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IN ESMERALDAS**



APPLIED LINGUISTICS SCHOOL

THESIS REPORT

***COMMON WRITTEN ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN THE
STUDENTS FROM THE APPLIED LINGUISTICS SCHOOL AT PUCE IN
ESMERALDAS***

TESIS DE GRADO

***Errores gramaticales escritos más comunes en los estudiantes de Lingüística
Aplicada en la PUCESE***

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College. I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

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STATEMENT BY THE AUTHOR

I, Boris López Estupiñán, affirm that the investigation in the present thesis report is totally unique, authentic, and personal.

The content of this research is a limited legal and academic responsibility of the author and the PUCE in Esmeraldas.

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ABSTRACT

To analyze common written English grammatical mistakes in the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE, a prospective quanti-qualitative descriptive investigation was carried out, with the analytical-synthetic, the hermeneutic, and the statistical methods, using a survey, which contained open and closed questions to know specific information and students' opinions, and a test applied to the total of 45 students from the Applied Linguistics School, where they had to write a short essay about their future professional expectations. The results showed that all the students agreed that grammar must be taught during all the semesters so that they can learn it correctly and improve their knowledge. Besides, they think that grammar is the most important linguistic component to develop their communicative competence properly. The results also revealed that the most common written English grammatical mistakes are the use of the infinitive, specifically the for+ing form, the conjugation of the verb using the third person singular, and the verb tenses in general. There were coincidences with the results provided by several investigators in the field. It is concluded that Grammar must be taught during all the semesters until students finish their studies. Some tasks to teach grammar communicatively, with the necessary methodological orientations, were provided.

Key Words: Grammar; written English mistakes; methodological orientations; Applied Linguistics' students

RESUMEN

Para analizar errores gramaticales comunes en el inglés escrito, en los estudiantes de la Escuela de Lingüística Aplicada, en la PUCESE, se desarrolló una investigación descriptiva, cuanti-cualitativa y prospectiva, con los métodos analítico sintético, hermenéutico y estadístico, usando una encuesta, la cual contenía preguntas abiertas y cerradas para conocer información específica y la opinión de los estudiantes, y una prueba que fue aplicada al total de 45 estudiantes de la Escuela de Lingüística Aplicada, donde tenían que escribir un corto ensayo sobre sus expectativas profesionales. Los resultados mostraron que todos los estudiantes estuvieron de acuerdo en que la gramática se debe impartir durante todos los semestres para poderla aprender correctamente y mejorar sus conocimientos. Ellos también piensan que la gramática es el componente lingüístico más importante para desarrollar su competencia comunicativa adecuadamente. Los resultados revelaron, además, que los errores gramaticales del inglés escrito más comunes son el uso del infinitivo, especialmente la forma for-ing, la conjugación del verbo usando la tercera persona del singular, y los tiempos verbales en general. Hubo coincidencias con los resultados de varios investigadores en el campo. Se concluye que la gramática se debe impartir durante todos los semestres hasta que los estudiantes terminen sus estudios. Se proveen algunas tareas para impartir la gramática de forma comunicativa, con las orientaciones metodológicas necesarias.

Palabras Clave: Gramática, errores del inglés escrito, orientaciones metodológicas, estudiantes de Lingüística Aplicada.

1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of the most important linguistic components to include in the English language teaching learning process because of the fact that without grammar the language cannot be developed very well, and there could be some misunderstanding in the communication among people. Certainly, grammar is the spinal cord and the most important base to speak good English and be able to communicate correctly.

Every time when there is a need to write something, people are being judged because to have a good grammar shows simply good education and makes people more educated, so it is important for everyone to spend a little time perfecting it.

There have been some observations in the students of the Applied Linguistics School from the PUCE Esmeraldas, about the essential grammatical mistakes they make in the use of English at the moment to write, something that also influences in the speaking skill. This may occur because some students start the career without much knowledge about English. In addition, grammar is only taught in the first level, so over the course they keep doubts which are not clarified properly.

Teachers, on the other hand, have lack of time to work with the grammatical mistakes adequately because they need to include this topic in the different subjects, the majority of which do not deal with grammar specifically. These teachers would benefit with information about common mistakes the students make, so that they can be reduced by systematic teaching.

This is why the scientific problem of this investigation is: Which are common written English grammatical mistakes of the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE?

Other important questions to consider are:

What do theories reveal about common written English grammatical mistakes that students make?

Which is the real situation of the Applied Linguistics' students at PUCESE concerning written English grammatical mistakes?

How can written English grammatical mistakes be avoided?

1.1 JUSTIFICATION

English is considered the most important language; it is spoken in many countries around the world for diverse causes. But certainly English is a difficult language to learn and people always find difficulties and problems when they face it. Learners always make mistakes when they write even when teachers explain the topics very well. But that always happens because there are different grammatical rules, the different ways of writing words, the interference of the mother tongue and also the lack of practice, which is one of the most important factors for students to make mistakes in written English. This research did an analysis about common written English grammatical mistakes in the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE and provides the English teachers new methodological alternatives to help the students diminish those mistakes and be able to be proficient in the language.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 GENERAL

- To analyze common written English grammatical mistakes that the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE make.

1.2.2 SPECIFIC

- To make a bibliographical research about common written English grammatical mistakes that student frequently made.

- To diagnose common written English grammatical mistakes that students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE make.
- To design methodological orientations and some tasks in order to improve the students grammatical correctness.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.3.1 WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

According to Harmer, J. (1999), grammar is partly the study of what forms (or structures) are possible in a language. Grammar is one of the most important parts in language learning because it studies the syntax and morphology of sentences. Besides, it analyzes if the words are chained together in a particular and correct order to make sentences in the ideas that want to be expressed. If there is not a correct grammar, it is difficult for people to develop the other skills very well.

According to Greenbaun S, and Gerald N. (2002), Grammar is a set of rules that allow us to combine words in English into larger units. Referring to that concept grammar is syntax. There are some possibilities to apply some combinations of words in English, while others are not possible. For example, when the native speakers of the language are speaking or writing, they put all the words they use in the correct order, the same happens, when a person, who is not a native speaker of the language, has received enough knowledge, and studies about how to use a correct grammar in English.

Grammar is the combination of different patterns to create or form sentences with a good logic which must be understandable by people. Moreover, Hartwell (2009, p. 109) said that "Grammar" is "the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meaning".

The investigation reflects that honestly it is perceivable that most of people do not apply grammar correctly and use it as a way to communicate emergently without taking into consideration the different important aspects and rules to follow and respect. If that is applied, it is feasible to express that people control and manage the patterns involved in the grammar of a determined language (Hartwell, P, 2009).

1.3.2 IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT GRAMMAR

There are two important approaches to teach grammar: explicit and implicit.

Explicit Grammar is more focused and concentrated on the grammatical items. It is a main method in the traditional grammar method for the fact that the teacher provides the explanation about the use of grammatical rules, the correct steps that should be respected by students to acquire an academic writing, and finally the knowledge.

Students obviously must follow those points and learners are able to know everything about the language, but in other words, some students are unable to use the language itself appropriately in contextualized situations, they consistently make errors when they try to use the language in context. Ling, Z (2015) said that “Explicit Grammar teaching refers to the teaching methods making form as the center, it emphasizes to learn the grammatical rules purposefully (p. 557).

