

Revisiting Grammar Teaching in a Saudi EFL Context: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

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Abstract

In language, meaning is conveyed and received through words and grammar. A phrase or a sentence is not a random collection of words. In the absence of grammar, words hang together without any real meaning. Thus, grammar plays an essential role in language teaching. With adequate grammar explanations in meaningful contexts and practice, some serious errors in learners' language can be avoided. This study aimed at examining the relationship between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and their actual practices in a Saudi EFL context. Questionnaires and classroom observation checklists were used to gather information about teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and to compare that with their practices. The paper sought to find answers to these questions: 1) What are teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching? 2) Do teachers' perceptions of grammar correlate with their actual teaching in EFL classes? 3) What are teachers' perceptions of problems, if any, hindering their practice of grammar teaching? The sample consisted of 23 teachers who completed a questionnaire discussing their perceptions of grammar teaching and practice. Six of these teachers were observed teaching grammar in classes. The findings revealed that there was a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and their perceptions of their grammar classes. Also, there was a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and the observed classes. However, teachers' perceptions of their classes were mostly reflected in observation cards, and they were positively correlated. Further, the study revealed teachers' tendency towards traditional methods of teaching where the meaningful practice was overlooked.

Keywords: *belief, grammar teaching, perception, practices, Saudi EFL Context*

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Introduction

This study is an empirical endeavor to expand understanding of EFL teachers' perceptions about grammar teaching in a Saudi EFL context. It intends to investigate the extent to which the EFL teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching match their practices in an EFL class. Although there have been several research works about teachers' views of grammar teaching and their contribution to classroom practices, there is no much information about the Saudi EFL context. Pajares (1992) emphasizes that investigating teachers' beliefs "should be a focus of educational research and can inform educational practice in ways that prevailing research agendas have not and cannot" (p. 307). Teachers' beliefs usually reflect the actual nature of the instructions the teacher provides to students (Kagen, 1992). Consequently, this may or may not help students to understand and apply grammar structures effectively. Examining the relationship between language teachers' beliefs and their actions can improve teaching practices in the EFL setting. According to Borg (2003), teachers' beliefs is a term that has been usually used to refer to teachers' pedagogic beliefs or those beliefs that are related to an individual's teaching, such as views of language learning and teaching beliefs, curriculum perspective..., etc. Numerous studies have reported EFL teachers' traditional teaching methods and students' low level of language proficiency and grammar (Grami, 2010; Javid, Farooq, & Gulzar, 2012; Chowdhury, 2014; Khan, 2011). This requires an investigation of EFL teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching to pinpoint the sources of weaknesses in the teaching process. It is important to understand teachers' perceptions, which may affect their practices in classrooms (Borg, 2003). According to Borg (2009), teachers' beliefs and their classrooms practice do not only act as a filter through which teachers realize new information and experience, but they also develop a long-term effect on teachers' instructional practices. Besides, grammar plays a vital role in students' positive performance in language production (Borg, 2013).

According to the results of final exams in the last few years, the level of students in grammar in the English department at Najran University is unsatisfactory. This poses an urgent need to investigate the process of grammar teaching to shed light on the sources of the problem and suggest some recommendations. Since teachers' decision-making and practice are affected by their prior beliefs about teaching methods. Therefore, the present study will investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs concerning grammar teaching and their actual classroom practices.

This study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching regarding the introduction of grammar items, the methods of teaching, practice, and the material used?
- 2) Do teachers' perceptions of grammar correlate with their actual teaching in EFL classes?
- 3) What are teachers' perceptions of problems, if any, hindering their practice of grammar teaching?

Literature Review

The idea of grammar teaching has always been controversial. Many scholars have discussed whether the knowledge gained from explicit grammar teaching would become implicit. For instance, Loewer and Sato (2017) classified SLA scholars' views regarding explicit and implicit types of knowledge. They stated:

There are three perspectives: (1) the noninterface position maintains that the two

types of knowledge are distinct and it is not possible for explicit knowledge to become implicit, (2) the weak interface argues that under the right circumstances explicit knowledge may become implicit, but such conversion is not easy, and (3) the strong interface position claims that explicit knowledge can become implicit (p. 5).

