The Influence of Age on Grammar Acquisition

in the English Learning Process

Maria Victoria Riascos, Lorena Arteaga Silva, School of Human Sciences,

University of Nariño

Submitted to the School of Human Sciences in partial

Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of B.A.

Linguistics and Language Department

English and French Program

University of Nariño

August, 2011

**NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD**

"Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en el trabajo de grado, son de responsabilidad exclusiva de la autora"

Artículo 1 del acuerdo No. 324 de octubre 11 de 1966, emanado del honorable consejo directivo de la Universidad de Nariño.

**Nota de aceptación:**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Presidente de Tesis

_____

Jurado

_____

Jurado

San Juan de Pasto, Agosto de 2011

**Table of Contents**

**Chapter One: Introduction**

The learning process depended on many factors and there were multiple studies about the influence of age. It was believed that age affected the acquisition of knowledge; in fact, the learning process depended on many individual external and internal factors in relation to the social context where a person lived. So, it was relevant to define the importance of this factor in EFL settings and in our particular conditions, in order to enhance learning conditions according to the learners' linguistic abilities.

If we were working with learners who were in a period of time when learning was more effective, it could increase their opportunities for the development of cognitive skills. On the other hand, if this opportunity was not exploited, they were going to lose a good chance for learning. For instance, it was evident that young people were better learners than adults when learning the second or foreign language.

According to some research, as in learners' differences by Jordens (1985), the learning process depended on individual differences such as sex, working memory, motivation, and prior knowledge, i.e. the role of the first language which was included in acquisition.

In the complex process of learning a second language it was considered that learners might manage all the skills to communicate in the second language in order to be understood. An aspect that helped talkers to organize their ideas in a comprehensible way was grammar showing them how their thoughts might be expressed in an oral and written way.

Some authors such as Hinkel and Fotos (2002) considered grammar universal in all languages while other ones believed that it was an interlanguage grammar that was present in SLA and it should be taught since it had different points of learners' grammar native language.

Teaching grammar might have the same importance that other components of language had since, it differed in many aspects and learners should be conscious of them for knowing that learning a second language should be taken as a whole, and that this second language varied in many aspects of their native language.

**Problem Statement**

What was the influence of age in the English grammar learning process when working with children and teenagers who displayed a lower- intermediate proficiency?

**Problem Description**

The research discussed the acquisition of grammar in foreign language learners of third level of English courses at the Language Center of the University of Nariño. Age was considered an important factor during the learning process. Given that age was a factor that affected foreign language learning, it was expected that some communicative or linguistic differences regarding the use of grammar in a chosen setting would be found. It was expected that the two age groups showed differences in:

- Lack of fluency to communicate in a foreign language.

- Interest or engagement for studying English.

- Grammatical strengths and weaknesses.

The limitations in the use of grammar could affect the learning process in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), so they were identified in order to establish a difference between children and adults in relation to the way they learnt.

The main theory that the research was based on was the 'Critical Period Hypothesis' (CPH) by Lenneberg (1967) which referred to the brain flexibility and suggested that adults might not reach the same proficiency level of young foreign language learners because there was a critical period between 2 to 12 learners' age in which the process of learning was acquired with more facility. Since between the age of 0 and 2 years there existed a physical immaturity, and around 12 years and on there was a loss of cerebral plasticity that did not allow a successful process of learning a language. But taking into account the cultural and

environmental conditions that were considered decisive when learning a second language, it was relevant to know that the learning process could also depend on learner's physical conditions, for example, nervous system illnesses.

Considering that in Colombia the foreign language learning policy was not clear and the standards were difficult to achieve given the difficult learning conditions under which foreign language teacher worked (large classes, few hours a week, scarce materials, mixed ability groups), this study intended to detect how age affected the acquisition of grammar. Knowing how learners from different age groups acquired grammar might help future teachers to develop and adopt teaching strategies that could lead to more effective grammar learning, minimizing the limitations of an EFL setting like this one.

**Significance of the Study**

Taking into account Lenneberg's theory (1967), it was intended to prove if the learning process was developed in the same way in older and younger learners; it was seen that if the students were in an appropriate environment, age was not an important factor while the learners' cultural conditions were similar.

In our society learning a foreign language outside school was something that learners could do freely where they could be mixed and the difference of age and the social conditions were relevant. Since it was intended to develop this research in a population that studied the second language as an extra class, it allowed us to notice if the learning process took place despite of learners' differences showing that people of all ages were able to acquire the knowledge in the same way, taking into account that the English courses had learners of different ages and second language proficiency in the same classroom.

Talking about teachers, they needed to know the result of this study because they might notice the different strategies to work with age groups regarding grammar; and the way how children and adults could learn that; in addition, if they knew the role that age played in second language learning, they should take into account modifying or creating new syllabi that could help to make more successful for students their second language grammar learning.

Besides, this study was also relevant for learners who thought about their communicative skills using the foreign language since they needed to be aware of the importance of knowing grammar in order to produce a comprehensible output having a good understanding of it; as a result of that, it allowed them to have a rewarding career in many fields of their personal and professional lives.

This research was important since the relationship between age and grammar acquisition in an EFL setting, and considering different age groups, was not studied before at the University of Nariño. So, analyzing this issue could shed some light on the way grammar could be approached when working with students in an elementary school, in high-school or in college.

One more reason why this study was important for student-teachers and foreign language teachers in general was because grammar was a permanent issue for L2 teachers. Although recent trends in grammar instruction like focus on form were applied around the world, our EFL classrooms could still be using more traditional instruction, which done relate to communication or fluency. Knowing more about grammar instruction and matching it to the age of learners could benefit the professional practice of teachers.

## Research Objectives

### General Objective

It was described the extent to which age played a role in grammar acquisition in an EFL setting with low-intermediate learners who belonged to two different age groups.

### Specific Objectives

- It was described the differences found between learners of two different age groups regarding grammar acquisition.

- It was proposed some strategies in order to cope with the differences age groups could have regarding grammar instruction and acquisition.

### Research Questions

Did age have a relevant implication that could affect the process of learning English grammar?

a) What advantages and disadvantages could be found because of learners' age differences when learning a second language in EFL settings??

b) Could we establish some differences between younger and older learners when learning a language in EFL settings??

### Limitations

A limitation that we could find was teachers that could not allow us observe the class and students that might not like to cooperate with the research. We needed to explain the benefits of our study and try to speak to them about the importance of their cooperation. Also, there might exist a lack of cooperation for the teachers since they could not feel comfortable when a person was observing their classes, and it could affect the results of the study.

## Definition of Terms

- Second Language Acquisition: Selinker and Gass (2008), affirmed that "this is the common term used for the name of the discipline. In general, second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the process of learning another language after the native language has been learned. Sometimes the term refers to the learning of a third or fourth language. The important aspect is that SLA refers to the learning of a nonnative language *after* the learning of the native language."

- Context: Benson and Samarawickrema (2007), talked about context expressing that "The importance of context to the experience of learning has been acknowledged from a number of points of view. Context is a complex, multifaceted, perspective-dependent concept which may include a range of factors in its definition, from the specific characteristics of the learning and teaching environment, to disciplinary, institutional and systemic variables, and beyond that to broad social influences and personal issues affecting students' lives. Along with learner characteristics, context is frequently one of the first variables to be considered in learning design."

- Grammar: According to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2010), grammar "is the knowledge speakers have about the units and the rules of their language-rules for combining sound into words (called phonology), rules of word formation (called morphology), rules for combining words into phrases and phrases into sentences (called syntax), as well as the rules for assigning meaning (called semantics). The grammar, together with a mental dictionary (called a lexicon) that lists the words of the language, represents our linguistic competence. To understand the nature of language we must understand the nature of grammar.

- Interlanguage: Shamim Ali (2001), affirmed that "the term interlanguage was first coined and developed in the interlanguage theory published in 1972 under the authorship of Larry Selinker, a well known theorist. Whenever one acquires second or another language, one develops a so called interlanguage, which is developed by him/her as a system of rules and applications that can either bear the properties and rules of L1, properties and rules of both L1 and L2, can also not possess features of neither."

  He also argued that "interlanguage refers to the separateness of a second language learners' system: System that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language; interlanguage is neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them; by a gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, learners slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer and closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of the language."

- Skill: seen as an ability or capacity acquired through effort to efficiently and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills).

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

**The Influence of Age**

Lenneberg (1967) argues in his theory of critical period hypothesis (CPH) refers to a long-standing dispute in linguistics and language acquisition where the ability to acquire language is biologically linked to age. The hypothesis claims that there is an ideal 'window' of time to acquire language in a linguistic environment, after which it is not possible because of changes in the brain. The hypothesis has been discussed in the context of first and second language acquisition (SLA). First language acquisition tries to explain the appreciable absence of language in individuals whose childhood exposure was very limited, and in SLA is explained variation in adults' performance in learning a second language, which is very often observed to fall. Various ages have been suggested for the supposed end of the CPH where pre-adolescent ages such as 12 have been vulnerable to alternative theories, which include psychological or social factors applying as children move into adolescence. If age is an important factor which affects SLA, we have to consider it as a relevant point when teaching a second language since it can help us to understand the neurological development of learners who have different needs and make their learning process proficient.

Lenneberg also suggests that there are not similar facts along the motor, intellectual and the verbal development. So, articulation and language do not have an equal process because children do not produce imperfect words at the beginning of their lives which occurs because of mechanic causes.

In his theory, Lenneberg also affirms that a similar beginning of language in different cultures and with limited linguistic stimuli would be a delay which can be recovered through exposition, this situation may be presented in a context like ours where the use of the second

language is not presented in a common or regular way in the daily life and it could discourage learners when learning and using the second language in real-life contexts.

**Learners' differences.**

According to Jordens (1985), there are five factors in SLA that influence in the learning process, they are: age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation, and personality.

When talking about age, it is possible to find many ideas and hypothesis of different authors (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000), Neufeld (1978), Rozansky (1975), Halliday (1973), Snow and Hoefnagel (1978), there is concern about if adults and children learn in the same way. An adult has more memory capacity and may pay more attention to the formal characteristics of language. Even so, the product of the power of speech does not change with age. It is important to separate the effect of age on the natural change of the learning process and the impact on the speed of it, proving that age does not affect the change that is still in acquisition.

Ellis (1985) cites some of the following authors talking about some aspects that play a relevant role when discussing age and SLA such as grammar and information acquisition.

When talking about younger and older learners' differences, in Snow and Hoefnagel's studies (1978) teenagers are those who process information faster than children and adults. These studies also found that age is a factor concerning the time to learn morphology and syntax. It is believed children are better in pronunciation with slightly different flow and coherence. The advantage, that all adults have, is the ability to understand language as a formal system. Adults can consciously learn linguistic rules and apply them when they use the language. On the other hand, a child uses language as a meaningful tool of expression.

This point of view is shared with Rosanzky (1975) making a contrast between children and adults, affirming that learning ability depends on the degree of learners' consciousness about what s/he does. Rosanzky (1975) just looks flexible thoughts where the child learns without knowing that s/he is learning the language. It's a contrast with adults' language since s/he does not learn it automatically and naturally because of the social attitude that s/he has with the language.