On the other hand, teachers have implicit grammar teaching because there are some teachers who prefer that the students produce and use the language in communicative situational scenes in which they have to think by their own, but inducing the grammar rules through the communicative use of language. It seems like students are learning unconsciously, but it is not like that fortunately, because students are focusing more on meaning rather than on form. Vairamuthu, S, (2013) established that “major to recognize and

acquire grammatical patterns in real life situations. Simulations are introduced in the classroom (p. 611)

1.3.3 BENEFITS OF IMPLICIT GRAMMAR TEACHING

Vairamuthu, S (2013. p. 611) designed some advantages if teachers use the implicit way for Teaching Grammar, like the following:

- There is high level of motivation among students.
- The sessions are more enjoyable and students show greater keenness on lessons.
- Students are prompted to focus more on meaning than on form, in an implicit manner.
- There is restriction on the use of grammatical terms of which students are generally “allergic”.
- The approach appropriately guides students to correct error.

1.4 MISTAKES VS. ERRORS

According to Harmer, J. (2001), there are different types of mistakes which are divided into two aspects:

- Slips, in which students realize they make mistakes and they correct themselves because they have enough knowledge acquired before.
- Errors, which refer to when students cannot correct themselves for the fact they do not know the structure and have not received enough knowledge to realize they make some specific mistakes.

When people have knowledge about grammar and vocabulary, it is normal to get confused and sometimes to say some things that do not make sense so the ideas are not connected. That is also called mistakes; but there is something remarkable here, which is

that mistakes can be corrected and sometimes people realize immediately the mistake they have made (Taiseer, M, 2008).

Corder, B. (1967, 1971) and James (1998) quoted by Taiseer, M (2008) reveal a criterion that helps people to do so: “A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Taiseer, M (2008) established that errors are “systematic,” i.e. likely to happen regularly and not recognized by the learner” (p. 5).

The author of this investigation coincides with Corder and James’ definition. Some students from the speciality of Linguistics generally make mistakes and errors in written English despite the fact that they study grammar. This is why teachers and students should be aware of these two concepts.

Chih Hsin Hsu (2013) stated that mistakes are committed by students for negligence because of the fact that sometimes some of them do not pay attention to what they are doing and are not concentrated on the words they are using for writing, if those words are connected to the idea they want to express and the order in which they are structured. Those mistakes can be corrected when they raise awareness.

1.5 COMMON GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN WRITTEN ENGLISH

There are some different types of mistakes in written English, established by Fitikides (2002), there are mistakes in:

- The construction of sentences, for the fact that most of the students do not use the verbs correctly and commit some violations of this rule in the conversation and also in writing, for example they say: you “was”, for “you were” and he “don’t” for “he doesn’t”. The following examples are incorrect usage:
 - “The steamer, with the crew and passenger, were [was] lost”.

- “What signifies [signify] good opinions, when our practice is bad?”
 - “Day after day pass [passes] away”
 - “The legislatures, with the Governor, decide [decides] how the State taxes shall be expended”.
- The use of prepositions is generally considered at the present day to be perfectly legitimate English idioms. The use of prepositions is very important and indispensable but there are some mistakes students make and the sentences sound inelegant for incorrect usage, as the following examples:
- “To rise *beyond* [above] that is given to the few”
 - “Alike independent *on* [of] another”
 - “How different *to* [from] this is life of Fulvia!”
 - “The wisest powers need not think it any diminution *to* [of] or derogation *to* [from]
 - “In pursuance to [of] the provisions of their charter
- The use of the indefinite article [a] and [an]. They cannot be used with a plural noun, but with a noun of multitude; as, “an army”, “a fleet” and etc. [A] is used before all words beginning with a consonant, or a consonant noun, [An], before all words beginning with a true vowel or a silent h; as,
- “a man”, “a woman”, “a youth”, “a European”, “a unit”, “such a one”, “a harpoon”, “a harangue”, “an angel”, “an Indian”, “an hour”, “an honest”.
- The definite article [the] may be used before a noun, whether singular or plural, except abstract terms, or names of virtues, vices or sciences. Articles are also often inserted erroneously, as the following examples:
- “That is the kind of *a* man of whom we are speaking.”
 - “What sort of *a* charm do they possess?”
 - “What species of *a* reptile is this?”

- “Men to whom this kind of *an* organization has been given generally have active minds.”
 - “He was a better mathematician than *a* linguistic.”
- The appendix refers to when the person does not use the verbs correctly referring to the third person singular, in accordance to the foregoing rules:

Play, plays	Do, does
Eat, eats	Go, goes
Break, breaks	Sleep, sleeps
Write, writes	Buy, buys
Pray, prays	Refer, refers
Comply, complies	Jump, jumps

Fitikides, (2002), described that there are different types of mistakes in written English that students make when they write and some of those mistakes are fossilized because they are not corrected in the precise moment and are kept during the academic life. The author referred to a list of those mistakes in written English that some students make, such as: Use of certain prepositions, use of the gerund, use of certain tenses, negatives, third person singular, indefinite articles, verb TO BE, definite article, questions, correct order of words, use of will and shall and singular and plural.

1.6 SOME CAUSES OF WRITTEN ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES

One of the causes of written English grammatical mistakes established by Ruin, quoted by Johansson, (2010) is the lack of motivation students may have, so it is important to engage student’s attention in the teaching of grammar and motivate them to the English language learning. Most of them feel frustrated when they make grammatical mistakes and frustration provokes disinterest. Grammar is the most difficult part in the acquisition of a new language, especially in English.

Al-Khsawneh, F (2010) indicated that the students identified that the teaching method and the environment are the main causes of their weaknesses in English. (Adas A and Bakir, A. 2013, p. 254) said that it is always recommendable to change the environment, changing the positions of the chairs or grouping the students for them to feel more comfortable.

Another relevant cause stated by Adas, A and Bakir, A (2013) is the interference of the mother tongue in the target language because there could be a misunderstanding in the usage of that rule or doubts that are not clarified at the right moment.

Abdulrahman R and Yousif A, (2015) added that “the common cause of mistakes is that students often make an effort to communicate faster in order to develop language fluency. Consequently, they lack concentration and forget about other aspects of their speech such as grammar, word choice and vocabulary” (p. 127).

Also it is very noticeable that most of the students tend to generalize the rules, using them incorrectly. “Overgeneralization occurs when a learner applies a rule to a context of the target language, using it incorrectly” (Krashen, 1985, p. 64). For example, the past tense indicator in English for regular verbs is “ed” consequently, some students tend to apply that rule to the irregular verbs, like; I “drived”, and they are falling in generalization without taking into consideration the different rules established in the different lines of the language (Abdulrahman R and Yousif A, 2015).

Leon, L and Maria, I (2013) quoting Bhela (1999) mentioned that one of the factors is the high influence of the mother tongue in the acquisition and learning of a second language which in this case is English; the author explains that the main mistake that English language students make is related to the structure; it means how sentences are formed because they always tend to look back to the native language.

