

# Grammatical Knowledge and Grammatical Competence Among English and Non-English Pre-Service Teachers

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## ABSTRACT

Grammatical competence is defined as the linguistic ability required for the precise production of language in a certain context. This study aims to investigate the grammatical knowledge and competency of pre-service teachers, specifically at colleges affiliated to Tamilnadu Teachers Education University. In India, English is considered a second language, and in many instances, pupils exhibit deficiencies in grammar despite several years of study. In this regard, it is essential to comprehend the nature of the pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and knowledge. This research has been undertaken for this goal. A survey was administered to students in their first and third semesters across several pedagogy subjects for fact-finding purposes. This study revealed that the grammar components like subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech and adjective-adverb agreement are positively correlated with grammar competency of pre-service teachers. And also, the grammar knowledge is play a crucial role for the grammatical competency of pre-service teachers.

**Keywords:** Grammar knowledge; grammatical competency; Linguistics; parts of speech; English as second language.

## Introduction

English is the contemporary, highly recognized international lingua franca. As the world merges into a global society commonly engaged by modern technologies, the requirement to speak the English language has grown more and more apparent. Moreover, English is acquired and studied in the current world for its evident practical value, i.e. as a means to communicate in the worldwide level and as a means to optimize one's access to chances in the employment market (Estanislao, 2013).

Grammar can be succinctly defined as the method by which a language organizes and integrates words to create extended units of meaning. A collection of rules dictates the construction of meaning units in any language; thus, a student proficient in grammar has understood and can apply these rules to communicate effectively within the accepted language forms (Chung and Pullum, 2015). Furthermore, Ur (2009) defines grammar as the mechanism by which a language functions and integrates words to transmit certain meanings, some of which cannot be sufficiently expressed through vocabulary alone. This encompasses the organization and interrelation of thoughts, as well as the functions of utterances, including statements, questions, requests, and others. Grammar can also convey temporal relationships, single or plural distinctions, and various other facets of meaning. Rules exist that dictate the manipulation and organization of words to transmit meanings, enabling a proficient speaker of the language to apply these rules efficiently and appropriately to express their intended meaning.

Moreover, Burns (2009) asserts that grammar fundamentally pertains to the systems and patterns individuals employ to choose and amalgamate words. Through the study of grammar, individuals discern the structure and regularity that underpin language, acquiring the means to articulate the language system. Mellish and Ritchie (2008) assert that creating a grammar necessitates the formulation of an appropriate set of grammatical categories to categorize the words and other elements that may appear. The mnemonic names assigned to these categories are fundamentally arbitrary; their importance arises from their application in the rules and lexicon. Algeo and Pyles (2010) assert that grammar is occasionally characterized as all elements of a language that can

be articulated through basic principles, while lexis encompasses all aspects that are unpredictable. However, that assertion is not entirely accurate. Specific pairings of words, known as collocations, exhibit varying degrees of predictability.

Kirkham (2010) succinctly defines grammar as the fundamental laws governing language. However, the conception of these rules and their scope can differ significantly from one definition to another. Consequently, the prevalent interpretation of grammar varies in nuanced yet significant ways from the linguistic definition of the term. Richards (2016) asserts that grammar constitutes the system of rules employed to construct sentences, encompassing knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, and syntactic structures necessary for formulating grammatically correct sentences in English. The principles for creating grammatically accurate sentences pertain to sentence grammar. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) define grammatical competence as the speakers' understanding of grammatical forms and meanings, along with a theoretical comprehension of their application. This form of knowledge is, moreover, articulated by Burns (2009), who asserts that grammar fundamentally pertains to the systems and patterns individuals employ to choose and amalgamate words. Through the study of grammar, individuals discern the structure and regularity that underpin language, acquiring the means to articulate the language system.