Halliday (1973) talks specifically about children arguing that they take into account language for what they can do with that rather than what it is. Halliday (1973) developed a framework that takes into consideration the importance of language in children's development as a social being, so teachers should analyze how much time they are going to use for teaching the second language due to his importance for them in order to be accepted in their atmosphere.

Neufeld (1978) makes a contribution to learners' differences talking about two basic and elementary language learning levels. In the first level there is relevant vocabulary and pronunciation and grammar rules control. The second level includes the ability for using complex grammar structures and a different language style. All learners have a native ability for acquiring and mastering the basic level, and even children have more probabilities for acquiring the second level because of strong motivations of being accepted in a society, besides, the extent of mastery of the high level skills depends on one's intelligence. Despite it, adults are happy acquiring their own foreign accent while children like to learn pronunciation in their first contact with the second language, since Neufeld (1978) believes that learner's ability in learning a second language is not innate, but dependent upon learner's previous learning experiences.

At this point, Oller and Perkins (1978) also share the same view. They do not believe the existence of aptitude for language acquisition. They say that intelligence is responsible for the variance in a wide variety of language measures.

The analysis about the research of the notion of a sensitive period of second language acquisition has many questions unanswered. Two studies found that the correspondence between language structures in the first and second language is the most important factor affecting acquisition where age is not a relevant factor.

Nevertheless, Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000) contrast it with what they call the linear decline hypothesis where age effects are explained in a linear decline in performance that continues throughout lifespan without the specific period of learning; but, even though Lenneberg's CPH shows an explanation about the lack of second language knowledge, it does not make explicit claims about a successful second language learning before puberty. Age affects different aspects of the learning process. A good level of proficiency in learners depends on their own goals and their second language abilities.

Continuing the idea of an appropriate age to learn, Penfield and Roberts (1959) agree with the last authors insuring that the optimal age for learning a language is up to ten years taking into account the Critical Period Hypothesis, where the lateralization takes place in the neurological capacity to produce and understand language, at this point Penfield and Roberts (1959) neglect Brown's ideas (1980) which proposed that SLA is relative since the adult is exposed to the language more time than children, buy they learn faster. For example, Lenneberg finds that the injuries suffered in the right hemisphere affect more the ability of language learning in children than in adults, but children have a greater chance of recovery in the field of languages; nevertheless, these results do not yield evidences about learning a

language before puberty. This theory of critical period does not refer to the learning mode, or the acquisition of this in terms of speed but rather to the loss of plasticity due to multiple critical periods.

Although Ellis and the last mentioned authors discuss their different points of view, Muñoz (2006) claims that this role assumes that native language affects the learning process of a second language. Thus, language transfer happens when L1 is similar to L2, the first one can help in the acquisition process, and the differences found among them can be difficult when learning the second language.

Muñoz (2006) notices that it is really difficult the acquisition of a second or foreign language since learners' settings do not allow them to practice and keep in contact with it and there is little possibility of regular interaction with the target language community, besides this acquisition usually occurs in descontextualised settings of the classroom.

Muñoz (2006) denies the common assumption that the younger learner is better, so the author makes a considerable investigation in relation to age taking also into account some areas such as accents or phonetic imitation showing that efficiency in formal language learning increases with maturation, it means that older students seem to have an advantage over young learners under the age of twelve.

The BAF (Barcelona Age Factor) project which analyzes the effects of age in foreign language learning agrees with her saying that older learners seem to acquire faster some language aspects, specially learning mechanics where an age-related difference does indeed exist in formal language learning, clearly in favor of students with higher maturation levels, but a recent research demonstrated that carefully planned explicit teaching can be useful for younger learners too.

Foreign language structure needs to be acclimatized with learner's maturation phases where it is considered relevant the implicit second language learning in younger pupils, so that in can be taught explicitly when they get older.

Muñoz (2006) talks about Critical period hypothesis which was used in the field of SLA in the 1960s and early 1970s for explaining why some aspects of the second language were more difficult to acquire than others. Muñoz (2006) is based on CPH and agrees with it saying that there is a biologically-determined critical period during which it is possible for a person to acquire a second language with high attainment levels, and then, they acquire a mental mechanism for language learning changes. At this point, Muñoz (2006) makes a clear distinction with CAH because this hypothesis is based on first and second language acquisition and not on foreign language learning.

Muñoz (2006) also finds out about Krashen (1985, 1996, 2003) and his involvement in the sequence of morpheme acquisition in English as a second language, and she determined that although there is parallel order of morpheme's acquisition between younger and older learners, the rates of acquisition of them are different where the older pupils learn faster. Moreover, there is not enough information about learner's interaction with the second language and the nature of tasks pupils used in this learning process. So, this type of information could have provided a more complete overview of the background to the study.

**Grammar**

According to the NCLRC (National Capital Language Resource Center), many people, hear the word "grammar" and think of a fixed set of word forms and rules of usage, errors and correctness; associate good grammar with the forms of the language, such as those used in

writing and in formal oral presentations, and bad grammar with the language used in everyday conversation or used by speakers of nonprestige forms.

But grammar also helps understand what makes sentences and paragraphs clear and exact, and knowing about grammar also means finding out that all languages follow grammatical models. We learn basic grammar when we start to put sentences together as children do, but it can be considered as something more difficult.

Hinkel and Fotos (2002) argue that learners of a second language do not become proficient if they do not understand a basic structure that is only provided by grammar studies. Hinkel and Fotos (2002) also say that learners who are between the age of 15 are more susceptible to this problem since they are persons who acquire a considerable level of the second language to be able to communicate even with grammar errors, and many people who learn English as their second language do not get the negative feedback that would allow them know if they are doing something wrong.

Grammar teaches how to build sentences, about the types of words that people use, when it is important to use it, and how to use them in a specific sentence, as a result, understanding grammar will mean that you can think more logically, since without coherence and organization you cannot make understandable what you want to say; so, as more grammar rules you understand, your communication is going to be clearer.

Grammar is important because it is what makes possible for everybody to communicate and understand what people say. Grammar names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but in any language since being able to talk about how sentences are built and they are coherent, means that one knows about grammar.

In current trends of language teaching, grammar is an important element to produce a comprehensible output of learners not only in writing, but in speaking. Since this view let us to start looking for the influence of age in English grammar learning according to how learners' use the target language rules and their age.

Chomsky (1995) says that children learn sound and vocabulary of their native language through imitation, but grammar is taught explicitly and they acquire fast the capability to speak grammatically. So, children can learn some items about grammar of any particular language because all intelligible languages have a complex structure of grammatical rules that are universal and are in contact with a capability of the human brain. So, children understand grammar rules deducing them about they hear and have some problems that cannot be inferred since they should be taught.

According to Crystal (2003), there are six reasons to study grammar which involve people's desire to understand the world, the conception that people cannot live without language, to notice all the potentialities that can be developed when talking or writing, to solve possible language problems like the ambiguity and unintelligible speech or writing, to learn a basis for learning other languages, and the possibility of being in a better position to use and to evaluate it.

Regarding these objectives that are almost for all the people that want to learn grammar, it is possible to find another ones that can be specific for students taking into account their own needs and goals. There are lots of different aspects to English grammar, and each one is important, it is English grammar that will allow them to be better communicators, listeners, thinkers, readers and writers. Having a good understanding of grammar will allow learners have a potentially rewarding career in many fields of work since if they don't know

the rules of grammar; they will never be able to communicate clearly and effectively in the English language.

Children and adults who are learning English as a second language tend to forget to learn English grammar. Even basic grammar is better than none, and the advance learning can always come later, but many of them do not realize that they must know grammar for being able to communicate which can be considered as the main goal of every person that wants to learn a foreign language. So, it is necessary that they know that once they have mastered English grammar, they will be able to communicate with everyone, and they will be able to understand as complex and simple language.

Besides, nowadays people use to judge people based on the way they write, so, if someone reads any kind of text and sees a poor and incorrect use of language, they immediately are going to think that this person has not been educated and they would devaluate his or her work. Then, if a person does not know grammar or how to use and apply it correctly, it is possible that he or she could be considered as a non educated person.

Nevertheless, many students do not matter how important it should be, they just dislike studying it. Moreover, they should be conscious that they have to make sure that you can concentrate on understanding grammar, no matter how boring the study of the subject may be; it is essential for communicating when they have the chance to use it.

Learners sometimes tend to feel indifferent when learning grammar because in many cases, their classes are based in just one skill, specially writing or speaking, without analyzing the second language itself. So, these courses are based on a specific purpose in just one skill, and it is not appropriate for language students since first at all, learners can perfectly learn grammar, but when teacher asks him or her any basic information, the student is going to

hesitate too much before being able to answer because they look through all the grammar rules that they know before making an expression. On the other hand, just talking in class without anything else done can be good, but not at all. Classes focused on speaking can be more useful for advanced students, who just need to practice their second language, but for those students that are starting to learn, it is unclear and without any reliability.

So, when teachers provide grammar, it is advisable to be selective with the grammar topic they are going to develop in the class. Students benefit much more from learning a few grammar key clearly than from trying to remember many terms and rules. Teachers can try with different methodologies in order to find how they and their students work better. Besides, teachers have to show students how to apply its grammar not only to their writing but also to different skills and to real-life contexts so that they could feel more interested in learning it. For example, compare the informal private language students speak around friends and family with public Standard English.

Besides teachers may also take into consideration some patterns for learning second language grammar since, when teaching grammar, it is possible to apply two different methods: Deductive and Inductive method.

**Deductive method**

This method considers the idea of teaching grammar from the general to the specific; it means that rules or theories are taught first and then, they are applied; so, a grammar rule is explained explicitly and once students understand it, they practice and use it. Eisenstein (1987) affirms that this approach allows learners to be in control while they practice with the grammar rule, and they feel more confident for making errors in relation to how the second language works, and in this way they are more engaged to use it.

Swan (2008), talks about some principles to take into consideration when a rule is presented:

- The rules should show clearly what limits are on the use of a given form;

- The rules need to be clear;

- The rules ought to be simple;

- The rules needs to make use of concepts already familiar to the learners; and

- The rules ought to be relevant.

But it is also important to consider that the rule must be presented with examples, engaging learners' understanding, and allowing them an opportunity for personalizing the rule. Here, we can also find some advantages that these principles have when teaching grammar, for example, teachers can go directly to the explanation of the rule saving time, the rules can be more clear when they are taught explicitly, and examples are immediately given. However, its approach sees the second language learning process as the fact of just learning some rules; students may feel bored since this approach begins directly with the grammar explanation; some of them would not understand some grammar expressions; and the teacher is the most important person in the classroom, so it can decrease learners' interaction and involvement.

**Inductive method**

It states that the grammar learning process goes from the specific to the general; it means that learners see some examples or cases and they may infer the rule. So, the teacher starts presenting some examples and learners should understand the grammatical rules from them. Eisenstein (1987) also argues that the inductive approach uses the option of bringing clarity and meaning to the learners' understanding; as a result, students participate more encouraging them to build up their mental progress when dealing with grammar tasks.