Narayanan, Rajasekaran and Iyyappan (2008) quoted by Leon, L and Maria, I (2013) researched four relevant factors affecting English learning in students such as

motivation, attitude, language anxiety and the relationship between gender and each one of these factors. The study suggested that it is important that teachers must focus on creating a friendly environment where students feel comfortable and relaxed taking more participation and responsibility of their own learning.

Kozminsky and Kozminsky (2002) quoted by A, Johansson (2010) describe how important it is for teachers to have a dialogue with students. Feedback from teachers plays a big part when it comes to success or failure.

Johansson (2010) quoting Mihalas, S., Allsopp, D., Morse, W. and P. Alvarez McHatton (2009) “write about the importance of good relations between teachers and students. They notice what the effects can be if the relations function in a good way and also the negative ones if the relations are poor. The authors say that the teacher’s relations to his or her students can influence whether the students will want to try to develop and learn more”.

1.6.1 THE INFLUENCE OF WRITTEN ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN THE STUDENTS’ COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

When the word mistake is pronounced, it gives the notion of something negative; however, it is not like that for the fact that without mistakes no one can learn. Mistakes in teaching are a positive signal that students are learning new things or trying to acquire more information.

Concerning the significance of mistakes in language teaching, Corder (1974) stated that:

- They are indispensable to the learners because making mistakes can be regarded as device the learners use in order to learn. Through hypotheses-testing, the learner gets to know which formulations are acceptable and which ones are not.
- They inform the teacher if he\she undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the foreign learner has progressed and consequently what remains for him\her to learn.
- They provide the researcher with evidence of how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies the learners are employing in their discovery of the knowledge about the language (p.283).

On the other hand, grammar is not just a set of rules or exercises in which students are going to develop their writing skill. Grammar is tied with the use of the language and involved with some patterns that some students memorize in order to develop the communicative competence (Sañudo, J. 2013).

Some students tend to have many mistakes when they are developing the rest of skills, such as: Speaking, Reading and Listening skill because when they start to write and use the grammatical rules, they have some problems and mistakes in the acquisition of language and it is indisputable that those mistakes are not corrected by the teachers and surely become fossilized by some students. Psychologically it has been proved that when students write they are keeping all the information in their minds and memorizing the structures of sentences, words, coherence and rules and consequently those aspects said before are applied in the rest of skills, creating a bad communicative competence.

1.7 ROLE OF THE TEACHER TO DIMINISH THE WRITTEN ENGLISH GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES

It is important to implement interesting activities in writing exercises by means of which students must be involved in order to make the experience very valued. If that is followed the teacher is encouraging students' participation, and at the same time they are using the language correctly, what avoids fossilization of errors. The professor must take into consideration what type of exercise is going to be applied in order to make the learning of grammar in the target language easier.

The lack of students' motivation provokes weakness in their acquisition of learning. According to different views there have been some student's expressions in which they have mentioned that the environment and the method used by teachers are not correct, it is important to be focused on the topic and purpose of the lesson, according to that, the professor must look for a useful method that function with the topic.

C, Griffith and G, Sönmez (2015) quoting Gray, R. (2004) stated that it is important that teachers always provide students a short grammatical lesson in which they can discuss what grammatical problems they have found out in the different assignments and how they can solve them in order to improve their grammar and write correctly. If teachers do this, it is possible that students reinforce their knowledge and avoid many grammatical mistakes that were committed before.

In addition, as mentioned by Roberts and Griffiths, (2008), students learn from error corrections, but it is essential that corrections are first noticed. In other words, it is relevant that students first of all get focused on their errors, then to raise students' awareness of the correct forms and provide opportunities and motivation so that they can use these corrections to their advantage and improvement.

Zhou (2008) commented: "error correction should be done softly with a gentle attitude and humor and teachers should be careful about the students' self-esteem" (p. 133). This

author referred to the way which must be positive and polite and the tone of voice that all teachers must use when it is necessary to correct students' mistakes because if it is not like that some students could feel attacked and scared provoking frustration and demotivation in the majority of them making that in a next time when students do not understand a topic or have doubts they will not ask the teacher. Teachers apart of explaining the lessons they need to know something about psychology and know how to treat students.

Al-Buainain, H (2006) pointed out that “it is the teachers’ responsibility to adopt, modify or even develop remedial procedures that can elevate the students’ level and minimize their errors. Teachers should try to find the best method to deliver the lesson to their students”.

Al- Buainain, H (2006) referred that teachers have to take into consideration that education has suffered different modifications and evolutions for the well-being of everybody. In the past, the majority of teachers used the traditional way of teaching, reducing the students’ possibility to elevate their levels and diminishing their motivation in order to feel interested in decreasing their own mistakes. Also teachers currently have a range of methods and techniques to present students the mistakes they make because it is important to make them feel focused on and concentrated when the teachers are clarifying their doubts since everything must keep in the students’ minds.

Uusen and Määrsepp, (2010: 170–184) quoted by Uibu, K and Liiver, M (2015) established that “a good technique used in language teaching is to guide students in the manner that they find their own mistakes. If the children have an interest in, and proficiency for, writing it is possible to teach them to find and analyse grammar mistakes”. “A teacher does not correct the mistake but draws a students’ attention to it and gives them the opportunity to correct it” (Allahyar and Ramezanpour, 2011: 240–243).

It is important to highlight that professors must take an organized structure at the moment to carry out the process of correction. This organization contains some important supports. First, there is self-correction, it means that each student has to identify and modify the mistakes individually supporting with the knowledge they have learned before during the

previous lessons of certain topics. On the other hand, there is peer correction which consists of the fact that the mistakes that one student make must be identified and corrected by the rest of the partners in a determined group. It encourages pairwork, collaboration, organization, and students' motivation. Finally there is teachers' correction in which the professor revises and analyzes student's correction and identifies if there are weaknesses, empties and problems in the language. Because of that, if the teacher observes that corrections were very well done means that students have improved in their grammatical mistakes but if it is not like that, the professor must eliminate or avoid those mistakes looking for different strategies and methodologies (Duran, J. 2014).

Cassany, D (1993) proposed the following model of questionnaire that the teachers can give out their students in order to know exactly what must be corrected and the mistakes students prefer that the teacher corrects (p. 124).

1- What do you want that the teacher corrects in the homework you make? Tick the options you prefer, if you wish you can add more:

- Ortography
- Originality text
- Grammar
- Coherence and structure
- Punctuation
- Fluency

2- What do you want the teachers do with the mistakes that you make? Point out one option in each group:

2.1.

- The teacher points out the mistakes you make.
- The teacher writes the solution.
- The teacher provides an explanation about the mistake made before.

2.2.

- The teacher scores with a grade the mistake made before.

- The teacher evaluates the text with an adjective.
- The teacher writes advices to review the document.

3- What does the student do with teachers' modification? And, ¿ what should the student do? Point out one of the options:

3.1. ¿What does the student do?

- Nothing.
- Read the corrections made by the teacher.
- Write down the mistakes in a list.

3.2. ¿What should the student do?

- Elaborate a list with the mistakes.
- Continue the same.
- Rewrite the document.

4- Other Questions you wish to improve you writing works.

