

## Exploring the Effects of Teachers' Beliefs towards Grammar Teaching in EFL classrooms

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study was to explore the effects of teachers' beliefs towards grammar teaching in EFL classrooms. Thirty-one preparatory school English teachers were selected by using an available sampling technique. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations were used to collect the data. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively including descriptions, such as frequency counting and percentage. The findings indicated that the great majority of the respondents' beliefs affected their grammar teaching in EFL classrooms. As a result, it is concluded that there is a relationship between teachers' belief in grammar teaching and their classroom practices. Thus, the Ministry of Education should assess teachers based on the structural approach, and the classroom observation system should be arranged in the schools to guide teachers at the right time. It is also better to arrange a proper language development program for teachers so that students can get better language exposure; professional training would help teachers to have directly related beliefs and classroom practices.

**Keywords:** Effect, Belief, Practice, Grammar Teaching and EFL.

### Introduction

Teaching is mainly an outcome of a teacher's perception. Philosophy of teaching revolve around one's understanding of how students learn, what types of instructions are best suitable for deep and concrete learning, and what actions should be taken to enact such instruction. It also defines the teaching and learning goals and the specific areas in which a teacher wants herself/himself to improve her/his abilities (Richards 1996). The structure of a teacher's beliefs seems to be interconnected. Teacher's beliefs deeply influence both behavior and perception. Pajeres (1992, p.324 as cited in Nayer 2013). William and Burden (1997) state that teachers' beliefs play a vital role in the teaching-learning process, that is, why teachers must know their own beliefs. Teachers' beliefs can be transformed by experience, knowledge, professional development, and making them aware of their teaching approaches. According to Fisher (2007), a teacher must understand his/her teaching philosophy so that he/she can work on further improvement. Most of the researches have focused only self-reported beliefs through interviews and questionnaires, whereas a few have investigated whether these beliefs are practiced in the classroom or not.

No doubt, there is an essential need to determine whether there is a correlation between teacher's beliefs about teaching English grammar and their actual classroom practices. There has been an on-going debate about grammar in ESL teaching and in studies of L2 acquisition.

The inconclusive debate about the best way to teach grammar has a significant influence on the development of language teaching practice. As a result, different views, approaches, and methodologies to grammar teaching have emerged for ESL teachers to choose to suit their own learners and classroom environment. However, "the methodological proposals in pedagogic grammar for teachers are often implicit rather than explicit" (Corder, 1988; p.127). The absence of clear guidelines about the teaching of grammar, particularly in situations when "the context and environments within which teachers work, and many of the problems they encounter are ill-defined and deeply entangled". Nespor, (1987; p. 324), has led teachers to create their own personal theories about how to approach grammar in the language classroom (Borg, 1998; 2003). These personal theories are derived from their belief systems. Thus, there is a crucial need to explore the teachers' perceptions about teaching English grammar and their actual classroom practices are important.

### 2. Some related empirical findings

As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, there are related studies both at a global and local level. Some of

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them are discussed as follows. A study was conducted by Mehemt Bardakci (2014), in Gazi University; Turkey entitled "Teachers' Beliefs and Practices of Grammar Teaching: Focusing on meaning and form." The findings revealed that most of the teachers favored beliefs that represent traditional approaches to grammar teaching, such as the use of explicit grammar teaching followed by controlled practice; use of L1, mechanical drills, and repetition. Another study that arrived at almost similar findings with the previous study was conducted by Nayyer Hassan (2013) entitled "The Impact of Teachers' beliefs on L2 Grammar Teaching." Her finding shows that there is a deep woven correlation between teachers' beliefs about teaching English grammar and their classroom practices of teaching grammar.

Coming to the local studies in this area; as far as the researcher knowledge goes, there are only two studies that have some kind of relation with the current research which are carried out locally. The first one was Habtamu Adem (2011) entitled, "Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Effective Grammar Teaching." His finding shows that there is a correlation between teachers' beliefs about teaching English grammar and their classroom practice of teaching it. The second study was conducted by Dereje Tadesse (2001) entitled, "An Exploration of Students' Beliefs about EFL Grammar Teaching and Learning and Strategy Use." His finding shows that quite a significant correlation among their grammar belief variables, teaching variables, and strategy variables. These findings have tremendous practical implications like EFL learners hold wrong beliefs about grammar. Consequently, they expect and insist on an inadequate teaching approach and poor learning strategies. As a problem, Hbtamu Adem (2011), it has suggested that further research should be conducted on how teachers 'and students' previous experiences affect their present perceptions; and the impacts of their perceptions on their teaching and learning practices. His study was altogether considered both teachers' and students' perceptions on grammar teaching. As a result, the teachers' perception was that; an implicit approach is an effective approach to teaching grammar. Contrary to this, the explicit approach is chosen as an effective approach by students. Here it is clear that teachers' and students' perceptions are mismatched. Thus, the present researcher wants to explore the effects of teachers' beliefs and practice on grammar teaching independently.

