

# A Study Among Professionals Learning English: Importance of Grammatical Competence

Maruf Rahman\*

Nure Jannat\*\*

Abdulla al Masum\*\*\*

## Abstract

Grammar is one of the main components to understand a language and to be competent in the language. This article incorporates on a study investigating the importance of grammatical competence for improving the professional learners' level of English language proficiency. The study identifies the problems related to parts of speech, sub-verb agreement, modals, voice, and tense through the analysis and discussion of professional learners' questionnaire and interviews. Finally, it deals with the importance of grammatical competence over communicative competence, providing extra emphasis on the required grammatical parts, clarifying the doubts, self-study, providing materials depending on proficiency level etc. as important components for enhancing the professionals' learning process.

**Keywords:** grammatical competence, professional learners, grammatical problems, proficiency

## Introduction

In the educational institutions in our country, English is taught as the second language. But after completing the HSC level, students get joined in various universities, and they take their under graduation in different subjects where they study the subject in English but regarding communication in English what is necessary for professional jobs is not taught. For this reason, professionals fall in many problems in their professional life regarding the use of English.

From time to time, various new methods, approaches substituted the previous ones with new guidelines, procedures and with extremely new scenarios. But, whatever the methods may be, the grammatical importance for learning a new or second language cannot be ignored, rather it enhances the communicative competence. In this connection, this article found out the necessity of grammatical items in professional levels, the problems professionals face, and the grammatical problems which need to be clarified with more effort.

\*Lecturer, Dept. of English, Noakhali Science and Technology University

\*\*Lecturer, Dept. of English, Noakhali Science and Technology University

\*\*\*Lecturer, Dept. of English, Green University of Bangladesh

### **Statement of The problem**

As Communicative language teaching is followed in our country at the professional teaching level, the students of this level used to go through some monitored procedures to learn English. But in the context of our country, the application of Communicative language teaching method does not fulfill the required achievement as the environment is not favorable. Saying this, to communicate effectively, professional learners face grammatical problems as well, and it is noticed that as the professionals of our country do not get enough time to practice English for the pressure of their job, the result would not be as satisfactory as they deserve. But if little care is given in some areas for the professional learners with focusing them in some particular grammatical items, the communicative competence of the learners would be enhanced. This article is designed to investigate whether grammatical competence for being proficient in English language is required or not.

### **Justification of the study**

This study has great importance for both the teachers and professional learners. Especially, the learners of different professions would be able to know the importance of grammatical competence for their communicative competence in English language. Moreover, the professional learners will be able to easily focus on the grammatical items which are frequently used. On the other hand, the teachers will also be benefited if they prioritize the required grammatical items and make the professional learners grammatically competent by providing sufficient grammatical worksheets.

### **Literature Review**

To achieve communicative competence, grammatical competence is the first one to be competent with. According to Canale and Swain (1980: 29), grammatical competence is the type of competence in which it focuses on the use of lexical items, morphological rules, syntax, semantics, and along with the aspect of phonology (pronunciation). Again, Ellis et al.,(2002) suggest that the teaching of linguistic form, grammatical rules in particular, continue to take major part in language pedagogy. Canale and Swain (1980: 27) propose that communicative competence will be at least consisting of three components such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (communication strategies) . The learners level can vary, for example, he or she can be from higher secondary level or tertiary level or professional level, but without grammatical competence, communicative competence faces challenges in learning a second language. According to (Fikron, 2018), Grammatical competence has its own role in L2 communication. It is responsible for both language production and the correcting process of the

language production itself. Grammatical competence will give such ability to the learners to not only use the language properly and deliver the idea or the message accurately but also to understand the message itself. Many scholars opine the importance of grammatical competence in different ways. The important question is not whether teaching and learning grammar is necessary and/or sufficient for language learning, but whether it helps or not. And my own opinion is that yes, it does help, provided it is taught consistently as a means to improve mastery of the language, not as an end in itself. (Ur, 1999:77-78)

To make the professionals competent in communication, first need is to make them grammatically competent and to make them confident in grammatical rules. We should bear in mind that grammatical rules and regularities of the target language cannot be separated from the expression of meaning since they, in turn, have crucial roles in making a work meaningful. (Khamesian, 2016)

Again, another study suggests, the study of grammar should not be the ultimate end in itself but also must meet its role in the actual use of language, that is to be a tool that contributes to successful communication (Amelina S.N., 2014). Moreover, the grammar is an interlocking system in which the grammatical choices themselves contribute to the communicative meaning (Chalker, 1993: 7). Rules of word formation and sentence formation, and the ability to recognise correct sentences and organise them to form texts, are regarded as central components of grammatical competence (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992: 71; Verhoeven & Vermeer, 1992: 164). Grammar is a central component in any model of language competence (Cook, 1992: 9; Bachman, 1990: 84).