Besides, learners become more familiar with the rule when they discover it, it increases learners' problem-solving ability, they are more active in the class and the feel more motivated. Nevertheless, this approach is very time-consuming for learners when they learn appropriately the rule, learners can have a wrong understanding of the grammar rule, and they can feel frustrated with their learning style and they may prefer to learn it explicitly.

So, educators may also think about these two broad approaches when teaching grammar because some language teachers and language learners are often frustrated by the disconnection between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in all the skills. This disconnection shows a separation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge: Declarative knowledge is knowledge about something, it enables a student to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills; and procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something, it enables a student to apply a rule of grammar in communication.

To manage this disconnection, instead of the two approaches mentioned above, teachers can also apply some strategies such as relating knowledge needs to learning goals since each student has a different goal regarding learning a second language; applying higher order thinking skills teaching students how the language works and giving them opportunities to compare it with other languages they know allows them to draw on critical thinking and analytical skills; providing plentiful, appropriate language input understanding that students learn based on what they receive; using predicting skills that can facilitate the learning process; and limiting expectations for drills letting students to respond to a prompt using the grammar point under consideration, but providing their own content.

Some teachers might think that teaching grammar is just explaining grammar rules to students. However, some of them do not realize that teaching grammar effectively is much more complicated. So, according to Beare, (n.d.) it is prudent that they ask some questions when starting a grammar class such as:

- What are the objectives of this class? Since, as it was discussed before, each student has its own ideas and purposes with the language, for example, they want to prepare for a test, they have businesses purposes, they are going to travel in holidays, etc. It will help teachers decide on how much grammar really needs to be taught.

- What type of learning background do the learners have? Students must live different situations; for example, some students are at school while others have not studied for a number of years. So, people that have not studied for a period of time can be confused in grammar explanations while the students that are at school can understand faster.

- What learning materials and resources are available? Teachers can prepare a grammar class and it is possible that the materials they need to develop it are not accessible or not all the students can have them. As more learning resources you have to use in class, it is going to be easier for teachers to employ different strategies when teaching their students grammar.

- What kind of learning style does each student have? Each student can prefer different techniques for learning the second language. If teachers have a class of mixed learning styles, they have to vary as many different methodologies as possible.

In this way, teachers will have the opportunity to know how they are going to teach to their students the grammar they need; it means that each class is going to have different grammar needs and goals and it is up to the teacher to determine each class' goals.

Language teachers, who adopt focus on form as a set of forms and rules, teach grammar by explaining the forms and rules and then drilling students on them. It has as a result, bored, and disaffected students who can produce correct forms, but making mistakes when they try to use the language in a real context. Other language teachers do not use to teach grammar at all since they think that children acquire their first language without grammar instruction, so they suppose students would learn their second language the same way. They believe that students will learn grammar rules as they use the language in communication activities. So, it is advisable for teachers when they are going to teach grammar class to follow the next steps:

1) Provide them with exposure to real language and real situations in context.

2) Initial focus on body, not form.

3) Focus on more specific meaning.

4) We can then focus on very specific meaning.

5) Analysis and systematization: After students have understood the topic, the teacher can focus on a particular item.

6) Give them exercises for them to practice the new structure.

7) Give them homework to force them to revise this at a later time.

8) Provide them with sufficient opportunities to practice what they have learned in real or realistic communicative situations.

9) Recycle and mention the topic again as many times as necessary, time and again.

These steps can help students to learn the grammar in a natural way so that it is going to be easier to use it in real-life conversations and contexts, since it is important how grammar is presented to them; in this case, going from the most general to the most specific so that students do not get lost in the learning process.

As a result, it is possible to say that language is more graceful and legible when it is based on the rules of grammar and its style; if people use it correctly, they will look more professional; but especially for students, they will be able to be understood when using it. Nowadays, many students have the opportunity to travel to a different country for studying; so they need to be proficient in the language of that country, and grammar is relevant at this point.

Now, teaching grammar inductively has positive implications for communicative competence, which involves a collection of the correct grammatical terms in the right context. Learners need to also know how to use language in context; for example, when, where and to whom to use these grammatically correct sentences such as beginning a conversation or addressing people in different circumstances.

Ellis (2001) defines focus on form as an instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form which must take place in a communicative context. Teachers support learners to focus on form in many ways, since it may be planned on preselected structures, or incidental and spontaneous at any point in a communicative activity. Teachers might create activities in order to encourage learners to notice forms in their input, or they might explicitly teach these forms and provide opportunities for practicing. Focus on form may include explicit corrections to student language. Focus on form is most frequently teacher-initiated, but it is also initiated by learners through questions and requests for explanation. Ellis (2001) also found that when students are engaged in communicative tasks, focus-on-form activities improved their grammatical accuracy and their use of new forms; and some studies have shown that focus on form is correlated with more acquisition of new grammar and vocabulary than non-form-focused approaches.

But, it has also been suggested that focus on form should not be applied with beginning learners; as an alternative, learners should be promoted to focus to form only after they have acquired basic structures, vocabulary and have a basic ability to communicate. Yet, Spada and Lightbown (1999), argued that even when students are not completely ready to learn a grammar topic, intensive focus-on-form instruction can help them learn other structures that are associated with that. So, teachers should also take into account learners' needs and interests in order to identify the best way to catch their attention to a form and practice using it in a meaningful context.

Recent attention in SLA has been especially given regarding focus on form. One way to teach target language grammar is through the incidental focus on form during different activities where it has been demonstrated that when it exists in foreign language classes, it facilitates L2 acquisition if there is a positive respond in some interactional patterns such as teacher-learner and Learner-learner relations, and learners' proficiency levels on the features of incidental focus on form, since a successful interaction between students or students with the teacher can be considered effective for L2 learning because learners may be able to work as a knowledge source and a guide for each other, so it is necessary to encourage these types of interaction in second language learning classrooms.

So, teachers may go for inductive teaching, declining the idea of giving the learners all the answers since they may supply them with selected comprehensible linguistic data in context, mainly in the form of a text showing the use of the grammatical structure, then, the learners' job is to arrive at some comprehensible output and to formulate their own explanation of the rules presented in the materials. This inductive approach, instead of being

based on a teacher explanation classroom, is student-centered and lets students to become more involved in the language they are studying.

In the process of experiential learning that is learning-and-doing, learners are more active and do not get bored as fast as they do during a lesson. Therefore, the inductive technique can turn into a big tool for teachers who have problems with keeping their students concentrated and busy since knowing that they can work by themselves really increases learners' motivation; pay special attention; are more involved, secures and excited in the second language learning process contributing to its success. Besides, this inductive method has also the noticeable benefit that students are able to learn faster what they find out by themselves, and it also allows learners to interact using the target language at the same time as they learn it.

Learners can improve their learning when they are conscious about what they are doing and how they are doing it. Once students' attention is focused on expressing meaning in a specific manner, they will be able to learn the necessary grammar of the language in a more effective way: in addition, when they find grammar rules can create a more enjoyable class since they are persuaded to analyze the foreign language and find its grammatical aspects even outside the classroom, making them problem solving students increasing students' language consciousness and making a better understanding of second language grammar.

Nevertheless, focus on form should not be employed when the class presents some grammar rules that can be fast perceived and learned in order to not waste many time in the class; so it is more appropriate when a complex grammar topic is to going to be developed or when the teacher has not enough time for teaching it since many rules are better learned and drawn through examples; besides, even though the inductive method may cause some

confusion and frustration when the learners are not sure about the grammar rule that they have inferred and some teacher believe that is better to go for deductive teaching in order to avoid an incomprehensible input, it is more advisable to maintain a balance in order to not discourage students from learning and continue learning through focus on form.

As a result, teachers must take into account focus on form when teaching second language grammar since it will let students to be more encouraged in their learning process where they will notice that is grammar what help them to produce a comprehensible output and organize their ideas; besides, they will be also conscious many other benefits that learning grammar involve, they will be more enhanced to learn it by themselves without forcing them to do it, which is something the vast majority students face every day in their scholar lives. However, it is important also to realize learners' preferences when learning since some of them may prefer a laid-down demanding learning process because of their lack of knowledge about the second language and they do not feel confident to communicate using it.

Second language learning involves different factors that should be taken into account when developing this process; one of the most relevant factors is the grammar instruction that helps learners to carry out their purpose of communication using the second language. Grammar instruction can be provided in an implicit or explicit way, it depends on the philosophy of teaching of each instructor, who can use different structures and techniques depending on purpose that learners have for learning the second language.

According to Halgunseth (2010), there are two ways in which young learners can acquire the second language: simultaneously and sequentially. Simultaneous students can be children under the age of three who are exposed to two different languages; this can occur at home and at school, also their parents can speak different languages.

Sequential learning, on the other hand, includes children who already speak a language and are beginning to learn a second one. A clear example of that are learners in Colombia who are not English speaking children and go to a classroom where instruction can be carried out in the L2.

This author talks about four stages that can occur when learning the second language. The first one is called "Home Language Use" where students only want to use their native language; the second stage is "Silent period" where children prefer to be silent since they see that using the native language is useless, they hardly speak with other people and if the learner is younger, it is going to be longer the silent period. In the third stage that is named "Telegraphic and formulaic speech", children begin to talk using the second language through small sentences or repeating some words. And in the last stage, "Productive language", children can express their feelings and ideas creating their own sentences, they can have some grammar mistakes, but it will improve after some time.

When talking about older learners, Fitch (1995) states that teaching grammar explicitly does not discourage them, as it happens with younger learners. Once they learn the grammar rule, and do some exercises, they can transfer this knowledge to their writings. As Lenneberg, she discusses the biological hypothesis expressing that the hemispheres of the brain have to do with learning the second language and adults use the left hemisphere when learning it; besides many educators have realized that teaching grammar to children and adults vary.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

**Methodological Design**

The research had a relation between qualitative and quantitative research, where qualitative research was based on two variables which were age and grammar instruction in two different groups; and quantitative research was employed for gathering numerical data about the information found in the classrooms. This research also worked with descriptive and ethnographic research in order to illustrate the differences between two age groups who were learning English grammar. In this work, the problem was defined from a real situation which was the influence of age at the time of learning second language grammar, where the problem was directly observed through field observation.

The investigation best fitted teachers and students of a specific field that in this case was Second Language Acquisition (SLA) including the relationship between age and language learning. Besides this research also observed learners using a classroom observation format, which was filled with numerical information in order to obtain a percentage about each statement of this format, and it made possible to compare the different instruction used in each age group regarding grammar.

**Design**

The information that was collected through field observation and was gathered in a format that included statements regarding the type of instruction and teachers and learners' involvement, and last studies in relation to age and English grammar instruction because the collected data was related to the students and teachers' participation in the class and if it was a significant factor between students' learning process.

The ethnographic research tried the understanding of a specific problem in the society that in this case was the influence of age during the process of learning second language grammar because some studies demonstrated that age was a relevant factor when learning another language. So this research tried to look for some recommendations according to this conception that was deliberated through a long time based on direct observation and facts that this research aimed to find out.

