

L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices among Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers

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Received: 1 April 2024

Available Online: 15 June 2024

Revised: 15 May 2024

DOI: 10.5861/ijrsl.2024.018

Accepted: 30 May 2024

ISSN: 2243-7754

Online ISSN: 2243-7762

OPEN ACCESS



Abstract

Teaching grammar is an essential element of language learning and teaching, particularly in the context of learning a second language (L2). The methods, knowledge, and practices related to teaching grammar can greatly influence how effectively grammar is taught. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Chinese higher vocational institutions tend to have favorable views on the significance of teaching grammar. However, there is diversity in their opinions regarding the most effective approaches to grammar instruction. This research focuses on examining the teaching of second language (L2) grammar, along with the grammatical knowledge and practices of EFL teachers in Chinese higher vocational schools. The insights gained from this research are intended to improve the quality of grammar instruction provided by teachers. The participants of the study are 405 Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers coming from different patterns of vocational colleges concerning age, sex and years of teaching. The study employed the descriptive research method, and a locally designed questionnaire with a 4-level Likert scale including 60 items employed to collect data concerning L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices. In addition, it is reported that there were significant differences in age in terms of L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices. Hence, a proposed pedagogical plan to enhance the L2 grammar teaching for Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers was put forward.

Keywords: L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge, practices, Chinese higher vocational colleges, EFL teachers

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1. Introduction

L2 grammar teaching refers to the pedagogical approaches and techniques employed to instruct learners in the grammatical rules and structures of a second language (L2). This kind of instruction usually entails outlining grammatical principles, describing how they should be used, giving instances, and assigning practice problems to ensure that students fully comprehend and apply the rules. The teaching of grammar is a crucial aspect of language instruction and acquisition, and second language (L2) grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge, and practices can exert a significant impact on the effectiveness of grammar teaching. In this response, these three factors will be discussed specifically in the context of Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers. L2 grammar teaching especially teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching can influence their instructional decisions and classroom practices (Yusof, 2018). For example, some teachers may believe that explicit grammar instruction is necessary, while others may believe that grammar should be taught implicitly through communication and authentic language use. Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers generally held positive attitudes towards the importance of grammar instruction, but their beliefs about the best way to teach grammar varied. Some teachers emphasized the importance of explicit instruction, while others preferred a more communicative approach.

Many Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers hold a traditional view of grammar teaching. They believe that grammar is the foundation of language learning and that students must master grammatical rules in order to communicate effectively. However, some teachers also believe that grammar instruction should be integrated with other language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and that grammar should be taught in context (Alsied, Ibrahim and Pathan, 2018). Teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching may be influenced by a range of factors, including their personal experiences as language learners, their understanding of language acquisition theories, and their training in pedagogy. It is apparent that teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching significantly influence their grammatical knowledge and classroom practices. In the context of Chinese higher vocational EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching, there is a need to investigate how teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching affect their classroom practices and their grammatical knowledge.

Teachers' grammatical knowledge is also vital for effective grammar instruction. In order to teach grammar effectively, teachers need a solid understanding of the grammar structures they are teaching, as well as the ability to explain those structures clearly and accurately. There is a tendency that Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers generally had a good understanding of basic grammatical concepts, but some struggled with more advanced or complex structures. While many Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers have a strong understanding of grammar, some teachers lack in-depth knowledge of complex grammar structures. As a result, some teachers may rely on textbooks and other teaching materials to supplement their own grammatical knowledge. Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers are likely to have varying levels of proficiency and expertise in English grammar. While many teachers may have completed formal English language training programs, such as undergraduate or graduate degree programs, others may have only completed short-term training or self-study programs. As a result, some teachers may have a strong grasp of English grammar and be able to teach it effectively, while others may struggle to explain grammatical concepts to their students. The lack of sufficient grammatical knowledge themselves can lead to ineffective grammar teaching and a focus on rote learning rather than meaningful language use. The level of grammatical knowledge can vary depending on their educational background and training. Teachers who have studied English literature or linguistics may have a deeper understanding of English grammar, while those with a more general education background may have a more limited knowledge of grammar rules.

