ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about how to Teach English Grammar

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate Iranian English teachers' beliefs about how to teach English grammar**.** For this purpose,forty-three teachers, eighteen females and twenty-five maleteachers from Kermanshah, Iran, participated in this study. To gather data in the studies about teacher beliefs, MacDonald Badger & White, (2001) questionnaire was used (TBQ). The questionnaire used for this study contained close-ended sections that required teachers to respond to statements on a five point Likert scale- as well as open-ended questions that invited teachers to describe or comment on the issue in details. Findingsof the study indicated the extent to which some of these teachers' beliefs became an influential factor in their teaching and actually their stated pedagogical decisions. Consistent with the findings from previous research studies, this study indicates that teachers do possess a vast array of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues (e.g. importance of grammar) including beliefs about students (e.g. their ability to understand grammar) and classroom practices (i.e. approaches to grammar teaching). It was clear from the teachers' responses to thequestionnairethat their pedagogic beliefs represented an interconnected system in which some beliefs were central. These core beliefs were seen to influence other less strongly held beliefs. One strong core belief that almost all teachers shared was that grammar instruction was not only necessary but it should form a substantial part of the curriculum. Grammar was regarded by the teachers as a declarative set of facts to be learnt. Moreover, grammar instruction was seen to entail the explanation of grammar rules.

KEYWORDS: Iranian EFL high school teachers; beliefs;; teaching grammar; classroom activities.

As crenças de professores iranianos de inglês sobre como lecionar gramática da língua inglesa

RESUMO

O objetivo principal deste estudo é investigar as crenças dos professores de inglês iranianos sobre como ensinar gramática inglesa. Para esse fim, quarenta e três professores, dezoito mulheres e vinte e cinco homens de Kermanshah, Irã, participaram deste estudo. Para coletar dados do estudo sobre as crenças dos professores, utilizou-se o questionário MacDonald Badger & White (2001) (TBQ). O questionário usado continha seções fechadas que exigiam que os professores respondessem as declarações em uma escala Likert de cinco pontos - bem como questões abertas que solicitavam aos professores detalhes sobre as respostas. O estudo indicou em que medida algumas dessas crenças tornaram-se um fator influente nos ensinamentos desses professores e em suas decisões pedagógicas. Em consonância com os resultados de estudos de pesquisas anteriores, este estudo indica que os professores possuem uma vasta gama de crenças complexas sobre questões pedagógicas (por exemplo, importância da gramática) incluindo crenças sobre estudantes (por exemplo,

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sua capacidade de compreender gramática) e práticas de sala de aula (ou seja, abordagens para o ensino da gramática). Ficou claro a partir do questionário que suas crenças pedagógicas representavam um sistema interconectado em que algumas crenças eram centrais. Essas crenças centrais serviram para influenciar outras menos fortes. Uma forte convicção central que quase todos os professores compartilhavam era que a instrução gramatical não era apenas necessária, mas deveria formar uma parte substancial do currículo. A gramática foi considerada pelos professores como um conjunto declarativo de fatos a serem aprendidos. Além disso, a instrução gramatical foi vista como envolvendo a explicação das regras de gramática.

Palavras-chave: professores iranianos de ensino médio de inglês; crenças; ensino de gramática; atividades de sala de aula.

INTRODUCTION

The study of teachers' beliefs has emerged as a major area of enquiry in the field of language teaching in the last 15 years (Phipps & Borg; 2009). Borg (2003) asserted that studies exploring teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching have pointed towards the powerful role which teachers' prior experiences as language learners have on their own understandings of and beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching. He maintained that teachers' awareness of grammar has been equated with their performance on various tests of explicit metalinguistic knowledge. Formerly, Borg (1999) stated that in teaching grammar the teacherspaid attention to exclusive approaches in which both deductive and inductive strategies in teaching grammar were employed. They justify these with reference to interacting and sometimes conflicting beliefs based on their own teaching and learning experience.

Consequently, how to teach grammar in Iran seems to be controversial. In teaching methods based on a structural syllabus such as grammar translation and audiolingualism, grammar holds the primary focus; however, in other methods like communicative language teaching and natural methods, grammar has aminor role. Traditional grammar teaching methods remain a feature of English language teaching in Iranian context. Teachers in Iran usually use some techniques to teach grammar explicitly, e.g. using the tables of mechanical drills/models, using isolated pre-manufactured examples and focusing on structures and ignoring language functions. Iranian students may be able to state a grammar rule but consistently fail to apply the rules when speaking or writing. There is a kind of disconnection between knowing grammar rules and being able to apply those rules effectively when using the macro skills of the language or putting their language skills into practice. Although there is a combination of grammar items and communicative functions of English in Iran, teachers restrict grammar teaching to explicit instruction and language structures are not presented in meaningful communicative contexts. Moreover, grammar practice items seem to be insufficient and most teachers tend to ignore the methodology suggested for teaching grammar presented in the teacher's book.