**3. The general Objective:** The general objective of this research was to explore the effects of teachers' beliefs towards grammar teaching in EFL classrooms.

#### 4. Research questions

1. How do teachers perceive grammar teaching in EFL classrooms?
2. What is the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practice in the EFL classroom?
3. What is the effect of teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching in EFL classrooms?

#### 5. Limitations of the Study

School administrators were not willing to allow repetitive classroom observation to explore and assess teachers' practice in grammar teaching. It would have been better to have a repetitive observation and in-depth interviews with participants of the study. During interviews, teachers might reflect their own views and would remain unrepresentative of everyone in the study. Some teachers might respond to the interview to what they have responded in the questionnaire. Belief is too subjective and something in mind, therefore, care should be taken not to generalize the results into other similar contexts.

#### 6. Historical background of grammar teaching

According to Rutherford (1987), grammar is "a necessary component of any language teaching program" (p.9) and thus plays an important role in language teaching. However, the focus on grammar in language teaching was challenged with the emergence of teaching methodologies based on different learning theories, such a challenge influenced not only the content and curriculum in language teaching, but also the implications for teaching grammar. Thus, a fresh look at grammar was necessary, causing linguists and language educators to rethink the status of grammar in language teaching and learning. This led to a constant debate among language educators and linguists regarding the nature and type of grammar instruction, which affected the understanding of how second languages should be taught or learned. The beginning of communicative language teaching has a tremendous impact on the way language should be taught and learned. It is a turning point for linguists and language educators to seriously review the role of grammar in language teaching (Celce Murcia, 1991). This is because there are two different views about teaching grammar, that is, explicit and implicit grammar teaching (Howatt, 1984).

The conflicting views about how grammar should be taught are generally oscillating between language analysis and language use. The communicative approach to language teaching emphasizes the meaning and how language is used or the functional aspects of language. This emphasis leads to the implication that grammatical accuracy is less important in communication (Woods, 1995). However, communication can generally be achieved most efficiently by means of a grammatical sentence or by a series of such sentences logically related to" (Close, 1991; p. 14), implying the important function of grammatical competency in communication.

In general, although researchers and language educators differ in giving emphasis on grammatical competency, they all share the same view that grammatical competency has its important role in the development of communicative competence. Hence, three issues emerged related to the role of grammar in

language teaching. Firstly, how teachers teach grammar in classrooms in ways that avoid formalism “without losing sight of the fact that grammar is systematically organized” (Carter, 1990; p. 117). Secondly, how teachers decide and find ways of teaching grammar “which recognize that appropriate and strategic interventions by the teacher are crucial to the process of making implicit knowledge explicit” (ibid). Grammatical items in the syllabus are carefully selected, ordered, and tabulated, reflecting a linear and straightforward process of displaying the language items to be taught, while language acquisition is not a linear and straightforward process. The stages and time for each learner to learn or acquire certain aspects of grammatical constructs vary with age and personality.

**7. Design:** Descriptive survey method was used to conduct this research; because it enables to look into human attitudes and actions in detail, ranging from an individual

to class, school, or entire unity (McKay 2008). In this study, a case study is preferred as it enables a careful and complete observation of EFL teachers and learners while carrying out the interaction in the teaching and learning process in detail.

**8. Methodology:** Mixed method is used to collect and analyze the data because of the following reasons; using a mixed-method strategy has its own benefits compared to using just one method, it helps to use more than one research method

**9. The Setting and source of data:** Three government Preparatory Schools were selected in Nifas Silk Lafto Sub-City, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the available sampling technique because there are only three preparatory schools in the sub city, and the data was collected from primary sources. To achieve the objective of this study, the researcher used: the questionnaire, an interview, and classroom observations.

