"WHAT ARE THE GRAMMATICAL POINTS STUDENTS NEED TO DEVELOP?": NEED ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH-MAJORED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Nguyen Hong Nam Phuong*, Nguyen Thi Huynh Loc

University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang
131 Luong Nhu Hoc Street, Cam Le District, Danang

Abstract: The importance of grammar in L2 learners' development of language skills has anchored for the necessity of teaching grammar to learners of English. However, it is observed that there has been insufficient formal data relevant to the needs of L2 learners for learning grammar, particularly in the context of Vietnam. These two mentioned reasons motivate this current study into the needs of students at a university in Vietnam for learning English grammar with a hope to help teachers and curriculum designers make more informed decisions on their teaching methods and the content of the grammar course, respectively. In the study, students had difficulties with certain English grammatical points such as *Linking words and phrases*, *Tenses to describe events in the past*, *Articles, determiners and pronouns*. Students also expected their grammar lessons to be more interactive with writing and speaking practice included, while formal explanations of grammatical structures be maintained.

Keywords: English grammar, L2 learners, needs, difficulties, wants

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

Despite difficulties second language (L2) learners have with English grammar, "to teach, or not to teach English grammar" explicitly has remained a controversial discussion over years (Ellis, 2006; Krashen, 1981; Larsen-Freeman, 2009). While Krashen (1981) argued that learning grammar would take place unconsciously as long as L2 learners were exposed to sufficient comprehensible and meaningful input, it has been shown in the literature that grammar instruction is beneficial (Norris & Ortega, 2000) and contributes to overall L2 linguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2006). In other words, it is important for L2 learners to learn English grammar, including forms, meanings, and uses of different grammatical structures (Larsen-Freeman, 2001), in order to reach their targets of L2 performances.

Turning to needs analysis, which emerged from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as an instrument for course design, analyzing needs of learners has shown its importance not only in ESP programs but also in programs of general English (Brown, 2009; West, 1994). When being conducted continuously, needs analysis would provide course designers with helpful input to modify the content of the course to accommodate constant changes in linguistic needs of L2 learners. Unfortunately, little has been done regarding analyzing needs of L2 learners in the context of English

---

* Corresponding author.

 Email address: nhnphuong@ufl.udn.vn

education in Vietnam (Duong, 2007).

In some curriculum in the undergraduate program for English-major university students, English grammar has been treated as a separate compulsory course, aiming to enhance learners' grammatical knowledge and to develop their overall linguistic awareness to B2 level (CEFR). At the university where the study is conducted, *First Certificate Skills: Use of English* (Harrison, 2008) is currently used as the core textbook in the grammar course which delivers grammatical rules as well as their meanings to L2 learners. Nevertheless, it has come to our attention that few studies have been conducted in relation to needs analysis with a specific focus on English grammar. Given the importance of grammar learning, and the insufficient data on L2 learners' needs for English grammar, this present study aims to examine the needs for learning English grammar of English-major students who are currently students at a university of foreign language studies in Vietnam. This may become helpful input for course designers of English grammar at this on-going evaluations and development of the curriculum and give a reference to those who are interested in grammar teaching and learning, curriculum development for English-major university students in Vietnam.

1.2. Research Questions

With the aim to study the needs for learning English grammar of English major students, the paper puts forward two research questions:

1. What are the grammatical points that students need more improvement?
2. How do students want to learn English grammar in the classroom?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Grammar

Even though grammar plays a critical role in language development (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Ellis, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Nazari et al., 2022), its definition has not yet been agreed in the literature (Larsen-Freeman, 2009). From the viewpoint of generative linguistics, grammar includes sets of morphosyntactic rules that enable words to get combined in multiple ways. Halliday (1994, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2009), on the other hand, considered grammar as a resource for making and exchanging meaning. When pragmatics and meanings are the hearts of functional grammar, morphological features and grammatical rules are viewed as instruments to communicate ideas. Nevertheless, when it comes to teaching grammar, these definitions seem difficult to further operationalize. As a result, in this study, grammar is defined as a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints, which comprises form, meaning, and use (Larsen-Freeman, 2009).

In traditional syllabi that were based on structural grammar, forms of such structures and patterns were more emphasized over their meanings (Ellis, 2006). Although modern courses of English grammar have shifted the focus to the functions of those forms, such model of teaching was not preferred by teachers and syllabus designers. According to Ellis, (2006), they found the change not useful to improve learners' knowledge of English grammar and relied on modern descriptive grammar, whose content was presented in detail in *The Grammar Book* by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). Grammatical points included in this book were also found similar in other grammar books for L2 learners such as *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy, 2012), *Practical*

English Usage (Swan, 2017), and *First Certificate Skills: Use of English* (Harrison, 2008), including as many as 145 units (Murphy, 2012), describing the structures and their meanings, as well as identifying subtle differences between similar grammatical patterns (Swan, 2017).

