Classroom Practices Being Employed by Teachers of English Language to Teach Grammar in Senior Secondary School

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to search for classroom practices/exercises which would facilitate communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools. This study was informed by the Social Constructivism research paradigm. In addition, descriptive research design was employed. The population for this study included all the public secondary schools in Chongwe district, all the grade eleven teachers and learners of English language. Sample was picked purposively using criterion sampling technique. The sample involved 3 Heads of Department for Literature and Languages, 7 English language subject teachers and 15 grade 11 learners of English language. The study also included one standard educational officer. In total, the sample comprised 26 participants. Data was collected using interview guide, focus group discussion guide, classroom observation guide and document analysis. The findings were analysed thematically. Interview data revealed that both mechanical practices (Cloze exercise, transformation exercise, punctuation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling exercise, choosing a correct sentence, single word prompt) and meaningful practices (composition exercise, situational exercise, reading exercise and constructing own sentences) were used in the teaching and learning of English Grammar by the participants. Some teachers explained that they were encouraged to use meaningful practices more often. It was also indicated that both mechanical and meaningful practices are useful but both teachers and learners had put much emphasis on situational practices. They explained that situational practices/exercise enable the learner to use the language inside and outside the classroom effectively because structures are not taught in isolation but with context of the situation in which they are used. However, during classroom lesson observation, the researcher observed that in all the three lessons, teachers used mechanical practices only. Therefore, teachers need to systematically blend the two types of practices to facilitate learners' communicative competence. In view of the findings, it is recommended that teachers of English language should make sure that their classroom practices reflect all the four dimension of communicative competence (grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence). Grammatical competence will help learners master the rules while sociolinguistic competence will enable them know how to apply the rules in different social contexts. Discourse competence aspect helps in presenting ideas in an orderly manner while strategic competence helps in repairing discourses when there is communication breakdown.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

"Zambia was a British colony from 1924 up to 1964 and it was the British imperial and industrial power that sent English around the globe between the 17th and 20th century. Therefore, the legacy of the British imperialism has left many countries including Zambia with English language thoroughly institutionalized in their courts, parliaments, civil service, schools and higher education (Mwelwa and Mwanza, 2020:43)." Furthermore, it must be stated that the current status of English language is as a result of different recommendations made in different language in education policy documents. This is supported by Banda and Mwanza (2017:110) who state that "There have been twists and turns in the formulation and implementation of language in education policy in Zambia" (see also Nyimbiri & Mwanza, 2020; Mwanza & Bwalya, 2019; Mumba & Mkandawire, 2020; Mwanza, 2020, 2020; Iversen & Mkandawire, 2020). This dates back to the time the missionaries came to settle in Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia) and started their mission of evangelism and in the process, established schools." The twists and turns were as a result of trying to find a better pedagogical strategies.

Chishiba and Manchishi (2016:55) reported that "In 1930, the Department of Native Education introduced English in African Schools, mainly due to the fact that there was no Lingua-Franca in Northern Rhodesia. Nevertheless, the English language could only be introduced after the skills of reading and writing had been taught in the familiar local languages." Moreover, "It is during the time of the Federation that English was gradually being introduced to the early primary schooling as a subject. As early as the second year of primary school, pupils were given two to thirty minutes periods of English (Chishiba and Manchishi, 2016:56)."

In 2013, English was introduced as a learning subject in grade 2. Initially, English was a compulsory learning subject from grade 1 up to the end of secondary level (Mkandawire, 2022; Chanda & Mkandawire, 2013). The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (2013:19) recommended that "English will be offered as a subject, beginning at Grade 2." Moreover, "English is being used as the medium of instruction in Grade 5 upwards (Chishiba and Manchishi, 2016:59)." Given this status, the Curriculum Development Centre: (2013: v) states that the teaching of English language to Zambian Senior Secondary School learners should enable them "to use the language effectively in everyday life, in the world of work and in their further education." In other words, after completing the senior secondary school English syllabus, learners are expected to develop communicative competence. However, it was observed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (2013:4) that "With regard to Language and Communication, much as the learners are taught Languages at various levels, a number of them are unable to communicate effectively." It is on this premise that this study gains its motivation.

In order to develop productive (speaking and writing) and receptive language skills (listening and reading), English language is centered on teaching the following components: summary, comprehension, composition and grammar (structure). Each component is important in that it contributes to the development

of the language as a whole. However, this study focused on grammar teaching with regard to classroom practices or exercises employed by teachers. In the recent past, debates have shifted from the importance of teaching grammar to the question of how best grammar can be taught in a classroom. Moreover, Rahuma (2016:53) contends that "there is now convincing indirect and direct evidence to support the teaching of grammar. The role of grammar is important because not only does it help learners to improve their writing skills, but also it helps them in reading and listening alike." Similarly, Nalunga (2017:1-2) contends that "grammar teaching is important when studying English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL)." Additionally, Azar (2007:2) states that:

> One important aspect of grammar teaching is that it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear and write intelligible. Without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body expressions to communicate meaning. Grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric.