Although a growing body of research on belief has focused on the effect of teachers' belief on learning in the last decade, there is still little research that investigates teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar. More specifically, the researcher examines what English language teachers say and do when teaching grammar by exploring the reasons for using any type of activity in the class. Furthermore, the researcher tries to provide insights into deeper understanding among competing beliefs that teachers hold. Accordingly, this study has focused on teachers' beliefs; more specifically, there has been

interest in the extent to which teachers' stated beliefs correspond with what they do in the classroom while teaching grammar.

The current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1) What beliefs do English teachers in Iranian high schools hold about English grammar, its acquisition and methods of instruction?
2) How do teachers in Iranian high schools deal with grammar in the English classroom?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A growing number of research studies focus on investigating teachers' beliefs about language learning. Teachers may form a structured set of principles that are derived from school practices, a teacher's prior experiences and a teacher's individual personality. Therefore, there is a growing realization of the need to understand the underlying belief systems of language teachers and the impact these have on their classroom practice (Borg, 2003). Teaching is generally an outcome of a teacher's perception. Teaching philosophy revolves around one's understanding about how students learn, what type of instructions are the best suitable for perfect learning and what actions should be taken to enact such instruction. It also defines ones teaching and learning goals and the specific areas in which a teacher wants herself /himself to improve his/her abilities. There is overall agreement among educational and language teaching researchers that what teachers do in the classroom is mirrored by what they believe, and their beliefs often operate as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made (Farrell & Lim, 2005). The role of teacher beliefs on their instructional decisions has been discussed in mainstream educational research in the last decades.

Teachers' beliefs influence both behavior and perception. William and Burden (1994) pointed out that teachers' beliefs play a vital role in the teaching-learning process and that is why teachers must understand their own beliefs, philosophies or theories. They stress that teachers must record their personal reflection continuously because, by becoming aware of their beliefs, they may understand their own implicit theories and the ways these theories influence their professional practice. Teachers' beliefs may be transformed by experience, knowledge, and professional development. According to Fisher (2007), cited in Hassan (2013), a teacher must understand his/her teaching philosophies so that he/she can work on further improvement.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Pajares (1992) review considered teachers'` beliefs as a "messy construct," noting that "the difficulty in studying teachers' beliefs has been caused by definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures" (p. 307).

The first to conduct a systematic research into the nature of language learning beliefs was Elaine Horwitz of the University of Texas, Austin. As part of her teaching program, Horwitz (1985) asked 25 language teachers to recall freely what they believed foreign language learning involved. They were precisely instructed to write down not only their own personal

beliefs but also what they thought others believed about language learning. After the teachers' written answers were collected, she scrutinized them one by one, removed idiosyncratic opinions and kept 30 opinions as Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Over the years, the BALLI has evolved into a 34-item questionnaire and has since been used to assess learners' beliefs by many researchers.

Similarly, Clark and Peterson (1986) asserted that teachers' theories and beliefs represent a rich store of knowledge, and argue that teachers make sense of their world and respond to it by forming a complex system of personal and also professional knowledge. Borg (2001) stated thatbeliefs as personal knowledge which may be held consciously or unconsciously arealways accepted as true by the individual, and is "imbued with emotive commitment", further serving as a guide to thought and behavior.

According to Johnson (1994), beliefs are formed early in life as a result of a person's education and experience, and strong beliefs about learning and teaching are well established by the time a student completes schooling. Past experience accumulated through both learning and teaching are not the only source from which beliefs may be derived. Other sources may include established practice, teachers' personality factors, educational principles, research-based evidence, and principles derived from an approach or method (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). This argument is returned in Richards' (1996, p. 286) work on teachers' maxims. Richards maintains that beliefs are a set of rational principles that function as "rules for best behavior" that develop as teachers' belief systems. Furthermore, these maxims relate to all aspects of their teaching, including planning, maintaining order and discipline in the classroom, involving in class activities, encouraging and motivating learners, empowering learners as well as maxims related to accuracy, efficiency and conformity. Richards also pointed out that maxims are the outcomes of teachers' evolving theories of teaching which reflect teachers' individual philosophies of teaching, developed from their experience of teaching and learning, their teacher education experiences, and form their own personal beliefs and value systems.

Pajares (1992) argues that beliefs are unlikely to be replaced unless theyprove unsatisfactory and that they are unlikely to be proven unsatisfactory unless they are challenged. Even when challenged, changing belief systems remains difficult due to their static nature. Pajares also clarifies why beliefs are so resistant to change. He asserted that beliefs help individuals to form groups and social systems. On a social and cultural level, they provide elements of structure, order, direction and shared values. From both a personal and socio/cultural perspective, belief systems reduce dissonance and confusion, even when dissonance is logically justified by the inconsistent beliefs one holds. This is one reason why they acquire emotional dimensions and resist change. People grow comfortably with their beliefs, and these beliefs become their "self" so that individuals come to be identified and understood by the very nature of the beliefs, the habits they own.