First Certificate Skills: Use of English (Harrison, 2008), on the other hand, seems more exam-oriented as it is specifically designed as a reference book for the paper *Use of English*, one of four papers of Cambridge English: First (FCE) (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022). The book comprises 12 units in accordance with 12 key grammatical points of English grammar, with their forms, meanings, and uses being explained in detail. Although the number of units of this book is far fewer than that of *Practical English Usage* (Swan, 2017) and *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy, 2012), it claimed to "cover all the main areas of grammar … that appear in the Use of English paper" (Harrison, 2008). This book has been chosen to be the core textbook for students to learn English grammar when they are in the first year of their undergraduate program. Therefore, for the consistence between what the students learned and what they would be asked in the questionnaire, grammatical points in this paper will refer to the content of *First Certificate Skills: Use of English* (Harrison, 2008), which consists of: (1) Tenses to describe events in the present, (2) Tenses to describe events in the past, (3) Tenses to describe events in the future, (4) Linking words and phrases, (5) Reported speech, (6) Verb structures (infinitives and -ing forms, (7) Articles, determiners and pronouns, (8) Modal verbs, (9) Conditional sentences, (10) Passive voice, (11) Relative clauses and participles, and (12) Comparison.

2.2. Grammatical Knowledge

Grammatical knowledge has been controversially defined in the literature (Myhill et al., 2013). While grammatical knowledge and metalinguistic knowledge were used interchangeably in certain studies, other articles considered metalinguistic knowledge as an over-arching terminology, of which grammatical knowledge was a sub-category (Andrew, 2003). Myhill et al. (2013) defined grammatical knowledge as a part of metalinguistic knowledge which 'draws specifically on explicit knowledge of grammar in terms of morphology and syntax, rather than on broader knowledge about language and how texts work as socially-constructed artefacts' (p. 78). For L2 learners, L2 grammatical knowledge involves their understanding of morphological features of L2 words and syntactical features of L2 sentences.

A close terminology to grammatical knowledge is grammatical competence, which is 'the knowledge and the ability to use grammar in meaningful contexts' (Muhammed et al., 2018, p. 63). Nevertheless, in this current paper, grammatical knowledge is understood as the explicit understanding of L2 learners on 12 grammatical points (see section 2.1), in terms of their meanings, forms, and uses, with the understanding of different uses being shown through highly-controlled written practice.

2.3. Needs

In the literature, the term "needs" has been approached from different perspectives (Brown, 2009; Flowerdew, 2013). In terms of democratic philosophy, needs refer to learning goals that most relevant stakeholders prefer. From the viewpoint of analytic philosophy, needs are defined as the knowledge students would learn next, based on the information about them and their learning processes. Diagnostic philosophy treats "needs" as linguistic components or language skills that are critical for learners. In other words, if the learners missed any of them, that would cause harm to their

language development (Brown, 2009). Nevertheless, the definition of needs, from the point of view of discrepancy philosophy, seems to fit the aims of this study the most. The present paper will consider "needs" as "any differences between future desired student language performances and what they can currently do" (Stufflebeam et al., 1985, as cited in Brown, 2009, p. 271).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further identified "needs" in three different aspects: (1) necessities, which means what L2 learners need to know in order to have a successful performance in L2; (2) lacks, i.e., any differences between the target L2 level and the current L2 knowledge of learners; and (3) wants, or subjective needs, which are what L2 learners would like to learn, and how they would like to learn them. These subcategories of needs may allow researchers to conduct needs analysis in an easier and more systematic way. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also provided a framework for target situation analysis that has been often used by different researchers (Yan & Zou, 2021). However, as the present study aims to examine the needs for learning English grammar of L2 learners, only the three subcategories of needs provided by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) will be employed, leaving the framework of needs analysis for future studies. More specifically, "needs" mentioned in this paper entails lacks and wants of L2 learners, with the former corresponding to research question 1, and the latter to research question 2. The researchers are well aware of the necessities, nevertheless, as the present study focuses on L2 learners rather than course designers and teachers of English grammar, the necessities were opted out in this paper.

3. Previous Studies

As grammar teaching remains controversial over years (Richards & Renandya, 2002), some research on English grammar has recently focused on teachers' beliefs and practices in grammar teaching (Nazari et al., 2022; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019). Although being conducted on different participants, the two papers of Nazari et al. (2022) and of Satos and Oyanedel (2019) have yielded similar results on beliefs of teachers on how to teach English grammar, i.e., putting more emphasis on pragmatic meanings of grammatical structures. However, as Ellis (2006) pointed out multiple issues in teaching grammar, these recent papers have not done much on what grammatical features should be taught to L2 learners. In Vietnam, Nguyen (2019) did a study on teaching grammar for EFL learners in different Vietnam's universities. The paper proposed a solution to teaching grammar based on a communicative language teaching approach, which encourages the learning of English grammar to take place implicitly through reading comprehensible input rather than teaching grammar rules.