**10. Analysis and results**

**Table1:** Teachers’ responses to rating their perception of grammar teaching

Items	Rating Scales										Total	
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree			
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%
a. Teachers should apply their beliefs of grammar teaching in their classroom.	0	0	3	10	5	16	12	39	11	35	31	100
b. Teachers’ perception on grammar teaching has effects on their teaching methodology and classroom practice.	4	13	0	0	0	0	9	29	18	51	31	100
c. Grammar should be taught to all students in preparatory school.	0	0	1	3	4	13	19	61	7	23	31	100
d. Teachers should provide first grammatical rules and explanations.	1	3	8	26	1	3	11	35	10	33	31	100

From the above table (1) item (a), one can see that the majority, i.e., 74% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that teachers should apply their beliefs of grammar teaching in their classroom. Therefore, this implies that the great majority (74%) of the respondents believe that English language teachers should apply their beliefs in grammar teaching in their classrooms. The above table item (b) shows that 58% of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers’ perception of grammar teaching has effects on their teaching methodology. 29% of the respondents also agreed with the above idea. This implies that the great majority (87%) of the respondents believe that teachers’ perception about grammar teaching has effects on their teaching methodology and classroom practice.

According to the above table item (c), 23% of the respondents strongly agreed that grammar should be

taught to all learners. 61% of the respondents also agreed that grammar should be taught to all learners. Therefore, this shows that the vast majority (84%) of the respondents believe that grammar should be taught to all levels of learners. As the results depicted in table (5) item (d), 33% of the subjects strongly agreed that teachers should provide students with grammatical rules and explanations. The majority, i.e., 35% of the respondents agreed that teachers should provide students grammatical rules and explanations. This indicates that the great majority (68%) of the respondents believe that teachers should provide grammatical rules and explanations to their students.

As can be seen from table (2) item (a), 97% of the respondents replied that teachers should use implicit or skill-oriented approaches to teach grammar to raise the learners’ consciousness of a specific grammatical structures.

**Table 2:** Subject teachers' responses to the three Yes/No questions which assess their grammar teaching background as it has a strong connection with their classroom practice

Items	Responses	Respondents	%
a. Teachers should use an implicit approach to teach grammar so as to raise the learners' consciousness of specific grammatical structures.	Yes	30	97
	No	1	3
	Total	31	100
b. Teachers should use inductive grammar teaching approach than deductive grammar teaching approach.	Yes	31	100
	No	0	0
	Total	31	100
c. Have you ever experienced any difficulties in teaching grammar?	Yes	16	52
	No	15	48
	Total	31	100

Therefore, the researchers concluded that the vast majority (97%) of subjects believed that teachers should use an implicit approach to teach grammar to raise the learners' consciousness of a specific grammatical structures. As the data in table (2) item (b), 55% of the respondents either strangely agreed or agreed that teachers had better use the inductive grammar teaching approach than the deductive grammar teaching approach. This shows that the majority of participants believe that teachers had better use the inductive grammar teaching approach than the deductive grammar teaching approach. Concerning item (c), 52% of the respondents rated "Yes" meaning they have experienced difficulties in teaching grammar. This implies that the majority, i.e., (52%) of the respondents faced difficulties when they teach English grammar. However, 48% of the subjects claimed that they have not faced any difficulties in teaching English grammar.

**10. Conclusions**

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that there was a relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practice, although some teachers claimed to have indirect approaches towards teaching English grammar because they accepted the effectiveness of the communicative and functional approach. However, due to their own language learning experiences, structure-based assessment system, lack of monitoring system, and lack of professional development courses in schools, they teach through traditional methods. Almost all teachers deny that they are in favor of the structural approach and they actually teach through this method. They claimed that according to them, working out rules from examples is good for teaching grammar, but while teaching grammar they started their lesson by explaining grammar rules. A few teachers started their lessons by explaining structures and writing definitions on board. Because they think if they learn rules, they will automatically learn language. They

like to teach English grammar in the same way they were taught. Uneducated family background, lack of home preparation, and less language exposure would make students less competent in English grammar learning.

**11. Recommendations**

1. Most of the respondents have no beliefs about grammar teaching. Therefore, teachers should know what teaching beliefs they have.
2. As the evidence from the classroom observation, most of the respondents used the traditional teaching approach. Thus, they must be given proper professional training opportunities for opening the doors of self-development.
3. Almost all teachers used a structured teaching approach. Therefore, teachers must be given proper language-related guidance to develop their language teaching skills.
4. Large class size is one of the difficulties in teaching grammar so that classes should not be large enough as they hinder activity-based teaching.
5. Old traditional structure-based teaching approach does not let teachers' practice indirect teaching. Due to this, teachers should be provided ample opportunities through which they can develop their communication.
6. School administrators assessed teachers based on the structural approach. Thus, a proper classroom observation system should be arranged in schools to guide the teachers at the right time.
7. Most of the teachers like to teach English grammar in the same way they were taught; because they are unaware that they teach purely through a structural approach. Thus, skill-based teaching and assessment systems must be promoted.

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