Based on the above statement, it can be said that the need to teach English grammar cannot be overemphasised. Furthermore, regarding the teaching of English grammar, Burner (2005:85) found that "some teachers believe grammar teaching should have a repairing function since learners make a lot of grammatical mistakes even though they have studied a lot of grammar before senior high while others believe the purpose of grammar teaching at senior high should be to brush up what they already have learned earlier." As such, it can be suggested that the purpose of teaching grammar needs to be in line with the linguistic needs of the leaners and the functions of a given language. Moreover, it must be emphasised that grammar can definitely play a repairing role if it is taught and practiced effectively. Hence, the classroom practices need to be selected deliberately to ensure that they bring about the desired outcome which is communicative competence.

Rahuma (2016:129-130) observed that "Although many researchers have come to an agreement that some focus on grammar may be effective, a lot of controversy arises on how much grammar should be taught and how should it be taught; should it be isolated or should it be integrated or should grammar items only be taught when difficulty arises? While the teaching of grammar has been extensively researched, many gaps appear in the literature." Furthermore, Richards and Rodgers (2001: vii) observed that:

> Some methods recommend apparently strange and unfamiliar classroom techniques and practices; others are described in books that are hard to locate, obscurely written and difficult to understand...The proliferation of approaches and methods is a prominent characteristic of contemporary second and foreign language teaching…Invention of new classroom practices and approaches to designing language programs and materials reflects a commitment to finding more efficient and more effective ways of teaching languages.

This implies that research on language teaching and learning has to be an ongoing process in order to meet the rising needs of the teaching and learning process.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mart (2013:124) argues that "Knowing more about grammar will enable learners build better sentences in speaking and writing performances. A good knowledge of grammar helps learners to make sentences clear enough to understand. Improper use of grammar will not convey meaningful messages." Studies, both in Zambia and other countries have shown that lack of enough grammatical knowledge makes most learners to face huddles in both speaking and writing skills. (Tuomas, 2015 and Kashimba, 2020). Further, Mwanza (2016) reiterates that if the teaching of English grammar is done poorly, schools may graduate learners who understand the rules of the language but unable to use the language effectively in real life situation. As such, CDC (2013:43) recommends that "The teaching of structure (grammar) at Senior Secondary School level should also be based on errors which occur in the learners' spoken and written work….Learners should be given ample opportunities to practice structures orally in meaningful situations." However, it was not known whether the classroom practices employed in Zambian public secondary schools resonated with the recommendation made by CDC. Therefore, it was thought that if enquiries were not made on classroom practices, the situation would be detrimental. The question which begged attention was, what classroom practices are being employed to facilitate communicative competence of grade 11 learners in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian Public Secondary Schools?

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to search for classroom practices which facilitate the development of communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian Public Secondary Schools.

4. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was purely qualitative and both primary and secondary data were collected to answer the questions raised in the study. Wakumelo, Mwanza and Mkandawire (2016) explained that a qualitative research has an advantage of presenting detailed data. Secondary data was collected through reading documents such as books and journal articles to get what scholars have written on classroom practices in the teaching of English grammar. On the other hand, primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and classroom lesson observation. The sample involved 3 Heads of Department of Literature and Languages, 7 English language teachers and 15 grade 11 learners of English language. The sample was purposively sampled from 3 secondary schools in Lusaka province of Zambia. The primary data was used largely to answer the main question which aimed at ascertaining classroom practices which facilitate learners' communicative competence in the teaching of English grammar in the Zambian public secondary schools. Data was collected and analysed thematically.

5. THE CONCEPT OF GRAMMAR

Grammar is conceptualised differently by different scholars. For example, Harmer (2001:12) defines grammar as "a description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language". Additionally, grammar can also be viewed as the study of syntax and morphology as shown below:

> Grammar is traditionally subdivided into two different but inter-related areas of study - morphology and syntax. Morphology is the study of how words are formed out of smaller units (traditionally called morphemes). Syntax is concerned with the ways in which words can be combined together to form phrases and sentence. (Radford, 1997:1).

Mandahlhazi (2001:5) states that "The term 'grammar' is the basic foundation through which language works when it is used for communicative purposes among people." According to Mart (2013:124), "grammar is a description of the rules for forming sentences, including an account of the meanings that these forms convey." Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010:251) defines grammar as:

> A description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the grammar language. It usually takes into account the meanings and functions these sentences have in the overall system of the language. It may or may not include the description of the sounds of a language.