L2 learners were also the focus of the study by Vi et al. (2022) when the researchers investigated their strategies for learning English grammar at a university in Vietnam. The paper approached grammar learning strategies of L2 learners from different angles, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies. Participants in this study showed their significant awareness of the importance of English grammar, yet they found it very difficult to learn and to master the structures. Nonetheless, specific challenges that they had were left unanswered in this paper.

Needs analyses have been conducted on EAP programs (Duong, 2007; Yan & Zou, 2021). Employing the framework for target situation analysis (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), Yan and Zou (2021) investigated needs of doctoral candidates in an EAP program. While the results highlighted expectations of learners to the

content and the learning methods of the program, the paper did not focus on a particular language component or linguistic competence. Duong (2007) compared the procedure of needs analysis in two EAP programs, one in Vietnam and the other in New Zealand as well as observing two EAP classes in each country. The results showed significant differences in analyzing needs of L2 learners between the two programs. While needs analysis was treated formally and systematically in the program in New Zealand, it was not as formal and systematic in the program in Vietnam. Though Vietnamese teachers were aware of a lack of needs analysis and they tried to accommodate learners' needs, what they did was considered informal and the idea of conducting surveys on learners' needs was still an on-going discussion. Therefore, given potentially helpful data that could be collected in terms of what students need (Brown, 2009; Flowerdew, 2013), more needs analyses should be done in a formal and consistent way in Vietnam, not only within EAP programs but also programs for general English.

Grammar needs of L2 learners have also been discussed in studies by Yunita et al. (2018) and Ahmad (2018). The former paper, by distributing questionnaires to 44 students, showed several wants of L2 learners when they learn English grammar, but further details on their current grammatical knowledge were not mentioned. Ahmad (2018) also used questionnaires to yield helpful information on students' lacks and their wants in learning English grammar, yet the paper did not specify the problems students had with English grammar, regarding grammatical structures they found difficult.

As a result, due to a significant lack of formal studies on needs analysis in Vietnam, particularly within the scope of general English, and insufficient information on specific difficulties that L2

learners have with English grammatical features, this paper decided to examine the needs for learning English grammar of English-major university students at a university in Central Vietnam. The study aims to fulfil two objectives, which are (1) to identify the grammar points that they need more improvement, in terms of their awareness of the importance of such grammar points, and their grammatical knowledge, and (2) to describe their expectations to learning English grammar in the classroom.

4. Methods

The study followed a quantitative approach with the use of a questionnaire and a grammar test as research instruments. The questionnaire was virtually distributed to 118 participants, then 42 of them agreed to do the grammar test. Details of the participants, as well as the research instruments, were presented in sections. 4.1 and 4.2, respectively.

4.1. Participants

The survey involved 118 students, and 42 of them took the grammar test. Their participation in the survey and the grammar test was totally voluntary.

In 118 students responding to the questionnaire, 42 were first-year students, 39 second-year students, and 37 third-year students. Their length of studying English varied from less than 5 years to more than 10 years, with the majority of the participants more than 5 years.

Regarding 42 participants to the grammar test, their level of English was determined by the Cambridge Level Test (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022), whose results are referred to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), ranging from A1 to C2. It was reported that 11 students reached A2 level, 14 students for B1 level, 13 for B2, 3

for C1, and 1 student for C2 level. No participants reported their level of English as A1.

4.2. Research Instruments

In this study, a grammar test and a questionnaire were utilized to fulfill the objectives set in section 1.2.

A grammar test of 65 multiple-choice questions was employed to analyze the grammatical points that students need to develop (research question 1, see section 1.2). The test was compiled from two grammar knowledge tests, *Clear Grammar Placement Test* (Michigan English Language Teaching, n.d.) and the grammar test in the book *English Grammar in Use* for intermediate learners (Murphy, 2012). As the length of such original test may cause exhaustion to participants, the researchers decided to compile the items from the two tests, with questions being shuffled to ensure that students were not aware of the origins of the questions.

A questionnaire of 37 items was designed to answer the proposed research questions (see section 1.2). Four-point Likert-scale questions were used to identify students' expectations to learning English grammar in the classroom (research question 2, see section 1.2), as well as investigating their awareness of the importance of the English grammatical points. The rating of the importance of English grammatical points given by students would also provide more in-depth information on the improvements that students may need regarding the grammatical points (research question 1, see, section 1.2).

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

A survey was designed on Google form and then distributed to students via their online classrooms on Microsoft Teams in June, 2022. After this period of time, 119 responses were received from students of first year, second year, third year, and fourth year, the number of which was 42, 39, 37, and 1 respectively. As there was only one response from a fourth-year student, compared to the remaining numbers, this response was purposefully deleted from the data set in order not to interfere in the overall results.