Woods (1996) proposed that the more central the belief and the more tightly interconnected it is with other beliefs, the more difficult it will be to change it. Due to this interconnected network of beliefs, it will be almost impossible for a teacher to change one belief without affecting others. For

teachers to shift their beliefs to accommodate new ones would require them to develop new practices and to abandon well-established and seemingly successful practices. Woods also stated that the process of changing beliefs can lead to disorientation and frustration, and therefore change should only be encouraged, not mandated.

TEACHER'S BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

SL/FL teachers' beliefs in relation to classroom practices have been studied thoroughly. There are various factors that explain the relevance of investigating teacher beliefs. Horwitz's (1987) investigated gender effect and the differences in learners' beliefs based on their target language i.e. the language they are going to learn. The results showed a number of significant differences based on the gender and target language of respondents.

According to Johnson (1992), teachers' beliefs offer insights into teacher education programs which enable research to go beyond classroom practice descriptions towards the understanding of teacher action. Burns (1992) claimed that it can inform curriculum policy in relation to any innovation plausible to particular situations. Richards and Lockhart (1994) argued that beliefs are built up gradually over time. They asserted that beliefs consist of both subjective and objective dimensions, and beliefs serve as background to much of the teachers' decision making and classroom actions. Beliefs are formed early in life as a result of a person's education, experience and strong beliefs about learning and teaching are well established by the time a student completes schooling (Johnson,1994).

Teachers' beliefs can also generate grounded alternatives to the 'accepted wisdom' originated from academic traditions and institutions (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, &Thwaite, 2001, p. 472). According to Gimenez (1999),investigating teachers' beliefscontributes to the notion of reflection on teacher action and helps teachers make their beliefs more explicit at institutional and social level. Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) pointed out that teachers' beliefs help them to understand how teachers conceptualize their work.

According to Farrell and Lim (2005), there is overall agreement between educational and language teaching scholars that what teachers do in the classroom is mirrored by what they believe and their beliefs often operate as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made. Borg (2003) asserted that in language teaching, research on teacher beliefs emerged in the 1990s with its momentum being in the second half of the decade.

All teachers have beliefs about teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs reflect personal values and ideologies (Verloop et al., 2001), and as Richards (1996) mentioned, they reflect individual philosophies of teaching. For Borg (2001), a belief is a mental state which has as its content a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual holding it, although the individual may recognize that alternative beliefs may be held by others. Studies on teachers' beliefs have revealed that they can have a profound impact on instructional decisions (Borg, 2003). As Breen et al (2001) pointed out, it is these beliefs that "influence how the teacher orchestrates the interaction between learner,

teacher, and subject matter in a particular classroom context with particular resources" (p. 473).

Nevertheless, Basturkmen's (2012) recent comprehensive review of the research on teachers' beliefs and practices indicated that, although the majority of studies reviewed indicate a limited correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their practices, more experienced teachers' beliefs tend to be informed by their teaching experiences and might be expected to correspond better with teaching practices than the beliefs and practices of novice teacherswould. Teaching is now viewed as a cognitive rather than a behavioral activity, and research in second language education has shown that teachers hold a complex set of beliefs about students and pedagogical practices; these beliefs influence the instructional judgments and decisions made in classrooms (Farrell & Lim, 2005). Borg (2003) asserted that teachers' beliefs are concerned with 'what teachers know, believe, and think' and teachers may have many competing beliefs at play at any time. Andrews (2003) exposed that even though teachers have many different and sometimes competing beliefs, there is adefinite relationship that emerges between their beliefs and their classroom practices. Accordingly, a recent review on beliefs' research has also demonstrated that language teachers' belief systems do not always correspond with their classroom practices (Basturkmen, 2012). Consequently, not many language teachers are aware of their beliefs and to what extent their beliefs are reflected, or not, in their classroom practices (Farrell, 2007).

A study by Breen et al (2001) illuminates the complex relationship between beliefs and practices. Vieira's (2006) longitudinal study, which investigated student-teachers' beliefs in the beginning and at the end of participation in an educational program, indicated that the student-teachers seemed to have changed their view of teaching and learning. She reports that initially teachers defined teaching as transmission of knowledge and learning as absorption of new knowledge, whereas by the end of the teacher education program they expressed their view of teaching "as creating opportunities for learning creatively "and "learning a foreign language as a critical act".

Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis (2004) found evidence of incongruence between SL teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices related to form-focused instruction. These inconsistencies related mainly to appropriate time to focus on form during a meaning-focused lesson and the type of error correction techniques to be employed. Basturkmen et al (2004, 268),pointed out that it may be better to view the stated beliefs of teachers to be "potentially conflictual rather than inherently inconsistent".

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS

Research on the beliefs of language teachers has revealed that their beliefs are formed by a variety of factors counting their learning and teaching experience. To Phipps and Borg (2009) teachers' experiences helped shape their deep-rooted belief in the importance of fulfilling students' expectations. If teachers had successful teaching experiences in using a traditional grammar approach, they preferred to use it rather than innovating their pedagogical instructions with context-based grammar teaching. The teachers explained that as the traditional grammar instruction was preferred by their learners,

they believed that using it would facilitate class discipline. Their experience led them to decide to use the traditional rule-based approach in their classes when they perceived that their learners expected a teacher-centered method and were more disciplined with traditional teaching. Phipps and Borg also asserted that teachers' deep-rooted (core) beliefs in the importance of meeting their students' expectations and controlling discipline in the classroom were shaped by their experience as teachers and became more influential in the teachers' pedagogical decisions than the peripheral belief in an innovative approach to grammar teaching.