**Application of Methods**

This research was focused on a specific group in the Language Center at the University of Nariño where there was active involvement in the research process; through learners and teacher's participation, it was possible to achieve the objectives of the investigation. Besides, the research tried to get information that allowed understand learners' behavior when learning second language grammar, what caused a deficiency when learning a second language recognizing which factors could affect this process, and what was the role of age and instruction.

Also, a relevant purpose was to analyze the social relationships and describe the situations that learners lived through direct observation that allowed keeping a personal contact showing how age and instruction could interfere in the second language learning process. The use of qualitative and quantitative research permitted to establish some differences between the age groups and the effect of instruction in the classroom; and it showed the social relationships before mentioned about the form that younger and older students learn a second language; allowing us to find not only age differences, but also the role that teachers might handle regarding this aspect in theirs learners.

**Population**

The population considered in this research was composed by learners from different ages who belonged to the Language Center of the Linguistics and Languages Department at the University of Nariño.  There were around 400 male and female learners in these courses. The children and adults who took foreign language courses studied in public and private institutions. The courses were divided in two schedules: Learners study from 4:00 to 6:00 pm and from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday. This population was chosen because in the Language Center existed different ages and learning processes that facilitated establishing a parallel in the way learners approached grammar through different forms of instruction.

**Sample**

The sample for this research was composed by two third level courses in the evening shift which had about 20 students; both classrooms worked with the same textbook, as a result of that, both groups worked with the same grammar topics. One age group were between ages ten and fifteen, and another group in the same schedule which had the same amount of students but whose ages range from eighteen to twenty-eight years old.

**Data Collection Techniques**

The research applied interval data because it made use of equal-sized units of measurement, in the research the main data collection technique was a class observation format. Some classes were observed in order to analyze how learners behaved according to their age and how grammar instruction was carried out with these two age groups. Observations also helped us identify the strategies used by teachers to provide grammar instruction in the Language Center.

These observations were then compared to the existing theory about grammar instruction to decide which type of grammar instruction was more suitable for the learners regarding age and which techniques could be suggested to enhance grammar teaching in our setting, and specifically which strategies benefited more each age group.

**Validity**

The validity of the research could be corroborated since it used some techniques applied to actual second language learners showing real data that could be compared with another studies to complement this investigation.

Here it was possible to talk especially about second language teachers because some of them believed that all students learnt in the same way; and while some teachers underestimated children thinking that as they were too young, they were not capable for learning a foreign language, other ones thought that younger learners were more capable for acquiring another language.

**Chapter Four: Data Analysis**

Taking into account the information presented in the review of literature regarding implicit and explicit grammar instruction, and the cited research about the differences between younger and older learners when acquiring L2 grammar,  different classroom observations were developed in two third-level courses at the Language Center of the University of Nariño. The observations were done in a classroom where the students' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years old. In the second classroom, learners' ages ranged from 10 to 15 years old.

In order to have a more organized and systematic account of what went on in the classroom, a classroom observation format was used as a basis for comparing grammar instruction provided in these two different age groups learning English for communicative purposes. This format was divided in two parts, the first one focused on teachers' involvement in the provision of grammar instruction. The second part focused on learners' involvement in the process of learning second language grammar. The results of the number of times a certain action took places can be seen in more detail in the percentages on the right side of the format. These percentages complemented the comments carried out by the observers about the general development of the class.

**Teachers' involvement**

To gather this information, it was used seven statements in the classroom observation format that were filled with tallies each time that they happened during the class:

1) The teacher introduces grammar explicitly.

2) The teacher provides implicit grammar instruction.

3) The teacher assigns grammar an important place in the lesson.

4) Grammar is introduced by means of authentic materials.

5) Grammar is introduced by means of the textbook.

6) Grammar is introduced by means of an explanation or lecture.

7) The L1 is used in grammar instruction.

In the first statement about the explicit grammar instruction, it was observed that this type of instruction is more used by the teacher in charge of older learners who responded positively. Contrary to that, and as it was examined in the second aspect of the observation, implicit grammar instruction was extensively found in the teaching process with young learners since this instruction had no place with older students. The third point, discussing the place of grammar in the class, demonstrated that it had a relevant place in both classrooms, but it was more important for the teacher in charge of older students establishing grammar as the most fundamental skill to teach in the class.
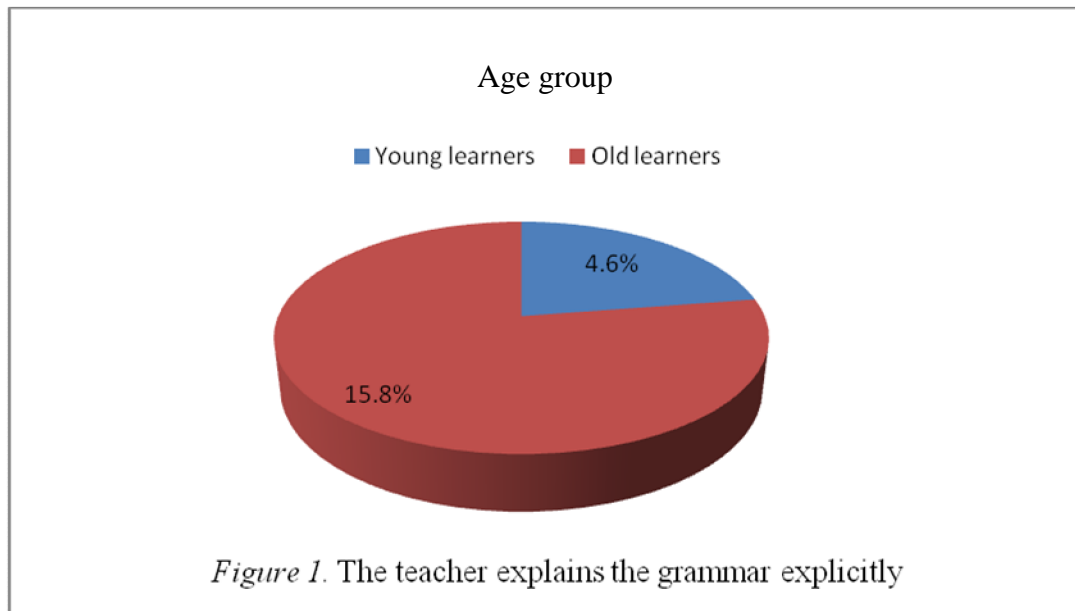
Introducing grammar through different means such as authentic materials, was noticed with older students where the teacher used visual aids and listening activities; whereas the use of these materials was not observed with the teacher of young students, the teacher preferred to develop other type of activities where was not necessary any material, for example debates. Now, using a textbook for introducing grammar, as it was seen in the fifth statement, had evident results in both classrooms because the courses were developed using a book as the central tool for teaching and learning the foreign language during the class. In this book, different lectures appeared for introducing the grammar topic to the students, so they were used by both teachers, and it was combined with a short explanation of the teacher to older students.

The use of the native language was the final point to observe in this format, and it was employed by both teachers during the classes when necessary, for explaining some meanings or clarifying some doubts to the learners.

Teachers played a relevant role in the learning and teaching process, and these results showed many aspects that they might consider when teaching grammar to a certain age group. Older students, for example, preferred to learn grammar in an explicit way; the teacher explained them foreign language grammar rules without context because learners did not need it. They felt comfortable learning just the grammar rule for putting it into practice through some exercises, if they had some mistakes, the teacher corrected them and in few occasions, students corrected themselves. As a clear example, the teacher in charge of older learners corrected grammar errors orally such as the plural form showing the mistake they made with explicit instruction.

On the other hand, young learners might respond to this way of teaching grammar too, but it was not as appealing as it was for older students, teacher in charge of young students could develop the class with explicit instruction, but they responded to the class learning in an implicit way too; they learnt grammar unconsciously and might find it more useful and interesting, differing of Chomsky (1995) since it was not necessary for them to explain the grammar topic explicitly so that they understood the topic. But in both age groups, learners reacted to this explicit grammar technique in a positive way because it was observed in the two classrooms that they understood the topic and were able to put it into practice with different exercises. When working with countable and uncountable nouns, both teachers made a parallel on the board for comparing and explaining the topic directly, and it had positive

results in both age groups since learners developed correctly some exercises about the topic

that were found in the book.

Age group

■ Young learners   ■ Old learners

4.6%

15.8%

*Figure 1.* The teacher explains the grammar explicitly

Young learners tended to prefer implicit grammar instruction; they enjoyed the idea of

finding out by themselves the grammar rule that they were going to learn, made their own

conclusions about it, and recognized when to use it appropriately. So, teachers had to develop

the correct activities that encouraged students to do that, it could be debates or expressing

opinions about a topic where learners might use the grammar rule unconsciously, as it was

previously discussed by Rosanzky (1975); in some cases the teacher also made some mistakes

on purpose for noticing if the students understood the grammar topic and they responded

positively, or the teacher changed the intonation of the voice when a mistake was committed.

For example, the class where the teacher worked with phrasal verbs, students realized the

errors on the board when the teacher read the sentence and exaggerated the stress of some

words that were not correct.

Teachers in charge of older learners were going to have a preference for teaching

explicitly since they might be accustomed to do that with their learners and they enjoyed it

too; so it was obviously noticed in the results of the study since teacher of younger learners

was always using techniques that allowed students learn grammar in an implicit way; while

the teacher in charge of older learners limited his/her class only to explicit grammar

instruction, and implicit instruction had no place in the class.



*Figure 2*. The teacher provides implicit grammar
instruction
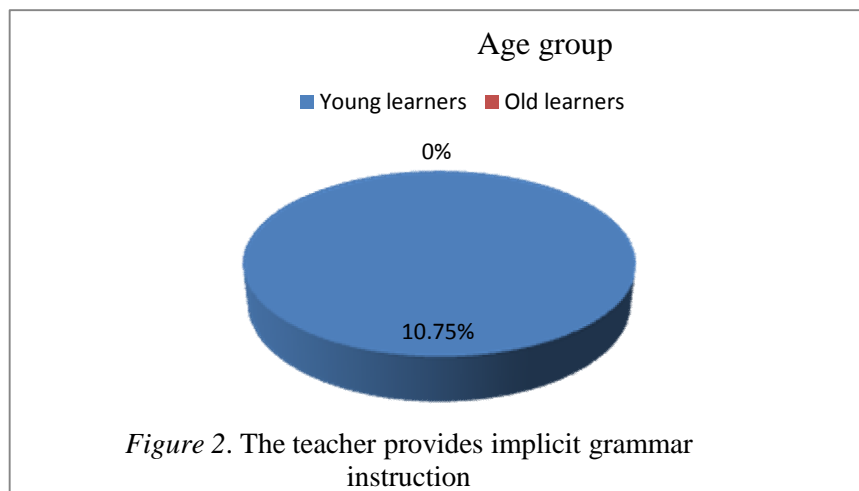
The relevance of grammar also varied in each age group. Even though both age

groups' teachers gave grammar an important place in the class, the teacher responsible of

older learners gave to it more meaning. The teacher not only provided grammar explicitly, but

also grammar was the main point to discuss during the whole class, the educator limited the

class to explain carefully a grammar rule, and some exercises were developed based on it; and

when some grammar mistakes appeared, the teacher was going to correct them immediately explaining the reason of the failure to the students.