When the survey was closed, the researchers preliminarily classified the responses into three sub-sets based on the year of the students, then sent the online grammar test to the participants via their personal emails provided in the survey. Time limit was not set for this test, as time pressure may have affected the answers of the students. In total, the test received answers from 42 participants.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data were saved and analyzed using Microsoft Excel as this was the most accessible tool of processing numbers for the researchers at that moment. For the data from the questionnaire, textual information was coded to generate descriptive statistics. Regarding the grammar test, the answers of students were coded and marked on this software as well.

4.5. Validity and Reliability of the Study

4.5.1 Validity

The validity of the study was contributed by the validity of the two instruments, i.e., the questionnaire and the grammar test. The test was designed and administered with the main aim to measure students' understanding on 12 grammatical points that they previously learned in courses of Basic English Grammar. The selection of questions for the grammar test was guided by 12 grammatical points mentioned in section 2.1. There were initially 60 questions in the test in correspondence to 12 grammatical points, but after the constructive feedback from senior colleagues whose expertise was syntax, the point of *articles, determiners,*

and pronouns was divided into 2 sub-categories, i.e., *articles*, and *determiners and pronouns*. Therefore, 2 questions were added to measure students' knowledge of articles, and 3 additional items were put in the test to examine their understanding of determiners and pronouns. In total, there were 65 questions in the grammar test.

In the questionnaire, four-point Likert scale was used to collect students' opinions on their needs to learn English grammar in the classroom (research question 2), and to examine their awareness of the importance of English grammatical points. Initially, a multiple-choice question with multiple answers was designed to collect the data for students' wants to learning grammar; however, after being reviewed by two senior colleagues, multiple-choice items were alternated by Likert-scale ones to ensure the consistency of the questionnaire.

4.5.2 Reliability

The internal consistency of the two instruments made a contribution to the reliability of the study. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated separately for the questionnaire and the grammar test.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was .93, which indicated a strong consistency among the responses of the students. However, the coefficient of the grammar test was .68, exceeding the warning point of .60 and being close to .70, a point that the reliability coefficient should aim to (Dörnyei, 2007). As a result, it was considered a respectable figure contributing to a positively acceptable degree of reliability of the study.

5. Results

5.1. Awareness of Students on the Importance of English Grammatical Points

The needs of students for improvements on English grammatical points were initially reflected on their awareness of the importance of these structures. The four-point Likert scale was used to examine how students rated the importance of each grammatical point, the results of which were described in Table 1. Generally, students showed their deep awareness towards the role of 12 grammatical points in learning English.

Table 1

Students' Rating the Importance of Grammatical Points

Grammatical points	Mode	Mean	SD
Tenses to describe events in the present	3	3.27	0.67
Tenses to describe events in the past	3	2.35	0.66
Tenses to describe events in the future	3	3.18	0.69
Linking words and phrases	3	2.98	0.67
Reported speech	3	2.80	0.77
Verb structures (infinitives and -ing forms)	3	2.93	0.78
Articles, determiners and pronouns	3	2.83	0.82
Modal verbs	3	2.92	0.73
Conditional sentences	3	2.88	0.83
Passive voice	3	2.96	0.77
Relative clauses and participles	3	2.97	0.72
Comparison	3	2.92	0.76

The mode value in Table 1 shows that *Important* was the most frequently chosen answer of participants. In other words, all 12 grammatical points were perceived mostly as important to learning English, with *Tenses to describe events in the present* having the highest mean score, closely followed by *Tense to describe events in the future* and *Linking words and phrases*. The means of other grammatical points

varied insignificantly from 2.97 to 2.80, showing that these points would play an important role in learning English of the participants.

However, it is noticeable that while tenses for present and future events were rated as the two most important grammatical points, the mean score of *Tenses to describe events in the past* was significantly lower than the others in Table 1 (2.35). It could be inferred from the figure that students did not consider this grammatical point as important as the other features.

In short, 118 students participating in the survey perceived all 12 grammatical points as important to their learning of English, though the degree of importance varied among the categories. *Tenses to describe events in the present* was considered the most important, while *Tenses to describe events in the past* was interpreted as the least important.
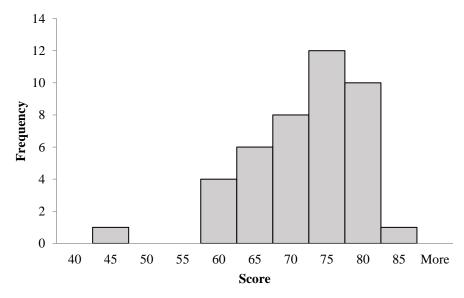
5.2. Grammatical Points That Students Need to Develop

Results from the grammar test showed the understanding of students on each grammatical point, indicating the first sense of "need", i.e., lack of grammatical knowledge (see section 2.3). Answers of 42 participants to the test were summarized in Figure 1. The maximum score of the test was 100, and the minimum was 0.