While grammatical knowledge depends on the rules of grammar, grammar skills depend on the intensity of training exercises, and the grammatical intuition depends on the breadth and scope of the communicative experience of the students. Watching the students, you will notice that the best results are obtained when a communicative experience of students is supported by targeted training and language patterns are explained with the help of rules. (R.P. Millrood, 2014)

### **Research Questions**

1. What problems do the professional learners experience while communicate in English at their work places?
2. What are the main grammatical problems they face when communicate in English?
3. What measures can be taken for minimizing the grammatical problems of the learners?

## Research Methodology

It is a field research that requires the questionnaire method. This study followed three main techniques. These are questionnaire, interview, and observation. For collecting the primary data, those methods have been adopted. For data collection the following methods are followed:

1. The student questionnaire
2. Interviewing learners
3. Test for the learners

The outcome of execution of these methods is used to design this article. This study ensures the accuracy, authenticity, validity, and reliability of the data collection.

### Participants

Twenty students from different professions have been selected for being the respondents of the questionnaire survey and the interview who are learning communicative English by staying their home. Among twenty professional learners, four are from Bangladesh army, four are from different private banks, four are engineers, four are doctors, three are University teachers, and one is journalist.

### Preparing questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed as per the demand of research questions. The first section of the questionnaire seeks personal details of the respondents including name, age, and workplace while the another section assesses their grammatical knowledge and performance. The questionnaire meets the assessment specification, and maintains content validity in which performance questions on 11 grammatical, both fundamental and compound, contents are offered to respond. As the respondents are professionals completing their formal study, their knowledge on intended grammatical patterns or contents are static. Time or place fluctuations do not generally qualify the target group's performance status, so reliability coefficients are ensured regarding the assessment. As the questionnaire is designed for thirty-minute duration through both digitalized and manual formats, it is accessible to the respondents in an easy and time-friendly way, so practicality is safeguarded in the questionnaire.

### Test for the learners

A test has been taken in the police staff college, Mirpur, Dhaka. It was a grammatical test where eleven questions are from right form of verbs, four questions are from preposition, three questions are from article, one question is from degree, and one question is from parts of speech. The participants of this test were twenty four.

**Interviewing students**

Total twenty professional learners were interviewed. Every professional was interviewed separately, and after the interview, the questionnaire was given for their judgments.

**Data Analysis**

**Analysis of the learners’ questionnaire and interview**

The learner’s questionnaire that was conducted was closed. Total twenty professional learners of different professions were interviewed. The first question to them was do they interact with the teacher in English and out of twenty students, eighteen learners replied positively where only two learners replied negatively. When the learners answered positively, asked them whether they communicate by using only verbs or full sentence and except one all of them said that they communicate by using full sentence. But while taking interview they were asked whether they face any problem when they speak in English by using the full sentence and most of them replied affirmative. For that reason they were given a questionnaire to find out where they face problems in the grammatical parts.

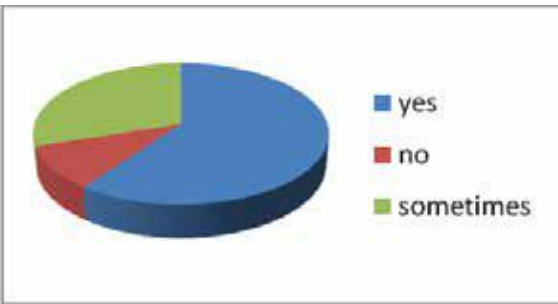


Chart 1: Percentage of problems regarding preposition.

Regarding preposition, out of twenty learners, twelve learners (60%) said that they face problems regarding preposition, only two (10%) gave tick mark in “no” ,six learners reported that they face problems and confusion regarding the usage of preposition sometimes. This information says that preposition is an important fact to be taught.