Now, teacher in charge of younger learners was going to place grammar in an important place, but it was considered more important to develop other skills with the students, such as speaking. The educator encouraged learners to express their ideas or comments using the foreign language as much as possible during the class since learners took more into account what they had done with the language. Some grammar errors were common to appear, but the teacher did not correct each mistake for not discouraging learners to participate and in some cases, the same learners realized themselves of their mistakes by listening their classmates, contrary to what happened with the other age group's teacher.



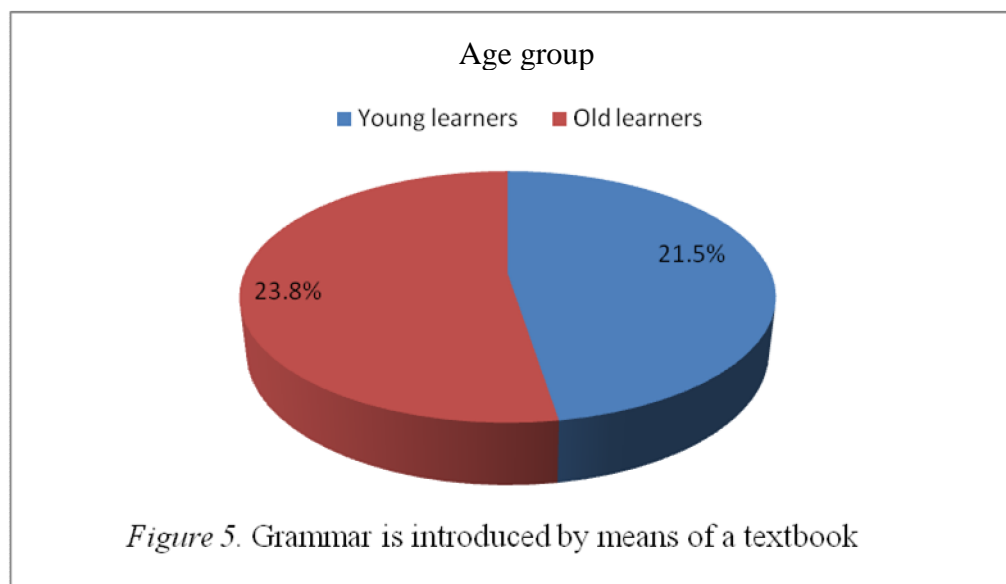*Figure 3.* The teacher assigns grammar an important place in the lesson
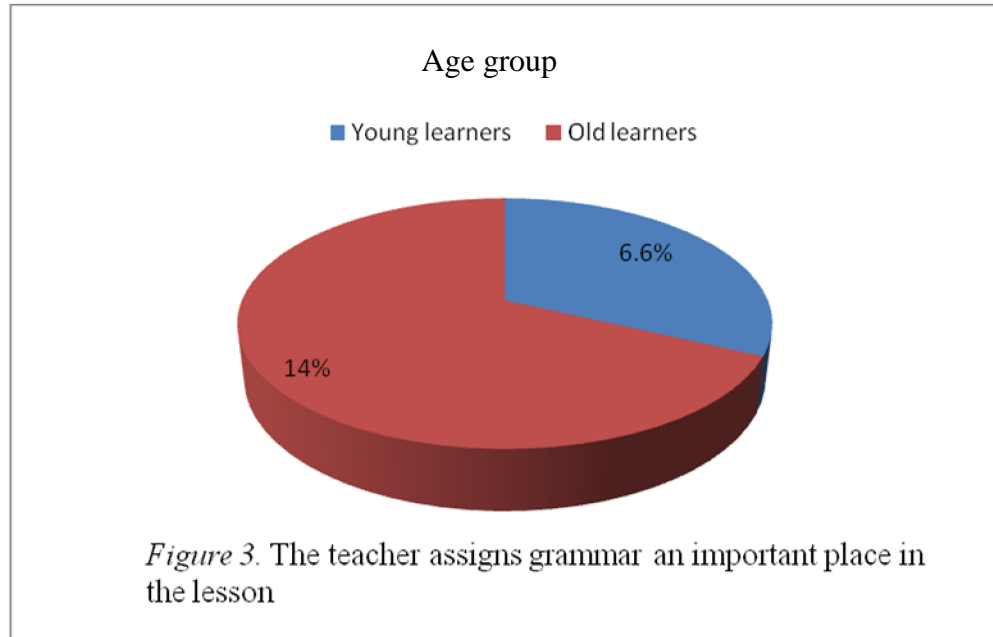
When teaching grammar, it was considered a good idea to use some authentic material for enhancing learners during the class. Grammar could be introduced by means of different

elements. Some materials, such as listening activities or videos, were only presented in older

students' classroom with 4.9% and 0% in the younger students' classroom. In the first group,

teacher presented some small listening activities where learners had to develop some

comprehension exercises; they were presented in different parts of the lesson so that they

practiced grammar through different activities, but always in an explicit way.

In contrast, young learners' group did not develop any kind of these activities because

the teacher tried to use exercises that focused on other skills such as speaking, so the teacher

tended to create debates and ask for opinions for pushing learners to speak using the second

language and the grammar topic seen in an implicit way. In such manner, the class was active

and did not need additional materials for practicing the grammar topic. For example, when

talking about animals and zoos using phrasal verbs in the younger learners group, students

discussed their opinions for or against to the teacher's question and they were forced to use the

phrasal verbs in the speech.



*Figure 4.* Grammar is introduced by means of authentic materials
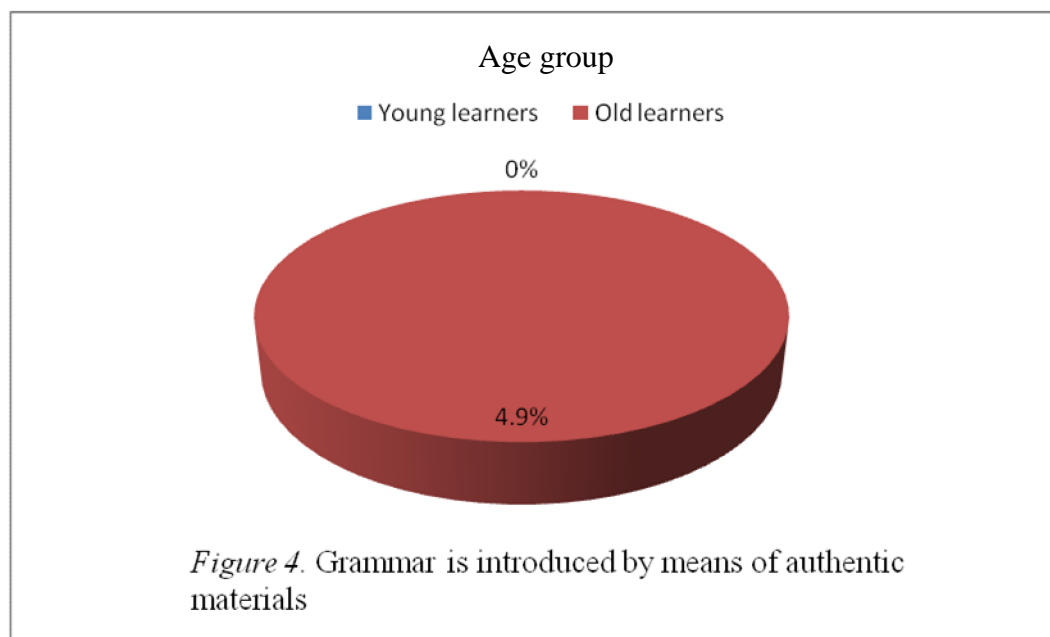
When introducing grammar with a textbook, it was possible to find similar results on both age groups. It happened because the English courses were based on a book; in this case was the same book for both classrooms since the two groups were in third level. The small difference that was found in the results lied on the use that teachers gave to it. Younger learners' teacher focused the class with some specific points, the ones that were considered as more relevant than the rest of the exercises, where the students were going to understand clearly the grammar topic and was more interesting for them to develop; then, the teacher supported the grammar topic with some extra activities, such as asking for opinions and questions where the students had to use the grammar topic. Oppositely to that, the teacher responsible of older learners developed each exercise in the book, corrected mistakes explicitly and provided some feedback about the grammar topic, but the teacher was always going to make the class with each point and activity found in the textbook.

Age group

Young learners    Old learners

21.5%

23.8%

*Figure 5.* Grammar is introduced by means of a textbook

Other technique to present grammar to the class was with an explanation or a lecture. As the class followed a textbook, it was possible to find some lectures that introduced the grammar topic, but these were used in different ways in the two age groups. With older students, the teacher began with an explicit explanation of the grammar topic, then asked students to read the lecture, answered some questions that learners had about it, such as vocabulary or unknown grammar tenses, and finally did some exercises found in the book about the grammar topic.

The teacher responsible of younger learners worked the lecture in a different way; the educator gave an explanation of the topic if they had already seen it so that students got familiarized with it again. Then, they read the lecture, but the teacher read first for checking pronunciation and punctuation, after that each student read a part of the lecture for checking their reading skill; next, both teacher and learners discussed about the topic of the lecture using the grammar topic without noticing it.

*Figure 6.* Grammar is introduced by means of an explanation or a lecture
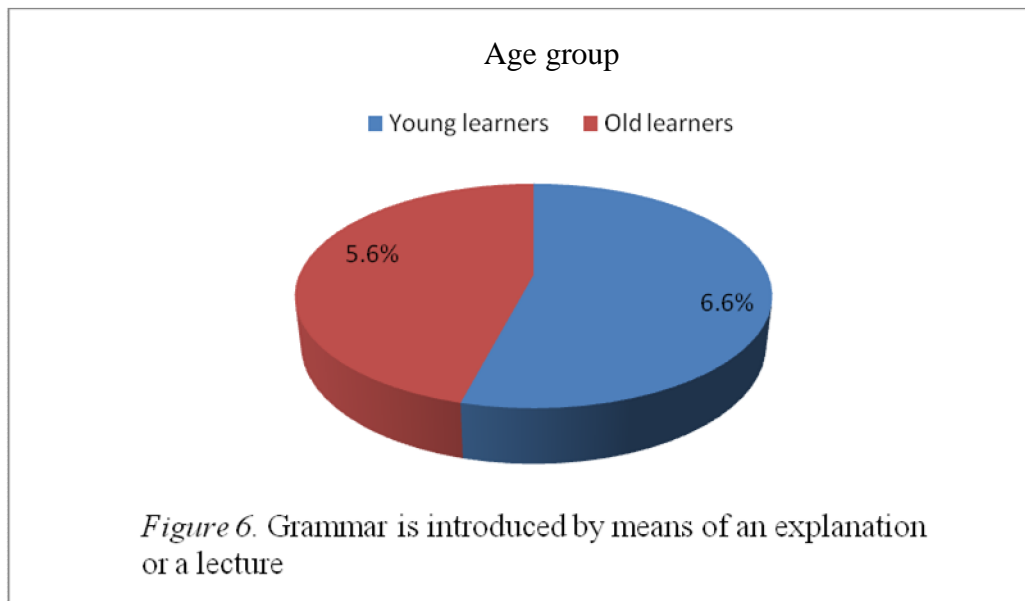
Finally, it was observed the use of the native language during the class for teaching the grammar topic, and it was realized that it was widely used in both younger and older teachers' classrooms. Teachers used it whenever necessary, since there were some occasions in which learners had some doubts or did not understand completely the grammar topic, and both teachers used the first language for avoiding confusion. Younger learners' teacher used in some cases the Grammar Translation Method, asking students to translate some statements or sentences that they read or use, for noticing if learners understood the meaning of the grammar topic in the context given.