As shown in Figure 1, the score range was from 45 to 85, with the most frequent score being 75. Although the distribution of the scores was negatively skewed, it can be interpreted that students' grammatical knowledge is well above the average. They were able to provide correct answers for the majority of the questions, which may show that they had more or less understood the basics of the 12 grammatical points. One student was able to get 85, and in total, there were 31 in 42 participants whose scores were 70 or above. In other words, the students participating in the grammar test had shown their understanding of English grammar, yet their knowledge in this aspect was, to a certain extent, far from perfect, as the number of students who scored 85 was only one and there was no one that achieved above 85.

Figure 1

Score Distribution of the Grammar Test

Nevertheless, when the correlation between the students' level of English and their grammar test scores was computed, the result was not significant. The Pearson's $r = -.02$ ($p > .05$) shows that there was insignificant relationship between the level of English of students and their grammatical knowledge. The level of English may not be a good indicator of students' grammatical knowledge and vice versa.

When the answers of the participants were analyzed, it yielded some interesting results (Table 2). Questions targeting *Comparison* and *Relative clauses* did not cause many difficulties to the participants, when 90% of the test takers answered them correctly. Also, over 70% of students managed to choose correct answers for items related to *Reported speech*, *Passive voice*, *Verb structures*, *Tenses to describe present and future events*. Accordingly, these

grammatical points may not pose significant challenges to 42 participants.

However, the second half of Table 2 shows different results. Less than 70% of the test takers chose correct answers to questions on *Linking words and Phrases*, *Tenses to describe events in the past*, *Articles*, *Conditional sentences*, *Modal verbs*, and *Determiners and pronouns*. Noticeably, less than a half of the participants were able to answer questions related to *Determiners and pronouns* correctly. The descending order of the percentages of correct answers may indicate the increasing level of difficulty of each grammatical point. While *Comparison* was considered the least difficult grammar point to the participants, they were having more trouble with *Articles*, *Conditional sentences*, *Modal verbs*, and particularly, *Determiners and pronouns*.

Table 2

Percentages of Correct Answers for 12 Grammatical Points

Grammatical points	Percentage of correct answers
Comparison	91%
Relative clauses and participles	90%
Reported speech	86%
Passive voice	83%
Verb structures (infinitives and -ing forms)	79%
Tenses to describe events in the present	75%
Tenses to describe events in the future	72%
Linking words and phrases	66%
Tenses to describe events in the past	66%
Articles	62%
Conditional sentences	59%
Modal verbs	56%
Determiners and pronouns	45%

When the figures in Table 2 were put in comparison with those in Table 1, there were some noteworthy observations. While

Comparison and *Relative clauses and participles* were rated less important than such other grammatical points as Tenses to

describe events in the present and in the future, the former were the ones causing the least difficulty for students in the grammar test. Furthermore, as less important as *Tenses to describe events in the past* was rated compared to other categories, this grammatical feature was shown to challenge the participants of the grammar test significantly, with less than 70% of them were able to provide correct answers. Similarly, *Articles, determiners and pronouns* was considered the third least important grammatical feature to students, when as low as 62% of the grammar test takers managed to choose correct answers for questions targeting *Articles*, and more than a half of the test takers were not able to answer question items related to *Determiners and pronouns* correctly.

In brief, it is observed that the general understanding of the participants on English grammar was well above the average, though this may not be an indicator to their general English competence or vice versa. More specifically, *Linking words and phrases*, *Tenses to describe events in the past*, *Articles*, *Conditional sentences*, *Modal verbs*, *Determiners and pronouns* seemed to signified students' lacks in terms of grammatical knowledge. These are suggested to be the grammatical points that students should make more efforts to fully understand.

5.3. Students' Wants to Learn English Grammar in the Classroom

The study also examined the ways that students want to learn English grammar in the classroom, which addressed the second sense of "needs" in this paper (see section 2.2). Several ways of delivering the meanings, forms, and uses of English grammatical points were listed in the questionnaire and participants were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree with each way of delivering the knowledge, from 1 *(strongly disagree)*, 2 *(disagree)*, 3 *(agree)*, to 4 *(strongly agree)*.

As shown in Table 3, students would like their teachers to explain the details of English grammatical points, then they want to do interactive exercises rather than traditional paper-based ones (3.32 compared to 3.11). It seems that students would not enjoy exploring English grammatical knowledge either by themselves or in groups as much as listening to teachers' explanations.