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Kirkham (2010) succinctly defines grammar as the fundamental laws governing language. However, the conceptualization of these norms and their scope might differ significantly among various definitions. Consequently, the prevalent interpretation of grammar varies in nuanced yet significant ways from the linguistic definition of the term. Richards (2016) asserts that grammar constitutes the system of rules employed to formulate sentences, encompassing knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, and syntactic structures necessary for constructing grammatically correct sentences in English. The principles for creating grammatically accurate sentences pertain to sentence grammar. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) define grammatical competence as the speakers' understanding of grammatical forms and meanings, along with a theoretical comprehension of their application.

### Review of Literature

Chomsky (1965) posits that grammar reflects the mind, as language is generated inside it. Grammar is generally the fundamental subject that EFL students have studied in class, as per the syllabus. In primary school, pupils learn the basics of grammar.

Wang (2010) defines grammar, an essential component of language training, as a collection of rules governing word selection and their arrangement to create coherent meaning. Grammar is essential for the existence of language. Students struggle to speak English fluently without proficiency in English grammar. The acquisition of a language has been significantly facilitated by grammar, a fundamental element of language learning. In English language instruction, grammar serves as an essential instrument for enhancing students' communicative competence. Wang (2010) asserts that grammar and communication proficiency should not be at odds.

Demir (2019) examined the grammatical proficiency of Turkish senior high school pupils. Their findings indicated that students faced challenges with intricate grammatical structures and had difficulties in applying grammar rules in contextualized scenarios. The study advocated for the inclusion of explicit grammar education, the provision of error correction feedback, and the facilitation of communicative activities to improve students' grammatical competence.

Mastering verb tenses, particularly the present simple and present continuous, is essential for competency in English grammar. This link is symbiotic, as mastery of these tenses improves a learner's capacity to articulate time-related concepts precisely, which is fundamental to effective communication (Lee & Huang, 2021).

### Significance of the Study

English grammar comprises eight parts of speech: noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, interjection, and verb. Students are instructed to demonstrate proficiency in the imaginative application of these grammatical features. Nevertheless, the researcher, having dedicated several years to the field of English language instruction, has seen that a primary issue among students is their functional understanding of subject-verb agreement.

The challenges ESL students face with subject-verb agreement are more evident and pervasive across many grade levels. Throughout their educational journey from primary school to university, numerous individuals exhibit difficulties in adhering to the principles of subject-verb agreement in both speech and writing. Subject-verb agreement errors were identified not only in students' essays but also in the works of university colleagues.

The more concerning aspect of this issue is that such failures extend to professionals who utilize English in their lectures, as well as to esteemed members of state and national assemblies and those involved in various media organizations. Errors in subject-verb agreement are more prevalent, suggesting that many individuals are either unaware of the rules or disregard the significance of grammatical conventions, provided they can communicate their message (Tafida & Okunade, 2016).

Despite the introduction of subject-verb agreement requirements throughout primary education, children continue to encounter difficulties in achieving linguistic competence in their usage of English. Nayan (2009) concurs that, despite being taught grammatical principles at an early age, ESL (English as a second language) learners struggle to apply their understanding of these rules in practical communication.

Zhou (2017) observed that grammar is the most complex and challenging aspect of learning and teaching English, necessitating considerable time for both students and teachers to comprehend its rules. Both educators and learners must acquire the ability to construct sentences that are coherent and significant by appropriately organizing their words and understanding their usage in the target language.

This study was done to examine the grammar knowledge employed by pre-service teachers in their grammatical competency. Secondly, to ascertain the grammatical competency level of the pre-service teachers. This study will examine the correlation between pre-service teachers' grammar knowledge and their level of grammatical competency. Comprehending this data would significantly assist future educators in refining their grammatical competency through the successful use of their individual grammar knowledge.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

The study evaluated the grammatical knowledge and skill of pre-service teachers in their first and second years of the bachelor of education program. It aimed to address the subsequent inquiries:

1. What is the grammatical competency of pre-service teachers regarding Subject-Verb Agreement, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, Parts of Speech, and Adjective-Adverb Agreement?
2. What is the extent of grammatical knowledge among pre-service teachers regarding various grammatical structures, including tenses and conditional sentences?
3. Is there a substantial correlation between pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and their extent of subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech, and adjective-adverb agreement?
4. Is there a substantial correlation between pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and their extent of grammatical knowledge?
5. Is there a significant association between the English and non-English pre-service teachers, in their grammatical competency, and grammatical knowledge.
6. Is there a significant difference between the demographic profile of pre-service teachers, in their grammatical competency, and grammatical knowledge?
7. What educational interventions may be developed to meet the learners' requirements based on the findings of this study, while considering the current educational landscape?