1.7.1 GRAMMAR AND COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Learning a language through a communicative method can be more useful and appropriate because it provides a better opportunity to communicate than the traditional way of teaching grammar, like grammar based- approach. But it is very important to say that teachers are able to use the communicative approach and the traditional grammar method and, hence it is much better if they mix them in the lesson, above all because learners first learn the grammar through exercises, grammar rules explained by the teacher and it is very feasible that they produce what they learned before by means of communication, conversations, debates, or opinion about something they like. That is how teachers can obtain perfect results in students' communicative competence and provoke that students apply the grammatical patterns acquired before (Pizarro G, & Cordero D, 2013).

Long (1991) quoted by Chiu, C, Barrea M. (2012) differentiates between focus on forms and focus on form. He defines focus on forms as learning grammar rules, and focus on form as drawing learners' attention to grammar in activities and tasks.

Some teachers think that form-focused instruction and communicative activities, where the focus is on meaning, should be separated. Teachers believe that drawing students' attention to grammar, while they are engaging in meaning, may have harmful effects (Lightbown, 1998) quoted by Chiu, C, Barrea M (2012). However, some scholars argue that form-focused instruction and communicative activities should be combined. Students pay more attention to target forms, and the forms become more memorable.

1.7.1.2 PRACTICAL AND FUNNY ACTIVITY FOR COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE STRATEGY

There are many activities that teachers can use to make English classes more vivid and active. Since many years ago teachers have used the same and repetitive activities that do not fulfill the main objectives, which is to enable students to learn grammar correctly and consequently get some mistakes that can be fossilized with time. When this happens, learners feel pressured because teachers are pushing them to memorize structures that are not contextualized or used in everyday speech; this is why students do not know how to use those structures in a flexible and practical way. However, there are different enjoyable and amazing activities proposed and mentioned by different authors that can make language teachers' classes funnier and more oriented. One of those activities is described as follows:

- Students sit down in a circle. The language teacher asks the students for a catchy and challenging topic to talk about. When the topic is chosen, the teacher chooses a verb tense and begins the story by providing the thesis statement to be developed orally by the students. Then, the first student on his right side continues by adding two or three sentences. Each student adds something until finally the last participant gives the concluding sentence to end the story. The

idea is to keep the same verb tense throughout the story and see how students insert new information and vocabulary, and use simple or complex verbal phrases. They become story-tellers (Pizarro G, & Cordero D, 2013. p. 274-275).

1.8 TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

TBLT state that the primary unit of programme design and planning individual lessons is a task. Most of its definitions (Ellis 2003:4-5) show that a task should follow these criteria:

1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).
2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).
3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right). On the basis of such criteria, a distinction can be made between a ‘task’ and ‘a situational grammar exercise’. Whereas the latter may satisfy criteria (2) and (3), it does not satisfy (1), as the learners know that the main purpose of the activity is to practice correct language rather than to process messages for meaning, nor does it satisfy (4), as the outcome is simply the use of correct language.

Ellis (2009) establishes a distinction between ‘task’ and ‘situational grammar exercise’, which is explained because the former requires a syllabus consisting of unfocused tasks; that is, the content of the instructional programme is specified in terms of the tasks to be completed (Ellis quoting Prabhu: 1987). The latter utilizes a structural syllabus and typically involves ‘PPP’ (presentation–practice– production), with the final stage taken up with what is often referred to as a ‘task’ but more correctly constitutes a ‘situational grammar exercise’.

As Ellis (2009) points out, the phases in which a task-based lesson can be taught are: the pre-task phase, the main task phase or task-cycle, and the post task phase, being the obligatory one the main task. Tasks can be performed in a whole-class context, in pairs, in groups, or by learners working individually.

1.8.1 THE SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH BY LEV VYGOTSKY

This theory makes emphasis on the fact that language is first developed in the interpsychological level, in the social interaction with others, and then in the intrapsychological level, in the mind of the student. So, for learning, social interchange is fundamental. This means that a communicative approach may benefit the students' learning because it demands interaction since the very beginning.

A contribution in this theory is what Vygotsky calls the Zone of Proximal Development. According to Vygotsky (quoted by Vera & Holbrook, 1996), the ZPD is:

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86).

It is fundamental to consider that it corresponds to teachers the design of didactic materials, such as tasks and methodologies, to help students go from their current zone of development, i.e., what they can do for themselves, to the zone of potential development, Didactic materials become mediators for learners to go through the zone of proximal development, where teachers' assistance is very much necessary.

1.9. RESEARCH ANTECEDENTS

There are many studies concerning the meaning, the importance and function of grammar in order to develop the communicative competence correctly. There are some strategies that teachers can use to solve the students' grammatical problems, but in order to do that, it is necessary to know some teachers' strategies and what the teachers' role is to diminish this problem which is relevant for the students' academic life.

Harmer, J (1999) establishes some important points that help to identify the various problems or grammatical mistakes in written English in the students. But it is very important to know how to solve the problems from the root. That is why teachers must have knowledge of how to teach grammar correctly and know the different tools to make it easier for the students. That is why this investigation provides some different ideas about how to do it.

Feltsen, P (2009) indicates a list of written English grammatical mistakes that students frequently make when they are learning a new language, especially in English and some of those mistakes reflected by this author have a huge coincidence with the mistakes shown in this investigation.

Kolowich, L (2015) proposed the common mistakes in written English that students make and the causes about what they make them; it means what difficulties they present at the moment to face with this important part in the learning of the English language.

As it is known, there are many factors that influence the process of grammar learning, and that it provokes written English Grammatical mistakes, Almuhimedi, R and Yousif (2015) investigated the main reasons why learners make mistakes, and they establish that people most of the time tend to feel frustrated and desperate, trying to use language correctly they tend to focus on what is being said rather than on how it is said.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 TYPE OF INVESTIGATION

This is a quantitative-qualitative descriptive and prospective investigation because this research analyzed, described and enumerated common written English grammatical mistakes that the students of the Applied Linguistics School at PUCE in Esmeraldas have.

2.2 VARIABLES OF THE RESEARCH

This study used the following variables

Dependent: Applied Linguistics School Students' English language level.

Independent: Common written English grammatical mistakes.

2.3 METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Analytical-Synthetical, in order to analyze the most important information and data and made a synthesis of the most relevant.

Hermeneutic, with the objective to interpret the information found, as well as the results, in order to arrive to conclusions.

Statistical, in order to quantify the data and take them to figures.

2.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population consisted of forty five students from the Applied Linguistics School at Puce, 7 men and 38 women. It coincided with the sample.

2.5 DATA PROCESSING

The information was processed using the percentage manual method. The Microsoft Excel programme was used to take the data to figures.

2.6 TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS

2.6.1 SURVEY

It was applied to students from the Applied Linguistics School at Puce in Esmeraldas. In order to have a greater confidence and effectiveness, this survey was placed inside the school, where there were 10 questions which were closed and open, in order to determine common written English grammatical mistakes.

2.6.2 TEST

A test was applied to the students from the Applied Linguistics School. In it they had to write a composition about their expectations. This test was done in order to identify the common written English grammatical mistakes in the students from the Applied Linguistics School and have an idea about their weaknesses in grammar.

