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Grammatical Knowledge and Proficiency among the M.Ed. Teacher-Trainees in Manipur

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Abstract

This study examined the grammatical knowledge of M.Ed. teacher-trainees in Manipur, India, to understand their level of competence across demographic and institutional factors. The study is important because grammatical knowledge forms a key component of effective language teaching and teacher preparation. It adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey and a cross-sectional research design. The sample population comprised M.Ed. trainees in Manipur, and 99 teacher-trainees from the 2023-2025 academic session were selected from Dhanamanjuri College of Teacher Education and R.K. Sanatombi Devi College of Education using convenience sampling. Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire containing 40 multiple-choice items covering five domains of grammatical knowledge. The instrument demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.850) and validity (0.785**). Data were analysed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that teacher-trainees provided 2,571 correct responses (64.9%) and 1,389 incorrect responses (35.1%), indicating a generally satisfactory but moderate level of grammatical competence. Female respondents contributed 1,845 correct responses compared to 726 by males. M.A. and M.Sc. graduates showed nearly equal performance (1,304 and 1,267 correct responses, respectively). Trainees from a government institution performed slightly better, with 1,366 correct responses, than those from a private institution (1,205). The study highlights the need for stronger grammatical instruction and targeted training in teacher education programmes to enhance future teachers' linguistic competence.

Keywords: Grammatical knowledge, Effective teaching, Institutional type, M.Ed. teacher-trainees, Linguistic competence.

1. Introduction

Knowledge of grammar is a fundamental component of language education and teacher training. Research shows that teachers and teacher candidates often struggle with grammar. Many in-service teachers lack strong metalinguistic knowledge of grammar, and effective teaching relies more on pedagogical grammar knowledge than on mere content knowledge (Myhill et al., 2013). Research revealed that Dutch teacher-trainees also struggle with certain forms of grammatical reasoning, particularly linguistic manipulations. This echoes global concerns about declining 'Knowledge about Language' (KAL) among teacher candidates, suggesting that explicit grammar instruction is often insufficient (Van Rijt et al., 2024).

Given these concerns, examining the grammar proficiency of current M.Ed. trainees is crucial. The present study focuses on M.Ed. students in Manipur, India. These graduate learners will become educators, so their grammatical competence directly impacts the quality of language teaching they will provide later. In India, English is typically taught as a second language, and teacher preparation programmes (such as B.Ed. and M.Ed.) are responsible for strengthening future teachers' language knowledge. However, prior research on this topic in India is scarce. Thus, the source study fills an important gap by surveying 99 M.Ed. trainees across various teacher training institutes in Manipur.

The study employed a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. A self-developed, structured questionnaire of 40 grammar items was administered to students from the 2023–25 academic session. The questionnaire covered multiple grammar domains (word classes, sentence structure, etc.), and respondents selected answers from the provided options. The tool was pilot-tested and found reliable (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). Collected responses were analysed with SPSS to compute descriptive statistics. The objectives were explicitly to examine the distribution of overall grammar performance by four factors: gender, educational qualification, age group, and type of teacher-training institution.

The results indicate that overall grammatical performance was moderate across the board. Specifically, only a small fraction of students scored in the top "outstanding" category, while the majority fell into "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory" ranges across most grammar domains. Female students answered slightly more items correctly than males, but both groups registered a notable number of errors. Similarly, graduates from Science and Arts backgrounds showed comparable performance levels. Slight variations emerged with age (the 22–25 group did better) and institutional type (government college had a marginally higher correct rate than private institute), but no factor yielded a dramatic advantage. These findings suggest that M.Ed. trainees in this sample generally have only fair-to-middling mastery of English grammar, regardless of their demographic or educational background.

Consequently, these results align with international findings that many pre-service teachers demonstrate limited grammar competence. Studies from diverse regions, from Norway to the Philippines, have similarly reported only moderate knowledge of grammar among teacher candidates (Brøseth & Nygård, 2023; Caber, 2023). The consistency of this pattern underscores the need to improve grammar instruction in teacher education.