Teacher in charge of older learners, also used it during the whole class when the students did not understand the grammar topic at all, but this educator did not ask learners to translate any of the sentences that appeared in the textbook, the teacher preferred to give an explanation if the word or phrase that students did not know using the foreign language; and

the native language was also used in some occasions to give some definitions when it was

necessary for learners to comprehend the topic they were working on.



*Figure 7.* The native language is used in grammar instruction
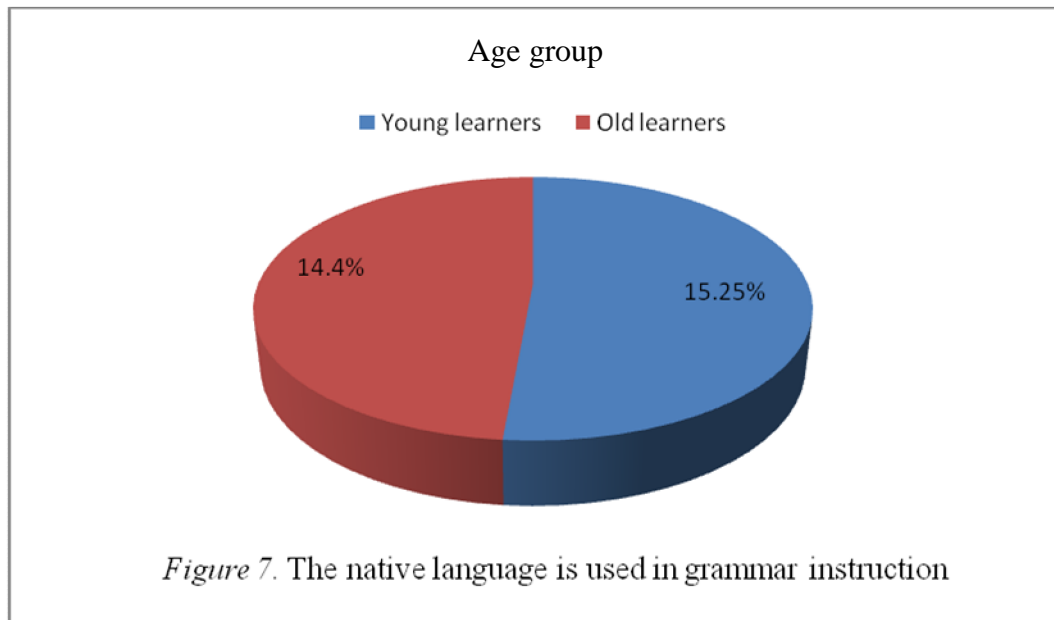
**Students' involvement**

For finding this information about learners, it was used four statements in the

classroom observation format which were filled with tallies too:

1) Students react to explicit instruction positively.

2) Students react to implicit instruction positively.

3) Students discover grammar and provide personal hypothesis about it.

4) Students practice a pattern presented explicitly by the teacher.

The first statement observed about learners' response to explicit grammar instruction

showed that both younger and older students reacted positively to it; while implicit grammar

instruction that was analyzed in the following statement demonstrated that only younger learners responded completely to it.

The next point to see in the classroom had higher results with younger students than with older learners since the first group mentioned used to learn grammar rules by listening their teacher and classmates in the different activities realized during the class. Finally, both younger and older learners tended to follow a pattern presented by the teacher, where older students preferred patterns showed in a written way and the younger learners had a preference for oral patterns.

Learners responded to the class based on teachers' presentation of the grammar topic, and it was seen in the way they reacted to grammar instruction, discovered grammar themselves and provided hypotheses, and practiced a grammar pattern presented by the teacher.

Talking about how learners reacted to grammar instruction, both groups reacted positively with explicit grammar instruction, but it was more clearly noticed with older learners since with this group, grammar was presented explicitly during the whole class and learners did not find it tedious, on the contrary, they liked that and responded positively to this grammar teaching, they learnt without context of the grammar topic, in fact they did not consider it relevant for learning, and asked the teacher for some exceptions of the grammar rule explicitly too. In contrast, even though younger learners also responded to this teaching grammar technique, they found it unexciting and did not work enthusiastically with this explanation. So the teacher noticed it and changed the technique immediately for not discouraging students to learn and practice the grammar rule, otherwise, students might feel uninterested and they did not pay attention to the class. As it happened in the classroom, the

teacher gave a short explicit explanation about the topic and continued the class with other activities where the grammar rule was applied but learners did not realize that the teacher was applying it to the lesson.



*Figure 8.* Students react to explicit instruction positively
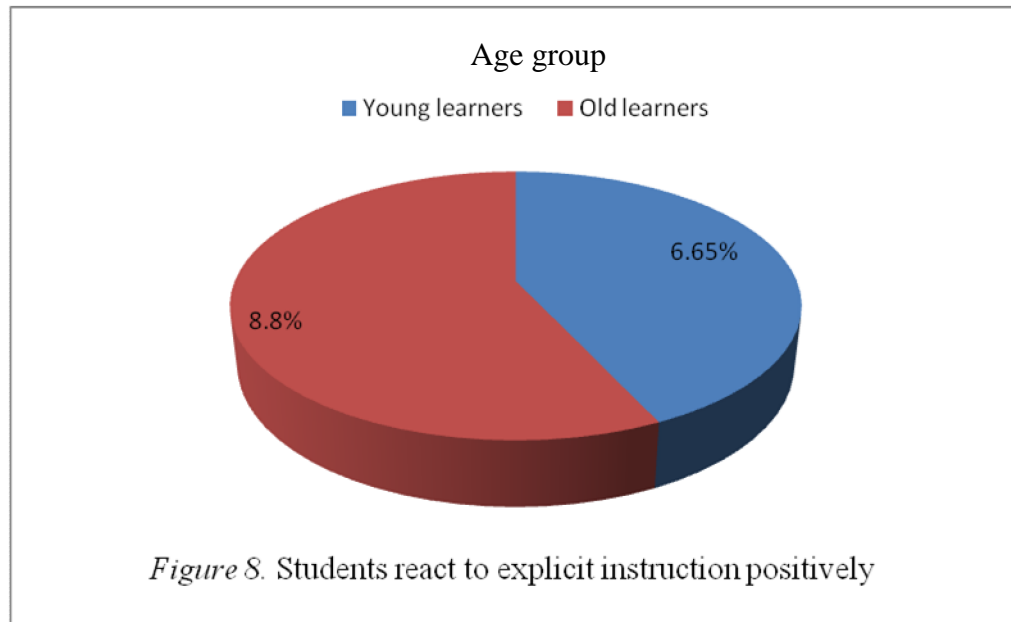
As a result of that, younger learners reacted better toward implicit grammar instruction, but older learners had no response to this technique; it happened because implicit grammar instruction did not take part in their classes, the teacher was used to teach the grammar topic explicitly. At this point, younger learners had a preference for implicit instruction since they did not realize they were learning and putting into practice a grammar topic; they only felt they used the second language for expressing their ideas or opinions; as it was previously seen in Halliday's studies (1973). They used the foreign language and each class they introduced a new grammar rule without noticing it since they learnt different grammar topics through activities that they enjoyed during the class. On the other hand, older students learnt with

teacher's explanation, and contrary to younger students, they found it interesting and worked

with concentration and enthusiasm during all the class. So, implicit grammar instruction had

no place in the classroom, but they did not consider it necessary since they learnt and had

positive results with an explicit instruction class.

Age group

Young learners   Old learners

0%

8.65%

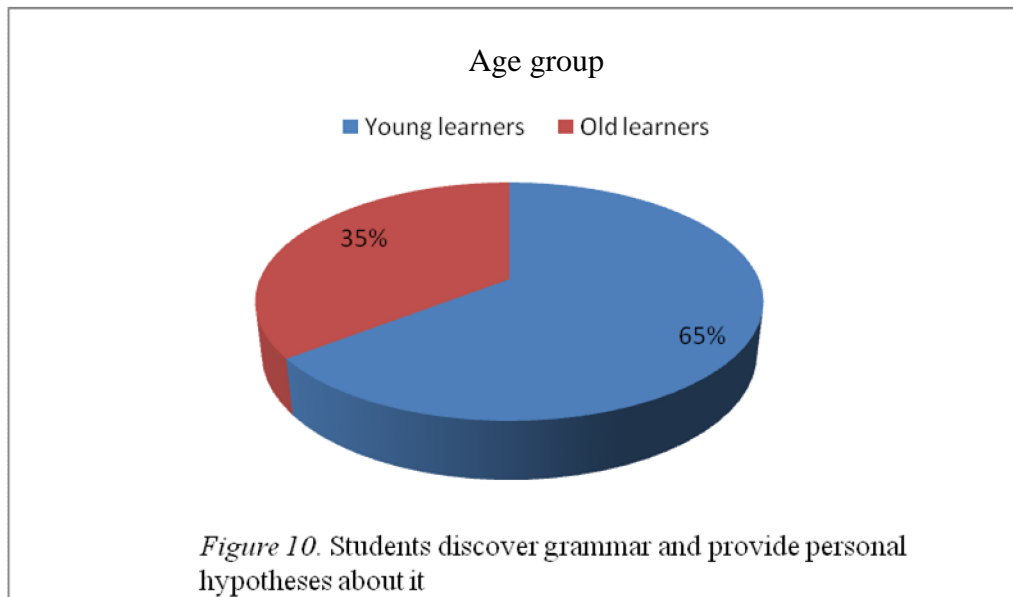Figure 9. Students to implicit grammar instruction positively
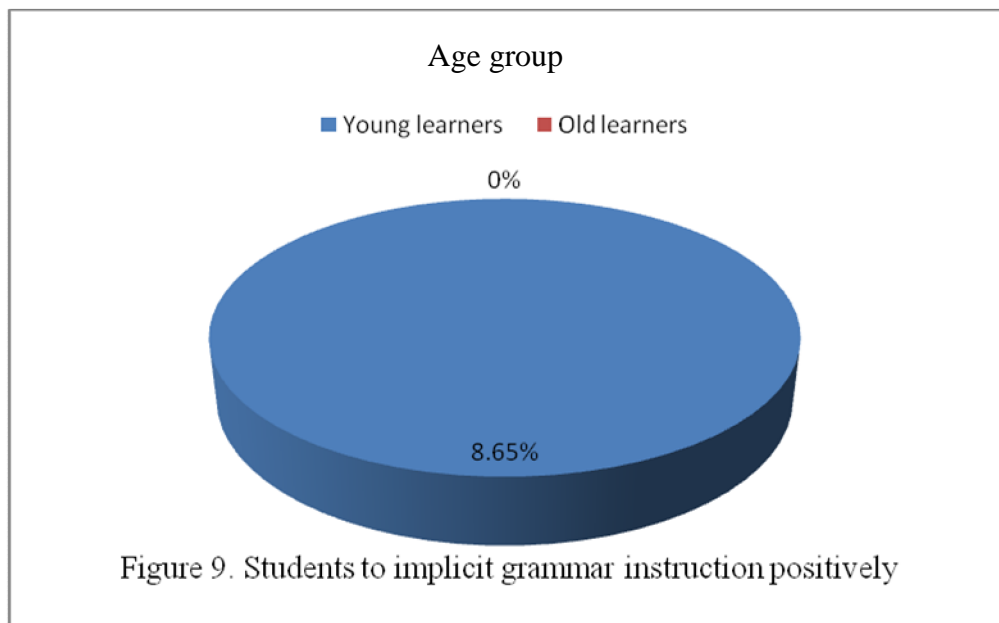
Now, during the class, some learners of both age groups discovered themselves the