3 RESULTS

3.1 RESULTS OF THE TEST APPLIED TO THE STUDENTS FROM THE APPLIED LINGUISTICS SCHOOL

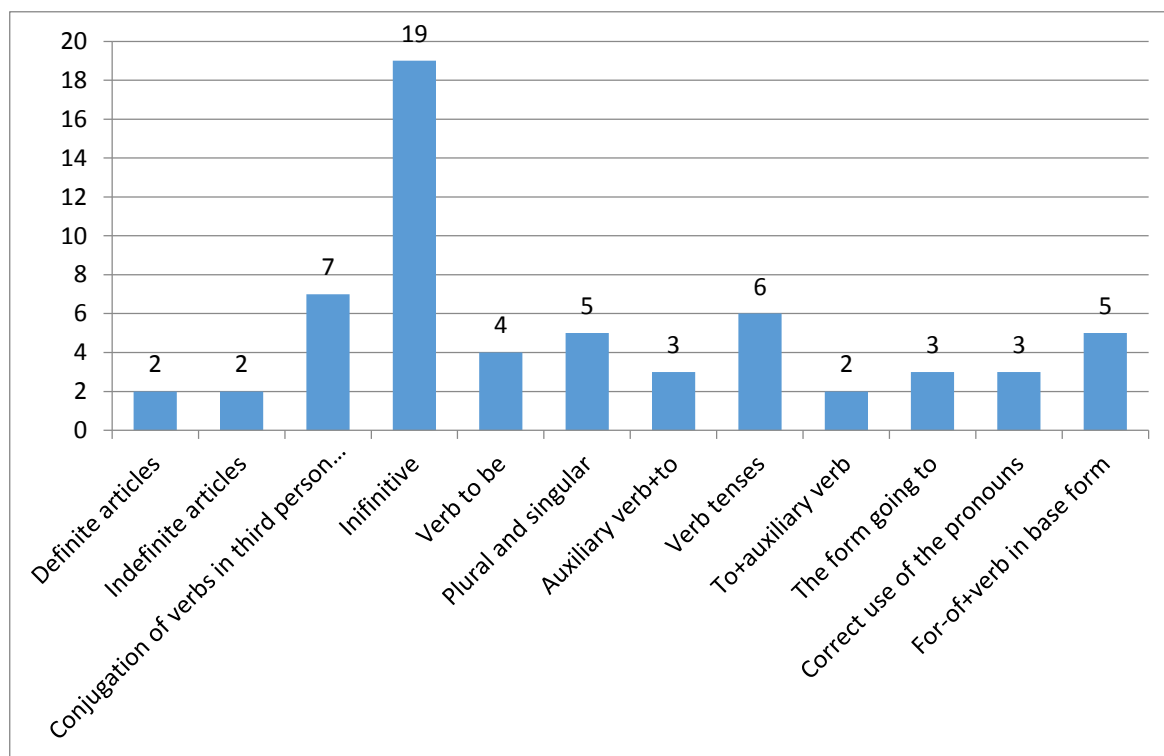


Figure 1. Common Written English grammatical mistakes

Source: students' test

This result shows the necessity to work basically with the infinitive, verbal tenses, as well as the conjugation of verbs using the pronouns of the third person singular. Later, it is noticeable to analyze that students also made mistakes in the use of the form FOR+ gerund for example: correct way (for studying) and incorrect way (for study) and many of them wrote the incorrect way. Apart from this, they also showed mistakes in the use of the verb to be, some of them did not use properly that grammatical pattern, which is important and relevant in the development of students' grammar.

3.2 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY APPLIED TO STUDENTS FROM THE APPLIED LINGUISTICS SCHOOL AT PUCESE

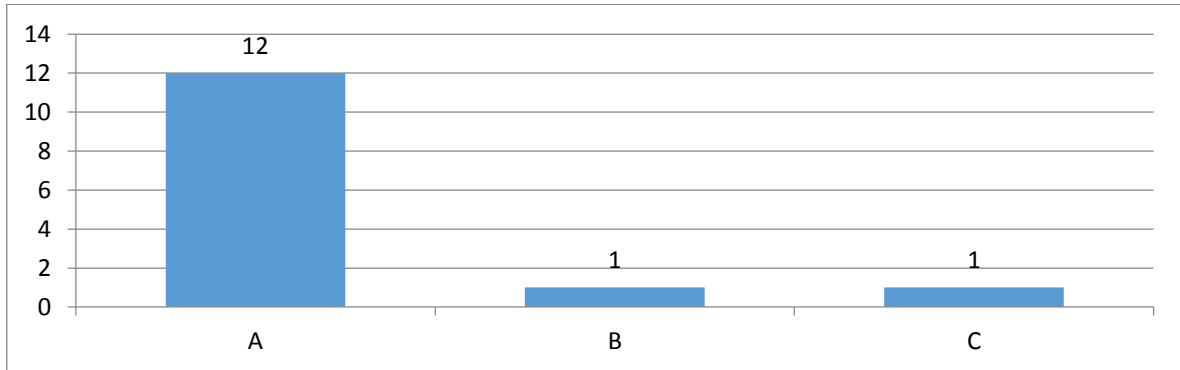


Figure 2. Students' definition of grammar

Source: survey

In this figure, it is remarkable that most of people selected the category A which means YES, while 1, 7% marked the category B which means NO and C agreed with the same answer. This reveals that the majority of students know what the meaning of grammar is and few of them do not know.

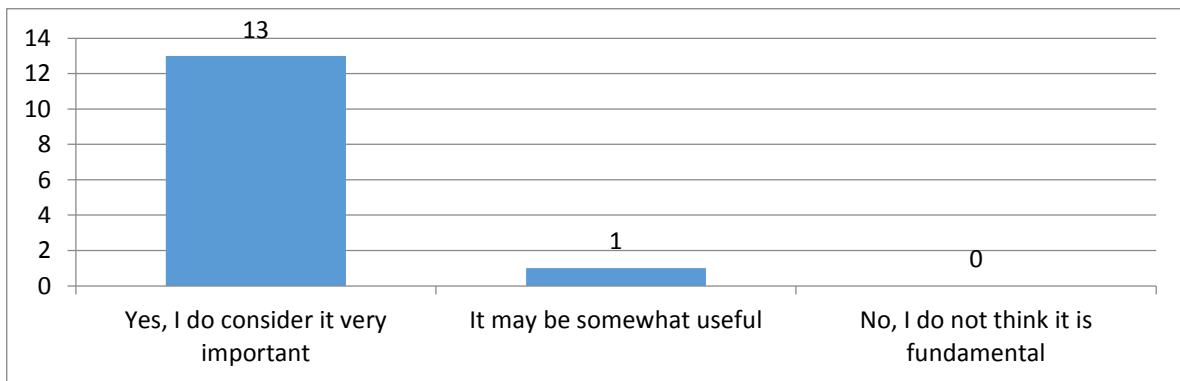


Figure 3. If grammar is very important to develop the rest of the skills properly

Source: survey

In this question it is easy to observe and analyze that 93% of people considered that grammar is very important for their academic life, while 1, 7% expressed that grammar is somewhat useful. This question reveals that the majority of them think that grammar is the best linguistic component in order to improve the communicative competence.