Rahuma (2016:49) contends that "While the resulting proliferations of the definitions of grammar provide useful insights and views, they are often overlapping, saying almost the same thing, even though they are stated differently." It can be deduced that most if not all the scholars agree that grammar has to do with rules of a given language. The difference however, is that some scholars have extended the conceptualisation of the term grammar to include the meaning and use of the grammatical structures. As such, there are two perspectives of grammar, that is, formal and functional grammar. According to Burner (2005:17), "Formal grammarians do not pay so much attention to meaning and context as they do to form and structures; they subject language to a bottom-up analysis, morphemes being the smallest language component they operate with, and the sentence the largest, and in between there are other levels such as word and clause." This is observed in the definitions of grammar given by Harmer (2001) and Radford (1997) above. Their conceptualisation of grammar does not go beyond syntax and morphology. On the other hand, "we have functional grammarians who deal with language in use. They regard words and sentences not as individual and independent forms, but as part of a whole, getting meaning from their surroundings (either from the rest of the language – semantics, or from the context in which they occur – pragmatics) (Burner, 2005: 17)." This is seen in the definitions of grammar given by Mandahlhazi (2001), Mart (2013) and Richards and Schmidt (2010) above. They believe that grammar is more than just rules governing sentence construction but also the meaning and the use of the constructions.

Based on the above conceptualisation of grammar, Nalunga (2017:3) suggests that "to accommodate the two perspectives of grammar (form and function), it is essential to use a holistic grammar instruction approach that focuses on both." For the purpose of this study, English grammar will be defined as the part of language which deals with the rules which guide the formation of accurate and meaningful sentences. This is because "students need to learn how to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately (Thu, 2009:6-7)." Moreover, it must be emphasised that teachers of English language must understand the diversity of the notion of grammar so that the teaching approaches can resonate with the needs of individual learners and the functions of the language. For example, a classroom may contain learners whose focus might be only on mastering the rules so that they pass examinations, while others may focus on both the rules and their application part in communicative situations.

6. THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE.

The Zambia's Senior Secondary School English Language Syllabus recommends a Communicative Language Teaching Approach which supports the development of learners' communicative competence. CDC (2013: v) states that

> Whilst the general format of the syllabus is essentially "structural", the recommended methodological interpretation is 'functional' and 'communicative'. As a result, High School learners should develop a high level of confidence in English, and be able to use the language effectively in everyday life, in the world of work and in their further education.

According to Mwanza (2016:10), the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) "arose from Dell Hymes' concept of 'communicative competence', and his classic utterance: There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." In the following paragraphs, the concept of communicative competence will be discussed and analysed in order to understand its relevance in the teaching and learning of English grammar in secondary schools.

Bagarić and Djigunović (2007:94) contends that "the term communicative competence is comprised of two words, the combination of which means competence to communicate. This simple lexico-semantic analysis uncovers the fact that the central word in the syntagma communicative competence is the word competence." Canale and Swain (1980:6) contends that "we have so far adopted the term 'communicative competence' to refer to the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use." Similarly, Bagarić and Djigunović (2007:95) defines communicative competence as "the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations."

Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020:44) state that the concept of communicative competence was "further developed in the early 1980s by Canale and Swain." Gałajda (2012:145) adds that "Communicative competence is composed of four elements: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse

competence and strategic competence. This framework is based on the work by Canale and Swain (1980).” This is confirmed by Canale and Swain (1980:27) who state that “Communicative competence is composed minimally of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and communication strategies, or what we will refer to as strategic competence.” These competences will be defined below.

Gałajda (2012:145) defines grammatical competence as “the mastery of the language code. It means that speakers know the rules of the language which include vocabulary, word and sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics.” According to Mwelwa and Mwanza (2020:51), discourse competence refers to the “interaction of individual message elements in terms of their interconnectedness and of how meaning is represented in relationship to the entire discourse or text.” According to Gałajda (2012:145), sociolinguistic competence refers to “sociocultural rules of language use which basically means that the speaker is able to produce and understand utterances in different contexts. Each and every interaction has its norms and purpose and the role of the speaker is to convey meaning in a form appropriate for a given context.” Finally, “Strategic competence basically refers to the coping strategies that are employed by communicators to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication (Mwelwa and Mwanza, 2020:51).”

Furthermore, it must be noted that Communicative Language Teaching does not neglect the teaching of grammatical rules. The approach in its complete implementation recognizes the importance of both language form and function. Additionally, Canale and Swain (1980:27) state that:

> There is no strong theoretical, or empirical motivation for the view that grammatical competence is any more or less crucial to successful communication than is sociolinguistic competence or strategic competence. The primary goal of a communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these types of knowledge for the learner, an outcome that is not likely to result from overemphasis on one form of competence over the others throughout a second language programme.

7. THE CONCEPT OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The concept of classroom practices can refer to a number pedagogical issues. However, in this study it refers to a set of exercises or activities which are used to engage learners with the content through completing given tasks or class exercises. This is based on the recommendation by The Curriculum Development Centre (2013:43) that “Learners should be given ample opportunities to practice structures orally in meaningful situations…Learners should also be given written activities that allow them to use the structural item being practiced in paragraphs rather than simple sentences.” Generally, lessons are characterised by three main stages: presentation, practice and production. This study focused on the practice stage. This stage is mainly used to make learners internalise the content or grammatical structures by practicing the structures taught in the lesson.