On the same note, teachers' common practices in the classroom can also impact the effectiveness of grammar instruction. For example, some teachers may rely on traditional grammar drills and exercises, while others may

incorporate more communicative activities or use technology to support grammar instruction (Al-khresheh and Orak, 2021). Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers tended to use a combination of explicit and implicit teaching methods, but also noted a lack of innovation and diversity in classroom practices. Many Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers tend to use a deductive approach to grammar teaching, which involves presenting grammatical rules and asking students to apply them in exercises. However, some teachers also use an inductive approach, which involves guiding students to discover grammatical rules through contextual examples. In addition, many teachers supplement their grammar instruction with multimedia resources, such as videos and online exercises. In their teaching practices, Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers may employ a variety of methods for teaching grammar. Some common practices may include: using textbooks and grammar exercises to teach grammar rules, providing explicit grammar instruction and explanations, using examples and models to illustrate grammar rules, incorporating grammar into writing assignments and activities, correcting grammar errors in students' writing and speech.

The previous surveys seldom centered on the L2 grammar teaching of Chinese higher vocational college where students' English levels are comparatively lower than undergraduate universities. Hence, there is a need to investigate the status quo of Chinese higher vocational EFL teaching so as to give proper instructions on L2 grammar teaching. Overall, effective grammar instruction does require a combination of appropriate grammar teaching, strong grammatical knowledge, and effective classroom practices. This study aims to analyze L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices among Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers. Findings from this study would contribute to the enhancement of teachers' grammar teaching by proposing an action plan that will help 2L educators to enhance their teaching platforms.

This research paper was to propose a pedagogical plan for grammar teaching. More specifically, it sought to describe the profile of respondents in terms of age, sex and years of teaching; determine the L2 grammar teaching in terms of teaching beliefs, teaching procedures and teaching techniques; identify the grammatical knowledge as reflected in metalanguage recognition and metalanguage production; assess the L2 grammar practices of respondents as to traditional, communicative and task-based approaches; test the differences in responses when grouped according to profile; test the relationships among L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices and propose an action plan to enhance the L2 grammar teaching for Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers.

2. Methods

The study used a quantitative-descriptive method. The data were gathered through standardized survey questionnaires that suited the problem set in the study. This study is descriptive for it described the personal and professional profile of the respondents. This study is quantitative in nature and it also determined the relationships between L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices of the respondents. The respondents of the study were comprised by 405 Chinese higher vocational college EFL teachers randomly selected who come from different patterns of vocational colleges: Business Vocational College, Normal Vocational College, Technical College of Industry and Economy, Finance and Trade Vocational College. The total number of the respondents was calculated through Raosoft sampling size calculator in order to ensure the validity of the sampling size. The option of the above patterns of college may shed light on the issue that EFL teachers from different types of college may hold different teaching beliefs and adopt different teaching methods respectively.

This paper employed standardized but modified questionnaires which consists of 60 indicators about L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices among Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers. Each category includes several questions which are designed by Likert 4-point scales, with 1 representing "strongly disagree", 2 standing for "disagree", 3 meaning "agree" and 4 representing "strongly agree". Following data collection, statistical treatment such as frequency distribution, weighted mean and interpretations were used to describe and infer the features of each variable as well as the correlation between variables. The acquired data were statistically analyzed using the Statistic Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)28 program. First, the

questionnaire's reliability and validity, as well as the L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices, were examined; second, descriptive statistics were used to compute the means and standard deviations for each item of the L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices. The demographics used percentages to characterize the participants' fundamental background information. Thirdly, Pearson's correlation was utilized to do correlational analysis in order to evaluate the associations that existed between L2 grammar teaching and grammatical knowledge, grammatical knowledge and practices, L2 grammar teaching and practices. Fourth, it investigated whether aspects in participants' L2 grammar teaching and grammatical knowledge had a significant influence on practices.