2. Review of related literature

Studies across diverse contexts consistently found that many teacher candidates enter teacher education with only limited or moderate proficiency in grammar. For example, a survey of 235 Norwegian first-year students found that while most could identify basic parts of speech and the subject of a sentence, "structural features of language seem to be a blind spot," indicating overall weak grammatical knowledge. In the Philippines, one study reported that only 9% of 105 pre-service teachers scored "outstanding" in grammar, with nearly half rated only "satisfactory" or "worse". Spelling and determiner use were the most common errors they committed. Another study in the Philippines

(N=139) found pre-service teachers' overall grammar level only "fair", even though they frequently used cognitive learning strategies; interestingly, strategy use and grammar proficiency were positively but weakly correlated ($r \approx 0.20$). Conversely, Dillo & Gañon (2025) found a relatively high average score (mean 35.76/50, "very good") on a grammar test of 82 Filipino pre-service English majors; yet they also noted that while students excelled at reading comprehension and error identification, there's "a clear need to improve in English Grammar," suggesting specific gaps in formal grammar knowledge. In the Netherlands, Van Rijt et al. (2024) reported that Dutch student teachers (N=298) found arguments based on detailed linguistic analysis much harder to process than simple "rules of thumb", underscoring deficiencies in deep grammatical reasoning. Overall, these and other studies (Brøseth & Nygård, 2023; Caber, 2023) portray an international trend of only moderate grammatical competence among teacher candidates.

Importantly, several studies found that demographics do not explain differences in grammar proficiency. For instance, Sestoso et al. (2025) examined 81 pre-service teachers in the Philippines. They found that while most had reached an upper-intermediate level of grammatical competence, statistical tests showed no significant effects of sex, age of first English exposure, or academic major on their scores. Instead, factors such as continual English use, extensive reading, active skill practice, constructive feedback, and motivation were cited as key contributors to competence. Relatedly, Alharbi (2022) noted that female Saudi EFL undergraduates outperformed males on measures of grammatical awareness and performance, but, in general, both groups showed only partial mastery of grammar. What seems to matter is metalinguistic awareness and strategic study: both Alharbi (2022) and Roca & Manla (2023) suggest that learners with stronger awareness or who use grammar-learning strategies perform better overall. For example, Roca & Manla (2023) found that pre-service teachers who engaged more intensively in cognitive grammar-learning strategies tended to have higher grammar scores, despite the correlation being modest.

Across the studies, certain specific weak areas emerged. The Filipino study by Nagaño et al. (2025) found that while student-teachers scored well on topics like modifiers, subject-verb agreement, parts of speech, and pronoun use, their knowledge of sentence elements (structure) was very low. Similarly, Dillo & Gañon's (2025) analysis revealed that students consistently made errors in pure grammar, even when they could identify and correct errors in context. These findings suggest that teacher education programmes should include targeted grammar modules to address such gaps. In line with this, Myhill, Jones, and Watson (2013) emphasise that strengthening teachers' metalinguistic and pedagogical knowledge of grammar is crucial because limitations in grammar knowledge can lead to misconceptions in students' writing.

In sum, the research indicates that teacher candidates often have only moderate proficiency in grammar (Myhill, Jones, & Watson, 2013; Roca & Manla, 2023). Those who develop greater metalinguistic awareness or use effective learning strategies tend to achieve better outcomes (Roca & Manla, 2023). Many studies call for focused instruction on identified weak points, such as sentence structure and error patterns, to raise teachers' competence, since demographic background alone (e.g., gender, age, specialization) generally does not predict who will be stronger in grammar (Kayalvizhi & Shanmugam, 2023; Dillo & Gañon, 2025). These patterns reinforce the urgent need for improved grammatical pedagogy in teacher training to ensure that future teachers possess the robust grammatical knowledge required for effective language teaching.

3. Rationale of the study

Several gaps identified in the literature justify the present investigation. International research has documented teacher candidates' grammar knowledge in countries such as Norway, the Netherlands, and the Philippines (Brøseth & Nygård, 2023; Van Rijt et al., 2024; Dillo & Gañon, 2025).

However, little research has focused on postgraduate teacher trainees in India. Evidence suggests that incoming teacher candidates often possess only basic grammar knowledge (Brøseth & Nygård, 2023).