According to Borg (2003), study on teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and cognition has shown that both novice and experienced teachers can shape their beliefs about language learning through teacher education. It has been discussed that while exposed to innovative theories, teachers experience a cognitive process that leads them to reflect upon their core beliefs and compare new to old assumptions (Pessoa & Sebba, 2006).

Horwitz (1999), cited in Janfeshan, Islampanah and Nikenaam (2013), asserted that cultural differences reflect the relative status of language learning in the various contexts. Horwits (1999) indicates that social, political, and economic forces could also influence learner beliefs.

TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT GRAMMAR TEACHING

As stated above, one aspect of research inteachers' belief is teachers' perception of grammar instruction. Study on teacher cognition has found that a common sense idea among language teachers worldwide is that grammar teaching is essential in a language course syllabus (Borg, 2001; Schulz, 2001). Depending on various methods, grammar teaching has had its ups and downs in recent decades (Baleghizadeh & Mozaheb, 2011). As in the Grammar Translation Method, form is the central aspect of learning, whereas in the Direct Method and Natural Approach grammar had a marginalized role (Brown, 2001). At present, the discussion is based on task-based teaching of grammar and consciousness raising activities (Fotos, 2005). Nevertheless, how grammar is taught is sometimes an issue. Conflicts may arise due to teachers' uncertainty about the usefulness of formal grammar instruction to promote language acquisition (Burns, 1992). However, it seems that even though teachers are often unsure about the role of formal grammar instruction in language development, they are reluctant to dismiss traditional grammar teaching (Farrell & Lim, 2005). Some studies have revealed the existence of tensions between grammar teaching beliefs and classroom practices because even though teachers claim that they believe in alternative approaches to grammar instruction, their pedagogical decisions turn out to reflect traditional grammar teaching, practices which lead to teacher-centered lessons, mechanical exercises, and direct feedback on grammar-based oral and written errors (Phipps & Borg, 2009).Formal grammar instruction is the central theme discussed in teacher cognition research.

It is now normally accepted that some careful attention to grammar can have beneficial influence on learning and some general pedagogical guidelines for formal instruction have been proposed (Phipps & Borg, 2009). These guidelines generally encourage meaning-oriented activities and

tasks, which give immediate opportunities for practice and use (Mitchell, 2000). However, traditional teaching that exposes learners to explicit grammar instruction is still commonly observed world-wide (Borg & Burns, 2008). Some research has shown that language learners assertively expect explicit grammar instruction (Schulz, 1996, 2001). Consequently, teachers' willingness to conform to their students' expectations and beliefs sometimes impede their use of innovative approaches to grammar instruction.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The present study combines both qualitative and quantitative methods of research. It fits partly into the descriptive paradigm as it aims to observe and describe systematically, factually and accurately the qualities of a pre-conceived phenomenon i.e. teachers' beliefs in an Iranian context particularly in English language classrooms in Kermanshah's high schools.

Participants

Forty-three EFL teachers, 18 females and 25 males, from Kermanshah, Iran, participated in this study. They were given fictitious names to ensure anonymity. Their academic background varied from Bachelor degree to Mastersdegree in Applied Linguistics. Thirty-one teachers had finished a Bachelor's degree and twelve teachers had finished a Masters' degree in the same field. All teachers were experienced EFL instructors. Their experience varied from nine to twenty-eight years. These instructors were teaching or had taught English to high school students. Most of them taught English using traditionalist methods such as Grammar-Translation (GT), very common in high schools in Iran.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of the study, the following instruments were used:

Teachers' Belief Questionnaire

To gather data in the studies of teachers' beliefs, MacDonald Badger & White, (2001) questionnaire is used (TBQ). The beliefs questionnaire used for this study was designed to satisfy two main objectives. Firstly, it attempted to identify the beliefs teachers had regarding grammar and its role in language learning and teaching. Secondly, the questionnaire aimed to obtain information about teachers' reported classroom practices regarding the teaching of grammar. The questionnaire consisted of a mix of close- and open-ended questions. It was divided into four separate parts. Part A, whose aim is to find personal information about the respondents, was included with the purpose of analyzing if there were any relationships between teachers' beliefs and educational background, length of teaching experience and/or their own language learning experiences.

Part B was designed to elicit responses that would reveal underlying beliefs and shed light on what factors contributed to the development of

such beliefs. Teachers were asked to provide a definition of what grammar meant to them, requested responses about the role of grammar in learning, and the advantages and disadvantages of grammar instruction. Furthermore, teachers were asked to explain how their teaching habits have changed with experience and what factors played the most important role in bringing about this change.