The data collection of the dissertation is requested permission from the school administrators prior to conducting the research. The participants were then permitted to complete the questions willingly, and the goal of the research was fully explained to them before they took part in this survey. The anonymity of the participants was protected during the survey because they did not reveal their identities on the questionnaires. The participants' anonymity was protected, as was their reported data, which was only utilized in this study. Finally, the referential writers, as well as their thoughts and works, were appropriately credited and included in the references.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1

Summary Table on L2 Grammar Teaching

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Teaching Belief	3.10	Agree	3
Teaching Procedures	3.26	Agree	1
Teaching Techniques	3.22	Agree	2
Composite Mean	3.19	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 1 presents the summary of respondents' responses on L2 grammar teaching. grand composite mean refers to 3.19, with the verbal interpretation of "agree". The Composite Mean of teaching procedures is 3.26 ranking the first, the Composite Mean of teaching techniques is 3.22 ranking the second, and that of teaching beliefs is 3.10 ranking the last. The data result demonstrates that teaching elements on grammar are considered to a medium extent, which reveals that teachers are more inclined to emphasize teaching procedures than teaching techniques and teaching beliefs. Teachers resorted to implicit methods of teaching grammar only when deemed necessary. The choice between these two primary instructional strategies was influenced by the specific grammatical concepts being addressed. Researchers have recommended incorporating interactive exercises to enhance the effectiveness of grammar instruction, including warm-up activities, group projects, debates, and explaining diagrams. Moreover, applying language in practice is beneficial for understanding grammatical elements. Additionally, teaching grammar within a context requires students to recognize different grammatical rules and the contextual elements that affect their use, such as purpose, topic, genre, and characters involved. Oztürk (2018) also pointed out that the most crucial aspect is ensuring that students are able to utilize the target language both effectively and precisely, guided by an understanding of grammar rules. Teachers must craft instructional strategies that not only heighten students' awareness of these language rules but also aid them in acquiring language skills more efficiently. This, in turn, enables students to share their thoughts in a way that is both significant and appropriate to the context.

Table 2

Summary Table on Grammatical Knowledge

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Metalanguage Recognition	3.26	Agree	1.5
Metalanguage Production	3.26	Agree	1.5
Composite Mean	3.26	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

Table 2 shows that grand composite mean is 3.26, with the verbal interpretation of "agree". The Composite

Mean of metalanguage recognition and metalanguage production is the same, getting 3.26. It indicates that two aspects on grammatical knowledge are considered to the same extent of significance. Both recognition and production contribute to a learner's overall metalinguistic awareness, which is the ability to think about and analyze language as a system. While generating metalanguage enables learners to actively employ grammatical concepts in communication, recognizing metalanguage aids learners in understanding grammatical concepts when they come across them. While production enables learners to apply corrections or concerns about language use, recognition of metalanguage helps learners grasp feedback and corrections. Sanosi (2022) employed a descriptive quantitative approach to examine the relationship between metalinguistic understanding and grammatical precision. This study defined metalinguistic knowledge as the learners' grasp of fundamental grammatical components related to word categories and structures. The findings suggested that learners' grammatical accuracy could be improved through explicit grammatical instruction, which includes clear explanations of grammatical terminology. Instruction focused on metalanguage can accelerate the acquisition of grammatical knowledge, leading to improved grammatical accuracy. They recommended using a combination of both explicit and implicit teaching approaches to effectively grasp grammatical rules and their applications.

Table 3

Summary Table on Practices

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Traditional Approach	3.16	Agree	3
Communicative Approach	3.32	Agree	1.5
Tasks-based Approach	3.32	Agree	1.5
Composite Mean	3.27	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

In table 3, grand composite mean refers to 3.27, with the verbal interpretation of “agree”. The Composite Mean of both communicative and task-based approach is 3.32, ranking the dominant position and that of traditional approach is 3.16 ranking the second. Table 3 indicates that communicative and task-based approach are considered equally important, which reveals that teachers are more inclined to employ communicative and task-based approach than traditional approach. Language learning is believed to occur through natural conversation, without the need for direct or explicit grammar instruction. This perspective led to the endorsement of a communicative approach, designed to improve communication abilities during the language learning journey. This approach is closely aligned with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which favors a practical and inductive way of teaching grammar, effectively bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. CLT allows educators to recognize and emphasize the numerous benefits and positive effects of employing this methodology in English language teaching.

The Communicative Approach promotes the adoption of diverse techniques and materials to enhance learners' proficiency in communication and to foster deeper engagement in the learning process. Examples of techniques applicable within this framework include dialogues, role-playing, and interactive games, among others. Rather than assigning difficult-to-understand texts, teachers encourage students to engage in reading with the goal of enhancing language skills and achieving meaningful communicative competence. In this approach, learners assume a more autonomous role, while teachers transition from authoritative figures to facilitators, fostering dialogue by giving students opportunities to discuss and seek insights from both their more knowledgeable peers and the teacher themselves.