There have been numerous empirical studies investigating teachers' views of grammar teaching and the relationship between grammar teachers' perceptions and their classroom practices. Several studies indicated that teachers' beliefs had an impact on their teaching decisions and, subsequently, their practices in EFL classes (Andrews (2003); Burgess and Etherington (2002); Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997); Pajares (1992). Li Yan (as cited in Deng & Lin, 2016) studied teachers' beliefs regarding the integration of grammar instruction with communicative teaching. He investigated the relationship between senior English teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and their teaching practices. The results indicated that senior English teachers' grammar teaching beliefs had a significant effect on their grammar teaching practice. Besides, numerous empirical studies have proved that teachers' classroom practices were determined by their beliefs (Borg, 2003). The relation between teachers' views and their practice is like a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience and utilize a long-term influence on their instructional practices (Borg, 2009). Also, Hassan (2013) claimed that there was a parallel between teachers' belief about grammar teaching, which was shaped by their learning experiences, and their practices in classes. Moreover, Alghanmi and Shukri, (2016) conducted a study in the English Language Institute at the University of Jeddah investigating the relationship between teachers' beliefs of grammar instructions and classroom practices in the Saudi context. The study revealed that teachers' beliefs were reflected in their classroom practices.

Nevertheless, recent empirical evidence revealed contradictory results. Several researches reported that teachers' cognition concerning teaching grammar was not always reflected in their practices (Salimi, Safarzade & Monfared, 2016). The findings of many recent research works reflected complex relationships (Mohamed, 2006). Teachers' preferences for grammar teaching approaches vary from one to another. Furthermore, teachers' experiences might have an impact on teachers' practices. Woods stated that language learning experiences, early teaching experiences and education courses potentially influenced teachers' views about grammar teaching (as cited in Öztürk & Yıldırım, 2019).

Concerning the method of teaching, several studies revealed that teachers were in favor of teaching grammar items inductively by eliciting the rules indirectly from the language in meaningful contexts. For example, Aljohani (2012) found that teachers believed that form and meaning should be taught in a meaningful context. Furthermore, in another study investigating teachers' views about grammar teaching, the results showed teachers' strong beliefs in avoiding the teaching of grammar in isolation, and that it should be integrated into meaningful contexts. Although teachers believed that grammar knowledge leads to accuracy in the language, they thought that an inductive approach to grammar teaching was better than a deductive one (Borg & Burns, 2008).

On the contrary, the findings of several other types of research indicated teachers' inclination towards a deductive method. For example, Kalsoom and Akhtar (2013) reported that

teachers were much preferring explicit grammar teaching and preferred a deductive grammar teaching approach. Similarly, Al-Naeem (2007) observed that teachers were inclined to teach grammar deductively. Hence, selecting the type of grammar teaching method was likely to be affected by the teachers' background knowledge about the teaching methods and the way teachers were taught. Moreover, teachers' beliefs were, sometimes, influenced by their early education. The results of a survey in a study administered to secondary school teachers of English in Hong, Andrews (2003) claimed that teachers who were most in favor of teaching grammar inductively had a relatively high level of detailed knowledge of grammar, while those who had a relatively low level of explicit knowledge of grammar advocated a deductive approach. Regarding practice, many researchers reported that teachers' classroom practices did not necessarily reflect their beliefs about grammar teaching and showed mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practices in grammar teaching (Hos & Kekec, 2014). There was a range of mismatches in views related to error correction, place of grammar in language teaching, teaching methods and inductive or deductive teaching (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Ferreira, 2014; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

Several findings showed that teachers appeared to be flexible in selecting the grammar approach they followed. Many teachers were extremely devoted to either a deductive or an inductive approach depending on the types of grammar structures to be taught. However, such a belief might easily be reasonable as there seemed to be no universal specific way to teach language in general and grammar in particular. Jeram (2017) stated that the knowledge of teachers' practice was developed as a result of their experience and it was linked to what could be applicable in their teaching context, and not on any formal educational theory. This indicated that some teachers' choice of the method of teaching was due to the extent they found it appropriate when tried in class.

Additionally, several studies reported that teachers were in favor of a blended approach in which elements from inductive and deductive approaches are incorporated together in classes. For example, Sadat (2017) suggested in a review on teaching grammar that language instructors should blend grammar teaching with Communicative Language Teaching to achieve both linguistics and communicative competence in their classes. Pishghadam and Ebrahimi (2019) advocated implementing a dynamic method beyond theoretical teaching, which they referred to as 'applicative teaching'. This method, as they claimed, was a mixture of application and reflection, which included elements from practical teaching and thinking skills teaching. Thus, teachers' beliefs differed from one to another; therefore, their teaching styles would be different accordingly (Kalsoom & Akhtar, 2013).