Part C of the questionnaire aimed to achieve teachers' views about what activities they considered to be the most effective in teaching grammar and to find out how often they utilized these activities in their own teaching. Part C listed seven typical grammar activities and required the respondents to rate them in two ways: according to their effectiveness and according to how often they used the activities in their teaching. The activities listed involved the more traditional activities such as written grammar exercises, oral pattern practice drills and explanation of grammar rules, in addition to more learner-centered, communicative tasks. To make the terms clearer, a very brief explanation was provided for each activity.

Part D, made up of 35 statements about the teaching and learning of grammar, required the respondents to rate each statement on a given five-point scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The 35 statements which reflect some of the key issues in the field, obtained from reviewing the literature, were categorized according to the following:
– The importance of teaching grammar;
– Approaches to teaching grammar;
– Feedback and error-correction;
– Readiness to learn grammar;
– Arguments against teaching grammar.

Procedures

In order to gather data in the studies of teachers' beliefs, MacDonald Badger and White questionnaire (2001) was distributed to 43 teachers.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results are presented in two main sections. The first deals mainly with quantitative data exploring the general beliefs teachers have regarding the learning and teaching of grammar, the type of grammar activities that they use, and the factors that influence their teaching approach. The results in the second section are largely qualitative, supplemented where necessary with descriptive statistics. The results presented in the second section will focus on teachers' own language learning experiences, their beliefs about grammar and its role in instruction, the teaching approach they adopted as well as the difficulties they encountered in teaching grammar.

Scoring of Teachers' Belief Questionnaire

The data was coded and analyzed manually. Once they were assigned codes, they were analyzed to discover patterns or categories among the codes. This was done in two ways: horizontally (i.e. by analyzing the codes of all the

participants for a particular question); and vertically (i.e. by comparing the codes of a single participant's data corpus).

Quantitative results

General beliefs about learning and teaching grammar

Part D of the MacDonald Badger & White, (2001) Teachers' Belief Questionnaire (TBQ), made up of 35 statements about the teaching and learning of grammar, required teachers to rate each statement on a given five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The 35 statements were categorized into five different categories. Therefore, the researcher decided to retain five components for further investigation and to perform a confirmatory analysis to ascertain if the five components produced by the factor analysis correlated to the five original categories of the questionnaire. Varimax rotation was performed to aid the interpretation of these components.

The results of the rotated solution (see Table 1 below) show the presence of a number of strong loadings, and all but one variable loading substantially in only one component. The fifth factor solution explained a total of 39.357% of the variance, with Component 1 contributing the majority at 12.57%. The factor analysis broadly supports the construct validity of this section of the questionnaire. C1 – C4 all match closely with four of the original categories.

Table 1: Varimax Rotation of Five Factor Solution

NO	Description	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4	C 5
15	It is essential that students are familiar with grammatical terminology.	.156				
33	The primary role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the grammar point.	.154				
28	Students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology.	.149				
11	Grammar should be the main component of any teaching syllabus.	.146				
18	It is important to focus on grammar in all lessons.	.133				
29	Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how the structure works.	.125				
5	Grammar can be successfully taught without the use of extensive grammatical terminology.	.112				
13	It is best to teach grammar intensively rather than extensively.	.168				
20	It is more important to teach grammar to beginners than to advanced learners.	.105				
8	Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate.		.195			
7	Grammar is best acquired unconsciously through meaningful communication.		.192			
1	A learner can acquire a second or foreign language without grammar instruction.		.133			
17	It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work.			.143		
19	It is important to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work.			.135		
16	It is important for students to be given the right answers after an exercise/test.			.128		
12	If learners receive grammar instruction, they are more likely to be able to correct errors.				.142	
21	Regular practice ensures that grammar is quickly and successfully acquired.				.118	
3	Attention to grammar ensures that students become aware of how the language works.				.117	
4	Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.				.113	
34	Teaching grammar enables students to produce more complex sentences.				.109	
14	It is better for students to figure out for themselves why their answer was wrong.					.142
22	Students generally do not learn the grammatical structures they are taught.					.141
24	Students rarely become error-free because English grammar is very complex.					.138
25	Students should be given the opportunity to work out rules from examples.			.097		.116

Component 1, the strongest of the five, deals with different aspects of teaching grammar and can be broadly described as teaching approach. Table 2 below shows the frequency counts for each item included in this component; i.e. the number of teachers who strongly disagreed (SD), disagreed (D), were neutral (N), agreed (A) or strongly agreed (SA) to each statement. N denotes the total number of teachers who responded to each statement. NO refers to number in the original questionnaire.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Component 1, Teaching Approach

NO	Description	N	SD	D	NE	A	SA
15	It is essential that students are familiar with grammatical terminology.	42	1	9	7	18	7
33	The primary role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the grammar point.	43	3	12	6	17	5
28	Students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology.	43	3	12	6	8	4
11	Grammar should be the main component of any teaching syllabus.	43	3	11	9	13	7
18	It is important to focus on grammar in all lessons.	43	3	12	8	16	4
29	Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how the structure works.	43	1	9	7	2	4
5	Grammar can be successfully taught without the use of extensive grammatical terminology.	43	3	7	6	22	5
13	It is best to teach grammar intensively rather than extensively.	43	5	17	4	12	5
20	It is more important to teach grammar to beginners than to advanced learners.	43	3	10	5	4	11

NO refers to number in the original questionnaire. N = Number of responses. SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree; Ne = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

The majority of the teachers agreed/strongly agreed with each of the statements in this component, except in the case of statement 13, it is better to teach grammar intensively rather than extensively. It must be mentioned that statement 5, Grammar can be successfully taught without extensive grammatical terminology, loaded negatively to this component.