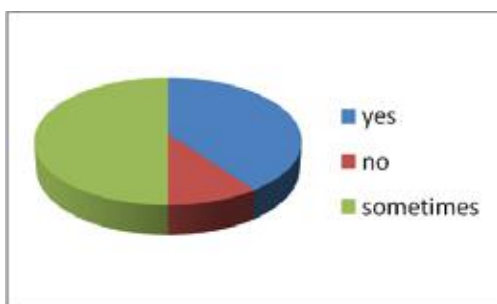


Chart 2: Percentage of problems regarding verbs.

Regarding the usage of verbs, 40% professional learners face the problems regarding verbs while 10% professional learners think that they have no problems in the usage of verbs. There are some professional learners who answered that they face problems regarding the usage of verbs sometimes and their percentage is 50%.

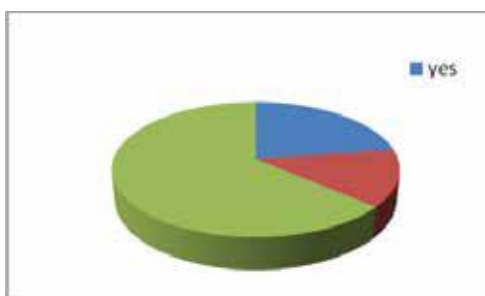


Chart 3: Percentage of problems regarding adjectives.

In case of adjectives, 50% professional learners face problems. The percentage for "no" is 30% and some professional learners reported that they face problems here sometimes and their percentage is 20%. They become confused to identify whether the word is "adjective" or "noun".

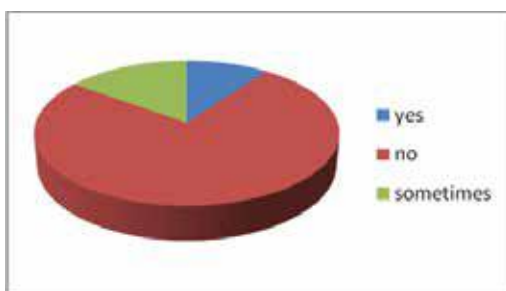


Chart 4: Percentage of problems regarding nouns.

Regarding nouns, only 10% participants think that the usage of noun is a problem, but 75% participants think that they don't face any problem regarding the usage of noun while only 15% professional learners think that they face problems and become confused regarding the usage of noun when the nouns are used in the middle of a sentence.

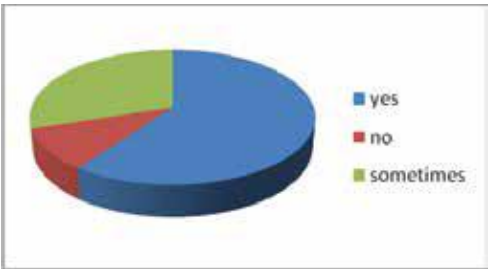


Chart 5: Percentage of problems regarding adverbs.

Out of twenty learners, twelve learners (60%) reported that they face some problems regarding the usage of adverbs. Sometimes they use wrong adverbs in the sentence and become confused that they think that all the “ly” words are adverb for this reason they sometimes face problems to identify and use the adverbs which are not “ly” words. Out of twenty learners only two learners (10%) reported that they have no problems regarding the usage of adverbs. 30% professional learners reported that they face problems regarding the usage of adverbs sometimes.

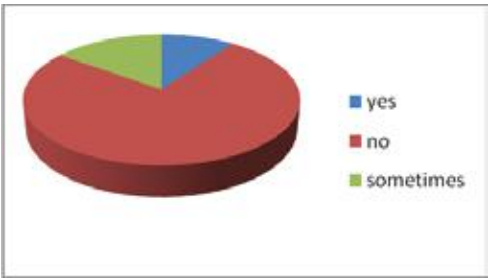


Chart 6: Percentage of problems regarding pronouns.

Regarding the problems of pronouns, , only10% participants gave their opinion that, they think that the usage of pronoun is a problem as they think that sometimes they cannot put the correct pronoun in the place of noun while 75% participants don't face any problem. Only 15% professional learners think that they face problems of using pronoun when they need to use it for abstract noun.

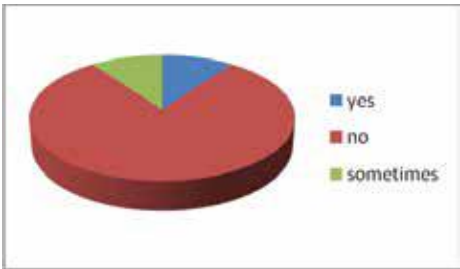


Chart 7: Percentage of problems regarding conjunction.