grammar topic about countable and uncountable nouns, and made hypotheses about it, its rules

and its exceptions; and that was more observed with younger than with older learners. While

younger learners participated in the class through different activities, at some point they

realized the grammar topic they were using and learnt about it with his or her participation as

well as with the participation of the teacher and the rest of students in the class. When a debate

was created in the class and some learners participated, other students noticed and learnt from

this participation affirming a grammar rule already explained, or learning a new one by

listening to the rest of the class, and in some occasions asked the teacher to clarify some doubts.

Contrary to that, older learners did not tend to discover it by themselves because they reviewed the grammar topic explicitly before doing any exercise about it, so they were conscious about the parameters they had to use, and if some mistakes were done while they used grammar, the teacher corrected them explicitly and explaining them the reason of their failures in an explicit way too. In addition, they used to feel confused when a new word or rule appeared without explanation in the exercises.
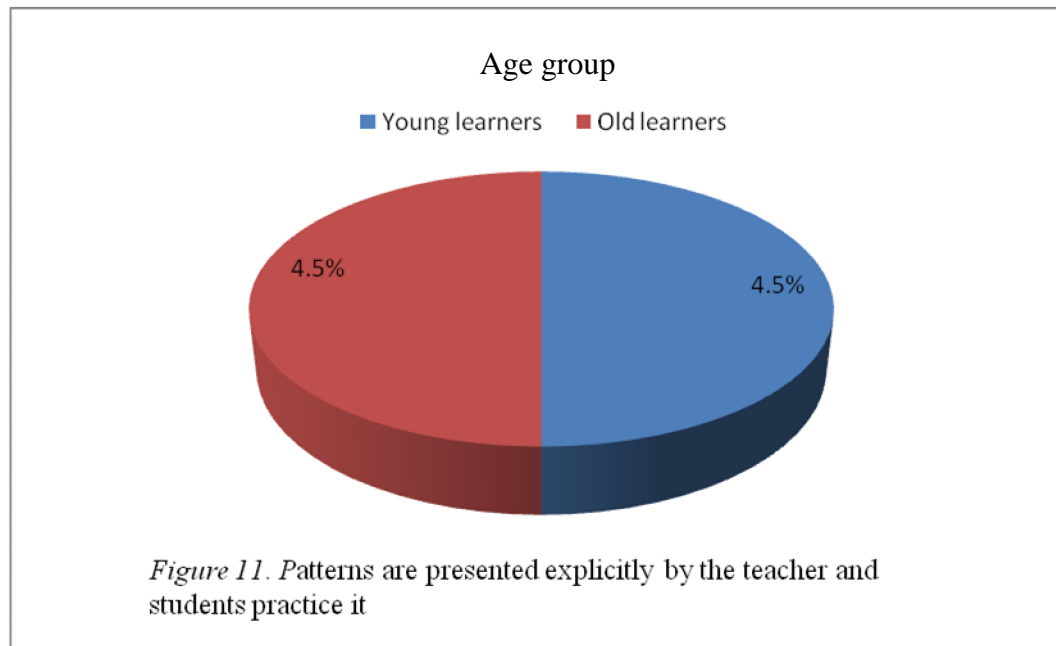
Even though, older learners discovered grammar and made some hypotheses about it, they preferred the idea that the teacher explained them the grammar rules for avoiding confusion. It was observed in the class when some students made some hypotheses but they asked it to the teacher for clarifying it; while younger learners made their own conclusions about the grammar rule and decided to use these hypotheses when expressing their ideas. As a result of that, it worked positively for them since they made the correct and adequate inferences about the topic and only in few cases it was asked to the teacher about the grammar rule explicitly.

<figure>
Age group

■ Young learners    ■ Old learners

35%

65%

*Figure 10.* Students discover grammar and provide personal hypotheses about it
</figure>

As a final point to compare in this observation, a similarity between the two analyzed groups of younger and older learners was that both groups' teachers included the practice of patterns as a way to provide grammar instruction. It was noticed that both teachers introduced the grammar topic and reinforced it showing examples so that learners used the new structure accurately. A difference between the two groups could be observed, though. Adult learners preferred to be given written examples, whereas younger learners preferred to practice what they learnt in an oral way.

It was possible to say that younger learners process information faster than adults and it could occur using similar learning techniques in some cases, as it was discussed in Snow and Hoefnagel's studies (1978), such as giving examples or patterns for the students to use as a guide, because both age groups worked with the same grammar topics and they both had positive responses with the patterns and examples presented for the teachers.

Despite that, it was necessary to realize that some patterns were also presented implicitly to younger students; the teacher gave the patterns and examples while talking about a topic that could interest to the students or introducing the activity they went to develop. Opposite to that, teacher in charge of older learners tended to present the examples in an isolated way, without context, so that students followed this pattern when developing the exercises in the book. During the class, the teacher gave some words classified in countable and uncountable nouns, whereas the teacher who worked with younger students, asked them the nouns to remember the topic; and these techniques were effective with each age group as it was developed in the class.

Age group

■ Young learners   ■ Old learners

4.5%          4.5%

*Figure 11.* Patterns are presented explicitly by the teacher and students practice it

## Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

**Conclusions**

Taking into account Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis, age was a relevant factor when learning second language grammar, it might be taken into account for considering the adequate techniques and materials that were going to be used for teaching foreign language grammar according to learners' age, it meant younger or older students. Age determined the type of material and activities that the teacher applied in the class, where implicit instruction was the most appropriate teaching strategy for younger learners and explicit instruction worked effectively for older students.

During the second language grammar instruction, teachers had to consider learners' age when preparing a class including teaching techniques and materials in order to obtain the desired results, since even though both age groups responded to explicit grammar instruction, it was preferred by older learners, while younger learners felt more encouraged with implicit grammar, they participated more actively and did not notice their learning process, differing of Chomsky (1995) given that the results of the study showed that younger learners did not need to learn grammar explicitly in order to speak grammatically correct.

For making it possible, different materials were used for teaching second language grammar, using a textbook allowed teacher and students to follow an order with the grammar topics, and the diverse activities found in it were useful for students when learning the grammar topic since it provided them the correct context in which it had to be used.

It could also be concluded that explaining the grammar topic before it was put into practice was helpful for older learners, while younger students preferred to use it unconsciously and a short explanation was useful if they had already seen the grammar topic

so that they identified it and used it correctly. It meant that older learners preferred to learn

grammar through a deductive method, whereas younger students had more successful results

for learning grammar with an inductive method.

Now, considering learners' age, younger students had a tendency to discover grammar

rules by themselves and learn from their own conclusions, so the teacher did not need to

explain it explicitly, and contextualized examples also guided students to learn the grammar

topic through their own findings. While explicit patterns were more advisable for older

students, teachers needed to provide examples of the grammar topic in an implicit way as a

useful technique for learners to identify aspects and rules of the grammar topic; so learners

followed the rules trustily and used them as a basis to continue using grammar correctly.

As a result of that, it was possible to neglect Hinkel and Fotos (2002) studies which

expressed that learners of a second language did not become proficient if they did not

understand a basic structure that was only provided by grammar studies, because it was

possible to observe that they did not need a explicit grammar instruction for using a grammar

topic accurately.

When talking about the place of grammar in the classroom, it took more relevance with

older than with younger learners; adults preferred to use grammar during the whole class,

while younger students were more concerned about using the second language for expressing

their opinions and ideas. Older learners also had a preference for correcting their mistakes

with the teacher, but younger learners found more useful to correct their mistakes themselves

so that they learnt from their own errors for avoiding them in a future.

The use of the native language in the class was commonly used when learners had

some problems using it, or still had some doubts; so the teacher explained it clearly and used

the native language if necessary in order to avoid confusion and students who learnt grammar

mistakenly, but it was preferred that the native language was used as less as possible during

the class.

In the grammar class related with authentic material, if the teacher knew how to handle

correctly the grammar topic implicitly, it was not necessary its use with younger learners. In

the same way, the teacher did not need to follow the complete textbook exercises with

younger learners; extra activities were more interesting for them.

Finally, this study agreed with some of the authors previously mentioned such as Snow

and Hoefnagel's studies (1978) and its conception that children preferred to use the second

language as a meaningful tool of expression, and it was seen in the way how the teacher

presented and developed the grammar topic with younger learners. Also Rosanzky (1975)

studies which argued that children learnt without knowing that they were learning the

language; and this point of view was observed in younger learners' classroom where they

used the second language and the new grammar topic without being conscious of that. In the

same way, Halliday's studies (1973) that expressed that younger students take more into

account what they could do with the language, in this case, expressing their opinions about

the different topics presented in the class, rather than what it was.

Younger learners showed that implicit instruction was more effective at the moment of

learning foreign language grammar increasing their proficiency with the speech; the teacher

did not focus on grammar mistakes as much as the teacher in charge of older learners and that

allowed learners to use grammar as a useful tool in their learning process. Older students were

limited to the use of grammar as a relevant skill to develop in the class through explicit

instruction, causing a lower proficiency and fluency with the foreign language, even though they had a preference for this type of instruction.

It showed that age had a significant role in the classroom since each age group had a preference for a sort of instruction where they felt more comfortable for learning the foreign language. As a result of that, it was noticed that younger students learnt grammar meaningfully without the necessity of being exposed to it directly; whereas older students were more concerned in the structure of the language trying to understand word by word, and that caused that their abilities were limited when using the foreign language.

The age groups showed some differences between them. There was an evident lack of fluency to communicate in the foreign language in older students because they were more concerned about its structure. Younger learners demonstrated more interest and engagement for studying the language, since they found more useful the use of the target language for expressing themselves. In addition, younger learners tried to express their ideas as much natural as possible without focusing on structure; while older learners hesitated about each sentence in their speech making an effort to find the correct grammar construction.