Kruzicová (2015) conducted a study which looked at different approaches to teaching grammar at lower-secondary school level in Mělník Region. In terms of methodology, the researcher used Mixed methods (questionnaire and semi-structured interview). The study indicated that Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response and Eclecticism are some of the approaches used to teach English grammar. The study also revealed that an approach is an overall term where teaching methods, teaching techniques and classroom practices are drawn. This study also revealed that there are two forms of classroom practices. These are mechanical and meaningful practices. The exercise/activities can be divided into two groups (mechanical practices and Meaningful practices). Furthermore, this study revealed a number of classroom practices as presented and described below:

Mechanical Practice: At this stage of the lesson the teacher gives students practice in forming the structure. It is a controlled kind of practice which is done very quickly. The teacher can use for example:

Repetition – The teacher presents different examples and the students repeat them.
Teacher: I am sitting.
Pupils: I am sitting.

Substitution – Student repeat what the teacher said, but they replace some specific element in each sentence.
Teacher: I am sitting.
Pupils: I am speaking. I am learning....

Single word prompt: Teacher gives a word as a prompt and the students give examples.
Teacher: playing
Pupils: We are playing.

Meaningful Practice: It should be the second stage of practice following the mechanical type of activities. At this stage, pupils not only create the form but they also have to work with context. Learners have to think and understand what they are saying. At this stage, teachers can use the following activities:

True sentences – Teacher asks students to say real information about themselves by using specific structure, e.g.:
Teacher: I like chocolate, but I don't like vegetables. What about you?
Pupil: I like music and movies, but I don't like sport.

Situational – Teacher creates specific situation in which the pupils have to use the new grammar structure, e.g.:
Teacher: You are a stranger asking about places in the town.
Pupil: Is there a café near here?

Talking about real life – It works as the previous activity, but the pupil talks about real life.
Teacher: Tell me, what are you doing?
Pupil: I am sitting and learning English. I am listening. I am taking notes.

It must be noted that these are not the only classroom practices. There are a number of practices. Therefore, the duty of the teacher is to choose those which facilitates the development of leaners' communicative competence. Furthermore, Farrell and Lim (2005:1) assert that "teachers are active decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs. Indeed, research has indicated that teachers possess a vast array of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues including beliefs about students and classroom practices." The teachers should teach based on the needs of individual learners.

8. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to find out which classroom practices are used by teachers to facilitate the development of communicative competence of learners in the teaching and learning process of English grammar. Data from teachers and HODs was collected using interview guides. Data from learners was collected using focus group discussion guide. This section will be presented using the following major questions: What are the classroom practices being used by teachers to teach English grammar in grade 11 classes? Which classroom practices facilitate communicative competence in the teaching of English grammar in the Zambian public secondary schools? 2 What are the classroom practices being used to teach English grammar in grade 11 classes?

The first research question sought to find out the classroom practices being used in the teaching of English grammar. It was intended to bring out the practices often used by the participants in the teaching and learning of English grammar.

8.1 What are the classroom practices used to teach English grammar in grade 11 classes?

The findings revealed a number of classroom practices which teachers use during grammar lessons including: Cloze exercise/filling in the blank spaces, transformation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling exercise, punctuation exercise, composition exercise, single word prompt, choosing a correct sentence and situation exercise. For example, teacher 1 said that:

I use situation, single word prompt and substitution exercises.

Teacher 2 said that*:*

> *I usually use substitution tables, filling in the blank spaces.*

Teacher 3 said that:

> *I normally use spelling exercise, transformation, cloze exercise and punctuation exercise.*

Teacher 4 stated that:

> *I use single word prompt, identifying correct sentences, editing and substitution. But I don't use repetition. For repetition, I don't use it because it brings some kind of noise. Sometimes you ask them to repeat after you, they just laugh. You know grade elevens.*

The HOD from school A said that:

> *I use situation exercise most of the times. Sometimes, the topic determines the selection of the practices to use.*

HOD from school B said that:

> *When teaching vocabulary, I use cloze exercise. Here learners are given a variety of words to choose which one is appropriate. When teaching tenses, I ask learners to identify tenses in given sentences. I also use substitution tables and identifying correct sentences but I have never used situation exercise before.*

Teacher 7 stated that:

> *Usually, we are guided by the teacher's guide on how to go about teaching a particular topic. The common practices are cloze tests, transformation and constructing own sentences. But I don't only rely on teacher's guide, I also use my initiative.*

The HOD from school C stated that:

> *I normally use cloze tests, transformation, word identification, situation and sometimes repetition.*

Learners from the focus group discussion also revealed a number of classroom exercises used during grammar lessons including: cloze exercise, transformation exercise, substitution exercise, reading exercise, choosing a correct sentence and situation exercise. For example, pupil 4 stated that:

> *We use situation exercises and sometimes substitution tables.*

Pupil 5 noted that:

> *Normally, we do close exercise and substitution.*

Pupil 6 said that

> *We also do reading.*

Pupil 11 stated that:

> *Basically, they ask us to construct our own sentences*.

Pupil 12 stated that:

> *Sometimes they give us sentences and we have to rewrite (*transformation exercise).