Only 10% professional learners face the problems regarding conjunction. 80% professional learners don't think that they face problems in conjunction. 10% reported that sometimes they face problems.

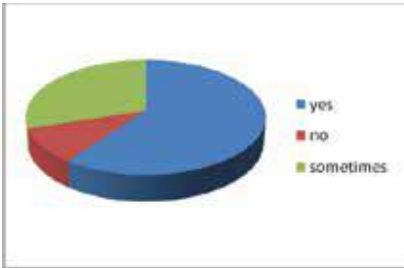


Chart 8: Percentage of problems regarding subject verb agreement.

Regarding the problems of subject-verb agreement, 60% professional learners reported that, the usage of subject-verb agreement is a problem. 10% learners don't face any problem and 30% professional learners think that they sometimes face problems and become confused regarding the usage of subject-verb agreement when the nouns phrases are used in the sentence.



Chart 9: Percentage of problems regarding modals

Regarding the problems of modals, 80% professional learners gave their opinion that, they think that the usage of modals is a problem as they think that



sometimes they cannot understand the difference between auxiliary verb and modals. Only 5% participant thinks that he doesn't face any problem regarding the usage of modifiers. Only 15% professional learners think that sometimes they face problems and become confused regarding the usage of modals when they come in contact with the different use of single modal.

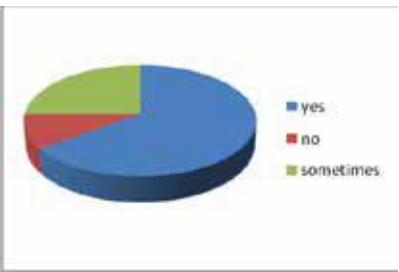


Chart 10: percentage of problems regarding passive voice.

65% professional learners face the problems regarding passive voice. They face problems when they go to change the active voice to passive voice and want to talk in the passive voice. 10% professional learners don't think that they face problems in passive voice. 25% learners reported that sometimes they face problems and confusion regarding the change of active voice to passive voice other than simple present tense, simple past tense and simple future tense. While talking, they get confused of using the "continuous" and "perfect" form of tense.

Regarding tense, out of twenty learners, fifteen learners informed that they have problems regarding tense. Many of them don't know the actual sentence formation pattern of respective tenses and many of them don't know the actual usage of different tenses. They use many tenses but don't know the pedagogic model of using the tenses. Out of twenty learners only one participant gave tick mark on "no". Out of twenty learners four learners conveyed that sometimes they face problems regarding the difference between past tense and present perfect. They become confused when by using "going to" future tense is indicated and they are only concern that future tense can be happened by using "will" only.

For identifying the percentage of problems in different tenses, I have collected some data regarding the problems of different tenses.

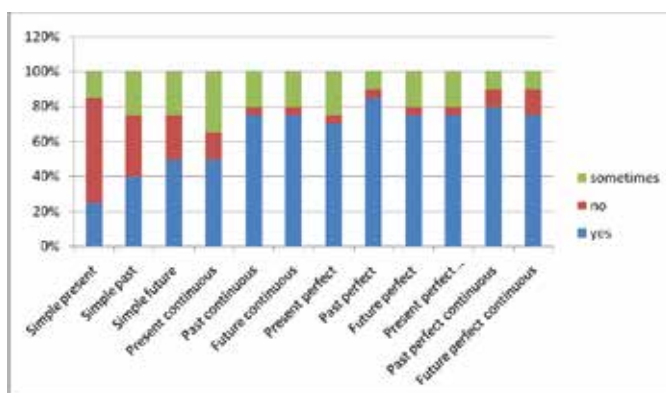


Chart 12: Problems in different tenses

So, here in tense, the information gathered from the participants gave a clear idea that in what percentage and where the participants face problems and are not clear about the pattern and meaning of the individual tense. From the data it was found that, regarding present tense, 25% of the professional learners face problems where 60% of the students don't think that there is any problem. Only 15% of the professional learners sometimes face problems.

Regarding the usage of simple past tense, 40% professional learners face the problems. They think that, they become confused regarding the usage of present perfect and past tense as many times they describe their past incident by using present perfect tense. 35% professional learners informed that, they don't have problems while 25% learners sometimes face problems here.