Teacher training institutions also require local data to inform curriculum development. Existing studies highlight general trends but may not reflect the specific challenges faced in multilingual contexts such as Manipur. Collecting data from M.Ed. students, therefore, provides valuable context-specific insight. Another gap concerns demographic and institutional differences. Some research has explored factors such as gender or specialization, but findings indicate that these variables rarely produce major differences in grammar competence (Sestoso et al., 2025). Nevertheless, identifying possible patterns remains important for targeted interventions (Alharbi, 2022).

Overall, concerns about teachers' grammar knowledge and the lack of local evidence justify examining the grammatical competence of M.Ed. students in Manipur.

4. Methodology

The present study adopted a quantitative research approach using survey data to examine the grammatical knowledge of M.Ed. teacher-trainees in Manipur. A descriptive survey method, along with a cross-sectional research design, was employed. The descriptive survey design helped systematically collect and analyse data to describe the current status of grammatical knowledge among the respondents. The cross-sectional design enabled the researcher to collect information from the participants at a single point in time during the academic session 2023–2025, providing a clear overview of their grammatical competencies without manipulating any variables.

Population

The study covered all students enrolled in the M.Ed. programme in Manipur, with particular focus on student-teachers studying at two teacher education institutions: Dhanamanjuri College of Teacher Education and R.K. Sanatombi Devi College of Education. These institutions offer postgraduate teacher education programmes and account for a significant share of M.Ed. students in the state. Therefore, the student-teachers pursuing the M.Ed. programme in these two institutions constituted the target population for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 99 M.Ed. teacher-trainees from the academic session 2023–2025 were selected as the sample for the study. Among them, 49 respondents were from Dhanamanjuri College of Teacher Education and 50 from R.K. Sanatombi Devi College of Education. The sample included 30 male respondents (30.3%) and 69 female respondents (69.7%). In terms of educational qualifications, 51 respondents (51.5%) possessed an M.A. degree, and 48 respondents (48.5%) had an M.Sc. degree. Regarding age distribution, 21 respondents (21.2%) were aged 27 years or below, 47 respondents (47.5%) were aged 28–30 years, and 31 respondents (31.3%) were aged 31 years or above. The sampling was conducted using convenience sampling, based on the respondents' accessibility and availability.

Instrument of the Study

Data were collected using a structured, self-developed questionnaire comprising 40 multiple-choice items. The instrument assessed five domains of grammatical knowledge: grammatical accuracy, word-order accuracy, hierarchical organisation of sentences, identification of grammatical relations, and interpretation of structural meaning. The reliability of it was established using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of 0.850. The validity coefficient of 0.785** indicated strong internal consistency among the domains.

Data Analysis Techniques

Prior permission was obtained from the principals of the selected institutions before data collection. The data were analysed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version

2021. Using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency and percentage, data were analysed and presented to describe the sample's demographic characteristics.

5. Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To examine the distribution of overall performance in grammatical knowledge across different domains among M.Ed. teacher-trainees with respect to gender.
2. To analyse the distribution of performance levels of M.Ed. trainees in overall grammatical knowledge across domains based on their educational qualification.
3. To investigate the distribution of performance levels of M.Ed. trainees in overall grammatical knowledge across domains according to different age group categories.
4. To study the distribution of performance levels of M.Ed. trainees in overall grammatical knowledge across domains with respect to institutional type.

6. Results and findings

6.1 Objective 1: To examine the overall performance in grammatical knowledge across different domains with respect to gender.

Table 1: Distribution of Overall Performance on Grammatical Knowledge across different domains by Gender

Overall Performance across Domains* GENDER Crosstabulation					
			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Overall Level of Grammatical Knowledge	Answered incorrectly	Count	474	915	1389
		% within overall performance	34.1%	65.9%	
		% of Total	478.8%	924.2%	1403.0 %
	Answered correctly	Count	726	1845	2571
		% within overall performance	28.2%	71.8%	
		% of Total	733.3%	1863.6%	2597.0 %
Total		Count	30	69	99
		% of Total	30.3%	69.7%	100.0 %
Percentages and totals are based on respondents' responses					

Table 1 presents the gender-wise performance of M.Ed. student-teachers across five domains of grammatical knowledge. The total sample consists of 99 respondents, including 30 males (30.3%) and 69 females (69.7%).

