhutanese English teachers and most approaches were flawed and varied. The teachers never taught grammar systematically, paying lesser attention to grammar. One of the drawbacks could have been due to inexperienced curriculum developers and unavailability of materials which had caused grammar to be neglected in the curriculum.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study resorted to employing a questionnaire survey and Facebook interview as methods of collecting data from the field, which was solely based on computer mediated communication (CMC).

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

This research aims to address the following questions:

- What are the approaches of teaching grammar?
- What are the beliefs and practices of Bhutanese English teachers while teaching grammar?
- What are the factors that affect teaching English as a Second Language?

#### **3.2. Participants**

##### **3.2.1. Questionnaire Survey**

The data for this research was collected based on "convenience" and "snowball" sampling as used in "Interviews" by Le Van Cahn (2012) to study about Vietnamese secondary teachers' beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction. The data collection through questionnaire survey was conducted in a few schools, mostly from eastern Bhutan, where most of the acquaintances worked. The questionnaire was firstly sent to those acquaintances in different schools, with an instruction to distribute to other English teachers. The mode of reaching out the questionnaire was via an email, after having obtained informed consent from the respondents. To avoid low return rate, the participants were closely administered by providing frequent reminders. There were 50 English teachers, who participated in the questionnaire survey, representing Primary, Lower, Middle and Higher secondary schools from Bhutan, and their reflections and responses to the questionnaire will their own views and cannot be representative of other English teachers in the country. The objective of having an equal number of participants from all categories of schools could not be achieved as planned and expected earlier and taking into consideration the size of the sample data, no statistical test has been conducted in this study. There were 19 participants from Primary, 19 participants from Lower Secondary, 4 from Middle and 8 from Higher Secondary schools. All the teacher participants had undergone Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) from the Colleges of Education in the country prior to starting their teaching career.

##### **3.2.2. Facebook Interviews**

Considering the advantages, Facebook interviews were initiated with six interviewees, who were English teachers from different schools and different levels of schools. Three

teachers from Lower Secondary and three teachers from Primary schools participated in the interview. Their opinions and responses in this study cannot represent other English teachers in Bhutan, as the interview data had been derived based on a limited number of respondents. The interviewees had also participated in responding to the questionnaire, and it helped in comparing their responses. The interview was conducted live on Facebook which roughly took about 20 minutes, to send the questions and receive their answers. Its primary aim was to check the reliability and triangulate the survey.

As mentioned, no statistical test was done to analyze the data obtained from the survey, because the data sample was small. The Licert scale type questions asked to test the attitude and beliefs were analyzed by calculating into percentages based on the response frequency. Therefore, the analysis of data is descriptive.

**4. RESULTS**

**4.1. Questionnaire Survey**

The questionnaire survey responses of teacher’s beliefs towards teaching grammar are presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Responses of Teacher’s Beliefs Towards Teaching Grammar.**

Item No	Statement	Response frequency					Response Agreement (%)	Response Disagreement (%)	Response Don't Know (%)
		SA	A	DK	D	SD			
	I teach grammar with a lecture method, posing a few questions in the middle.	1	16	0	16	17	17(34%)	33(66%)	0
7.B	I teach grammar using a rule driven approach, presenting rules first and followed by practices applying the rules and making students to work with a few examples.	25	17	3	2	3	42(84%)	5(10%)	3(6%)
7.C	I teach grammar by letting students discover the rules by working their own on some examples and make them understand the rules.	5	23	5	12	5	28(56%)	17(34%)	5(10%)
7.D	Teaching grammar in context helps students learn better than teaching it in isolation	26	21	3	0	0	47(94%)	0	3(6%)

SA-Strongly Agree      A- Agree      DK-Don't Know  
 D-Disagree      SD-Strongly Disagree

**Table 2. Question 5. Teaching grammar is more challenging than teaching other subjects**

Responses	Agree	Disagree	Total
No. of participants	38	12	50
Percentage	76.00%	24.00%	100%

**Table 3. Question 6. I don't follow any approach in teaching grammar**

Responses	Yes	No	Total
No. of participants	13	37	50
Percentage	26.00%	74.00%	100%

