

# Grammar Instructions and Error Correction: A Matter of Pakistani Students' Beliefs

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## Abstract

*Learner beliefs play a very significant role in the process of foreign language learning and teaching. Moreover, grammar instruction and error correction are considered to be important factors in communicative language teaching. Today, in the foreign language classroom, the role of grammar is under heated debate. This study investigates foreign language learners' beliefs relating to the role of error correction and grammar instructions. In this study, a total of 200 foreign language students at three different reputable universities in Karachi, Pakistan, filled out a questionnaire containing 24 Likert-scale items. Afterwards, the data underwent a factor analysis, which identified four different fundamental factors (grammar efficacy, priority of communication, importance of grammar and negative attitude toward grammar instruction). After statistical analysis, it was determined that for the interest and motivation of students, foreign language teachers must keep on varying the types of activities in teaching grammatical items. It was suggested that, keeping in view the importance and efficacy of student-centered learning, avoiding students' beliefs and attitudes would not yield the expected productive results.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Learning, Grammar Instructions, Error Correction, Beliefs.

## Introduction

We develop concepts and beliefs on the basis of our experience, knowledge and practices. Our developed concepts and beliefs contribute to shaping our future beliefs and endeavors. The concept of belief has been a debatable and important issue in the research of education. Borg (2001) believes that a belief is a state of mind that is declared as right by the individual who carries it. However, the person could have information that other individuals may have some alternative beliefs. This is one of the main distinctions between belief and knowledge, as knowledge must be right. A belief is a proposition a person could hold knowingly or unknowingly. It is also evaluative since it is accepted as true by the individual who holds it, and therefore, it is inclined strongly with personal emotions (Incecay and Dollar, 2011). According to Davis (2003) beliefs possessed by language students may bestow some helpful and enlightening understanding into learners' thinking processes and behaviors that are in relation to language learning (Incecay and Dollar, 2011). Schulz (2001) concluded that contradictions in student and teacher belief systems may have a negative impact on learning. Besides following some popular notions or set ideas about an international phenomenon, there is always an option to see and analyses the current local practices, attitudes and concepts regarding the same. This approach will yield more authentic findings. Teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes regarding error correction and grammar instructions in foreign language learning have been studied in different countries of the world. Loewen et al. (2009) claim that in a more recent study, the results found that there were diverse beliefs about the

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role of error correction and grammar instructions among learners studying English as a foreign language and also those who were studying English as a second language.

Mulloy (2005) believes that grammar has been the topic of a heated debate not only in L2 acquisition but also in school curriculums for native speakers of English. In the context of school curriculum, criticisms raised against teaching grammar went so far that the beginning of the 20th century saw the elimination of formal grammar teaching from the grade school curriculum in the US (Sarab and Naeim, 2013).

Widdowson (1978) believes that today's learners' expectations raise other today's learners expectations. Most of the students are attending English language classes to gain fluency in communicating with foreigners. Most of them are not interested in being hundred per cent accurate. Grammar learning is commonly not accepted as an important help in assisting this huge family of learners to reach their goal of communication (Sarab and Naeim 2013).

Error correction is also under heated debate. Schwartz (1993), for example, argues that positive evidence is only enough for getting a language and that negative feedback plays no significant role. Truscott (1999) states that negative feedback will only make the learners angry and embarrassed. He also points out interruptions in classroom activities, corrections without any consistency, and lack of clarity of corrections as other important reasons that leave corrections fruitless. Chaudron (1998) also reports a number of studies that declared correction ineffective and annoying instead of helpful as it was considered to be (Sarab and Naeim 2013).

In light of the current discussion, this research is conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, to know students' and perceptions towards grammar instruction and error correction. Being a cosmopolitan city in Pakistan, research conducted in Karachi will be more reasonable to be generalized for the whole country.

## Literature Review

Incey and Dollar (2011) studied the beliefs and ideas of foreign language learners about the correction of errors and grammar teaching. A total of 26 students participated in this study. These students filled out a questionnaire. They concluded that students had a firm belief about grammar teaching but in a more communicative way. They also responded positively to error correction.