The results show that a total of 1,389 responses were answered incorrectly across the domains. Among these, male student-teachers contributed 474 responses (34.1%), while female student-teachers accounted for 915 responses (65.9%). In comparison, a much larger number of responses, 2,571, were

answered correctly. Of these, 726 correct responses (28.2%) were given by males and 1,845 (71.8%) by females.

Although female respondents recorded higher frequencies of both correct and incorrect responses, this is consistent with their greater representation in the sample. Overall, the number of correct responses is considerably higher than the number of incorrect ones, indicating a generally satisfactory level of grammatical knowledge among the respondents. However, some areas may still require improvement.

6.2 Objective 2: To analyse the overall grammatical knowledge across domains based on their educational qualification.

Table 2: Overall Level of Grammatical Knowledge across Domains by Educational Qualification

Overall Performance across Domains* Qualification Crosstabulation					
			Educational Qualification		Total
			M.A.	M.Sc.	
Overall Level of Grammatical Knowledge	Answered incorrectly	Count	736	653	1389
		% within overall performance	53.0%	47.0%	
		% of Total	743.4%	659.6%	1403.0 %
	Answered correctly	Count	1304	1267	2571
		% within overall performance	50.7%	49.3%	
		% of Total	1317.2%	1279.8%	2597.0 %
Total		Count	51	48	99
		% of Total	51.5%	48.5%	100.0 %

Percentages and totals are based on respondents' responses

Table 2 presents the overall performance of M.Ed. teacher-trainees across different domains of grammatical knowledge based on their educational qualifications, namely M.A. and M.Sc. The analysis shows that 1,389 responses were incorrect across all domains. Among these, 736 incorrect responses (53.0%) were contributed by M.A. graduates, while 653 responses (47.0%) were from M.Sc. graduates.

In contrast, a considerably higher number of responses, i.e. 2,571, were answered correctly. Of these, 1,304 correct responses (50.7%) were given by M.A. graduates and 1,267 responses (49.3%) by M.Sc. graduates. Although M.A. graduates recorded slightly higher frequencies of both correct and incorrect responses, this difference is largely due to their slightly greater representation in the sample.

The proportion of correct responses between the two groups remains almost equal, indicating that both M.A. and M.Sc. graduates possess comparable levels of grammatical knowledge. Furthermore, the overall number of correct responses significantly exceeds the incorrect ones, suggesting that the student-teachers demonstrate a generally satisfactory level of grammatical competence across educational backgrounds.

6.3 Objective 3: To ascertain the overall grammatical knowledge across domains according to different age group categories.

Table 3: Overall Level of Performance of Grammatical Knowledge across Domains by Age Group Category

Overall Performance across Domains* Age-Group Category Crosstabulation						
			Age Group Category			Total
			Age 27 and Below	Age between 28 and 30	Age 31 and Above	
Overall Level of Grammatical Knowledge	Answered incorrectly	Count	271	600	518	1389
		% within overall performance	19.5%	43.2%	37.3%	
		% of Total	273.7%	606.1%	523.2%	1403.0%
	Answered correctly	Count	569	1280	722	2571
		% within overall performance	22.1%	49.8%	28.1%	
		% of Total	574.7%	1292.9%	729.3%	2597.0%
Total	Count	21	47	31	99	
	% of Total	21.2%	47.5%	31.3%	100.0%	
Percentages and totals are based on respondents' responses						

Table 3 indicates the overall performance of 99 M.Ed. trainees across various domains of grammatical knowledge. The data shows that 2,571 responses were correct, while 1,389 were incorrect. This indicates that correct responses (64.9%) considerably exceed incorrect responses (35.1%), suggesting a generally satisfactory level of grammatical competence among the respondents.