The findings from the questionnaire survey indicate that teachers in Bhutan follow a diversity approaches to the teaching of English grammar, and there is a perception among the teachers that teaching grammar is more challenging. 76% of the respondents agreed with the statements „teaching grammar is more challenging than teaching other subjects“ and only a minority, 24% disagreed with the statement (table 1.2). A teacher participant from lower secondary school said that “teaching grammar is more or less equivalent to teaching Mathematics.” In response to the statement, I don’t follow any particular approach in teaching grammar“, 74% of the teacher participants were against the statement and a minority, 26% of the respondents were in agreement with the statement (table 1.3).About 66% of the teacher participants disagreed with teaching grammar using a lecture method, posing a few questions in the lesson, while 34% of the participants admitted to employing lecture method in teaching grammar. According to the findings, the main pedagogy to teach grammar in the Bhutanese ESL classroom is a deductive approach which is a rule driven method to teach grammar. A majority 84% of the teacher respondents agreed that they used the deductive approach to teaching grammar, but there were also some teachers who used the inductive method. About 56% of the respondents answered that they teach grammar by making their students to discover the rules by themselves and work their own to solve questions.

Teachers in Bhutan have a belief that grammar must not be taught in isolation, but taught in context for better understanding. A huge majority of 88% believed in teaching grammar in context. There was no respondent who believed in teaching grammar in isolation, but 6% of the teacher participants were uncertain about teaching grammar in context. One very remarkable finding here is, 100% of the teacher respondents believed in importance of grammar in development of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. To one of the primary school teachers “grammar is the heart of the language. Grammar makes one’s language perfect.”

One of the concerns this questionnaire expects to address concerns the beliefs of some teachers and educationists who treat grammar as a less important constituent of English. About 34% of the participants supported the statement “Grammar in Bhutan is treated separately and taught as part of examination preparation only.” On the other hand, 52% of the teacher participants were against the statement and 14 % of the respondents were neutral. In relation to this, 56% of the participants disagreed about spending more time on teaching literature, while 24% agreed to allocating maximum time in teaching literature texts, and most interestingly, 20% of the informants were not sure of how much they spend in teaching literature and grammar. One of the teacher respondents from higher secondary school remarked that “more space must be provided in the curriculum for teaching grammar rather than making the text literature heavy.” Similarly, one teacher participant from a primary school stressed that “teachers should devote equal time to teach grammar as in teaching

literature since grammar is imperative in the spoken and written aspects of working world after schooling.”

#### **4.2. Interview Data: Teachers’ Beliefs about Teaching English Grammar in Bhutan**

A structured Face book interview was conducted with six teacher participants, three English teachers from Lower Secondary Schools and three English teachers from Primary Schools. All the respondents in the interview had participated in the questionnaire survey prior to conducting the interview. The responses to various questions from the teacher respondents quoted below are in their own words and no alteration has been made to their expressions.

#### **Teachers’ Belief about Influence of L1 in Learning L2.**

All the teacher participants, from Primary and Lower Secondary school who participated in the interview, had the same belief about the interference of L1 in learning L2. The responses from the respondents are as follow:

Interviewer: *Second language acquisition or learning is believed to be interfered by a first language. Explain your belief, citing any suitable examples on any aspects of grammar.*

Primary Teacher 1: Yes, acquisition of second language is very much affected by first language. There are certain rules to be followed while teaching grammar but following the rules and getting into the real aspect of grammar is very difficult since English is our second language.

Primary Teacher 2: It is found to be true that learning L2 is interfered by our first language. For example, in my first language I do not have articles, as a result, when I write or speak English, the main problem I face is the usage of articles. In many cases, I do not know where to use articles and secondly, if I use in a sentence it would be mostly in wrong place.

Primary Teacher 3: Definitely, when children are made to explain something in second language, and when they feel difficult to express in English they try to mix languages.

Interviewer: *Second language acquisition or learning is believed to be interfered by a first language. Explain your belief, citing any suitable examples on any aspects of grammar.*

Lower Secondary Teacher 1: Yes, sure. I believe that second language is definitely dominated by first language. For instance, if there is no first language, there would not be any source of influence for second language. All the grammar especially in Bhutanese context is written in first language.

Lower Secondary Teacher 2: Second language learners encounter difficulty in many aspects of learning grammar as they are influenced by their first language. For instance, Dzongkha language usually follow SOV pattern, and English as a second language has SVO pattern.

Lower Secondary Teacher 3: Yes, L1 interferes L2 learning. For example, learning Dzongkha (L2) is interfered by Sharchop (L1) in pronunciation.