With regards to expectations of participants when they practice English grammar (Table 4), they would like to practice what they learned about English grammar structures, including their meanings, forms, and uses, by applying them to writing and speaking activities rather than doing either multiple-choice exercises or gap-filling ones. This was also harmonized with students' wants to learn English grammar, as they would expect their teachers to assign interactive exercises to them. Nevertheless, it can be seen in Table 4 that students seem to enjoy doing sentence-transformation practice, as this was the way with the highest mean score.

Table 3

Students' Wants to Learn English Grammar in the Classroom

Ways of learning English grammar	Mean	SD
Teachers explain the details of grammatical points.	2.87	0.77
Teachers explain the details of grammatical points, and assign traditional paper-based exercises to students.	3.11	0.71
Teachers explain the details of grammatical points, and assign interactive	3.32	0.68

exercises to students.		
I want to study the details of grammatical points by myself.	2.81	0.88
I want to study the details of grammatical points in groups.	2.61	0.78

As interesting as doing exercises on online platforms (Kahoot, Quizizz) may sound, participants did not show their strong interest in this way of practice. Similarly, they may not expect to make infographic posters, make videos or presentations about English grammar as much as doing exercises, and particularly, writing and speaking with the employment of target grammatical structures.

Table 4

Students' Wants to Practice English Grammar in the Classroom

Ways to practice English grammar	Mean	SD
I want to do multiple-choice exercises.	2.72	0.74
I want to do gap-filling exercises.	2.88	0.80
I want to do exercises on sentence transformation.	3.14	0.72
I want to do exercises on online platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz.	2.71	0.79
I want to do writing exercises in relation to grammatical points (e.g., write a letter to describe past events)	3.10	0.76
I want to do speaking practice in relation to grammatical points.	3.02	0.84
I want to make infographic posters about the details of grammatical points.	2.77	0.71
I want to make videos about the details of grammatical points.	2.63	0.82
I want to make presentations about the details of grammatical points.	2.58	0.84

In summary, students expressed their wants to learn English grammar through the explanations delivered by teachers, and to practice grammatical points by means of writing and speaking. Additionally, in the curriculum, they would appreciate English grammar as a separate course rather than its content being integrated into lessons of English Language Skills.

6. Discussion

Data from the questionnaire and the grammar test indicated the awareness of students majoring in English, as well as their needs for learning English grammar, in terms of the grammatical points they need to understand further, and their wants to learn English in the classroom. The results of students' awareness were similar to the ones that were reported by Vi et al. (2022), whose study was conducted on English-majored students at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. Participants in the research project of Vi et al. (2022), who shared the same educational background with the respondents to the questionnaire of this study, also showed their strong awareness of the important role of English grammar.

Besides, Vi et al. (2022) reported that half of the students participating in the survey found it difficult when they learned English grammar. Nevertheless, no further details on such difficulties were provided, which was a research gap that may be fulfilled by this present paper. Although the sample of this current study was not

sufficiently large to provide reliable generalizations, the challenges that the test takers faced in the grammar test may be informative for future studies, as well as for teaching and learning English grammar. Students may need additional support from their instructors in some grammatical points, such as *Linking words and phrases*, *Articles*, *determiners and pronouns*.

The study by Ahmad (2018) further pointed out that L2 learners did not manage to use grammar in the correct context, and that they wanted to get English grammar integrated into reading and speaking skills. This result is partially similar to how students in this paper want to learn English grammar. Both groups of participants expressed their interests in employing English grammar in meaningful contexts such as speaking activities, yet the participants in this study still appreciate explanations of forms, meanings, and uses of grammatical structures, and would prefer English grammar as a separate course rather than its content being infused in Language Skills courses.

Although needs of L2 learners may vary in accordance with their first language, educational backgrounds and individual differences (Ahmad, 2018; Vi et al., 2022; Yunita et al., 2018), they all seem to share one need to learn and to use English grammar in a meaningful context, through such productive practices as writing and speaking. This is a significant point that teachers and curriculum designers may shift more of their attention to. Traditional structured assignments as multiple-choice exercises, gap-filling exercises, or sentence transformation practice may not ignite L2 learners' interest in learning English grammar, which could further interfere their general English competence, as grammatical knowledge is shown to play a critical role in developing L2 learners' language skills (Nazari et al., 2022; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019).

The wants of the participants in the present study were also aligned with the benefits of teaching grammar that has long been discussed in the literature (Ellis, 2006; Long, 1988; Norris & Ortega, 2000). As controversial as the problem of teaching or not teaching grammar to L2 learners may be (Ellis, 2006), what students wanted in this study may contribute to justify the presence of English grammar as an independent course in English language curriculum. They showed their expectations to learn grammatical knowledge explicitly through the explanations of grammatical points from their teachers.