In case of simple future tense, 50% participants opined that they have problems in simple future tense. In case of speaking they found that, many times by using "going to", simple present tense, present continuous tense, and future tense are represented. 25% participants don't find any problem while 25% sometimes found problems regarding simple future tense.

Regarding present continuous tense, 50% participants have problem while 15% participants don't have any problems regarding present continuous tense and 35% professional learners sometimes face problems in present continuous tense while talking.

In case of past continuous tense, 75% participants reported their problems. They think that they are confused to use the past continuous tense when two things occurred almost at the same time but one incident interrupted the other. 5% partici

pants opined that they don't have any problems while 20% professional learners sometimes faces problem.

Regarding future continuous tense, 75% participants reported their problems as they can't identify the difference between simple future tense and future continuous tense. 5% participants didn't find problems and 20% professional learners sometimes found problems here.

In case of present perfect tense, 70% professional learners opined that they face problems here. 5% participants don't face any problem regarding its use while 25% participants sometimes face problems while talking.

Regarding past perfect tense, 85% professional learners informed that past perfect tense is a problem for them. They think that when they speak they can't identify that between the two past incidents which would be past perfect and which would be simple past tense. Only 5% students think that, they have no problem while only 10% participants opined that, sometimes they face problems when speaking but in case of writing they think that they don't have any problem.

In case of future perfect tense, 75% participants reported that, they face problems here as usually they don't come in contact with the use of future perfect tense, for this reason they think that they are not clear about its use. Only 5% students think that they have no problems here and 20% participants sometimes face problems in future perfect tense.

Regarding present perfect continuous tense, 75% professional learners found problem in its use and they are confused about the difference between present perfect tense and present perfect continuous tense. Only 5% professional learners opined that they are well concerned with its use while 20% professional learners sometimes face problems in its use like when to use "for" and when to use "since".

80% professional learners informed that, they are not fully concerned and confused about the usage of past perfect continuous. After the questionnaire part when their interview was taken, they informed that they need not to use it randomly in their professional works and for this reason they are not concerned about its use. Only 10% professional learners reported that they don't have any problem but during their interview they informed that they didn't find its use so much in their professional works. 10% participants said that sometimes they faced problem here. In case of future perfect continuous tense, 75% professional learners reported that they have problems. 15% participants didn't find any problem and only 10% professional learners thought that sometimes they faced problems here. After the ques

tionnaire part, during their interview, almost all of them reported that they don't find its use randomly in their official and daily life works.

A test has been taken in the police staff college, Mirpur, Dhaka. The result of the test is given bellow in a chart:

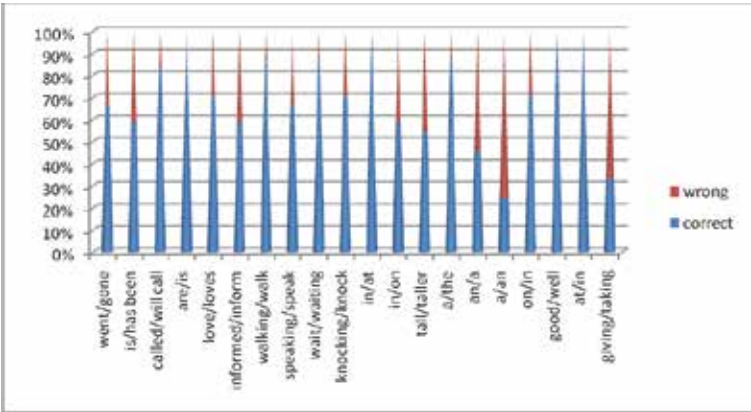


Chart 13: Result of the test

The participants of this test were twenty four. This test informs that, in every case majority was correct. During their interview after the test, they informed that, when they go for writing, many times by guessing they write down and in maximum cases the written down document is correct. They opined that, while writing they use their previous experiences and many times they use the grammatical category by hearing others. They also opined that they are not fully informed about many cases of grammar and for this reason when they talk, they feel hesitated. So they think that, they need grammatical competence for improving their communicative competence.

Findings and Recommendations

Analysis of the findings shows that professional learners are capable of achieving proficiency in their basic skills with proper grammatical improvement. In order to achieve the ultimate goal of improving learner's communicative skills, we need to focus on the following points that my study reveals.