Component 2, which includes two of the highest loading variables, make the anti-grammar case and could therefore, be described as arguments against teaching grammar. Observing the frequency counts in Table 3 below, it revealed that teachers had very strong responses to these statements, particularly statements 8 and 7 with only a very small number choosing neutral. The majority of teachers agreed/strongly agreed with statements 7 and 8 while teachers mainly disagreed/strongly disagreed with statement 1.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Component 2, Arguments against Teaching Grammar

NO	Description	N	SD	D	NE	A	SA
11	A learner can acquire a second or foreign language without grammar instruction.	43	7	16	3	10	7
7	Grammar is best acquired unconsciously through meaningful communication.	43	1	18	1	11	12
8	Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate.	443	1	21	0	10	11

The four variables in component 3 represented in Table 4, all deal with feedback and error correction. What is most noticeable here are that the vast majority of teachers either agreeing/strongly agreeing with all four of these statements. Again, it could be said that teachers had very strong views about this issue of error correction, and very few teachers chose the neutral response to these statements.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Component 3, Feedback and Error Correction

NO	Description	N	SD	D	NE	A	SA
16	It is important for students to be given the right answers after an exercise/test.	43	0	1	1	20	21
17	It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work.	43	2	7	0	20	14
19	It is important to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work	43	2	2	0	23	16
25	Students should be given the opportunity to work out rules from examples.	43	0	3	6	26	8

Component 4 highlights the importance of grammar. Teachers responded positively to these statements with the vast majority of teachers either agreeing or strongly agreeing with each of them.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Component 4, Importance of Grammar

NO	Description	N	SD	D	NE	A	SA
12	If learners receive grammar instruction, they are more likely to be able to correct errors.	43	0	5	4	22	12
21	Regular practice ensures that grammar is quickly and successfully acquired.	43	0	1	0	24	18
3	Attention to grammar ensures that students become aware of how the language works	43	0	2	0	22	19
4	Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.	43	1	4	2	18	18
34	Teaching grammar enables students toproduce more complex sentences	43	1	4	2	18	18

Component 5, although readily recognizable as the role of the learner in learning grammar, is somewhat different – though related – to the original category of readiness to learn grammar. One of the variables that loaded on to this factor (22) is in fact one that belongs to the original category of readiness to learn grammar. One reason why readiness to learn grammar did not appear as one of the factors in the factor analysis may be the fact that the concept is unknown to the teachers who responded to the questionnaire.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Component 5, Role of the Learner in Learning Grammar

NO	Description	N	SD	D	NE	A	SA
14	It is better for students to figure out for themselves why their answer was wrong	43	1	3	5	24	10
22	Students generally do not learn the grammatical structures they are taught.	43	1	9	9	20	4
24	Students rarely become error-free because English grammar is very complex.	43	1	8	7	21	6
34	Students should be given the opportunity to work out rules from examples.	43	0	2	7	26	8

Observing the frequency counts in the table above, it can again be seen that teachers mainly agreed/strongly agreed with these statements. The factor analysis has consequently largely confirmed the validity of this section of the questionnaire as it has produced five components that are very similar to the five original categories used in designing the questionnaire. The analysis shows that teachers generally place a great deal of importance on grammar, with grammar being given a strong focus in their teaching.

Teaching Approach

Change in teaching approach

A high percentage of survey respondents (87.4%) declared that their approach to teaching grammar has changed in some way since they first began teaching.

To account for why they changed their approach, the teachers were requested to identify the three factors which were responsible for this change from a list of 11 factors. As can be seen from the table below, experimenting with new ideas in your own classroom rated the highest, at 18.9%, while feedback from the supervisor rated the lowest at 1.2%.

Table 7: Factors Influencing Change in Teaching Approach

Factors Responsible for Change	Percent
Experimenting with new ideas in your own classroom	18.9
Student feedback	17.7
Self discovery	14.2
Trial and error	12.6
Use of new textbooks	11.8
In-service programs	6.8
Collaboration with colleagues	6.9
Professional teaching journals	4.9
Other	2.9
Published research	2.1
Feedback from supervisor	1.2
Total	100

Teaching activities

Part C of the questionnaire focused on activities for teaching grammar. Teachers were presented with a list of seven common grammar activities and were asked to rate these on a scale of 1 to 4, according to (a) how often they used these activities in their own teaching; and (b) how effective they felt these activities were. As seen from Table 4.8 below, discussion of errors appears to be the most frequently used activity with 34 teachers claiming to frequently resort to it, followed closely by explanation of a grammar point and communicative grammar tasks, while comparison with mother tongue grammar rates as the most seldom used activity, with only 17 teachers claiming to use it frequently.