Sarab and Naeim (2013) compared the thoughts and opinions of students and their teachers regarding the role of error correction and grammar instructions in the foreign language classroom. A 15-item questionnaire was used to gather the data of 440 students and 76 teachers in Tehran. The standard deviation comparison yielded the result that both teachers and students showed even consistency in their behaviors towards error corrections and grammar instructions. The chi-square results showed a contradiction between the attitudes of teachers and students.

Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) study teachers' of difficulties regarding their gender, education, experience, and the grades they have taught at school. They used the mean and the result of the t-test to interpret the data. As a result, they concluded that the students were facing more problems than teachers. It was suggested that more comprehensive studies are needed to probe this matter.

Dawood (2014) investigates the effects of grammatical error correction on EFL learners. Twenty-two male and female senior students were selected randomly to fill out a questionnaire investigating students' regarding immediate correction of grammatical errors. The obtained results related to the questionnaire revealed that immediate error correction had a positive effect and thus increased the learners.

Loewen et. al. (2009) also conducted a study to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of foreign language students about the role of teachers in the correction of errors and the process of grammar instructions. At an American university, 754 foreign language learners responded to

a questionnaire of 37 questions. Besides closed-ended questions, there were four open-ended questions too. The quantitative part of the questionnaire was processed for factor analysis, which identified six factors. Later on, with the help of these identified six factors, the difference among the learners studying different target languages was investigated. Furthermore, by the analysis of the qualitative data, the beliefs of the learners were identified. They finally concluded that students who were studying English as a foreign language and those who were studying it as a second language had clearly different beliefs and opinions related to error corrections and grammar instructions.

In this regard, Schulz (2001) also conducted a study. In this study, in Colombia, a total of 607 foreign language students and 122 teachers and in the US, 824 foreign language students and 92 teachers participated. The study was aimed to elicit teachers' student related to the role of error correction and grammar instructions. When the data were compared, it showed that there was relatively great consensus between teachers as a cluster and students as a cluster on the majority of the questionnaire items, especially related to grammar instructions in the foreign language classroom. This big contradiction between students and their teachers as a group was declared alarming, and the study suggested an immediate reconciliation. It was suggested that the teachers find ways to have a view of the student's beliefs students' and options.

Schulz (1996) also conducted exploratory research at the University of Arizona, which also investigated and compared the beliefs and opinions of foreign language students and teachers. Ninety-two teachers and 824 students participated in the study. Results disclosed students inclination toward focusing on form, irrespective of language. However, some surprising contradictions were pointed out in the beliefs of teachers and a contrast of teachers' students'. Finally, the researchers proposed that to create teaching credibility and enhance their students to and participation in the process of learning, teachers must sort students related to language learning and create a kind of balance in the expectations of students and their own.

Uysal and Yavuz (2014) conducted a study at Balikesir University. They investigated those teachers knowledge of grammar teaching who were going to start their careers as language teachers. In this study, a questionnaire was served to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service language teachers. The result of the study showed that the pre-service teachers had a positive attitude related to teaching grammar, and they were in favor of covert teaching grammar. The study also concluded that there was a gap between theory and practice, which may result from the Turkish educational system's policy.

### Objectives of the Study

Keeping in mind the importance of students' beliefs and attitudes in the learning of a foreign language, the following research questions have been posed by the researchers for the current study.

1. What hidden constructs are present in the answers of the foreign language learners while answering the questionnaire regarding grammar instructions and error corrections?
2. Why are grammar instructions important for foreign language learners?

### Methodology

The model to estimate the effect of students' beliefs on the importance of grammar in parametric form is defined as follows:

$$IG = \alpha_0 + \beta_{1EG} - \beta_{2NAGI} + \beta_{2PCI} + e$$

Where  $\alpha_0$  is constant, "e" is error term, *IG* is importance of grammar, *EG* is Efficacy of grammar, *NAGI* is Negative attitude towards grammar instructions and *PC* is Priority of communication. Correlational research design has been applied to conduct this explanatory research. Loewen et. al. (2009) questionnaire of 24 items has been adopted to gather the data

of 200 English language learners to analyse their beliefs about grammar instructions and error correction in Karachi Pakistan.