### **Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research strategy, as the numerical data were analysed descriptively to address the highlighted concerns. According to Sousa et al. (2007), a descriptive-correlational design delineates the variables and the inherent correlations that exist between them. The researcher deemed this design appropriate for the study as it sought to examine the grammatical knowledge of the participants and ascertain their correlation with the other variable, namely grammatical competence level.

### **Research Instruments**

The researcher employed a standardized grammatical competence test questionnaire created by Rocel Mae C. Roca and Edralin C. Manla (2023) to evaluate the participants' grammatical ability. The assessment was a multiple-choice format encompassing grammar elements, comprising 20 items each for Subject-Verb Agreement (items 1-20), Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement (items 21-40), Parts of Speech (items 41-60), and Adjective-Adverb Agreement (items 61-80). Furthermore, to assess the pre-service teacher's grammatical knowledge, the investigator employed a multiple-choice grammar test consisting of sixty grammatical items sourced from Nelson assessments. The items pertained to various grammatical structures, including tenses and conditional statements.

### **Analysis**

#### **Hypothesis 1**

There is high level of grammatical competency of pre-service teachers regarding Subject-Verb Agreement, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, Parts of Speech, and Adjective-Adverb Agreement.

**Table 1: Grammatical Competency of Pre-Service Teachers**

Grammatical Competency	Low		Moderate		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Subject-Verb Agreement	21	12.3	102	59.6	48	28.1
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	18	10.5	114	66.7	39	22.8
Parts of Speech	09	5.3	105	61.4	57	33.3
Adjective-Adverb Agreement	32	18.7	103	60.2	36	21.1
On the Whole	28	16.4	94	55	49	28.6

As shown in Table 1, pre-service teachers exhibited moderate levels of grammatical competency namely, subject-verb agreement (59.6%), pronoun-antecedent agreement (66.7%), parts of speech (61.4%), and adjective-adverb agreement (60.2%). This result indicate that there is a moderate level of grammatical competency expressed by pre-service teachers.

### Hypothesis 2

There is high level of grammatical knowledge of pre-service teachers.

**Table 2: Grammatical Knowledge of Pre-Service Teachers**

Grammatical Knowledge	Low		Moderate		High	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
	14	8.2	60	35.1	97	56.7

As shown in Table 2, pre-service teachers unveiled high level of grammatical knowledge (56.7%). This result indicate that there is a high level of grammatical knowledge uttered by pre-service teachers.

### Hypothesis 3

There is a substantial correlation between pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and their extent of subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech, and adjective-adverb agreement.

**Table 3: Relationship between Pre-service Teacher's Grammatical Competency and their extent of Subject-Verb Agreement, Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement, Parts Of Speech, and Adjective-Adverb Agreement**

Variables	Grammatical Competency	'p' Value
Subject-Verb Agreement	0.392**	.000
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	0.515**	.000
Parts of Speech	0.603**	.000
Adjective-Adverb Agreement	0.564**	.000

With reference to Table 3, there is significant relationship among pre-service teachers grammatical competency and the dimensions namely, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech and adjective-adverb agreement, as the calculated 'y' values of 0.392, 0.515, 0.603 and 0.564 at 1% level of confidence. It indicates that, grammatical competency are associated with mastery in grammar components.

### Hypothesis 4

There is a substantial correlation between pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and their extent of grammatical knowledge.