Methods

Instruments

To examine teaching grammar in EFL classes, and to be able to answer the study's questions, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data was collected to investigate the problem under study. Questionnaires and classroom observation checklists were used. The questionnaire consisted of 22 statements and questions on teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and their perceptions of their grammar classes. The observation cards included 11 items related to teachers' applications of their perceptions in actual classes. The questionnaire was developed using Likert's four-point scale

items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree for items related to teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching. Also, it used four-point scale- items ranging from always to never for items related to teachers' perceptions of their grammar classes. Besides, the questionnaire included open-ended and close-ended questions.

The data obtained by the teachers' questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software version 22.0. They were analyzed by calculating the frequencies and percentages that were listed in tables respectively. Also, the correlation coefficient was carried out to find the relation between teachers' perception of grammar teaching, their perceptions of their grammar classes and their actual teaching of grammar as observed in classroom observation cards.

Participants

The sample of this study consisted of 23 staff members chosen randomly from the English department at Najran University in Saudi Arabia. Six of these teachers were observed teaching grammar in classes in order to explore the relationship between their perceptions and practices.

Results

Questionnaire Items

Table 1. *Teachers' background information*

category	Groups	Number of participants	Percentages
Gender	Male	9	39.13%
	Female	14	60.86%
Degree	PhD	7	30.4%
	MA	9	39.13%
	BA	7	30.4%
experience	1-10 years	15	65.21%
	11-20 years	7	30.43%

Teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching have been analysed and shown in the following tables:

Table 2. *Teachers' Perceptions of the importance of teaching grammar*

Do you think grammar is important in teaching English?	Slightly important	important	Very important	Not important
	8.7	39.1	52.2	0

Table two shows that most teachers (52.2%) think that grammar is very important in EFL classes and (39.1%) feel that it is important, which reflects the fact that most of the teachers consider grammar teaching highly.

Table 3. *Teachers' Perceptions about the method of teaching grammar*

What is the best way to teach grammar?	Inductively	Deductively	mixture of both	Don't know
	30.4	39.1	30.4	0

As shown in Table three, there is no agreement about the best way to teach grammar. Some teachers (39.1%) feel that the best way is to use a deductive approach. Some of them (30.4%)

think that the best method is to use an inductive one. Similarly, (30.4%) think that the best way is to use both ways.

The teachers were asked to answer the following question: What kind of material do you often use in teaching grammar? Their answers are analysed in Table four.

Table 4. *Teachers' Perceptions about materials used to teach grammar*

Prescribed textbooks in addition to books/handouts on grammar	prescribed supplementary flashcards, pictures, and wall chart, videos	textbooks, prescribed textbooks only	others
39.1	34.8	13.0	8.7

Table four reveals that most teachers (39.1%) claim that they use supplementary books or hand-outs on grammar in addition to these textbooks and (34.8%) claim that they use the prescribed textbooks, flashcards, pictures, and wall chart, videos in grammar teaching. However, (13.0%) of them claim that they use prescribed textbooks only.

The teachers were asked to answer the following question: Is the grammar book you are teaching satisfying? Their answers are analysed in Table five.

Table5.. *Teachers' satisfaction with the material used in teaching grammar*

Highly satisfying	Satisfying	Slightly Satisfying	Not Satisfying
26.1	8.7	65.2	0

Most teachers (65.2%) think that the prescribed textbooks are slightly satisfying, but it is highly satisfying to (26.1%) and (8.7%) think it is satisfying. This might explain why most teachers need to use supplementary books/ handouts on grammar besides the prescribed textbook.

The teachers were asked to answer the following question: If you face problems in grammar teaching, specify the issue, please? Their answers are analysed in Table six.

Table 6. *Teachers' Perceptions about the problems they face in teaching grammar*

Some grammar points are unsuitable for the levels of the students	The explanations in the course book are not enough.	The students do not understand explanations in English	other problems
4.3	26.1	65.2	4.3

Most of the respondents who face problems in teaching grammar (65.2%) claim that students do not understand explanations in English and (26.1%) of them think that the illustrations in the course book are not enough and only (4.3%) think that some grammar points are unsuitable for the levels of the students. This might explain the unsatisfactory level of students in grammar.

The teachers were asked to answer the following question: What should teachers do when a student makes a mistake? The answers are analysed in table seven.

Table 7. *Teachers' Perceptions of students' error correction*

What should teachers do when a student makes a mistake?	No need correction	Correct for directly	Correct it indirectly	Depends on context: written or spoken

8.69 43.47 26.08 21.73

Most of the respondents (43.47%) claim that they correct their students' mistakes directly, whereas (26.08%) of them believe in indirect correction. However, (21.73%) of the teachers think that it depends on the context, whether spoken or written. According to them, in a written context, it should be corrected, but in a spoken context, mistakes should not be corrected to avoid disturbing students, and (8.69%) of them think correction is not needed.