### Participants

The participants of this study were 200 English language learners from different reputable institutes in Karachi, Pakistan, like the National University of Modern Languages, Iqra University and PAF KIET. The qualifications of the participants ranged from matriculation to master. Out of 200 learners, 5 (2.5%) were matric, 59 (29.5%) were intermediate, 108 (58%) were graduate and 28 (14%) were Masters. Male and female were 125 (62.5%) and 75 (37.5%) respectively.

As Karachi is a cosmopolitan city and industrial hub of Pakistan, people with different ethnicities and languages live there, although Urdu-speaking people are in the majority. So among our participants, 150 (75%) were *Urdu* speaking, 19 (9.5%) were *Sindhi* speaking, 11 (5.5%) were *Pashto* speaking, 9 (4.5%) were *Sindhi* speaking, 5 (2.5%) were *Balochi* speaking and 5 (2.5%) were *Siraiki* speaking.

Most of the participants, 141 (70.5%), were between the ages of 21 and 30, 31 (15.5%) were between the ages of 10 and 20, and 28 (14.5%) were 31 and above.

In Pakistan, different languages are used as a medium of instruction in the school. 111 (55.5%) of our participants had English as a medium of instruction at the school level, 82 (41%) had Urdu, 3 (1.5%) had Sindhi, 2 (1%) had Punjabi and 2 (1%) had Pashto as medium of instructions.

Participants were asked to decide their proficiency level. So according to that self-assessment, 131 (65.5%) were intermediate proficiency, 36 (18%) were beginners, and 33 (16.5%) assessed themselves as advanced in English proficiency.

### Measures

After the literature review on grammar instructions and error corrections, the questionnaire used by Loewen et al. (2009) was found suitable. Loewen very humbly and promptly sent the softcopy of the original questionnaire to the researchers. The qualitative part (open-ended items) of the original questionnaire was omitted as this study is purely quantitative, so the original questionnaire was reduced to two parts. The distractive items were also dropped, and the demographic part was changed according to the particular needs of this research. The items in the quantitative section cover different aspects of grammar instructions and error correction.

### Procedure

It has already been stated that the data collected through the adopted questionnaire was collected from different institutes in Karachi, Pakistan. The questionnaire was distributed among the students of three different institutes. They were asked to respond to the questionnaire based on their experience of taking English language classes. The ambiguities they faced were answered on the spot. They were not allowed to take the questionnaire home. Even a few of the questions were interpreted in the students' mother tongue for the students who faced problems in understanding. The reason behind this was to make sure the students understanding of the questionnaire.

### Data Analysis (Using SPSS)

The learners' responses to Likert scale items underwent factor analysis using SPSS. The factor of 0.3 and greater on the varimax rotated factor matrix was measured as significant.

**Table 1: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

|  |                    |          |
|--|--------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | .929     |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 2245.057 |
|  | df                 | 276      |
|  | Sig.               | .000     |

The result of KMO was 0.929 exceeded the value of 0.7 which means the sample size is adequate for factor analysis and Bartlett's test value is 0.00 which is less than 0.05, which means it is not an identity matrix. Therefore, we can proceed further.

**Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

|    | Component |      |      |      |
|----|-----------|------|------|------|
|    | 1         | 2    | 3    | 4    |
| A1 | .736      |      |      |      |
| A2 | .719      |      |      |      |
| A3 | .688      |      |      |      |
| A4 | .659      | .441 |      |      |
| A5 | .469      | .305 | .371 |      |
| A6 | .316      | .605 | .417 |      |
| A7 |           | .519 | .503 |      |
| A8 | .450      |      | .416 |      |
| A9 | .371      |      | .530 |      |
| B1 | .633      |      | .504 |      |
| B2 |           |      |      | .778 |
| B3 | .330      |      | .577 |      |
| B4 |           |      |      | .781 |
| B5 |           | .304 | .704 |      |
| C1 |           |      | .449 | .591 |
| C2 |           | .320 | .606 |      |
| D1 | .359      | .665 |      |      |
| D2 | .430      | .742 |      |      |
| E1 | .517      | .406 |      |      |
| E2 |           | .518 |      |      |
| E3 | .385      |      | .528 |      |
| F1 |           | .679 |      |      |
| F2 | .384      | .468 | .303 |      |
| F3 |           | .597 |      |      |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

In this study instead of six factors four underlying factors were identified. It is because some of the questions were overlapping or the students could not distinguish among them.