In terms of incorrect responses, the highest frequency is 600 (43.2%), followed by 518 (37.3%) and 271 (19.5%). Similarly, the distribution of correct responses shows that 1,280 (49.8%) is the highest, followed by 722 (28.1%) and 569 (22.1%) across the respective groups. The difference between correct and incorrect responses is 1,182, reflecting an overall positive performance pattern.

Although there is some variation in responses across domains, the predominance of correct answers indicates moderate to good mastery of grammatical knowledge among the trainees. However, the presence of several incorrect responses suggests the need for further improvement in certain grammatical areas.

6.4 Objective 4: To study the performance levels in overall grammatical knowledge across domains with respect to institutional type.

Table 4: Overall Level of Performance of Grammatical Knowledge across Domain by Institutional Type

Overall Performance across Domains* Institution Types Crosstabulation					
			Institutional Type		Total
			Private Teacher Education Institute	Government Teacher Education Institute	
Overall Level of Grammatical Knowledge	Answered incorrectly	Count	795	594	1389
		% within overall performance	57.2%	42.8%	
		% of Total	803.0%	600.0%	1403.0%
	Answered correctly	Count	1205	1366	2571
		% within overall performance	46.9%	53.1%	
		% of Total	1217.2%	1379.8%	2597.0%
Total		Count	50	49	99
		% of Total	50.5%	49.5%	100.0%
Percentages and totals are based on respondents' responses					

Table 4 highlights the overall performance of 99 M.Ed. trainees in grammatical knowledge across different domains by institutional type. The sample includes 50 trainees (50.5%) from Private Teacher Education Institutes and 49 (49.5%) from Government Teacher Education Institutes.

The data shows that 2,571 responses were correct, while 1,389 were incorrect. This indicates that correct responses (64.9%) are considerably higher than incorrect responses (35.1%), suggesting a generally satisfactory level of grammatical competence among the respondents.

Among the 1,389 incorrect responses, 795 (57.2%) were from private institutions, while 594 (42.8%) were from government institutions. In contrast, out of the 2,571 correct responses, 1,205 (46.9%) were contributed by private institution trainees and 1,366 (53.1%) by those from government institutions.

These findings indicate that teacher-trainees from government institutions performed slightly better overall, with a higher proportion of correct responses and fewer incorrect responses than those from private institutions.

7. Discussion

The study's findings fit well with the broader patterns reported in previous research. The M.Ed. students in Manipur demonstrated only a fair-to-moderate level of grammatical competence, with most participants falling within satisfactory or below-satisfactory performance categories. Similar patterns have been reported in studies of pre-service teachers in different countries, where only a small percentage achieved outstanding scores while the majority demonstrated moderate levels of

grammatical proficiency (Caber, 2023; Roca & Manla, 2023). Likewise, pre-service teachers have been found to reach only upper-intermediate levels of grammatical competence rather than full mastery, suggesting that many teacher candidates enter professional training with incomplete grammatical knowledge (Sestoso et al., 2025).

In contrast, some studies have reported relatively higher grammar proficiency among pre-service teachers. For instance, a study of Filipino pre-service English majors reported very good average grammar scores, although gaps in formal grammar knowledge remained (Dillo & Gañon, 2025). Variations in participants' academic backgrounds may explain differences between studies, the difficulty level of the assessment tools, or the focus of teacher education programmes. In the present study, the M.Ed. cohort consisted of students from diverse educational backgrounds, which may explain the moderate level of grammar performance.

The results also indicated minimal differences in grammar competence based on gender, age group, educational background, or institutional type. This pattern is consistent with earlier research suggesting that demographic factors rarely produce significant differences in grammatical competence among pre-service teachers (Sestoso et al., 2025). Although a slightly higher proportion of female students answered questions correctly, the difference was small and did not indicate a strong gender-based advantage. Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts, where female learners sometimes demonstrate slightly stronger grammatical awareness, but overall competence remains relatively comparable between genders (Alharbi, 2022).

The moderate performance across the sample may also reflect limitations in deeper grammatical understanding rather than simple rule-based knowledge. Research has shown that student-teachers often struggle with complex grammatical reasoning and linguistic analysis, especially when tasks require deeper metalinguistic awareness rather than memorized rules (Van Rijt et al., 2024). Such findings support the view that teacher-trainees may possess basic knowledge of parts of speech or grammar rules but lack a deeper structural understanding of language.