#### **Teachers’ belief about whether students need to be taught grammar.**

Grammar need not necessarily be taught at school because grammar can be learnt through interactions unconsciously, but some believe in explicit teaching of grammar. The beliefs about whether grammar needs to be taught in a formal classroom or not are reflected below:

Interviewer: *Some people believe that students don’t need to be taught grammar. They learn grammar through exposure to the target language. Do you agree?*

Primary Teacher 1: Since grammar is the heart of English language, it should be taught with full priority. Learning through exposure and learning from teaching is very different.

Primary Teacher 2: I sincerely feel that learning grammar through exposure would not be as effective as attending the grammar class. I have seen many native speakers who have not taken grammar class separately in their schooling period, attending the grammar class even after they are being employed. They are able to speak fluently, but can't write well.

Primary Teacher 3: I feel that children should be taught at least the basic rules. Of course, if they are exposed to speakers of the target language, watching movies, reading books and watching television, children would learn.

Interviewer: *Some people believe that students don't need to be taught grammar. They learn grammar through exposure to the target language. Do you agree?*

Lower Secondary Teacher 1: No, I disagree. If grammar is not taught to the students, they may not know the sentence structure, and they will not be able to write even a single sentence correctly.

Lower Secondary Teacher 2: Yes, language is learned through exposure, without having to attend formal classroom instructions. For instance, many Bhutanese would speak Nepali, Sharchop and Hindi fluently which are learned through contact.

Lower Secondary Teacher 3: Yes, only if there is a natural surroundings where L2 learner has access to L1 speakers. That will develop only fluency only, but grammar needs to be taught in order for a child to develop linguistic proficiency.

### **Integration of grammar in various skills.**

The teaching grammar must not be in isolation and treated separately. The views on integration of grammar with other strands are given below:

Interviewer: *The Curriculum guide provides standards for all skills: Reading, Writing, listening and speaking, from classes PP till XII. How do you integrate grammar in teaching these skills?*

Primary Teacher 1: We go into teaching as per the guide. And we also try to focus in all these strands while teaching in classrooms. From reading to writing and listening to speaking, it's all about grammar to be followed in English language.

Primary Teacher 2: Yes, I do. It is solely taken care by writing portfolio and reading portfolio, assigned to the students. In case of speaking and listening, we conduct book talk, debate and extempore speech where grammar is observed.

Primary Teacher 3: Teaching grammar in isolation could be monotonous and less effective, because it's all about memorizing the rules and practicing. In one of the units I took last year, it mostly taught us how to make a grammar lesson fun by integrating grammar with other stuff. Grammar can be most of the time integrated with other skills like reading, listening, speaking and writing. For example, I can teach „simple past“ through story telling which would be fun for the learners.

Interviewer: *The Curriculum guide provides standards for all skills: Reading, Writing, listening and speaking, from classes PP till XII. How do you integrate grammar in teaching these skills?*

Lower Secondary Teacher 1: Yes. For example, in writing, I assign a writing task after a lesson is taught and correct their work.



Lower Secondary Teacher 2: Students are introduced to different standards of learning and grammar skills are imparted to them through all standards of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Lower Secondary Teacher 3: I integrate grammar in teaching other skills. 1. Encourage communicative language teaching (CLT). 2. Give them activities which involve them. 3. Change the mode of teaching by replacing traditional teaching methods. Give them practice exercises. Correction of errors and provide positive corrective feedback.

### **Teachers' classroom experiences in teaching grammar.**

Is the teaching of grammar as interesting as teaching other subjects? The responses based on classroom experiences are presented below:

Interviewer: *Have you ever had any interactive and interesting grammar lesson with your students? Could you share what made it so interesting and interactive?*

Primary Teacher 1: Teaching the usage of articles in class four was very interesting and interactive. I taught them where to use articles a, an, and the. Then I gave a few examples and made them to use articles of their own. So, this was the most interesting lesson that I ever had.

Primary Teacher 2: No, usually I present the rules first and ask children to solve some examples.

Primary Teacher 3: I had a very interesting class with my grade six students when I taught them on regular and irregular verbs. In the first step, I told them a story, and they were let to listen to it. Next thing, I retold the story, and they were made to write down whatever they heard. After that, they were made to circle all the words that described the things in the past. And finally they were made to explore the rules for regular and irregular verbs. They found it quite interesting, and I enjoyed at the same time. There are many ways where we can make our grammar lesson fun.