Table 8: Grammar Activities – Frequency of Use

Grammar Activities	N	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently
Discussion of errors with class	43	1	1	7	34
Explanation of grammar point	41	1	2	14	24
Written grammar exercises	42	0	2	18	22
Communicative grammar tasks	42	1	3	15	23
Comprehension-based grammar tasks	43	2	8	20	13
Oral pattern practice drills	40	3	9	15	13
Comparison with MT grammar	43	3	9	15	16

A somewhat different picture emerges when considering teacher's beliefs about the effectiveness of these activities in teaching grammar. Discussion of errors still rates the highest with 26 teachers claiming it to be very effective. However, the next highly rated activity which 16 teachers felt were very

effective was communicative grammar tasks. Explanation of a grammar point, written grammar exercises and oral pattern practice drills were seen to be more or less the same in terms of their effectiveness. Comparison with mother tongue grammar is seen to be the least effective by the teachers.

Table 9: Grammar Activities – Effectiveness

Grammar Activities	N	Not at all	Fairly	Effective	Very
Discussion Of Errors With Class	43	1	2	14	6
Explanation Of Grammar Point	41	0	7	19	5
Written Grammar Exercises	39	3	7	16	3
Communicative Grammar Tasks	43	5	9	13	16
Comprehension Based Tasks	41	5	9	15	2
Oral Pattern Practice Drills	43	4	8	16	15
Comparison With MT Grammar	42	15	10	8	9

Factors affecting teachers' decisions

In order to determine factors that affect teachers' decisions, the teachers were presented with a list of ten factors and asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, how important each of these factors were to them personally in deciding how to teach and the type of activities to use. Their responses to this question are shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Factors influencing teacher decisions during planning

Influential Factors	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.d
The Interests of My Students	43	2.00	5.00	4.37	.872
The Level of My Students	42	1.00	5.00	4.12	.949
Availability of Materials	43	1.00	5.00	3.87	.975
Current Research in The Field	41	1.00	5.00	3.79	1.04
Whether I Think It Will Work	43	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.00
My School's Goals and Policies	40	1.00	5.00	3.58	1.15
My Personal Goals and Beliefs	42	1.00	5.00	3.55	1.21
What I Learnt During Training	39	1.00	5.00	3.47	1.09
What Feels Right Moment	43	1.00	5.00	3.40	1.12
The Way My Peers Operate	40	1.00	5.00	2.84	1.22

As indicated in Table 10 the teachers appear to be strongly influenced by their own students as the students' interests (mean = 4.2) and level (mean = 4.1) seem to be the most influential factors behind the teachers' decisions regarding the type of activities to use in the class.

Qualitative Results

The Importance of Grammar

In response to the question "Do you think it is necessary to teach grammar?" an overwhelming majority of 94.8% teachers replied affirmatively. Firstly,

teachers claimed that teaching grammar is essential if students are to make sense of the language they are learning. It clarifies meaning and helps students to avoid ambiguities in communication: teaching grammar is essential at all stages of learning. It is the only way of making sure that students understand the language and articulate themselves clearly and coherently, without ambiguity or uncertainty.

Secondly, teachers believed that grammar instruction helps students to produce more accurate language. It is a way of ensuring that students are aware of the rules of language. Teachers suggested that regular attention to grammar brings students closer and closer to attaining an ultimate level of competence that would allow them to produce error-free language. They believe that if they do not teach grammar, students will not know what is right and what is wrong. Of course grammar teaching is necessary. It is a must if we want learners to write accurately and without mistakes. Theyare only be able to identify their own errors as well.

Thirdly, grammar instruction was seen to be necessary if students are to succeed in examinations. Examinations play a large role in school life. In English, students were penalized heavily for not writing grammatically. Grammar is very important in the marking scheme, so it is essential that teachers have the same focus on their teaching too, otherwise when it comes to examination time, students will fail.

Difficulties in Teaching Grammar

More than half of the teachers (63.5%) admitted that they had experienced difficulties in teaching grammar at some point in their teaching career. Their descriptions of the difficulties fell into six main categories.

Lack of students' interest

This was noted as the most common difficulty that teachers faced, with 28% of the teachers who responded to this question noting student passivity and lack of receptivity to be major obstacles in teaching. Generally, most teachers believed that there is always a great deal of resistance from students when they teach grammar. Somehow grammar becomes synonymous with boredom in the classroom context. They acknowledge that "grammar is very dull and dry" and that inevitably "students get very bored." Motivating students and keeping them interested appeared to be the key problem that teachers faced.

Lack of available resources

Forty-two teachers explained that there were "no good textbooks or grammar worksheets available" and even available resources had "no clear grammar rules and very few exercises." A few teachers noted that schools did not have any resources whatsoever for either the teachers or the students, and that this made it impossible to locate suitable teaching materials.