Evidence from related studies also highlights recurring weaknesses in specific grammatical domains. In particular, knowledge of sentence structure and sentence elements has been identified as a major difficulty among pre-service teachers (Nagaño et al., 2025). Persistent grammatical errors have been observed even when learners can recognize and correct mistakes in context (Dillo & Gañon, 2025). These patterns suggest that grammar instruction in teacher education programmes may not sufficiently develop metalinguistic awareness and analytical skills.

The instrument used in the present study is reliable, providing confidence in the validity of the findings. A reliable questionnaire and a structured statistical analysis provide a solid basis for understanding participants' grammatical competence. The overall results, therefore, reinforce the growing body of research indicating that teacher candidates across different countries often enter the profession with only moderate grammatical competence (Brøseth & Nygård, 2023; Caber, 2023).

Overall, the findings highlight a consistent pattern across international contexts: teacher trainees often possess basic grammar knowledge but require further development in deeper grammatical understanding and application. These results emphasize the need for more systematic and targeted grammar instruction within teacher education programmes to ensure that future teachers possess the linguistic competence necessary for effective language teaching (Myhill et al., 2013).

8. Suggestions

Based on these findings and the literature, several recommendations follow for improving grammatical competence in M.Ed. programmes:

- i. **Integrate targeted grammar modules:** Develop dedicated coursework or workshops focusing on core grammatical domains, e.g., sentence structure, verb forms, and agreement rules. The work

of Nagaño et al. (2025) suggests that identifying weak domains enables targeted instruction. For example, if sentence elements are problematic, a module emphasising syntactic analysis could be introduced.

- ii. **Emphasise communicative practice with feedback:** Encourage teacher-trainees to use English grammar in meaningful tasks, speaking, and writing, and provide corrective feedback. Sestoso et al. (2025) found that continuous use of English and feedback were key factors in competence. Classroom activities that embed grammar in communication rather than decontextualised drills may improve retention and motivation.
- iii. **Teach grammar reasoning explicitly:** Train teacher-trainees in linguistic reasoning tasks, not just memorising rules. Van Rijt et al. (2024) highlight that teacher-trainees struggle with deep grammatical analysis, so exercises that compare grammatical options, e.g., multiple parses of a sentence, can build higher-order grammar skills.
- iv. **Encourage metacognitive strategy use:** Following Roca & Manla (2023), it is necessary to instruct candidates in effective grammar-learning strategies, cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Workshops could teach self-monitoring of grammar errors, peer collaboration, and use of learning tools, e.g., grammar apps or guided inquiry.
- v. **Regular assessment and diagnosis:** Implement periodic quizzes or diagnostic tests are necessary to track progress in grammar. This data-driven approach helps identify persistent gaps early, as the source study did, enabling timely intervention. Comparing results across groups (gender, programme) can further ensure equity.

These measures, which align with the literature's guidance (Sestoso et al., 2025; Dillo & Gañon, 2025), aim to systematically raise grammatical competence. Emphasising grammar within the teacher preparation curriculum and promoting self-directed learning strategies should help future teachers achieve higher proficiency.

9. Conclusion

The study provides important insights into the grammatical knowledge of M.Ed. trainees in Manipur. The findings indicate that the overall level of grammatical competence among the respondents is moderate, with most participants demonstrating satisfactory but not advanced mastery across different grammar domains. The results also show that there were no significant differences in performance based on gender, educational background, or age group, suggesting that grammatical competence is relatively uniform among the trainees in the sample.

These findings highlight the need to strengthen grammar instruction within teacher education programmes. Since future teachers are expected to guide students in language learning, a strong foundation in grammar is essential. Teacher training institutions should, therefore, incorporate more focused grammar modules, practical language activities, and opportunities to deepen understanding of grammatical structures.

Overall, the study emphasizes that while M.Ed. trainees possess basic grammatical knowledge, there is considerable scope for improvement. Addressing these gaps through improved instructional strategies can enhance teacher preparation and ultimately contribute to more effective language teaching in schools.

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