Interviewer: *Have you ever had any interactive and interesting grammar lesson with your students? Could you share what made it so interesting and interactive?*

Lower Secondary Teacher 1: Yes, I had one interesting lesson, which I would like to share. It was when I taught eight parts of speech, particularly on interjection. Here interjection talks about the feelings and students are found so interested to share and pronounce words like wow! hurrah!

Lower Secondary Teacher 2: Yes, teaching of prepositions such as, in, on, under, etc. was quite interesting with new language learners. They could easily pick up the rule using objects and placing it in different locations.

Lower Secondary Teacher 3: Yes, I did have interesting grammar lesson with my students. I used pictures, visuals, audio, and practiced exercises, provided positive corrective feedback. Encouraged them read, write, speak and listen by making the lesson communicative. Change teaching styles and methods.

### **Teachers' belief about students' grammar competency**

The teacher participants had a mixed type of response, in respect to students' ability in learning and applying grammar as mentioned below:

Interviewer: *Could you comment briefly on how good your students are at learning and applying grammar?*

Primary Teacher 1: Since the number of students in class is less, with eight students, I cannot say that they are excellent, but I can say that they are good. I can give attention to all the children, and it is very easy to make them understand and evaluate.

Primary Teacher 2: Children are not that much good at and applying grammar as children usually fetch low marks in grammar in exam.

Primary Teacher 3: My students are really good in learning grammar, however, in the application part they are not in the position to apply as much as they learned. When it comes to speaking, they do not get enough time to practice, therefore, they encounter problem in speaking. In writing, they are much confident as they practice a lot in the class.

Interviewer: *Could you comment briefly on how good your students are at learning and applying grammar?*

Lower Secondary Teacher 1: To be frank, whether students are good or bad, it is in the hands of teacher. I should say that my students are very good at grammar, especially to apply the grammar rule that I teach.

Lower Secondary Teacher 2: Students are usually influenced by their first language, and they find it difficult in grammar learning as use of second language like English is only in the classroom. The students are exposed to other local dialects outside the classroom and do not get an opportunity to use the learned language.

Lower Secondary Teacher 3: Many of them improved satisfactorily. This is attributed to conducive environment, practice exercises, positive corrective feedback, encouragement, availability of reading materials other than the texts.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Questionnaire Survey**

The teachers who participated in the survey seemed to be following different approaches to teaching grammar, but responding to the question of whether appropriate approaches are employed in teaching grammar. 26 participants out of 50 mentioned that teachers should not be confined to using only one particular approach, but change their approaches according to the needs of students, and this reflects the flexibility of the Bhutanese English teachers. They are in position to understand the learners' styles which suit various students, because there are different types of learners and learning styles where teachers should adapt accordingly. A majority of teachers disagreed with using lecture method to teach grammar, which is a positive aspect for the teachers, and shows that they are able to differentiate teaching English from other subjects. The fact is, teaching English demands the modern and appropriate skills, forgetting the obsolete teaching skills and strategies. The deductive approach to teaching grammar is mostly followed by the Bhutanese English teachers, followed by the inductive method. The teaching of rules, followed by student activity in class and providing home task is considered an easy procedure for students to learn and less hectic for teachers to teach. Some teachers also agreed on using more complex method in teaching grammar, which is the inductive method, where students are made to work on their own and discover the rules. This method is activity-oriented compared to directly teaching the rules and engaging them with activities. The teacher participants did not raise any concern about the grammar textbooks they have been using to teach their students. In my own experience, for classes IV to VIII, the prescribed grammar text books don't provide for any productive learning of grammar by students themselves, because the text books have activities at the end of each topic, with answers to questions. Hence, this has hindered teachers wishing to monitor their students' effective extended learning.