Correlation analysis shows the relation among variables i.e. either they are interdependent to each other. All variables including negative attitude to error correction, efficacy of grammar, priority of communication, importance of grammatical accuracy, importance of grammar, and negative grammar instruction have positive influence on each other. The variables which have greater impact over each other are highlighted with the help of asterisk in table 2.

**Table 3: ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

| Model |            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1     | Regression | 134.558        | 5   | 26.912      | 54.428 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
|       | Residual   | 95.922         | 194 | .494        |        |                   |
|       | Total      | 230.480        | 199 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Importance of Grammar

b. Predictors: (Constant), negative attitude towards grammar instruction, priority of communication, negative attitude toward error correction, importance of grammar accuracy, efficacy of grammar.

**Table 4: Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .764 <sup>a</sup> | .584     | .573              | .70317                     |

a. Predictors: (Constant), negative attitude towards grammar instruction, priority of communication, negative attitude toward error correction, importance of grammar accuracy, efficacy of grammar

**Table 5: Coefficients**

| Model |   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|       |   | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1     | (Constant)                                    | .393                        | .275       |                           | 1.433  | .153 |
|       | Efficacy of Grammar                           | .525                        | .107       | .405                      | 4.920  | .000 |
|       | Negative Attitude toward Error Correction     | -.190                       | .107       | -.118                     | -1.775 | .077 |
|       | Priority of Communication                     | -.136                       | .062       | -.119                     | -2.212 | .028 |
|       | Importance of Grammar Accuracy                | .157                        | .092       | .125                      | 1.718  | .087 |
|       | Negative Attitude towards Grammar Instruction | .528                        | .093       | .416                      | 5.694  | .000 |

a. Dependent variable: Importance of grammar table 5

The adjusted R- Square value and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table shows the model is good. Regression analysis shows two variables negative attitude toward error correction and importance of Grammar accuracy are not significant. So, we can eliminate these two variables and run regression analysis by SPSS in the absence of these variables.

**Table 6: Coefficients**

| Model |   | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|-------|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|       |   | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1     | (Constant)                                    | .275                        | .261       |                           | 1.054  | .293 |
|       | Efficacy of Grammar                           | .538                        | .093       | .415                      | 5.812  | .000 |
|       | Priority of Communication                     | -.165                       | .058       | -.144                     | -2.863 | .005 |
|       | Negative Attitude towards Grammar Instruction | .555                        | .090       | .438                      | 6.162  | .000 |

a. Dependent variable: Importance of grammar table 6

Table 6 is the output of regression analysis run by SPSS in the absence of negative attitude toward error correction and importance of grammar accuracy. The following model shows the relation of independent variables (efficacy of grammar, priority of communication and negative attitude toward grammar instruction) with dependent variable (importance of grammar).

$$y = 0.275 + 0.538x_1 - 0.165x_2 + 0.555x_3$$

Where  $x_1$  is efficacy of grammar,  $x_2$  is Priority of communication,  $x_3$  is Negative attitude towards grammar instruction and  $y$  is importance of grammar. It means that priority of communication is a problem for the importance of grammar. Nowadays, because of high demand of speaking a language is overshadowing the importance of grammar.

**Table 7: Reliability and Validity**

|   | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Rho A | CR     | AVE   |
|---|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| <b>Priority of Comm.</b>                    | 1.000               | 1.000 | 1.000  | 1.000 |
| <b>Efficacy of grammar</b>                  | 0.867               | 0.870 | 0.904  | 0.652 |
| <b>Importance of grammar</b>                | 0.815               | 0.835 | 0.904  | 0.652 |
| <b>Neg. attitude to error correction</b>    | 0.815               | 0.835 | 0.915  | 0.843 |
| <b>Neg. attitude to grammar instruction</b> | 0.752               | 0.762 | 0.8858 | 0.688 |
| <b>Importance of grammatical accuracy</b>   | 0.6690              | 0.673 | 0.819  | 0.602 |

### Data Analysis (Using Smart PLS)

Convergent validity is established for that construct if the average variance extracted 0.5 or above (Fornell and Larcker, 1981); all constructs met criterion (see Table 1). Scale reliability was assessed through composite reliability and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (Table 1), and both were higher than 0.7 for each of our constructs without "importance of grammatical accuracy" for which Cronbach's Alpha remained 0.6690.