8.2 Classroom practices used to teach English grammar in grade 11 classes: classroom lesson observation data

After collecting data from both teachers and learners, the researcher conducted classroom lesson observations. The idea was to ascertain whether they practiced what they stated during interviews where they stated that they used situational exercises, transformational exercise, cloze exercise, repetition, substitution and spelling exercise. What is presented under lesson observation data are the excerpts from the transcribed lesson (verbatim) and not the whole lesson (verbatim). A total of three lessons were observed. The first lesson observed was a grade 11 English structure lesson on Reported Speech taught by teacher 9 at school A.

Excerpt 1: English language structure lesson on "*Reported speech*"

Teacher:	*So, there are rules we need to follow in order to change sentences from direct to reported speech. What are those rules?*
Pupils:	(silent).
Teacher:	*There are things we need to change and these are:*
	1. Tense
	2. Pronouns
	3. Time and place
Teacher	(writes on the board) "*I will come tomorrow," he said. Who can change it to reported speech?*
Pupil:	*He said that he would came the following day*.
Teacher:	*Which tense is going to change?*
Pupil:	*Will*
Teacher:	*What else?*
Pupil:	*Come*
Teacher:	*Alright, what about time and place?*
Pupil:	*Tomorrow changes to the following day.*
Teacher:	*Lets connect. He said that he would came the following day. Is that correct?*
Pupils:	*No*

Teacher:	*What is wrong?*
Pupils:	*Came.*
Teacher:	*What is wrong with came?*
Pupil:	*The grammar doesn't just sound good.*
Teacher*:*	*I know it doesn't sound good, but what is making it not sound good?*
Pupil:	*Would. Would is already in the past, so the verb come has to remain unchangeable.*
Teacher:	*Very good. That is what I wanted you to say. So it is supposed to be: he said that he would come the following day.*
Teacher:	*When you are given transformation, you don't have to take more than two minutes thinking.*
Teacher:	*Get your books and write the following exercise.*

Exercise

Change the following direct sentences to reported or indirect speech.

1. "Katongo, have you heard about the news of your sister's results?" she asked.

B: She asked Katongo if…………………..

1. "I have been working for six years now," Jane said.

B: Jane said……………………….

The second lesson observation below was of a grade 11 English language on the improbable conditional sentences which was taught by teacher 10 at School B.

Teacher: *Today we are going to look at the condition called unlikely condition. So, the unlikely condition is also known as the improbable condition. I will write a sentence on the board. You and I are going to identify why it is called unlikely condition (something that is likely not to happen)*

Teacher:	*So when we start with the main clause you are not supposed to put a comma. When you start with the if clause you put a comma to separate the two clauses. Any questions on the unlikely condition.*
Pupils:	*No questions.*
Teacher:	*Okay, since you don't have questions, I am going to give you my questions. I always have questions.*

Exercise

Make sentences using the following expressions. You may start with either the main clause or the if clause.

Main clause	**if clause**
1. Be upset	hear the news
2. Be sad	lose the money.
3. Celebrate	get a job

The third lesson observation below was a grade 11 English lesson on vocabulary which was taught by the HOD at School C.

Teacher: *Let us look at today's topic. What is on the board?*
Pupils: *Cloze*
Teacher: *What is cloze?*
Pupil: *A type of exercise where you are supposed to fill in the blank spaces.*
Teacher: *Let me have two people in front a boy and a girl. I want you to read the passage without putting answers in the blank spaces.*
Teacher: *Let's work out number 1,2,3,4 and five together and you will do the rest as your individual exercise.*

Cloze exercise:

Instructions: Read the passage carefully and find a correct word to fill in each blank space.

Feeding entirely (1)....small living creatures, spiders(2)...the greatest part of each day looking (3)……….. something to eat. Although they are (4)……small, it is (5)…….unusual for them to catch something (6)……………..than themselves. Throughout the year, the spiders in our gardens kill and eat many garden pests. It has been said (7)……………without the spiders keeping down fly population, we would soon be knee-deep in (8)………….and overrun with diseases and death. Different types of spiders use different ways of catching their food. Many spiders spin silky webs and position (9)…........... to catch flying (10)………………..

8.3 Which classroom practices facilitate the development of communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools?

The researcher sought to find out the classroom practices which facilitate learners' communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English language. In other words, the researcher sought to ascertain the classroom practices which facilitate learners' communicative competence. Teachers, learners and District Education Standard Officer were asked to state which classroom practices are effective in the teaching and learning of English grammar.

The findings from teachers revealed that the use of situational exercises, transformation exercise and substitution exercise are effective in the teaching and learning of English grammar. But the emphasis was pressed on situational practices. For example, teacher 1 said that:

Situation practices should be used as much as possible. Off course with others like substitution, single word prompt. Though this one seem to cling to certain part of work. For example, that one where you have words or conditional sentences like "provided that, supposing and unless". However, I feel all the practices can still be maintained. They can still be maintained depending on the lesson. Situation practices helps pupils not only in English language as a subject but also other subjects. For example, mathematics and science. Situation practices can be looked at in a broader aspect.