A majority (88%) of teachers in Bhutan believes in teaching grammar in context rather than in isolation, but some teachers were not aware of the possibilities of teaching grammar in context. Three respondents have mentioned that grammar lessons should be taught with the help of literature texts, without forgetting the aspects of grammar. Though many were found to be positive about teaching grammar in context, but I believe that most teachers in Bhutan forget grammar when they teach stories, essays and poems, as they are more focussed on the content; however, it can be made inclusive by teaching important grammar items rather than simply teaching grammar during the allocated and stipulated time and teaching rules from the grammar text. Combination of rules together with real examples of uses can foster their understanding and application in the real setting. There is a question being raised whether grammar is taught for a sake of examination and not for real learning of grammar. I don't remember any specific grammar lessons being taught when I was a student. A huge time was spent on covering the literature and hardly any time was allocated for grammar lessons. I am able to recall a few instances, where teachers came with the past examination questions and solved the grammar questions and reminded us to refer the past papers. Therefore, effective teaching and learning of grammar was not prevalent. This still seems to be a practice nowadays with some teachers as per the findings, which show that grammar is treated as a separate constituent for the purpose of examination. Teachers should not possess such a mentality, and teaching grammar must be treated as an integral part of learning English.

A unanimous agreement was observed in the participants' responses about importance of grammar in developing the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The assessment of students' learning in Bhutan is based on assessment of four skills, where students maintain writing and reading portfolios and listening and speaking activities are conducted to assess their learning. A doubt here is whether teachers take grammatical aspects seriously enough to assess grammar and whether all teachers carry out assessment uniformly. Though guided by mandates of the curriculum, there are discrepancies in carrying out the assessment in a fair manner, as teachers follow their own styles of assessment, and some teachers provide marks without any evidence of work, by looking at students' faces, hence the assessment is conducted unjustly. I must say that assessment is an essential feature of teaching and learning, therefore, there must be judicious assessment carried out, guided by appropriate criteria designed by the curriculum department.

## **5.2. Interviews**

The teachers who participated in the interview showed unanimous agreement on the influence of first language in learning a second language. The interviewees believed that the learning of English is interfered with by their first languages, and they pointed out some areas of dominant influence such as pronunciation, syntax and use of articles. In the view of one teacher-participant from a Lower Secondary School, "L1 interferes L2 learning. For example, learning Dzongkha (L2) is interfered by Sharchop (L1) in pronunciation." Another teacher remarked, "It is found to be true that learning L2 is interfered by our first language. For example, in my first language I do not have articles, as a result, when I write or speak English, the main problem I face is the usage of articles. In many cases, I do not know where to use articles and secondly, if I use in a sentence it would be mostly in wrong place." The areas mentioned by the respondents, are the areas of true influence, as in the learning of any second languages, there will be a role of the first language.

As pointed out by the respondents, the Bhutanese languages like Sharchop and Dzongkha do not share the same features as English. English follows a SVO (Subject-verb-object) pattern of word order, while Dzongkha and Sharchop follow SOV pattern which is distinctive compared to English. For example, "The boy is playing football" in English would be "boy football playing" in Dzongkha or Sharchop, and it also shows a lack of article. In Dzongkha and Sharchop, adjectives don't precede nouns like in English, but it appears after nouns. For instance, "A beautiful girl" is "bum jarim" in Dzongkha or "zamin morab" in

Shar chop where “bum” is a girl and “jarim” is beautiful. Such differences can be easily transferred into English language, as this is deeply rooted in one’s first languages.

The respondents from both Primary Schools and Lower Secondary Schools believed in explicit instruction of grammar at school, while most of the teachers from Lower Secondary School also believed in learning grammar through interaction or contact with the speakers of target language. According to one of the teacher- participants from a Lower Secondary School, “Yes, only if there is a natural surroundings where L2 learner has access to L1 speakers. That will develop fluency only, but grammar needs to be taught in order for a child to develop linguistic proficiency.” The teacher respondents, in general had a belief that, for successful learning and application of grammar in writing and speaking; grammar must be taught and interaction with L1 speakers can be an incentive for better learning of grammar.

The four skills of writing, reading, listening and speaking are considered important, and teachers integrate grammar in teaching all the skills. One teacher said, “I integrate grammar in teaching other skills. 1. Encourage communicative language teaching (CLT). 2. Give them activities which involve them. 3. Change the mode of teaching by replacing traditional teaching methods. Give them practice exercises. Correction of errors and provide positive corrective feedback. ”A convergence of thought was observed between the questionnaire response and the interview responses in this respect, with a common belief, treating the four strands as important in teaching grammar. Though the belief came as one, but there still will be a concern in successful integration of grammar and uniformity of assessing based on the four skills.