Peng and Pyper (2019) conducted a qualitative study to uncover the factors that drive teachers to adopt task-based language teaching (TBLT). The findings suggest that teachers tailor the use of educational tools within their specific teaching environments to meet their instructional goals, marking a shift from traditional teaching methods. This adaptation often involves integrating tasks as a deliberate strategy to overcome challenges encountered in achieving their objectives. The study highlights the significant impact of teachers' beliefs and knowledge on their adoption of TBLT, noting that these personal convictions and understandings can sometimes conflict with the methodology and its intended outcomes, thereby influencing the extent to which TBLT is utilized in their

pedagogical practices.

Table 4

Relationship Between L2 Grammar Teaching and Grammatical Knowledge

Teaching Belief	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Metalanguage Recognition	.392**	0.000	Highly Significant
Metalanguage Production	.545**	0.000	Highly Significant
Teaching Procedures			
Metalanguage Recognition	.469**	0.000	Highly Significant
Metalanguage Production	.704**	0.000	Highly Significant
Teaching Techniques			
Metalanguage Recognition	.468**	0.000	Highly Significant
Metalanguage Production	.724**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 4 presents the association between L2 Grammar Teaching and Grammatical Knowledge. The computed r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship exists and reveals that the better the grammar teaching, the better are the grammatical knowledge. Grammar teaching provides the structural foundation for acquiring proficiency in a second language. Understanding grammatical rules enables learners to construct sentences correctly, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively. Proficiency in grammar is essential to developing precise and understandable language. Grammar instruction aids students in avoiding mistakes that could cause communication problems. Knowledge of grammar boosts learners' confidence in using the L2, as they are more assured of their ability to use the language correctly. This confidence can lead to increased opportunities for language use, further reinforcing grammatical competence. Bell (2016) explored the link between the attitudes of EFL teachers towards teaching grammar and their level of grammatical knowledge, finding that factors such as gender and years of teaching experience had minimal impact on teachers' grammatical expertise and their attitudes towards grammar instruction.

Table 5

Relationship Between L2 Grammar Teaching and Practices

Teaching Belief	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Traditional Approach	.411**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communicative Approach	.361**	0.000	Highly Significant
Tasks-based Approach	.382**	0.000	Highly Significant
Teaching Procedures			
Traditional Approach	.504**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communicative Approach	.493**	0.000	Highly Significant
Tasks-based Approach	.464**	0.000	Highly Significant
Teaching Techniques			
Traditional Approach	.548**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communicative Approach	.472**	0.000	Highly Significant
Tasks-based Approach	.472**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 5 shows the association between L2 Grammar Teaching and Practices. The computed r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. Results shows that there was significant relationship exists and implies that the better the grammar teaching, the better are the practices.

Grammar teaching provides the theoretical foundation, while practices, such as exercises and communicative activities, allow for the application of this knowledge, helping to solidify learners' understanding and ability to use grammatical structures in context. In order to effectively teach grammar, teachers must involve their students in activities that demand active application of grammatical structures. This shifts the focus from passive to active language use. Effective instruction relies on the integration of grammatical knowledge and practical application so as to foster a deep, functional understanding of the L2. Teachers believe that explaining grammar rules is an active learning process that engages students more deeply than passive listening or note-taking, leading to better retention of information. Students' oral communication abilities, such as their ability to use language clearly and

efficiently and to organize information logically, are developed through the process of explaining grammar principles. Teachers can evaluate students' comprehension of grammar principles and pinpoint areas that require further explanation or teaching during the explanation process. Van, Tran, and Tran, (2021) expressed the view that the conviction among teachers that students' familiarity with linguistic elements can better prepare them for final examinations highlights the significant influence of high-stakes testing on their approaches to classroom assessment. This suggests that the prevailing assessment beliefs and methods employed by teachers could, to a certain degree, impede the implementation of curriculum innovations.