**Recommendations**

Teachers of the Language Center at the University of Nariño might consider the age of their learners before developing the activities in the class since it determined if the class was going to achieve the desired results; teachers worked as a guide for learners and also might take as much advantage as they could from the textbooks, which were the main source of teaching the foreign language during the class, they could also choose the most relevant exercises of the books, not only developing writing, but also working with the rest of skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and pronunciation.

In this way grammar was combined with these activities and students felt more encouraged for learning since they saw grammar as a useful tool to use for being understood in different situations. So, both teachers in charge of older and younger learners reflected on the different needs of their students for feeling connected with the grammar topic in order to achieve the desired results depending on the instruction they were going to use for teaching the target language.

Second language grammar instruction was carefully prepared by the teachers since there were many relevant points that could determine the effectiveness of the class. When talking about teachers, they considered the age of the classroom they were going to work with, since they decided what type of techniques were more advisable to use for explaining the grammar topic; it meant that, even though all students, children and adults learnt explicitly or with and inductive method, teachers found the way to make the class more pleasant and encouraging for the learner, in this case, using activities for developing implicit instruction with younger students, while explicit explanation for a grammar topic was more suitable for older learners, since they felt they had a sense of progress when they learnt different grammar rules; and contrary to that, as Halliday (1973) argued, younger learners took into account language for what they could do with that rather than what it was, so they did not need to have a sense of progress by learning grammar rules, but using the foreign language accurately for being understood, and at the same time, they learnt different grammar topics unconsciously.

Teachers also might give grammar an important place in the class since it gave learners the structure for organizing their ideas and shared them with more people, but it was also important to mix it with other skills so that learners realized its importance and used it appropriately. As it was seen in the young learners' group, it was a good idea to use grammar

when speaking since learners were going to feel more interested in using the foreign language

for expressing themselves. Although teacher in charge of older students gave grammar the

most relevant place in the class, it was applied with different activities that should not be

necessary in the textbook for encouraging students to participate and use it in different

contexts and situations.

     Referring to the place that grammar had in the class, it was advisable to change its role

because it was not the most important part in a foreign language class, but it was an

instrument for promoting understandable communication.

     Also, when necessary, authentic materials were a tool for teaching the grammar topic,

it was observed that it encouraged learners to work using it in real-life situations, it meant

situations with context that they faced and were able to respond to them positively using the

foreign language. It could enhance learners to keep practicing and learning more about the

language, so that they could express themselves accurately; and showing different materials or

activities during the class, vary the way of teaching and students might find it enjoyable since

these materials explained or showed them the grammar topic from different points in which

they used it.

     Teachers of both younger and older learners could present to the class different

materials that enhanced students in their learning process, some of these activities appeared in

the textbook they used, the problem was that sometimes the teachers did not present them to

the class, so they might consider them as relevant as the rest of exercises of the book; some

activities were also suitable for creating a different environment in the classroom, debates or

opinions were useful for allowing students to participate in the class using the foreign

language as much as possible.

Authentic material could be an alternative for working in class since the study demonstrated that it forced students to learn in a significant manner if it was used correctly although it was not fundamental in the class if the teacher knew how to handle the grammar topic appropriately. These materials could be used as a tool to reinforce the grammar topic with both age groups for enhancing them to learn, as an alternative to vary the lesson.

Finally, even though the class was supposed to be carried out using the foreign language all the time, it was prudent to use the native language when students had some doubts about the topic, otherwise they could misunderstand the grammar rule and they were going to learn it wrongly. Nevertheless, the use of the native language could be as limited as possible, and it could be done in very specific and limited situations, since the students might feel used to wait for an explanation in the native language and did not pay attention to the activities previously done for explaining the grammar topic using the foreign language. So, to avoid problems when using it during the class, it was a good idea for teachers of both age groups to establish some parameters since the beginning of the class in order to clarify in which specific situations the native language was going to be used.

Future language teachers might consider this study for determining the correct form to work grammar in a specific age group regarding the instruction that was used when teaching the foreign language because it decided the effectiveness of their classes.

Regarding learners, they should work in the way they felt more comfortable; in this case even if both age groups responded to explicit grammar instruction, younger learners preferred to work with implicit instruction since they liked the idea of learning by their own sources, it meant that they inferred the grammar rules and they found it more useful for their learning process. It was also advisable for them to avoid the idea that the teacher had to

provide all the information about a grammar topic, it was better if the teacher worked as a guide, gave them the necessary information so that they could infer the rest of the grammar topic, so their learning was more meaningful and discovered themselves some hypotheses about grammar.

Besides, following a pattern given by the teacher whether in an implicit or explicit way allowed students to avoid any confusion about the grammar topic; so it was a good idea to follow them as a useful guide. These patterns could appear in an oral or written way, so students should pay attention to the explanations that the teacher gave so that they could recognize them and could be able to use them correctly.

As a final point, students who would like to continue with this study, they could work with some aspects that might also influence age and learning foreign language grammar in the Language Center, in this situation the use of textbooks since it was the most important tool in the classrooms when teaching the foreign language. Nevertheless, it was going to be possible to find some limitations when doing it, for example the lack of cooperation for the teachers of the Language Center since some of them might feel awkward or judged if somebody came to the class for observing them and their teaching techniques, as it happened with this study; some teachers found in uncomfortable and for this reason it was not possible to observe the desired number of classes.

## References

Algunseth, L. (2010). *How children learn a second language.* Retrieved from

http://www.education.com/reference/article/how-children-learn-second-language/

Ali, S. (2001). *Inter-Language Theory.* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from

http://www.slideshare.net/Shamimali/inter-language-theory

Beare, K. (n.d.). *Teaching Grammar in an ESL /EFL Setting.*Retrieved from

http://esl.about.com/cs/teachingtechnique/a/a_teachgrammar.htm

Benson, R., and Samarawickrema, G. (2007). Teaching in context: Some implications for e-

learning design. Retrieved from

http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/singapore07/procs/benson.pdf

Chomsky, N. (1995). *The Minimalist Program.* [DX Readre version]. Retrieved from

http://books.google.com.co/books?hl=es&lr=&id=vtPQiYCNpjgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&

dq=Chomsky,+N.+(1995).+The+Minimalist+Program&ots=HY2wrYz82H&sig=sKEp

QFcfctftgxpO9GpQb-

thvHw#v=onepage&q=Chomsky%2C%20N.%20(1995).%20The%20Minimalist%20P

rogram&f=false

Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language.* doi:

10.2277/0521530334.

Eisenstein, M. (1987). Grammatical explanations in ESL: Teach the student, Not the method.

In Puji, H. (2006, May). Approaches and procedures for teaching grammar. *English*

*Teaching: Practice and Critique,* 5(1). Retrieved from

http://eslboard.3web.me/Tips%20&%20methodology/teaching%20grammar.pdf

Ellis, R. (2001). Form-Focussed Instruction and Second Language Learning (ed.). In

Rodriguez, A.G. (2009, April). Teaching Grammar to Adult English Language
Learners. *CAELA Network.* Retrieved from
http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/TeachingGrammarFinalWeb.pdf

Fitch, D. A. (2006). Teaching grammar to adults and second language learning research.
*Education*, vol 16. Retrieved from
http://www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5000369912

Fromkin V, Rodman, R., Hyams N. (2010). What is language?. In Fromkin V, Rodman, R.,
Hyams N. *An introduction to language.* (pp. 3-42). Retrieved from:
http://books.google.com.co/books?id=0BhzqFratIAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=An+In
troduction+to+Language+By+Fromkin,+Rodman+and+Hyams&hl=es&ei=g9WlTdKb
N8-
10QG0jpj1CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAA
#v=onepage&q&f=false

Hinkel, E., & Fotos, S. (2002, June). New Perspectives on Grammar Teaching In Second
Language Classrooms. *TESL-EJ,* 6(1). Retrieved from http://www.cc.kyoto-
su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/ej21/r9.html

Hyltenstam, K. and Abrahamsson, N (2000)., Oller, J. and Perkins, K. (1978), Neufeld, J.
(1978), Brown, J. (1980), Rozansky, B. (1975), Halliday, M. A. (1973), Penfield, W.
and Roberts, L. (1959), Snow, C. and Hoefnagel, M. (1978). In Ellis, R. (1985).
Individual Learner Differences and Second Language Acquisition. In Ellis, R.
*Understanding Second Language Acquisition.* (pp. 99-126) Oxford: Oxford University
Press.

Jordens, E. (1985). In Ellis, R. (1985). Individual Learner Differences and Second Language

    Acquisition. In Ellis, R. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition.* (pp. 99-126).

    Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lenneberg, E. (1967). Biological Foundations of Language. In Birdsong, D. (1999). *Second*

    *Language Acquisition and The Critical Period Hypothesis.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence

    Erlbaum Associates. Inc.

Muñoz, C. (2006). *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning*. [DX Reader version]

    Retrieved from http://books.google.com.co/books?id=1C_-

    zfVkmOkC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Carmen+Mu%C3%B1oz+age+and+the+rate+of

    +foreign+language&source=bl&ots=7UD-

    EYNcCr&sig=FBRdVNd3yhJ5YbSgQzJ2OJ-

    0iVU&hl=es&ei=_dIDTOf1C8L78AaG5vmBDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&r

    esnum=2&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false

Selinker, L. and Gass, M. (2008). Introduction. In Selinker, L. and Gass, M., *Second*

    *Language Acquisition: An introductory course.* (pp. 1-19). Retrieved from:

    http://books.google.com.co/books?id=Dx5ohdiplRUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=acqui

    sition&hl=es&ei=3OWlTeGsN8bb0QHzkvHrCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&r

    esnum=2&ved=0CCgQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false

Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (1999). Instruction, first language influence, and

    developmental readiness in second language acquisition. In Rodriguez, A.G. (2009,

    April). Teaching Grammar to Adult English Language Learners. *CAELA Network.*

    Retrieved from

    http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/TeachingGrammarFinalWeb.pdf

Swam, M. (2008). Design criteria for pedagogic language rules. In *Grammar and the Language Teacher.* Retrieved from http://www.mikeswan.co.uk/elt-applied-linguistics/design-criteria.htm

Appendix

**Classroom Observation format**

This format will be used to observe a class at The language Center of the University of Nariño as part of the research "The influence of age on grammar acquisition in the English learning process". This format will be the basis for comparing grammar instruction provided to two different age groups learning English for communicative purposes.

| Category | | Completed tally marks made by an observer | Total tallies | Per cent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher | 1 | | | |
| | 2 | | | |
| | 3 | | | |
| | 4 | | | |
| | 5 | | | |
| | 6 | | | |
| | 7 | | | |
| Students | 8 | | | |
| | 9 | | | |
| | 10 | | | |
| | 11 | | | |

1) The teacher introduces grammar explicitly

2) The teacher provides implicit grammar instruction

3) The teacher assigns grammar an important place in the lesson

4) Grammar is introduced by means of authentic materials

5) Grammar is introduced by means of the textbook

6) Grammar is introduced by means of an explanation or lecture

7) The L1 is used in grammar instruction

8)  Students react to explicit instruction positively

9) Students react to implicit instruction positively

10) Students discover grammar and provide personal hypothesis about it

11) Students practice a pattern presented explicitly by the teacher

Additional comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____