An interesting result is the insignificant relationship between the overall English proficiency of L2 learners and their English grammar knowledge. In other words, those who achieved a significant level of English such as B2 are not necessarily the ones who mastered English grammar, and vice versa. This is worth noting for L2 learners when they approach English grammar courses. The values that those courses offer should not be underestimated, and students enrolling in the courses may need to show their appreciation towards such values in order to have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of English. By this way, the English level that they are labelled with would truly reflect their English competence.

In terms of needs analysis, differences in students' needs between the present study and the previous studies that were conducted by Ahmad (2018) and Yunita et al. (2018) suggested that learning needs of L2 learners vary significantly among contexts. As the first step in curriculum development (Brown, 2009), understanding needs of learners is critical and should be done continuously (West, 1994). As a result, the findings of the present paper may provide insights to the teaching of English grammar at Faculty of English.

Teachers in the faculty may need to provide their students with extra support on grammatical points that they have more problems with, e.g., *Articles, determiners and pronouns*. Also, as students showed to enjoy interactive and productive practice, instructors may consider adding these activities to their lessons in order to accommodate such want and stimulate their students' learning progress. Also, as needs may change over time (West, 1994), the findings of the present study may need to be re-examined to inform teachers and curriculum designers what students need, what they lack, and what they want, in order for the grammar lessons to be modified appropriately and for the content of English grammar course to be updated accordingly.

The results of the present study and previous ones have suggested useful implications for L2 learners, teachers of English, and curriculum designers of English programs. L2 learners of English have expressed the importance of learning English grammar while they acquire the language. Given a substantial number of benefits that teaching grammar explicitly has brought to students, prospective L2 learners should prepare themselves to get exposed to grammar rules and a wide variety of grammar practices which will potentially help them master this component of English language.

More importantly, teachers should be better-informed of grammatical points that students have more difficulty with and their wants to learn English grammar. *Linking words and phrases*, *Articles*, *determiners and pronouns* are among the most challenging categories that teachers should not overlook when they outline their lesson plans and deliver the knowledge. These categories are equally important compared to the other ones, e.g., multiple tenses, *Conditional sentences,* or *Comparison*, that should deserve better attention from the instructors, as well as the

students. Also, English grammar lessons are suggested by L2 learners to be more skill-integrated, i.e., reading, writing, and speaking practices may be infused in the lessons to get students immersed into meaningful contexts of different grammatical points. That would potentially be a great help not only for the improvement of English grammar knowledge but also for an overall better language development.

Last but not least, curriculum designers should be knowledgeable and updated with various needs of L2 learners in different contexts, together with constant changes in the needs, when they modify an existing syllabus or design a new one for a program. Needs analysis should be conducted continuously for the educators to be informed of what students need to know, what they lack, and what they want. The results from those needs analyses would be solid justifications for any modifications or changes in the curriculum.

7. Conclusion

The present study aims to investigate students' needs for learning English grammar, in terms of what grammatical points they needed further improvement on and how they wanted to learn English grammar in the classroom.

From the results in section 5, it can be seen that students were well aware of the critical role of English grammar, and they performed relatively well in the grammar test. The students demonstrated generally good English grammatical knowledge, but there were six grammatical points that may require additional efforts from them. *Linking words and phrases*, *Tenses to describe events in the past*, *Articles*, *Conditional sentences*, *Modal verbs*, and *Determiners and pronouns* were the points that participants showed their lack of understanding regarding the meanings, forms, and uses. *Comparison* and *Relative*

clauses and participles seemed not to pose much of a challenge to the students, though they were not perceived as important as *Tenses to describe events in the present*.

Another noteworthy point that should be taken was students' expectations of learning English grammar in the classroom. The students wanted their teachers to explain the details of English grammatical points, and they would like to get engaged in grammar practice that involved writing and speaking skills. Traditional multiple-choice and gap-filling exercises in the classroom seem not to be preferred by the students. As a result, teachers and course designers may need to pay more attention to these wants in order to make English grammar lessons more enjoyable, and to ensure the alignment between the English grammar syllabus and the needs of the stakeholders.

The study attempted to identify students' needs in learning English grammar as rigorously as possible, yet there existed unavoidable flaws that should be improved in future research. The sample size should have been larger to provide a more comprehensive view on students' wants, and the grammar test should have been validated to improve its quality and consistency.

Nevertheless, the results from the grammar test and the questionnaire may become a good source of reference for English grammar course instructors to enhance the quality of their teaching of English grammatical points. More importantly, as the expectations of students may change constantly, the activity of analyzing their needs as this study may have to be conducted on a regular basis to keep teachers well-informed of the changes and provide course designers with insights for any modifications on English grammar syllabus.

References

Ahmad, A. (2018). Developing the English grammar module based-cooperative learning to teach basic English grammar: Focus on students' needs. *ELT-Lectura: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *5*(2), 138-148.

Brown, J. D. (2009). Foreign and second language needs analysis. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 269-293). Wiley-Blackwell.

