

**Subliminal Isolation of the ESL Learner: Mapping the (Un) Conscious Pedagogical Error of Teaching Grammar in Isolation in the ESL Classroom**

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**Abstract**

Ira Shor in her work “Empowering Education” raises the question “Can education develop students as critical thinkers, skilled workers, and active citizens” reminding that the purpose of education is not to merely “stock the memory” but to “form the intelligence” (Piaget). However, current pedagogical practices have reduced the complex and intricate process of learning a language into a simplified formula of grammatical structures. Therefore, the notion that teaching a language is teaching grammar in isolation, a colonial method that has been practised for years, which is still in practice in the ESL classroom, should be problematized. Methodologically the study takes an autoethnographic approach. Data were collected from the two ESL teacher-participants from the Department of English Language Teaching of Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Allied Health Sciences. Findings show two critical instances where the structural approach of teaching the English language fails the ESL learner: when teaching/learning grammar rules, and the limitations in vocabulary. Reducing the English language to a fixed entity focusing only on grammatical rules is a way of disregarding the complex intricacies of language learning. For example, even though students can easily explain the role and function of tenses in isolation, they fail to contextualize these tenses in other instances both in and out of the ESL classroom. Additionally, since students are constricted within this teaching/learning practice, the moment the student is expected to step out and critically analyze socio-political, economic and cultural surroundings, there is a visible struggle. The purpose of learning a language is not merely to communicate, but to form a critical dialogue with one another, which is not accomplished through the current ESL teaching method. Therefore, this study attempts to map out this (un)conscious pedagogical error in the ESL classroom where the English language is treated as an abstract notion rather than a living breathing organism.

**Keywords:** *Critical thinker, ESL learner, isolation, literature, structure*

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