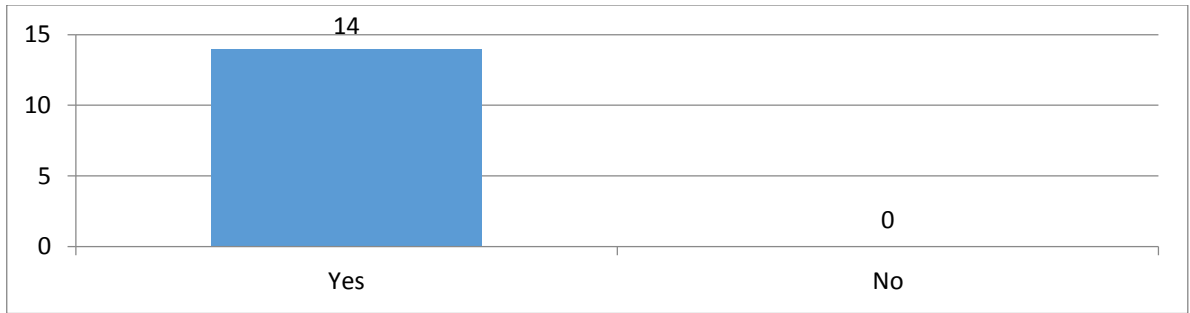


Figure 4. If students from the Applied Linguistics School at Puce in Esmeraldas need to receive or study grammar till the end of their university studies

Source: survey

The results show that the students are aware of the problem they have in grammar. It is noticeable that all the students from the Applied Linguistics School (100%) agreed that they need to receive and study more grammar till the end of their university studies because they think that studying grammar just in the first two levels is not enough to clarify and eliminate some determined doubts and mistakes that have become fossilized.

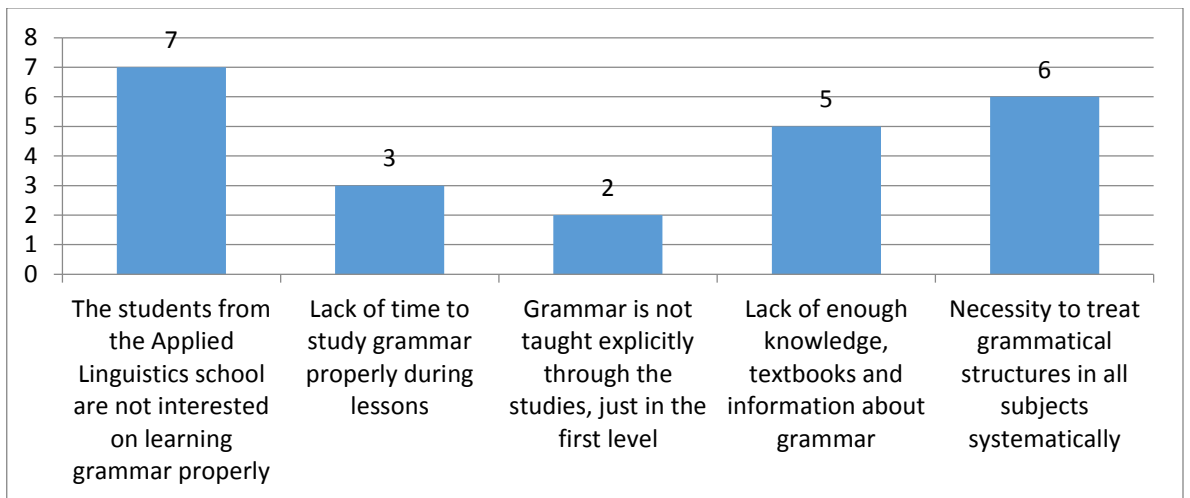


Figure 4: Why students make written English Grammatical mistakes

Source: survey

The majority of students said that they do not feel interested on learning grammar properly because there is a lack of motivation during the lessons.

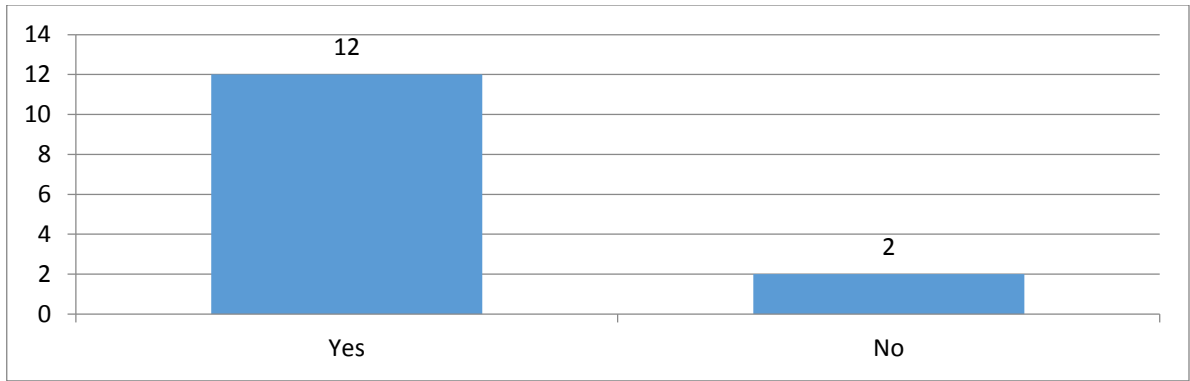


Figure 5: Problems in written English because of grammatical mistakes
Source: survey

86% of students demonstrated to be aware of the written English grammatical mistakes that they make while 14% said that they do not make a lot of grammatical mistakes. This situation expresses a huge necessity in students to learn grammar and diminish grammatical mistakes.

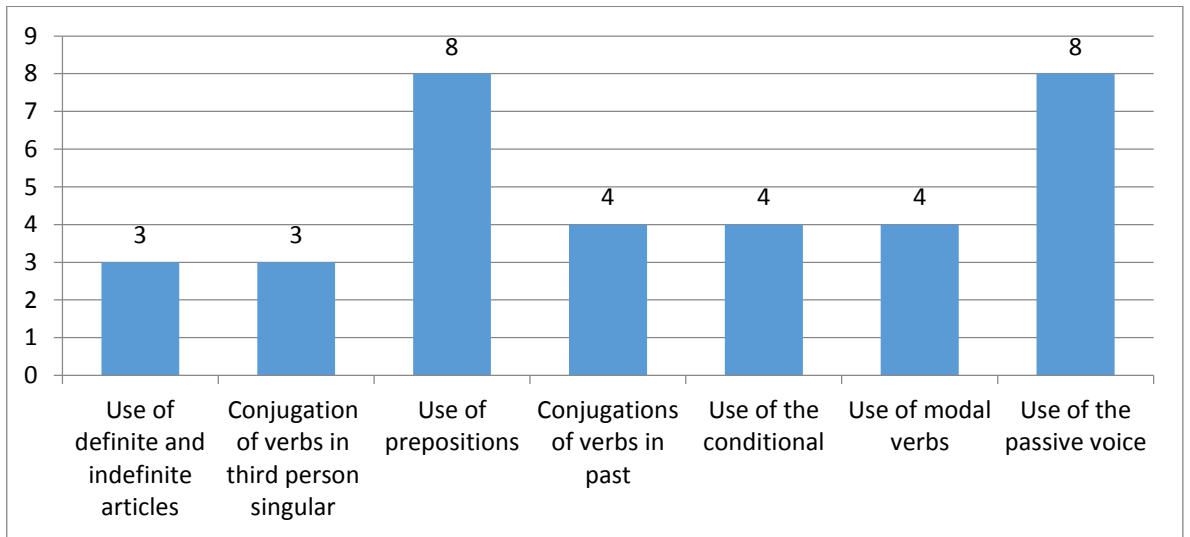


Figure 6: Frequent grammar mistakes.