The teacher participants from both Primary and Lower Secondary, mentioned about various methods used in teaching grammar. Two teachers from Primary shared that rule-based approach is followed, while one teacher mentioned about an interesting story told to teach past tense by making students discover the rules. The latter which is more student-centered would facilitate active learning because what they do by themselves cannot be easily forgotten compared to what is said and explained by teachers. It was also noteworthy to mention that a teacher from Lower Secondary School also shared about a communicative approach to language teaching and using audio and visuals to teach grammar.

The respondents had mixed feelings about their students’ grammar competency. Two teachers from Primary School said that the students are good at learning grammar, but one teacher responded that students are not so good at grammar, and they obtain low marks in grammar. Likewise, teachers from Lower Secondary School shared about their children’s improvement in grammar. One of the teachers from Lower Secondary school attributed the low standard of English to interference of first language and lack of environment to use English outside the classrooms. If there should be a successful teaching and learning grammar at school, communicative approaches should be followed, focusing more on student-centered learning rather than teacher- centered learning. The schools should adopt policies related to language use at school.

### 5.3. *Comparison between the Questionnaire Survey and the Interview*

The deductive approach to teaching of grammar is prevalent in the Bhutanese classroom, followed by the inductive teaching. In addition to the two methods, there are teachers who also resort to following a lecture method, though how suitable this method in teaching grammar is a big question. This particular group of teachers is unaware of pedagogies for teaching grammar, and they are unable to differentiate the teaching of grammar from teaching the content-based subjects like History and Geography. However, a convergence of thought has been observed between the respondents, who answered the questionnaire and those who participated in the interview, because the interviewees, like the questionnaire survey respondents, mentioned about employing rule-based teaching of grammar and incorporating a communicative approach, involving more communicative tasks rather than always teaching grammar rules and making students to apply the rules. Likewise, all the interviewees believed in the interference of first language (L1) in learning second

language (L2), and the areas like pronunciation and syntax have been cited as major areas of possible influence. The perception of the Bhutanese teachers is that English is a difficult subject is due to the influence of the first language, and this also reflects the non-native English teachers' lukewarm attitude towards the subject and their low level of confidence and enthusiasm in teaching English. In my opinion, it is quite clear to say that the non-native teachers are no better teachers of English than native teachers. The non-native teachers have problems in fluency, using the tenses, articles and prepositions correctly, hindering the delivery of right messages. As teachers have problems in essential grammatical ingredients, a question is, whether teachers are able to spot errors, correct errors and provide necessary constructive feedback, as error correction and feedback mechanisms are regarded as a high priority by the Ministry of Education.

A majority of teacher participants, as mentioned in the previous sections, are not positive about their competency in teaching grammar, viewing it as more challenging than other subjects. Now, a question is how good their students are at learning grammar? The teachers who participated in the interview were not certain, and they had mixed feelings commenting about the grammar competency of their students, which could be a ripple effect of the performance of the teachers. Most students are found lagging behind in English, but the teachers are quite positive about their potential for improvement.

There was also general agreement from both the survey respondents and interview respondents about the importance of the four skills namely writing, reading, listening and speaking. They believed in observing and integration of grammatical aspects into these skills while teaching and assessing the students' work. The interview respondents feel that grammar must be taught at school and the four important skills must be infused with grammatical elements while teaching and carrying out assessment, which in one way other talks about teaching grammar not in isolation, but integrated within the four skill areas as mentioned by the survey respondents.

#### **5.4. Comparison with the Literature**

Studies related to beliefs and defining belief have been viewed by many researchers as a challenging task, compared to carrying research in other areas, though necessity in studying teacher beliefs is considered crucial to know about classroom practises. Pajares (2013) thinks that "researchers have defined beliefs in terms of their own agendas" (p.326). According to Kagan (2012, cited in Le Van Cahn, 2012), one of the challenges of researching teachers' beliefs lies in the fact that beliefs are tacit and unobservable, and teachers may have difficulties articulating them" (p.91). In line with this, the study of the Bhutanese teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching English grammar was really challenging like Le Van Cahn (2012), studying the „Vietnamese secondary school teachers" beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction. Firstly, in spite of the repeated follow-ups and reminders on the survey questionnaire, a good number of respondents failed to reply on time, and some even did not reply, and secondly, the expected participant of 80 participants, 20 from each category of school, but the expected turnout was not achieved. This reflects the complexity of the term „belief" itself, and the difficulty in researching teacher beliefs, because beliefs are not observable, and there seems to be some factors affecting the study of beliefs. The same problem was encountered, while conducting the Facebook interview, where those many teachers who had agreed to participate, failed to participate. It is a dilemma whether teachers don't want to disclose their classroom practices and beliefs or whether they are burdened by academic tasks or other obligations.