Cambridge University Press and Assessment. (2022). *B2 first*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/first

Cambridge University Press and Assessment. (2022). *General English*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/general-english/

Celce-Murcia, M., & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course* (2nd ed.). Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Duong, T. H. O. (2007). Meeting students' needs in two EAP programmes in Vietnam and New Zealand: A comparative study. *RELC*, *38*(3), 324-349.

Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, *40*(1), 83-107.

Flowerdew, L. (2013). Needs analysis and curriculum development in ESP. In B. Paltridge & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The handbook of English for specific purposes* (pp. 325-346). Wiley-Blackwell.

Harrison, M. (2008). *First certificate skills: Use of English*. Oxford University Press.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learner-centered approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaewpet, C. (2009). A framework for investigating learner needs: Needs analysis extended to curriculum development. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, *6*(2), 209-220.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Pergamon.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2001). Teaching grammar. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as*

a second or foreign language (3rd ed., pp. 251-266). Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2009). Teaching and testing grammar. In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (pp. 518-542). Wiley-Blackwell.

Michigan English Language Teaching (n.d.). *Clear grammar placement test*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.press.umich.edu/elt/compsite/cleargrammar/CG_part1

Muhammed, A. C. P., Joshi, P., & Hareesh, S. (2018). Developing ESL/EFL learners' grammatical competence through communicative activities. *I-manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, *8*(1), 63-70.

Murphy, R. (2012). *English grammar in use: A self-study reference and practice book for intermediate learners of English* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Myhill, D., Jones, S., & Watson, A. (2013). Grammar matters: How teachers' grammatical knowledge impacts on the teaching of writing. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *36*, 77-91.

Nazari, M., Boustani, A., & Sheikhi, M. (2022). A case study of the impact of a teacher education course on two Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about grammar teaching. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *7*, Article 13.

Norris, J., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, *50*, 417-528.

Nguyen, T. Q. N. (2019). Teaching grammar for EFL learners in Vietnam universities. *Journal of Industry and Trade*, *13*, 75-80.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Sato, M., & Oyanedel, J. C. (2019). "I think that is a better way to teach but …": EFL teachers' conflicting beliefs about grammar teaching. *System*, *84*, 110-122.

Swan, M. (2017). *Practical English usage* (4th ed). Oxford University Press.

Vi, T. T. P., Nguyen, T. T. K., & Ma, P. T. (2022). An investigation of English-majored students' strategies for learning English grammar at Thai Nguyen University of Technology. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *9*(2), 40-80.

West, R. (1994). Needs analysis in language teaching. *Language Teaching*, *27*(1), 1-19.

Yan, X., & Zou, F. (2021). A survey on needs for English academic course for doctoral candidates. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *11*(1), 57-64.

Yunita, W., Emzir, & Mayuni. I. (2018). Need analysis for English grammar learning model from students' perspectives. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, *6*(2), 85-94.

"SINH VIÊN CẦN CẢI THIỆN NHỮNG ĐIỂM NGỮ PHÁP NÀO?": PHÂN TÍCH NHU CẦU CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH NGÔN NGỮ ANH

Nguyễn Hồng Nam Phương, Nguyễn Thị Huỳnh Lộc

Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ - Đại học Đà Nẵng
131 Lương Nhữ Học, quận Cẩm Lệ, Đà Nẵng

Tóm tắt: Ngữ pháp đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc phát triển kĩ năng ngôn ngữ của người học ngoại ngữ, và điều này đã lí giải cho sự cần thiết của việc giảng dạy ngữ pháp cho người học tiếng Anh. Tuy nhiên, dữ liệu chính thống về nhu cầu của người học ngoại ngữ đối với việc học ngữ pháp còn hạn chế, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh ở Việt Nam. Đây là những lý do để nghiên cứu này được thực hiện nhằm tìm hiểu nhu cầu của sinh viên tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam trong việc học ngữ pháp tiếng Anh, với mong muốn hỗ trợ giáo viên lựa chọn phương pháp giảng dạy phù hợp, và hỗ trợ các cá nhân xây dựng chương trình đào tạo thiết kế nội dung cho các khóa học ngữ pháp. Kết quả của nghiên cứu này cho thấy sinh viên gặp khó khăn với một số điểm ngữ pháp tiếng Anh như *Từ và cụm từ liên kết, Các thì diễn tả sự việc ở quá khứ, Mạo từ, từ chỉ định và đại từ*. Ngoài ra, sinh viên mong muốn các bài học ngữ pháp có tính tương tác cao hơn, kết hợp giữa phần giải thích nội dung của các cấu trúc ngữ pháp và các hoạt động luyện tập viết và nói.

Từ khóa: ngữ pháp tiếng Anh, người học ngoại ngữ, nhu cầu, khó khăn, mong muốn