When asked which classroom practices would facilitate the development of communicative competence, Teacher 2 said that

I would suggest the use of situation practices and some mechanical practices like substitution. Initially, we use both mechanical and meaningful practices but we are encouraged to use the meaningful ones whereby you only facilitate. But the capacity of our learners does not allow us. So, you will find a situation where they are just quiet. You are asking, but they cannot just say anything.

Also Teacher 3 stated that

I can say spelling exercise, Transformation, Close tests, Situation and talking about real life. Also Composition exercise can help. Here, you can test different grammatical aspects such as tenses or subject verb agreement. But situation exercise can be more helpful.

The HOD from school A said that

Whichever exercise you feel at that time that this one is going to work for my learners bring it in. Otherwise, if you say this is a specific practice we can use in teaching grammar, there, we can miss it. So, we cannot discard anything. For example, even the same repetition, there are times when it can be useful.

Findings from the focus group discussion with learners revealed that situational practices are more effective in the teaching of English grammar. It was also indicated that substitution, cloze tests, repetition and transformation exercise are also effective in the learning of English grammar. Below are some of the responses:

Pupil 1 said that:

I would say Situational and substitution exercise. This is because situations are easily understood.

Pupil 5 said that:

As for me, situation and substation is useful. Situation is useful because you find that they give me a situation which requires to think critically. Substitution is useful because the teacher has already constructed for me a sentence to substitute some words and add my own. So you find that maybe in rewrites, you substitute

> *and add your own. So you get to know which words to add on that situation.*

Pupil 8 noted that:

> *For me repetition is better. So, I can say that repetition and substitution are good because I cannot easily forget.*

Pupil 7 noted that:

> *Reading exercise is also important because teachers will be listening while us learners are reading. Teachers can control you on the word you are not reading properly.*

Pupil 6 added that.

> *Reading improves our understanding. It helps in using the right grammar and understand. Sometimes you can read without understanding. So reading exercises can help. The more we read, the more we improve our understanding.*

When asked about classroom practices which would facilitate communicative competence, what was prominent from both teachers' and learners' preference was the need to use situational practice. However, this was not reflected during lesson observation.

9. DISCUSSION

9.1 Classroom practices being used to teach English grammar to grade 11 class.

When asked what classroom practice they used, both the teachers and learners mentioned both mechanical (transformational, cloze and substitution exercise) and meaningful practices (situational and composition exercise). However, interview data and classroom lesson observation did not resonate in that, in the 3 lessons observed, none of the teachers employed meaningful practices. This confirms what Mwanza (2016:118) observed that "It would not be enough to interview teachers because it was possible that they could say what they did not practice in the classroom. Similarly, it would not be enough to just observe the lessons as I needed to interview them in order to understand the reasons behind the decisions and methodological choices they made in the classroom."

The term practice can refer to a number of pedagogical aspects, however, for the purpose of this paper, classroom practices refers to a set of activities/exercises designed to build learners language skills by completing given grammatical tasks. For example, there is transformational practice whose task is to re-write sentences without changing the original meaning. This practice can be done through different classroom techniques such as group work, pair work or individual work. For instance, a teacher can ask learners to transform or re-write sentences in groups or individually. Another classroom practice is cloze exercise where learners are

given a task to complete either sentences or passages by finding the correct or appropriate missing word(s) or phrase(s). Other classroom practices include "identifying Correct Sentences, Constructing Correct Sentences and Using the Future Tense (Manchishi, 2017:20-28)." Some of these practices can be done through role play where learners are given roles to play and a task is given. For example, after learning about impossible conditional sentences, learners will need to understand how the structure is used is used in real life situation. It is not enough for learners to know that impossible conditional sentences are formed by if clause + past perfect + conditional perfect. Therefore, learners need to know that it is used when referring to a condition whose results cannot be fulfilled because the condition is in the past and the chances are gone. For example, the sentence "If John had learned more words, he would have written a good report" entails that the results of writing a good report cannot be fulfilled because the condition of learning more words is no longer available or was missed.

9.2 Classroom practices which facilitate the development of communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar in Zambian public secondary schools.

The purpose of the current study was to search for classroom practices which facilitate the development of communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar. The collected data was useful for the establishment of the model for practices which would facilitate learner's communicative competence in the teaching and learning of English grammar. This section begins by providing insights from teachers, learners and educational offer on the classroom practices which facilitate communicative competence.

Kruzicová (2015:26) states that "Teachers usually divide grammar lessons into three phases: Presentation, Practice and Production. One of the best ways of helping students to reach the objectives of the lesson is to introduce the new language well in the first phase of the lesson: the presentation phase. Then, students need to have plenty of activities to help them to practice the new language. This is the practice phase. Lastly, the students need time to use the new language they have learned in order to communicate with each other. This is the production phase."

Kuhlman (2017:19) contends that "Best practices are a must for all teachers to educate students effectively and efficiently. Although the best practices for second language learning are fairly relative, all foreign language teachers must look at the research available and make educated decisions about how to engage in instruction."