**Table 4: Relationship between Pre-service Teacher's Grammatical Competency and their extent of Grammatical Knowledge**

Variables	Grammatical Knowledge	'p' Value
Subject-Verb Agreement	.158*	.043
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	.151*	.045
Parts of Speech	.167*	.039
Adjective-Adverb Agreement	.163*	.040
Grammatical Competency On the Whole	.194**	.009

With reference to Table 4, there is significant relationship between pre-service teacher's grammatical competency and grammatical knowledge, as the calculated 'y' value of 0.194, at 1% level of confidence. It indicates that, grammatical competency are correlated with knowledge in grammar components.

### Hypothesis 5

There is a significant association between the English and non-English pre-service teachers, in their grammatical competency, and grammatical knowledge.

**Table 5: Association between the English and non-English Pre-service Teachers, in their Grammatical Competency, and Grammatical Knowledge**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.557 <sup>a</sup>	22	.611
Likelihood Ratio	23.309	22	.384
Linear-by-Linear Association	.001	1	.980
N of Valid Cases	170		

As shown in Table 5, English and non-English subject pre-service teachers not associated with the grammatical competency and grammatical knowledge. Because the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), we do not reject the null hypothesis. Rather, we conclude that there is insufficient evidence to suggest an association between English and non-English subject pre-service teachers not associated with the grammatical competency and grammatical knowledge.

### Hypothesis 6

There is a significant difference between the demographic profile of pre-service teachers, in their grammatical competency, and grammatical knowledge.

**Table 6: Mean Score difference between the Demographic Profile of Pre-service Teachers, in their Grammatical Competency, and Grammatical Knowledge**

Variables	Demographic Nature	Mean	SD	't' Value	'p' Value
Grammatical Competency	Male	61.89	3.87	0.430	.668
	Female	61.62	4.11		
	Rural	61.94	4.39	0.686	.494
	Urban	61.52	3.65		
	UG with B.Ed.	61.84	3.98	0.557	.578
	PG with B.Ed.	61.48	4.11		
Grammatical Knowledge	Male	45.90	5.42	0.708	.480
	Female	45.33	5.17		
	Rural	46.14	4.75	1.440	.146
	Urban	45.00	5.65		
	UG with B.Ed.	45.25	5.26	1.076	.283
	PG with B.Ed.	46.15	5.26		

As shown in Table 6, grammatical competency of pre-service teacher's demographic nature (Male and Female, Rural and Urban, UG with B.Ed. and PG with B.Ed.) do not differed statistically, as the calculated 't' values of 0.430, 0.686, 0.557 at 5% level of significance. Further the Table 6, shown that grammatical knowledge of pre-service teacher's demographic nature (Male and Female, Rural, and Urban, UG with B.Ed. and PG with B.Ed.) do not differed statistically, as the calculated 't' values of 0.708, 1.440, 1.076 at 5% level of significance.

### Findings

1. There is a moderate level of grammatical competency expressed by pre-service teachers.
2. There is a high level of grammatical knowledge uttered by pre-service teachers.
3. Positive correlation found among grammatical competency and the dimensions namely, subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech and adjective-adverb agreement.
4. Pre-service teacher's grammatical competency are correlated with knowledge in grammar components.
5. There is insufficient evidence to suggest an association between English and non-English subject pre-service teachers not associated with the grammatical competency and grammatical knowledge.
6. There no significant difference between the demographic profile of pre-service teachers, in their grammatical competency, and grammatical knowledge?

### Conclusion

Language serves as a crucial instrument for communication. The same syntax is crucial for good communication. This study demonstrated that grammatical elements such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, parts of speech, and adjective-adverb agreement are positively connected with



the grammatical proficiency of pre-service teachers. Furthermore, grammatical knowledge plays a key role in the grammatical proficiency of pre-service instructors. However, there is inadequate data to indicate a correlation between English and non-English subject pre-service teachers that is not linked to grammatical skill and grammatical knowledge. It suggests that language is vital for humans, regardless of their inherent characteristics. The study's results strongly indicate a correlation between grammar knowledge and grammatical ability. The government, policymakers, stakeholders, and educators prioritize the enhancement of grammatical proficiency among instructors and pupils.

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