Table 8.. *Teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching*

Statement	SD	D	A	SA
Grammar teaching helps improve students' language skills.	0	0	30.43	65.21
Grammar teaching facilitates teaching English.	0	8.7	47.82	39.1
The teaching of grammar items should be followed by a lot of contextual practice to acquire the language.	0	4.3	26.1	69.6
Teaching grammar items should include both form and use.	0	4.3	39.13	60.86
The English coursebooks in use do not include enough exercises on grammar.	8.7	30.43	52.17	8.7
The English coursebooks are unsuitable to the level of the students.	8.7	39.13	52.17	0

Most of the teachers (65.21%) strongly agree that grammar teaching helps improve students' language skills. Most of them (47.82%) agree that grammar teaching facilitates teaching English. Most of them (69.6%) strongly agree that grammar instructions should be followed by a lot of contextual practice to acquire the language. Most of them (60.86%) strongly agree that teaching grammar items should include both form and use. Concerning grammar textbooks in use, most of the teachers (52.17%) agree that the English coursebooks in service do not include enough exercises on grammar and that the English coursebooks are unsuitable to students' level.

Table 9. *Teachers' perception of their grammar classes*

Question	always	sometimes	Rarely	never
Do you often focus on giving your students extensive explanations of the forms of grammar rules for examinations?	52.2	30.4	17.4	0
Do you often focus on giving your students extensive practice of grammar items in a meaningful context for communication?	52.2	43.5	4.3	0
Do you ever use pair/group work activities in teaching grammar?	21.7	56.5	17.39	4.34
How often do your students participate in a grammar class?	13.94	69.6	17.39	0
How often do your students use English in discussion in class?	4.3	52.2	43.5	0

How often do you face problems in grammar teaching classrooms?	39.1	52.2	8.7	0
Do you often focus on giving your students extensive practice on using grammar items in meaningful contexts?	65.2	17.4	17.4	0
How often do you give the students extra activities in grammar other than those in the textbooks?	17.4	43.5	39.1	0

Table nine shows that most teachers (52.2%) claim that they always focus on giving students extensive explanations of the forms of grammar rules for examinations. A similar percentage of the teachers, also, state that they give their students extensive practice on using grammar items in meaningful contexts. Most teachers (56.5%) say they sometimes use pair/group work activities in teaching grammar, but most of them (52.2%) claim that they sometimes face problems in grammar classes.

Regarding students' participation, most teachers (69.6%) claim their students sometimes participate in grammar classes and most of them (52.2%) say that their students sometimes use English in discussions in class. The majority (43.5%) claim that they sometimes give the students extra activities in grammar other than those in the textbooks.

Classroom Observation Checklist

Table 10. *Teachers' actual practice of grammar teaching*

Statement	SD	D	A	SA
The instructor introduced the structures correctly.	0	50.0	16.7	33.3
The instructor explained the form of grammar items clearly	0	0	66.7	33.3
The instructor explained clearly the meaning and use of grammar items.	0	16.7	50.0	33.3
The grammar items were introduced in meaningful contexts.	16.7	50.0	16.7	16.7
There was good practice of the grammar points.	16.7	50.0	33.3	0
Many students practised new grammar points successfully.	16.7	66.7	16.7	0
There were communicative activities to practice the grammar items (e.g. pair/group work, role play..., etc.).	66.7	33.3	0	0
The instructor spoke English in explanations and instructions in class.	0	0	83.3	16.7
The students used English in communication in class.	16.7	66.7	16.7	0
10. Every student was involved in activities in class at some point.	16.7	66.7	16.7	0
Many students had used books in which all answers were written.	0	0	50.0	50.0

As shown in the table above related to the introduction of grammar structures, in (50.0%) of the classes observed, the researchers disagree that teachers introduced the grammar structure

correctly. In (50.0%) of these classes the grammar items were not introduced in a meaningful context. However, most of them (66.7%) agree that the instructors explained the form of the grammar items clearly. The instructors also explained clearly the meaning and use of the grammar items in (50.0%) of these classes.

The researchers disagree that teachers gave a good practice of grammar items in (50.0%) of the classes observed, and most of them (66.7%) also disagree about the grammar items being practised successfully by many students. Coming to practice, the researchers strongly disagree about using communicative activities to practice the grammar items (e.g. pair/group work, role play., etc.) in most of these classes (66.7 %). Concerning the use of English for communication in class, in most classes observed (83.3%), the researchers agree that the instructors spoke English in explanations and instructions, but most of them (66.7%) disagree about students' use of English in communication, also most of them (66.7%) disagree about involving every student in activities in class at some point. As for the textbook used, in most practical classes, (50.0%) the researchers either agree or strongly agree that many students had used books in which all exercises were answered prior to class.