The researchers verified the data's quality before doing a thorough analysis. What we examined was:

*Measurement consistency:* with respect to the concepts being measured is known as reliability. The two metrics we employed, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite reliability, were both higher than the permissible threshold of 0.7.

*Convergent validity:* This is the degree to which the elements that make up a concept "converge" or "agree" with one another. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) metric that we employed showed that, for all constructs, it was above the acceptable level of 0.5.

**Table 8: Descriptive Statistics and Square Root of AVE**

| Variable   | M     | SD    | Correlation and Square Root of AVE in Diagonal |              |          |              |              |              |  |
|--|-------|-------|--|--------------|----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--|
|  |       |       | 1  | 2            | 3        | 4            | 5            | 6            |  |
| <b>Efficacy of Grammar (1)</b>                           | 3.713 | 0.831 | <b>0.808</b>                                   |              |          |              |              |              |  |
| <b>Negative Attitude toward Error Correction (2)</b>     | 3.225 | 0.669 | .631**   | <b>0.849</b> |          |              |              |              |  |
| <b>Priority of Communication (3)</b>                     | 3.373 | 0.936 | .351**   | .496**       | <b>1</b> |              |              |              |  |
| <b>Importance of Grammar (4)</b>                         | 3.740 | 1.076 | .693**   | .379**       | .150*    | <b>0.918</b> |              |              |  |
| <b>Importance of Grammar Accuracy (5)</b>                | 3.467 | 0.859 | .732**   | .606**       | .352**   | .589**       | <b>0.776</b> |              |  |
| <b>Negative Attitude towards Grammar Instruction (6)</b> | 3.645 | 0.849 | .750**   | .539**       | .338**   | .701**       | .672**       | <b>0.817</b> |  |

According to the table 8, the Mean (M) value of all the constructs are above average. The importance of grammar was valued the highest which is 3.740. By comparing the square root of each AVE on the diagonal with the correlation coefficients (off-diagonal) for each construct in the pertinent rows and columns, the discriminant validity was evaluated using the methodology of Fornel and Larcker (1981). The findings show that all of the study's constructs have demonstrated discriminant validity. The importance of grammar's square root (AVE = 0.918) is higher than the correlations with any other variable. In general, discriminant validity is acceptable for this measurement approach and provides evidence for the validity of discrimination between the constructs.

To ascertain discriminant validity, this study employed Fornell Larcker criteria. According to this criterion, a construct is declared different from other constructs used in study if its square root of AVE is more than its correlation with the other constructs. In our case, square root of AVE given in the diagonal of table 8 in bold reveal that all diagonal values are more than the inter-construct correlation of the construct with the other constructs so all constructs can be declared to measure different constructs.