The earliest method of teaching language was the Grammar –Translation Method, which according to Widodo (2006), is still prevalent in EFL classrooms and is taught deductively. The findings from the questionnaire survey and the interview show that grammar is also taught deductively in the ESL classrooms in Bhutan, but use of mother

tongue in translation of grammar in teaching grammar items has not been mentioned by any of the respondents.

The practice of using a mother tongue to translate the target grammar might be a practice in EFL classrooms for teaching language as mentioned by Widodo. However, I would support the honest beliefs put forth by the respondents about majority of teachers following the deductive approach, followed by the inductive approach in Bhutan. The use of mother tongue in teaching though is a possible scenario in lower classes; it is with small children who undergo transition from their homes to school setting. Code switching at this stage (mostly Sharchopkha or Tshangla with a target language) is an accepted norm by everyone, but use of only the target language is focused in the higher classes, though it is attributed to both positive and negative sides. The deductive method followed by the Bhutanese teachers is a form-based method, consisting of presentation, practice and production, where teachers give an input on a grammar topic, followed by assigning some related activities or practices, and finally making to use it in their real communication, be it in writing or speaking. This characterizes a traditional method used in teaching grammar, as there is a more recent method of language teaching called communicative language teaching (CLT), involving more use of language in interactive ways than mere teaching of rules. The Bhutanese English teachers are more inclined towards using a rule-oriented teaching because only a small number of teachers have considered using a communicative approach.

According to Gajmeer and Maxwell (2009), from their action research, there is no well-defined approach followed by teachers to teach grammar. It was taught in bits and pieces, using the teacher's manual with sketchy explanation of grammatical aspects, and there was a problem in procuring textbooks containing prescribed syllabus. It was the worst experience for the higher classes, for example, with classes XI and XII, with very little teaching of grammar without any grammar textbooks. The teacher participants from both the survey and the interview did not make any mention about any problems related to the English syllabus and instructional materials, and I am confident in stating that the new English curriculum has brought positive changes to the English curriculum. The impacts of the change which has been in effect from 2006, has firstly, equipped teachers and students with enough instructional materials like teacher's manual, textbooks and other references which provide adequate details on what to teach, how to teach, how to assess students' learning, and how much to teach in an academic year. In this respect too, no comments have been made by the respondents, however; I believe that teachers are still found confused and lost within the curriculum, particularly talking about teaching of grammar; grammar topics are based on their preferences though the guide states some objectives related to grammar. The teaching is concentrated on teaching a few grammar topics such as tenses, articles, subject-verb agreement and leaving out lots of important grammar lessons which are worth teaching. It is most often done with the intention of helping students pass an examination, and teaching of grammar is pushed towards the end, showing that grammar is taught as a practice for the examination. This has been proved to be true with some (34%) of the teacher participants, which reflects a serious pedagogical loophole and a negative attitude of the teachers which needs an immediate attention and rectification for good of students. To them, teaching and learning of grammar is a short term benefit for students rather than for creating long term benefits. Therefore, teachers must teach the right quantity of what must be taught, as classrooms these days are more facilitative compared to the past. The blame game regarding the curriculum materials and what to be taught, how much to be taught, and how to assess students' work should be the problem of the past.

I must finally note that, the teaching of English grammar was bearing no name of any approach in the past few years. It had to encounter a bad time, having to face a harsh reality without any proper textbooks, improper curriculum planning, and perhaps the teachers too were less exposed to modern development in the field of teaching compared to the present day. With the passage of time and the advancement in the field of education; the teachers are keeping abreast of new development in teaching. The teachers nowadays are mostly