Table 6

Relationship Between Grammatical Knowledge and Practices

Metalanguage Recognition	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
Traditional Approach	.682**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communicative Approach	.601**	0.000	Highly Significant
Tasks-based Approach	.685**	0.000	Highly Significant
Metalanguage Production			
Traditional Approach	.780**	0.000	Highly Significant
Communicative Approach	.710**	0.000	Highly Significant
Tasks-based Approach	.747**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

Table 6 illustrates the association between Grammatical Knowledge and Practices. The computed r-values indicates a strong direct correlation and the resulted p-values were less than the alpha level. Results shows that there was significant relationship exists and implies that the better the grammatical knowledge, the better are the practices. Understanding grammatical rules is crucial for developing language skills. Practices enable learners to actively use these rules, enhancing their speaking, writing, reading, and listening abilities. Learners have a deeper knowledge of grammatical ideas and are able to identify areas for development by receiving feedback on their grammatical accuracy through practical tasks. Alsied, Ibrhaim and Pathan (2018) emphasized that it is the duty of teachers to facilitate the learning of grammar by introducing a variety of learning strategies, making the grammar teaching process more accessible so that students can choose the strategies that work best for them. It's important for teachers to consider the perspective of the learners rather than imposing their own views. The role of the teacher is to ensure that students grasp the grammatical rules and patterns, while students should actively engage in applying different learning strategies and completing various tasks.

Table 7*Proposed Pedagogical Plan to Enhance L2 Grammar Teaching for Chinese Higher Vocational EFL Teachers*

Key Result Area	Objectives	Program/ Projects	Success Indicators	Persons involved
Grammar Teaching Teaching Belief The lowest ranking is that teachers should pay attention to the form and structure of the language instead of its meaning.	To enhance advanced teaching belief during teaching process and not to attach importance to the form and structure of the language	Hold a positive attitude to grammar instruction; Incorporate authentic materials into teaching; Attend professional and academic enhancement programs.	90% of the teachers will have personal teaching beliefs that effectively guide their teaching process.	English Teachers, Instructors
Grammatical Knowledge Metalanguage recognition The lowest ranking is that teachers can identify the words meaning in the different professional fields. Metalanguage production The lowest ranking is that teachers can provide a grammatical terminology precisely describing the specific part.	To improve grammatical knowledge In terms of both metalanguage recognition and metalanguage production	Be equipped with comprehensive knowledge on grammar by means of investing in reputable grammar guides or textbooks; Get a mastery on application concerning grammar.	90% of the teachers will gain more opportunities to enhance their grammatical knowledge.	English Teachers, Instructors
Grammar Practices Traditional Approach The lowest ranking is that teachers solely explain grammatical concepts.	To make full use of the merits of traditional approach and avoid its demerits	Maximize the benefits of traditional approaches such as obtaining a solid comprehension on grammatical knowledge; Avoid absorbing the disadvantages of traditional approaches such as adopt more interactive strategies to achieve communicative competence.	90% of the teachers will well balance the benefits and shortcomings of traditional approach.	English Teachers, Instructors

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings revealed seven points. First, most of the respondent teachers are 40 years old and above, female and has taught English language for 10 to 20 years. Second, majority of the L2 grammar teaches generally agreed that teaching procedures possessed a dominant position and teaching techniques ranked second while teaching beliefs rated least. Third, the most number of participants agreed English language grammar knowledge in terms of recognition and production. Fourth, most of the participants agreed on L2 grammar practices with communicative approach and task-based approach ranking on the same level while traditional approach rated least. Fifth, different responses on L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices are presented when the participants are grouped according to age, however, there is no difference in responses when grouped according to sex and years of teaching. Sixth, the participants' L2 grammar teaching, grammatical knowledge and practices were highly significant correlated with each other. Seventh, as an output of the study, a pedagogical plan for Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers to enhance the L2 grammar teaching was proposed.

The researcher proposes the following recommendations. First, Chinese higher vocational EFL teachers, in implementing this action plan, may enhance teaching beliefs, improve teaching procedures and adopt effective teaching strategies to achieve interactive teaching effect. Second, college EFL Teachers may apply grammatical knowledge to respective teaching spheres in order to arouse the awareness of mastering grammatical knowledge well. Third, university officials or administrators may provide abundant support and guidance on L2 grammar teaching aspects in order to guarantee the teaching facilities. Fourth, the future research may adjust the sample size of teachers; the participants of the study are randomly selected from no more than 10 colleges, so the representativeness of the sample may have certain limitations. Fifth, the future study may also incorporate qualitative research to guarantee the validity of the research results. Although the existing questionnaire has achieved certain aims, the completeness of the research needs to be improved. It is suggested to employ various methods for data collection to analyze comprehensively.

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