Grammatical competence over communicative competence

Teachers are giving more importance on communicative competence than grammatical competence. In the professional learning level, learners are not required to give any board examination like SSC and HSC, for this reason teachers

are not well concerned about giving more importance to grammatical competence as there is nothing to pass or fail here. But the findings reveal that, professional learners need to do many official works which are meant to be done by writing where grammatical competence is required so teachers should take care about the grammatical competence to accelerate communicative competence as well as Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Grammar is considered to be one of the important elements within communication in relation to form a speech. According to Ur (1988:4), Grammar can be defined as the rule of how to combine and construct words into larger units in aspect of meaning. It is a study of forming possible structures used in a language (Thornbury, 1999). Furthermore, he states that grammar is not always about the syntax and morphology, but it is all about linguistic chains and slots. It means that grammar will give such ability to someone (the speaker) to be able to chain some words in particular order (based on the rule) and also to give variation or finding another words which canslot into any link in the chain. So, in this particular case to be able to communicate with others, it is necessary to possess ability on how to use grammar correctly.

### **Providing extra emphasis on the required grammatical parts**

Again the findings reveal that, learners don't face equal problems in all grammatical parts. There are some parts where learners are less competent and there are some parts where learners' competence is satisfactory. Teachers should give more emphasis to those parts of the grammar. Moreover, the increase of the students' grammar competence was in line with the increase of their speaking skill and their writing skill. It was because PBL (Problem Based Learning) applied in this grammar class gave the opportunities to the students to speak and write more and more (Zuhriyah, 2017)

### **Clarifying the doubts**

The study reveals that, in grammar parts, participants have got doubts in some places where they need to be clarified with adequate examples and work-sheets.

### **Self Study**

The study reveals that, professional learners are very much interested in learning but they are dependent on the teachers and only follow what teachers provide them in the classroom. But the learners should give emphasis on self-study and they should watch English movies, listen to English music, and read English newspaper by themselves. They should take some initiative by themselves to facilitate the learning process.

### Providing materials depending on proficiency level

The teachers are giving training generally but different professionals have different types of proficiency level. So teachers should categorize the learners and should provide materials and lessons according the learners' needs.

### Conclusion

This study investigates the importance of grammatical competence for enhancing the professional learners' level of English language proficiency and provides a module to follow for the future professional learners as well as for their teachers. The results of this study reveal that in order to achieve communicative competence, grammatical competence is must, but due to some grammatical problems professionals face challenges to communicate. At the same time the current study identifies the problems regarding grammar which to be solved, and finds out that if the teachers take proper initiatives to solve the problems, professionals will be more confident in using English in their work places. Five issues are also found to follow for improving learner's communicative skills: (i) the importance of grammatical competence over communicative competence; (ii) providing extra emphasis on the required grammatical parts; (iii) clarifying the doubts; (iv) self- study;(v) providing materials depending on proficiency level.

### References

- Amelina S.N., D. E. (2014). Formation of Grammatical Competence in Training. *Науковий вісник НУБіП України. Серія: Педагогіка, психологія, філософія*.
- Bachman, L.F. 1990. *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Canale, M., & Merrill S. (1980). "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing". *Applied Linguistics*. 1 (1): 1-47. (date of access: 3rd December. 2016)
- Chalker, S. 1993. *Current English grammar*. London: Macmillan.
- Cook, V. 1992. *Second language learning and language teaching*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2002). Doing Focus-on-Form. *SYSTEM*, 30, 419-432.
- Fikron, M. R. (2018). Grammatical Competence within L2 Communication: Language Production, Monitor Hypothesis, and Focus on Forms Instruction. *Pancaran Pendidikan FKIP Universitas Jember*, 101-112.
- Khamesian, M. (2016). Grammatical Competence: An indispensible Component of Translating Scientific Research Articles. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G*.
- R.P. Millrood, I. M. (2014). Cognitive Models of Grammatical Competence . *Procedia*

- *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 259-262.

Scarcella, & Oxford. (1992). *Tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Thornbury, S. (ed) (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. England: Pearson Education Limited.

Ur, P. (1988). *Grammar Practice Activities: A Practical Guide For Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. (1999). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verhoeven, L. & A. Vermeer. (1992). Modelling communicative second language competence. In Verhoeven, L. & JHAL De Jong (eds), *The construct of language proficiency: Application of psychological models to language assessment*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Zuhriyah, M. (2017). Register Journal, Language & Language Teaching Journals Vol. 10, No. 1, June 2017, Problem-Based Learning to Improve Students' Grammar Competence. *Language & Language Teaching Journals*, 48-61.