Students' inability to understand/remember rules

This was also a common difficulty faced by nearly half of the teachers who responded to this question. Teachers noted that despite many repetitive practice exercises, students "never seem to grasp the basic concepts of grammar" and "are not able to understand even the simplest of rules, making errors time and time again in their writing." Several teachers identified that even though students are able to "correctly perform fill in the blanks exercises, when it comes to application, it is very difficult for them to understand and remember the rules taught". Some teachers explained that children are not given a good grammatical foundation in guidance school. Grammar is taught, but not very well, therefore students suffer in the long run and are not able to understand grammar thoroughly.

DISCUSSION

Similar to the previous studies, the present study found that EFL teachers do believe that grammar instruction plays an important role in language learning. Thus, the results of the present study further confirm the finding of many studies in terms of the role of grammar in the language classroom(Chou, 2008; Borg, and Burns, 2008).It can be concluded that teachers consider grammar learning as acrucial element tofacilitatetheir students achieve communicative ability. Therefore, the formal study of grammar in the classroom is the main part of their classroom activity.

Farrell and Lim (2005) suggested that what teachers say and do in the classrooms are governed by their beliefs. Senior (2006) has pointed out teachers may vary to the extent to which they can articulate their beliefs. Moreover, teachers may not be able to verbalize why they have made a particular decision while teaching partly because these beliefs are constantly changing.Gatbonton (2008) has asserted that novice teachers' beliefs are less likely to be rigid, as they have had fewer opportunities to revisit recurring issues and make generalizations. Farrell's (1999) study indicated that reflection encouraged teachers to be more open and flexible with respect to their beliefs in a particular method, approach, or technique for grammar teaching.

CONCLUSION

One of the main factors which affect the process of language teaching could be teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar. Therefore, the findings in this study indicate the extent to which some of these teachers' beliefs become an influential factor in their teaching and actually their stated pedagogical decisions. Consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g. Berliner, 1987; Burns, 1992; Borg 2003, 2006), this study indicates that teachers possess a vast array of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues (e.g. importance of grammar) including beliefs about students (e.g. their ability to understand grammar) and classroom practices (i.e. approaches to grammar teaching).

It was clear from the teachers' responses to the belief questionnaire that their pedagogic beliefs represented an interconnected system in which some

beliefs were central. These core beliefs were seen to influence other less strongly held beliefs. One strong core belief that almost all teachers shared was that grammar instruction was not only necessary but that it should form a substantial part of the curriculum. Grammar was regarded by the teachers as a declarative set of facts to be learnt and grammar instruction was seen to entail the explanation of grammar rules. Teachers also did not appear to make a connection between grammar instruction and students' subsequent ability to use language fluently in communication. This could either be because teachers were not overly concerned about students' communicative language ability or because they were unaware of the theoretical debate or ignore that teachers' beliefs have revolved around the issue of whether grammar instruction enhances communicative language use. Interconnectedness between beliefs did not necessarily indicate consistency. Teachers actually held several mismatched beliefs about language learning and the role grammar played in the instruction process, but few teachers appeared to be aware of these inconsistencies between their beliefs. For example, many teachers struggled to balance their belief that errors need to be corrected so as to retain accuracy, and their view that error correction by the teacher can negatively impact on the learner's language production and confidence. There was some evidence that such contradictory beliefs existed as a result of beliefs derived from different sources, such as previous language learning experiences and current language teaching experiences.

Disagreements between beliefs were not only apparent within a teachers' own system of beliefs. Differences also existed between the beliefs of a teacher and institutional and systemic conventions in addition to between the beliefs of different teachers.

Even thoughthe teachers often shared a set of core beliefs, the strength of these core beliefs varied depending on the individual teacher, resulting in personal and idiosyncratic belief systems. One shared belief among the teachers was that the teacher is the custodian of knowledge and therefore learning should be directed and monitored by the teacher. Beliefs relating to the type of direction and how much control should be exercised vary from teacher to teacher. One of them, for example, believed in paying individual attention to learners and the facilitation of learning through one-on-one assistance. Another teacher asserted that it was important to teach at the pace of her students, even if it meant abandoning a lesson plan when she felt that her students were not following her in the way she had envisaged. On the other hand, one of the participants believed that the teacher must be in full control and does not need to pay attention to the individual needs of students.

Pedagogical implications

The results of this studysuggest how educational systems can provide learners and teachers the opportunity to enhance their knowledge in teaching English in general and in grammar in particular. The findings of this study presents a variety of potential options for teacher educators, school administrators, and teacher mentors. First, problem-solving strategies and techniques must

become an essential part of novice teacher's training and experiences. Teacher educators may promote problem-solving through teaching case studies, guiding pre-service and novice teachers through action-research-oriented projects, and encouraging more advanced methods of problem-solving. Second, teacher educators can also facilitate discussion about school as a workplace, exploring professionalism and ways to manage co-workers and parents. Third, teacher educators may foster peer-support groups by creating cohorts in teacher education and creating novice teacher support teams within the school. Finally, teacher educators and school leaders must provide an atmosphere that allows teachers to feel safe when they seek for advice, guidance, and support.

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