Source: survey

According to this, the mistakes that the students more frequently make when writing English are related to the use of prepositions and the passive voice. In addition, they also present difficulties in the use of the definite and indefinite articles and in the conjugation of verbs in the third person singular, in the use of the conditional and the modal verbs.

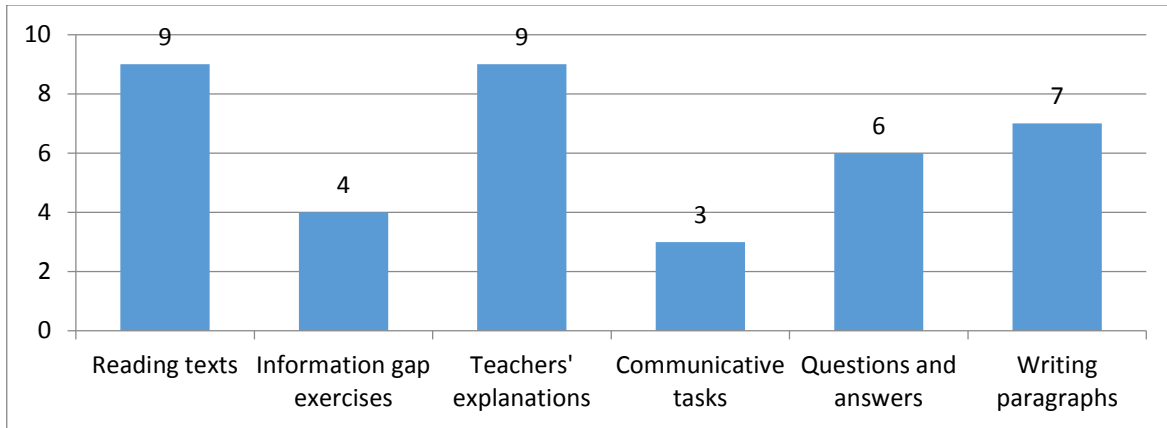


Figure 7: Techniques students consider useful to improve grammar

Source: survey

As can be seen in figure 7, students expressed they can improve their grammar by means of reading texts and teacher's explanation using the correct methodology and techniques. Also writing paragraphs is useful and beneficial for the reason that they can practice their grammar and diminish the grammatical mistakes.

4. DISCUSSION

The objectives of the present investigation were fulfilled thoroughly because the common written grammatical mistakes in the students from the Applied Linguistics School have been identified through the survey and the test mentioned before, after investigating different theories about grammar and why students make mistakes, especially the students from the Applied Linguistics School.

Some results have been obtained by this investigation that coincided with the ones provided by other authors or investigators, such as (Fitikides; 2002) in relation with the mistakes that students tend to make at the moment to write. This investigator reflected a list of the common written English grammatical mistakes that students make and that list of mistakes revealed what this investigation reflected, and there is a big coincidence concerning that.

This investigation reflected some techniques that students prefer that teachers apply and which are very useful to improve or diminish written English grammatical mistakes, and the most important by students were: teachers' explanation and reading texts, but there is another author (Robert, W; 1998) who pointed out different techniques and strategies that can function in order to improve the students' grammatical mistakes.

Some authors coincide with the opinion of the students from the Applied Linguistics School, which was revealed through the survey. It consisted of the fact that it would be good and more efficient to have grammar till the end of the career so that students can have a strong base about this important language component from which the rest of the skills derive, as it was mentioned before, because grammar is the spinal cord of the English language. Teachers should implement grammar in each subject without leaving the context and purpose of the lesson.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

- When students do not receive grammar as a requirement during all the semesters until they finish the university, some mistakes tend to become fossilized in their academic life, mistakes which are not eliminated and are not very well explained in the precise moment.
- Grammar is the spinal cord of the language and it is necessary that students learn grammar properly and very well so that they can improve and develop better the rest of the skills.
- This research reflected that the frequent written English grammatical mistakes are: the use of the infinitive, the conjugation of the third personal singular and verb tenses.
- The explanation of grammar given by teachers is very important and relevant for a real improvement of students' grammar. The correct use of tasks with some methodological orientations to teach grammar in a communicative way may help to diminish the students' grammatical mistakes.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should review grammar systematically when they teach their subjects.
- To continue this investigation with a pedagogical experiment with the implementation of the proposal.

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7 APPENDICES

Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador In Esmeraldas

7.1 SURVEY

This investigation's main objective is to analyze and identify the common written English Grammatical mistakes in Applied Linguistic School students

Please, read carefully and answer all the questions

1. Choose the correct item:

- a. Grammar studies the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make sentences .
- b. Grammar studies the phonology and morphology of the words.
- c. Grammar refers to the word order of the sentences and how those words are pronounced

2. Do you think grammar is very important to develop the rest of the skills properly and successfully in English as Foreign Language learners? Match one item.

	Yes, I do consider it very important.
	It may be somewhat useful
	No, I do not think it is fundamental

3. Put a tick: Do you think the students from the Applied Linguistics School at PUCESE need to receive or study Grammar till the end of the career?

	Yes
	No

4. Put a tick. Why do you think the students from the Applied Linguistics School have written English grammatical mistakes?

- The students from the Applied Linguistics school are not interested in learning grammar properly
- Lack of time to study grammar properly during lessons.
- Grammar is not taught in the whole career, just in the first level.
- Lack of enough knowledge, textbooks and information about grammar.
- Bad explanation of the teachers.

5. Put a tick. Do you consider you have problems and written English grammatical mistakes?

	Yes
	No

6. What written English grammatical mistakes do you think you make more frequently, match them?

- Use of definite and indefinite articles.
- Conjugation of verbs in third person singular in present.
- Use of prepositions.
- Conjugation of verbs in past.
- Use of the conditional tense.
- Use of the modal verbs

7. What of the following techniques do you think are useful and proper to improve students' grammar?

- Reading texts
- Information Gap exercises
- Teacher's explanations
- Communicative tasks
- Questions and answers
- Writing Paragraphs
- Comparing with Spanish

8. Read the next sentences and find the grammatical mistake. Circle the mistakes and write on the line how you think the sentence is correct.

7.1. Carlos gave to Dayana a piece of paper

7.2. Diana is an university student.

7.3. Luis say that Byron was who put that computer on the table.

7.4. If I would have time to go there, I would eat on time.

7.5. Richard took an paper and write a letter.

7.6. Penelope will to book the sits in the restaurant.

7.7. I must to buy to take care of the house.

7.8. My mother always say Ana is a high and dry.

7.9. Leonardo is the most tall student in the classroom.

9. Do you think grammar must be taught during the entire career of the Applied Linguistics School? And why?

	YES
	NO

10. What methodologies can the teacher use to improve students' grammar if there are different kinds of learning in students?