employing the deductive method, while there are also some teachers following the inductive methods. It is also quite alarming to hear that a few teachers are also aware of a communicative language teaching method, making their classroom more lively and interactive. The teachers have changed over the past few years in terms of changing their pedagogy of teaching grammar, and I see a future where teachers are mostly inclined towards using a communicative method of teaching.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study of teachers' beliefs and practices of the Bhutanese English teachers about teaching grammar in ESL classrooms in Bhutan has helped in finding out the Bhutanese teachers' beliefs and practices in the classrooms and also about teachers' views on the capability of the Bhutanese children in learning grammar. It also explored matters pertaining to the English curriculum besides discussing the teaching of grammar in particular. English teachers in Bhutan are found to be using diverse approaches to teaching grammar such as the deductive method, the inductive method, and a minority uses the lecture method. Among the approaches mentioned, the deductive method (rule-driven method) is most used teaching methodology in teaching grammar practiced in the Bhutanese ESL classrooms, followed by the inductive teaching method. It is also noteworthy to mention that the Bhutanese English teachers are also abreast with recent developments in the field of teaching language, because a communicative language teaching approach is adopted by a few teachers.

This particular study has facilitated a good comparison, in respect to the teaching grammar in the past years and at the present. The positive development has been observed, including the use of more appropriate pedagogy, availability of the curriculum materials, the implementation new English curriculum based on student-centered teaching and learning. Though problems related to the curriculum pose no more threats to teaching and learning of grammar, the interference of the first language (L1) in learning a second language is considered deeply rooted in the Bhutanese teachers and students. Because of the limited use of English in Bhutan outside school classrooms, English is still perceived as a foreign language and viewed as one difficult subject in the Bhutanese curriculum, and the Bhutanese teachers are less confident in teaching English, particularly grammar.

## **REFERENCES**

- Celce-Murcia, M (Ed.). (2001). *Teaching English as a second language*. Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Curriculum and Educational Research Division, Bhutan. (2009). *Teacher's perception about the new English curriculum: Reflections and insights from the classroom*. Paro: Paro College of Education.
- Bhutan. (2007). *English Curriculum: Assessment and Evaluation (Class PP-XII)*. Paro, Department of School Education: Curriculum and Professional Support Division.
- Gajmeer, N, B., & Maxwell, T. (2009). *Improving the Use of Articles, Prepositions and Tenses: "Action Research Study"* (pp.1-110). In RABSEL- the CERD educational journal. Paro, Bhutan: Centre for Educational Research and Development, Paro College of Education, Royal University of Bhutan.
- Hung, T.T. N. (2012). *How linguistics can contribute to teaching of grammar*. In J.E. James (Ed.) *The language classroom: Changing approaches and practices* (41-60). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Kaewsanchai, N. (2012). *Avoid cutting a frog in an English class: How to design motivating and meaningful grammar lessons*. In J.E. James (Ed.) *The language classroom: Changing approaches and practices* (pp.202-218). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

- Leng, H. (1997). New bottles, old wine: Communicative Language Teaching in China. *English Teaching Forum*, 35/4, 38-40.
- Le Van Cahn. (2012). Interviews: Case study. In R. Barnard & A. Burns (Eds.) In *Researching language teacher cognition and practice: International case studies* (pp.90-108) Bristol: England Multilingual matters.
- Marton, W. (1988). *Methods in English Language Teaching: Framework and Options*. Hempstead, United Kingdom: Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd.
- Pajares, M.F. (2013). Teachers' Beliefs and Educational Research: Cleaning Up a Messy Construct, 62, (pp.307-332). Florida, United States: American Educational Research Association and SAGE.
- Rivers, W.M., & Temperly, M.S. (1987). *A practical guide to the teaching of English as a second or foreign language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shoemaker, C. L., & Shoemaker, F.F. (1991). *Interactive techniques for the ESL classroom*, Boston, Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle publishers.
- Tayjasanant, C., & Robinson, M. (2014). Code switching in Universities in Thailand and Bhutan. In R. Barnard & J. McLellan. (Eds.). *Code switching in University English – Medium Classes: Asian perspectives* (pp.92-117), Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Van Driem, G. (1994). *Language policy in Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development*. Gartmore: Kiscadale Publications.
- Ward, C. (2012). Have teachers ever really changed their attitude to grammar. In J.E. James. (Ed.) *The language classroom: Changing approaches and practices* (pp.117-136). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Widodo, H.P. (2006). Approaches and procedures for teaching grammar, 6, 122-141. Retrieved on 20th March 2015 from <http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/2006v5n1nar1.pdf>

### **Authors Bio data**

***Pema Dendup is a school teacher at Yadi Central School, Bhutan. He holds an MA in English Language and Linguistics from the National University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) in Brunei.***

---