**Table 9: Regression Model**

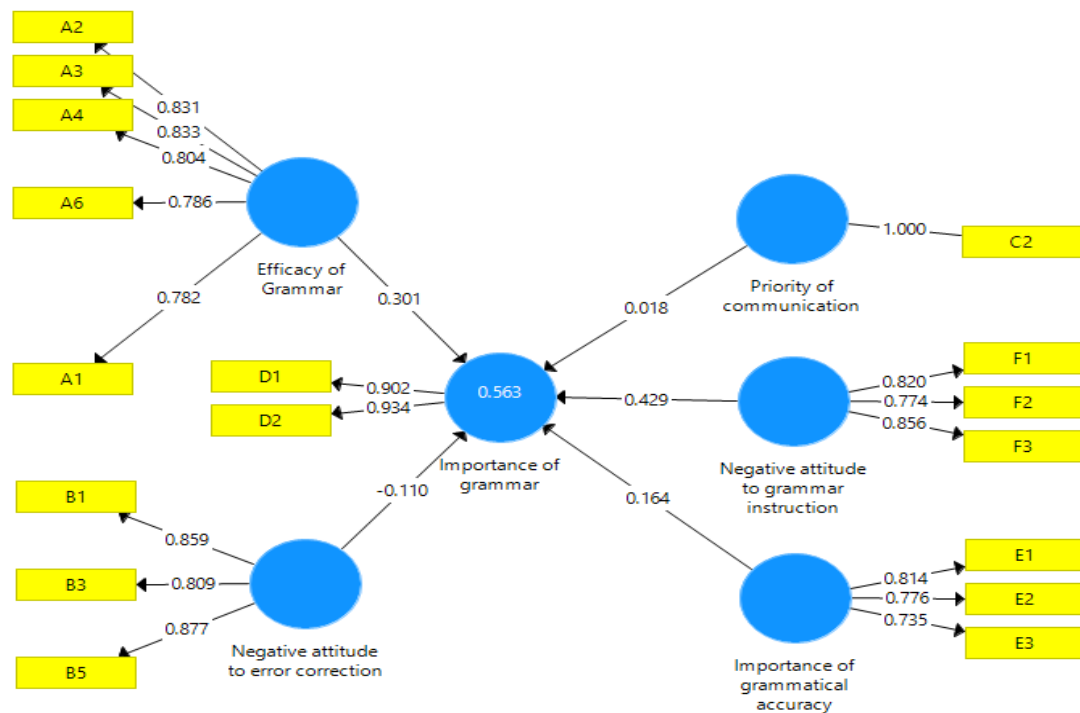
| Construct                                   | $\beta$ | Se    | t-value | p-value |
|---|---------|-------|---------|---------|
| <b>Efficacy of grammar</b>                  | 0.301   | 0.168 | 1.797   | 0.073   |
| <b>Importance of grammar/ IGA</b>           | 0.164   | 0.107 | 1.536   | 0.125   |
| <b>Neg. attitude to error correction</b>    | -0.110  | 0.144 | 0.764   | 0.445   |
| <b>Neg. attitude to grammar instruction</b> | 0.429   | 0.128 | 3.341   | 0.001   |
| <b>Priority of communication</b>            | 0.018   | 0.090 | 0.203   | 0.839   |

The first hypothesis of the study conjectured a relationship between the Efficacy of grammar and the dependent variable. The results given in Table 4 do not lend support to this claim. In other words, the relationship between the Efficacy of grammar and the dependent variable is not found to be significant ( $\beta = .301$ ,  $p = 0.073$ ). Conversely, a strong and statistically significant positive correlation is found for negative attitude to grammar instruction ( $\beta = 0.429$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating its significant impact on the dependent variable. Ultimately, there is a



positive but non-significant link with the priority of communication ( $\beta = 0.018$ ,  $p = 0.839$ ). Thus, only the relationship between negative attitude to grammar instruction and the dependent variable is found to be statistically significant, despite the fact that there are occasionally positive or negative relationships.

**Figure 1**



## Conclusion

In the past, when the communication was not very easy between the people living in different countries. At that time, people were just used to learning a language to translate books. Still, when communication gradually improved among the people of different countries, people started taking an interest in speaking a foreign language. In today's modern world and the world of social media, the priority of the learners is communication. They are no more like grammatical instructions and lessons.

In this research, it has been found that the priority of communication has a very bad effect on the importance of grammar. In contrast, because of the long tradition of overt grammar teaching under the umbrella of GTM, students still believe in the efficacy of grammar.

Despite many restrictions, this research offers a wide-ranging snap of second-language students' opinions and beliefs related to error correction and grammar instructions. A great variety of students' first language backgrounds and the appropriately large sample size added to the strength and generalizability of this research. In a nutshell, this research offers data-based knowledge related to the student's opinions and beliefs about grammar instructions and error correction in a language classroom. It is concluded that in order to uphold learners' motivation and interest, second language practitioners and teachers keep on switching the activities, procedures and techniques to teach grammar. Teachers and practitioners have to come to the understanding that learners' opinions, attitudes, and beliefs have a very decisive impact on the failure or success of the teaching enterprise.

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