Teachers responses on the practices which would facilitate communicative competence for this study are in tandem with Kuhlman (2017:12-13) who observed that "In this era, attention was shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use language appropriately for different communicative purposes, arising a need for communicative competence instead of grammatical competence" This implies that classroom practices should build into a learner the four dimension of communicative competence. All the participants agree to the fact that classroom

practices need to be used eclectically in the teaching and learning of English grammar. They explained that one can use 3 or 4 practices as long as they achieve the goal or the learning objectives.

One of the reason why some teachers suggested that classroom practices must be incorporated is because using both mechanical and meaningful can bring about the desired outcome. It was revealed that if teachers only stick to meaningful practices, learners are unlikely to participate. For example, Teacher 2 said that:

> *I would suggest the use of situation practices and some mechanical practices like substitution. Initially, we use both mechanical and meaningful practices but we are encouraged to use the meaningful ones whereby you only facilitate. But the capacity of our learners does not allow us. So, you will find a situation where they are just quiet. You are asking, but they cannot just say anything.*

It was further indicated that depending on the lesson, the teacher may need one or two practices. Some teacher indicated that for grade 11, the controlled practices should not be done much. Situation practice was emphasised because they believe it is learner centered. They explained that when different situations are created, learners will be able to use that piece of grammar correctly and they will not just stick to one situation. They also understand that this expression can be used in this situation and can also be used in another situation. It was noted that as a teacher, you need to read the situation in the classroom. If a teacher notices that a particular practice is not working, he or she needs to change a different activity. The findings indicate the shift from the traditional way of teaching English grammar.

A study by Phipps (2009) where he observed teachers over a 20-month period, the observations shed light on how they taught grammar and how classroom practices are employed. Findings on Anne's teaching showed that her initial grammar teaching consisted mainly of rule based presentations and fill-in-the-blank exercises: However, she tended to do oral grammar practice in a controlled teacher-fronted style. Her explanation for using a whole-class dialogue (with each question being answered by a different learner), rather than pair or group-work, to practice the target language was that the latter might cause classroom management problems, or make it difficult to monitor students' learning and give feedback on their grammatical errors.

Widodo (2008:3) asserts that "It is important to keep in mind that the successfulness of the proposed activities may vary from one teaching context to another. Understanding potential strengths and weaknesses of particular contexts allows teachers to adapt such proposed activities in the classrooms." The researcher agrees with widodo's assertion because it is representative of the reality in schools. Despite suggesting the use of all classroom practices, great emphasis was placed on situation practice. Teachers emphasised that situation exercise must be used more. Situation practices involves the creation of situations which learners are likely to face in real life situation. For example, the teacher can create a situation and learners can come up with different sentence constructions based on the grammar

point of the day. For example, if the teacher is teaching on probable conditional sentences, he or she can use a clinic and create a situation. For instance, he or she can ask some learners to take a role of a nurse and others the role of patients and express themselves using probable condition using a situation at the clinic. The expected outcome is that learners can come up with sentences like (1) "If the doctor comes early, I will survive (Patient)", (2) "If your laboratory results will be negative, we will discharge you this evening (Nurse)". A number of sentences can be constructed depending on how learners are familiar with the clinic context using classroom techniques like role play, group work or pair work.

Findings from the focus group discussion with learners revealed that both mechanical and meaningful practices can facilitate communicative competence in English language learning. Just like teachers, learners emphasised on the use of situational practices. They explained that situations are easily understood. Other pupils recommended situation exercise because it requires them to think critically. Another pupil strongly indicated that repetition exercise helps her a lot because she does not easily forget the structures taught. However, one participant reacted to the idea of repetition exercise by saying that repetition has a weakness because it focuses only on mastering the structure without providing context in which the structure can be applied. The study revealed that repetition can make one stuck both in the examination and real life communication.

Research shows that learners have different learning preferences (Kafusha et al., 2021). This was revealed in this study in that some learners preferred repetition exercises while others strongly disapproved the use of repetition. Learners learn differently. For example, "The conformists prefer learning about the language. They are happy to work in non-communicative classes. These learners do all the required exercises but they have no need to really use the language. The concrete learners are interested in language use and language as communication. The communicative learners prefer the social interaction with other speakers. They enjoy the use of language instead of analysis of how the language works and are able to use language without the guidance of a teacher (Michala, 2015:16-17)."

9.3. A Proposed Model for Classroom Grammar Practices which would facilitate learners' communicative competence.

Picciano (2017:166) "a model is more frequently a visual representation of reality or a concept." In addition, Nalunga (2017:11) states that "developing an effective model requires considering a number of factors, including when grammar should be taught and which grammatical aspects to focus on." The model developed in this study suggests that the classroom practices during grammar lessons must focus on the four aspects of competence derived from the four dimensions of communicative competence. The communicative competences include: sociolinguistics competence, grammatical competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Kuhlman (2017:11) states that "In all of the acquisition steps and practice suggestions, context is key." If the exercise is out of learners' contextual knowledge,

learners end up memorizing the structures." As a result, learners fail to use the structures effectively in different communicative contexts. This explains why both teachers and learners placed the emphasis on situational practices. Canale and Swain (1980) point out that the four competencies need to be given the same amount of vitality.