- Communicative approach
- Grammar translation
- Transformation and generative grammar.
- Reading method

7.2 TEST

The test consisted of writing an essay about their expectations of their studies in the university, minimum with 80 word

7.3 PICTURES



7.4 PROPOSAL

SOME TASKS WITH METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS TO TEACH GRAMMAR COMMUNICATIVELY

Objective: To teach grammar communicatively

Stage 1

Presentation

Objective: To present the grammatical structure in a communicative way.

Procedures

- To provide an example of the grammatical structure in a contextualized situation
- To ask questions to the students so that they can elicit the rule (first the communicative function implied, and then the forms used)
- To give a brief explanation of the grammatical structure (communicative function and form)
- To correct the students errors immediately

Stage II

Focused Practice

Objective: To get the students to manipulate the grammatical structure

Procedures

- To provide an activity so that the students can manipulate the grammatical structure
- To arrange the class in pairs or small groups
- To move around to monitor the students' interaction while doing the activity
- To jot down the mistakes-to correct the ones which hinder communication
- To give adequate time
- To check (see if the students can use the grammatical structure)

Stage III

Communicative Practice

Objective: To make the students use the grammatical structure in simulated situations

Procedures

- To provide a task.
- To get the students work in pairs or small groups to solve the task.
- To get the students use the language freely.
- To jot down the mistakes the students make for further correction.

Stage IV

Feedback and correction

Objective: To provide feedback and correction of the mistakes made in the fluency practice.

Procedures

- To design a task based on the mistakes made by the students.
- To get the students manipulate the structure first and then to make them use the structure in communication to check.

EXAMPLE OF TASKS DESIGNED ACCORDING TO THE MISTAKES DIAGNOSED

GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE

The use of modal verbs

The use of the modal should in the communicative function correcting and criticizing

1) Pre -Task (Structure presentation in a communicative way)

Objective:

To get the Students to be aware of the grammatical structure, by means of a communicative function, not by the form

Role of the teacher: Guide or manager

Role of the students: Active participation

Example:

Teacher: When you look at the sentence “You should have concerned about the importance of Grammar”

Ask students: What are we doing with the language?

Are we giving directions? Asking for advice? Greeting?

Students may say: No

Then the teacher insists: Then what do we mean?

Students: Criticizing/Correcting

(If the students do not get the idea, we may give a simpler example, and if they do not get the idea we can state the communicative function)

Teacher: Ok, we are expressing correcting or criticizing

Then the teacher asks:

For correcting and criticizing, what grammatical elements do we use?

Students: the modal should

Teacher: And what else?

Students: the present perfect of the verb

Teacher: correct, but notice the present perfect of the verb, what grammatical elements are necessary for this verbal tense?

Students: have or has (according to the subject) and the past participle of the verb

Teacher: That’s right

Note: Feedback and correction are immediate

2) Task-Cycle (Focused Practice)

Objective: To provide the students with exercises so that they can manipulate the grammatical structures.

Role of the teacher: Monitor (The teacher will control the students while they are doing the exercises)

Role of the students: Active

Example:

(The teacher will provide a contextualized situation, according to the subject he/she is dealing with)

Peter Wilson did not study for the test properly, so he got a low mark.

What should he have done? What shouldn't he have done? Criticize him

Write two sentences

a) _____

b) _____

The students may work in pairs

The teacher moves around the classroom checking the students' practice, and helping them if it is necessary.

Possible answers:

a) **He should have studied systematically**

b) **He shouldn't have lost time**

After the time assigned the teacher should check the exercises, either orally or on the board.

Note: Feedback and correction are immediate

3) Post-Task

Objective: To provide the students with realistic situations so that they can use the grammatical structures that are being studied

Role of the teacher: Facilitator. He/She moves around, just observing and jotting down the mistakes for further correction.

Role of the students: Active

Example:

The teacher gives the students a situation and they will role play using the structure that is currently being studied.

Role-Play Situation

Mary is sick. She has a stomachache, but she did not go to the doctor, so she is worse now.

Her friend Luisa phones her and criticizes her.

(Possible answer)

Luisa: Hello Mary

Mary: Hi Luisa

Luisa: How are you?

Mary: Not fine. I'm sick. I have a stomachache.

Luisa: Did you go to the doctor?

Mary: No, I didn't

Luisa: Mary, you should have gone to the doctor.....

Note: After the students practice for the time indicated, the teacher checks orally

The use of the Infinitive form correctly in the communicative function expressing an obligation

1) Pre-Task (Structure presentation in a communicative way)

Objective:

To get the Students to be aware of the grammatical structure, by means of a communicative function, not by the form.

Role of the teacher: Guide or manager

Role of the students: Active participation

Example:

Teacher: When you look at the sentence “You have to study very hard to improve your grammar.

Ask students: What are we doing with the language?

Are we asking for an order in a restaurant? Asking for advice? Greeting?

Students may say: No

Then the teacher insists: Then what do we mean?

Students: Expressing an obligation and using correctly the Infinitive form.

(If the students do not get the idea, we may give a simpler example, and if they do not get the idea we can state the communicative function)

Teacher: Ok, we are expressing an obligation and using the Infinitive form.

Then the teacher asks:

For expressing an obligation and use the infinitive form correctly, what grammatical elements do we use?

Students: the verb Have + preposition TO

Teacher: And what else?

Students: The other Verb after the preposition TO

Teacher: correct, but notice it can be the verb has or have (according to the subject)

Note: Feedback and correction are immediate

2) Task- Cycle (Structure Manipulation or Focused Practice)

Objective: To provide the students with exercises so that they can manipulate the grammatical structures.

Role of the teacher: Monitor (The teacher will control the students while they are doing the exercises)

Role of the students: Active

Example:

(The teacher will provide a contextualized situation, according to the subject he/she is dealing with)

Cynthia Nuñez did not study in the whole semester and now she has a lot of possibilities to lose the majority of her subjects because she always obtained bad grades

What does she have to do? What does not she have to do? Express her obligations

Write two sentences

a) _____

b) _____

The students may work in pairs

The teacher moves around the classroom checking the students' practice, and helping them if it is necessary.

Possible answers:

a) **She has TO study very hard**

b) **She does not have to spend her time in other things**

After the time assigned the teacher should check the exercises, either orally or on the board.

Note: Feedback and correction are immediate

3) Post-Task (Students' use of the grammatical structure in realistic situations. Communicative Practice)

Objective: To provide the students with realistic situations so that they can use the grammatical structures that are being studied

Role of the teacher: Facilitator. He/She moves around, just observing and jotting down the mistakes for further correction.

Role of the students: Active

Example:

The teacher gives the students a situation and they will role play using the structure that is currently being studied.

Role-Play Situation

Cynthia is tired. She always goes to bed very late and needs to get up early to go to the university.

Her friend Adelle phones her and tells Cynthia her obligations

(Possible answer)

Adelle: Hello Cynthia

Cynthia: Hi Adelle

Adelle: How are you?

Cynthia: Not fine. I'm tired.

Adelle: Did you go to bed early?

Cynthia: No, I didn't

Adelle: Cynthia, you have to sleep early because of the university.....

Note: After the students practice for the time indicated, the teacher checks orally