9. 4. Classroom Practices Model

Grammatical Competence Aspect

Sociolinguistics Competence Aspect

Effective Classroom Practices

Discourse Competence Aspect

Strategic Competence Aspect
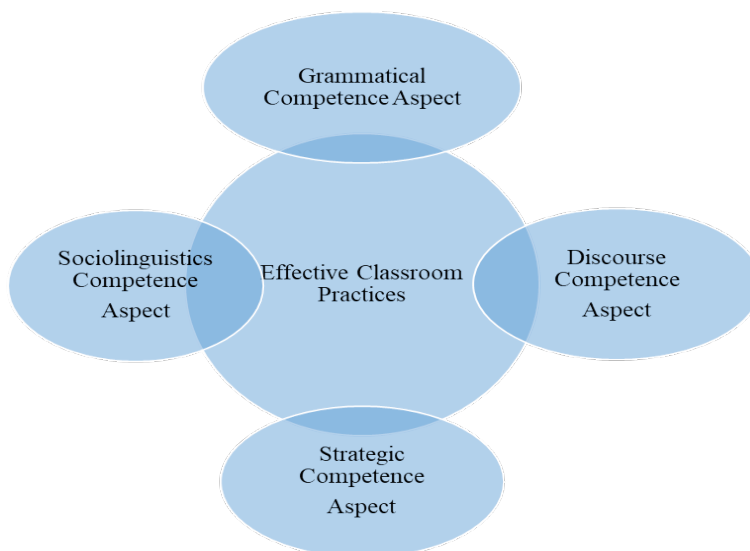
(Diagram source: Developed from Canale and Swain's Four Dimensions of communicative competence (1980)).

The model has used a Venn diagram to indicate that the four competencies have an overlapping relationship to the central idea. All the four aspects overlap. Meaning that they cannot be expressed in isolation. However, the question would be on how these aspects can be accommodated in one lesson. To address this concern, it is important to reflect on the teaching of grammar using the Eclectic approach. In terms of classroom practices, the teaching of grammar has three main stages namely Oral practice stage 1, oral practice stage 2 and written practice stage 3. The four aspects of communicative competence can all be tackled in these three stages. It is up to the teacher to decide which aspect to use at a particular stage. Below is an illustration:

9.5 LESSON: Structure

TOPIC: The Future Simple Tense

Practice stage

Oral practice stage 1: Using the verbs *will* and *going to,* construct sentences expressing (i) future conditionals (ii) plans or intentions (iii) future prediction.

Oral practice stage 2: In your groups, one should assume a role of a manager and the rest of the members should assume the role of employees. Instructions: As a group, come up with sentences expressing new offers of the company which can be used to motivate the employees. The manager should present them to the employees. Additionally, let few employees make promises based on the offers presented. For example, (1) starting this month end, the company *will* **b**e giving tokens of appreciation to the hardworking employees", "From today onwards, I *will* start reporting early for work (employee).

Written practice stage 3: *In three paragraphs, write a letter to your best friend telling her or him how you are going to spend your December holiday.*

In oral practice stage 1, the intention is to enable learners apply the rule of the day (Grammatical Competence Aspect). Oral practice stage 2 intends to develop learner's ability to interact (Sociolinguistics Competence/Strategic Competence Aspect). Written practice stage 3 aims at developing learners' ability to present discourses in a coherent and cohesive manner (Discourse Competence Aspect). Practices need to be learner centered. Apart from that, the aim should be to develop the four dimensions of communicative competence in learners.

10. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to search for classroom practices which would facilitate communicate competence in the teaching of English grammar to Zambian Secondary School learners. This paper has revealed that classroom practices being employed by teachers during English grammar lessons include: Cloze exercise, transformation exercise, substitution exercise, spelling quiz, composition exercise, single word prompt, choosing a correct sentence, situational exercise, punctuation exercise, reading exercise and constructing own sentences. This entails that teachers need to select what works for their learners. It must be noted that certain classroom practices are meant to build specific kind of competence. For example, transformation exercise helps learners to develop strategic competence. It helps them to understand that a person can express themselves using different forms and structures while maintaining the same meaning of the message. On the question of which classroom practices facilitates communicative competence, the findings from the participants revealed that there is no specific practice which could facilitate communicative competence. However, based on the responses and comments from both teachers and learners, much emphasis was pressed on the use of situational practice. This is because both teachers and learners believed that situational approach enables the learner to use the language inside and outside classroom effectively because structures are not taught in isolation. It was mentioned that structures practiced in context are easily internalised. Both teachers and learners further suggested that the use of more than one practice in a lesson can be effective too, especially the integration of both mechanical and

meaningful practices. In view of these findings, it is recommended that teachers of English language should make sure that their classroom practices reflect all the four dimension of communicative competence (grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence).

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