Table 11. *The correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching, their classes, and their actual teaching.*

	teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general	Their perceptions of their grammar classes	Observation Card
teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general			
their perception of their classes	Pearson Correlation -.202		
	Sig. (2-tailed) .356		
	N 23		
Observation Card			
		Pearson Correlation -.280	
		Sig. (2-tailed) .617	
		N 6	

Table eleven reveals a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general and their perceptions of their grammar classes (-.202). It also shows a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general and the observation card (-.280). However, there is a positive correlation between teachers' perception of their own classes and the observation cards (.617).

Discussion

The findings reveal that there is a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general and their perceptions of practices in their grammar classes (-.202). Also, there is a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general and the observation cards (-.280). This indicates that there are significant differences between the teachers' general perceptions of grammar teaching, their perceptions of practices, and their actual practices in the observed classes. On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between teachers' perceptions of practices and the observation cards (.617). The positive correlation indicates that observation cards support teachers' perceptions of practice. The negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in general and their practices and also with

observation cards may be attributed to the fact that teachers may believe in new and more effective techniques of teaching grammar. Still, in real classroom practice, these techniques seem to be inapplicable to the students for some reasons that need to be investigated in a further study such as big numbers of students, limited period of time..., etc.

The majority of the participants have either a Ph.D. degree (30.4%) or an MA degree (39.13%). Also, most of them (65.21%) have between 1 to 10 years of teaching experience, and (30.43%) of them have between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience. This indicates that most of them are well qualified and experienced. Nevertheless, teachers' methods still traditional, and the new teaching trends are not applied in their classes, which needs to be further investigated. The results confirm the findings of recent research works that are carried out on in the same Saudi EFL context. Almuhammadi (2020) claims that although teachers have the theoretical knowledge of various grammar teaching methods, they need to develop grammar instruction skills. Although Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) state that most teachers in their study (60%) are aware of the inconsistency between their beliefs and actual practices. They point out that this mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices is related to factors like students' levels, their attitudes, needs, learning styles and classroom environment.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Grammar Teaching

The majority of the teachers regard grammar teaching highly. Most of them think that grammar is essential in EFL classes, and they strongly agree that it facilitates teaching English and helps improve the students' language skills (see tables one and eight). This is in alignment with prior studies related to grammar teaching. For instance, the results of a survey conducted recently by Almuhammadi, (2020) reports that EFL teachers consider grammar a foundational framework for teaching English as a foreign language and a significant factor in improving the accuracy and proper use of EFL. He claims that the teachers in his study believe their students need to develop conscious knowledge of grammar since grammar helps achieve accuracy in a language.

Teachers' Perceptions of Methods of Introducing Grammar Items

There is no agreement about the best way to teach grammar. The majority of teachers think that grammar should be taught deductively (39.1%). Some of them (30.4%) feel that the best way to teach it inductively. Similarly, (30.4%) feel that the best method is to use both ways. However, teachers' actual practices reflect a tendency towards a traditional deductive approach which is observed in their classes. However, the grammar items are not appropriately introduced in meaningful contexts (see table three and ten). Teachers are class-centred, reading instructions and illustrations from the prescribed books and writing the rules with examples on the board while their students listen inactively. Most of them always focus on giving students extensive explanations of the forms of grammar rules for examinations without meaningful contexts (see tables nine and ten). This is compatible with other prior researches that report teachers' inclination towards GTM in teaching grammar. For example, Kalsoom and Akhtar's (2013) reports in a study examining the relationships between grammar teachers' beliefs and classroom practices that teachers, who are significantly in favor of explicit grammar teaching, teach grammar deductively. Furthermore, most teachers think that they should focus on both form and meaning, yet, their actual teaching methods concentrate only on giving extensive explanations of grammatical structures through different examples without meaningful contexts (see table ten). Ferreira (2014) claims that

the results of his study reveal a mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their practices. Alghanmi and Shukri, (2016, p. 80-81) report an inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and their practices. They state that "teachers apply traditional techniques for grammar instruction, which are generally used in GTM and ALM, such as drilling and memorizing grammatical rules". They mention that teachers favor direct grammar instruction in isolation rather than exposing their student to language in meaningful contexts. Similarly, Sofi (2015) points out that EFL classrooms are more teacher-centred in Saudi Arabia and the language context is overlooked.

Teachers' Perception of Practicing Grammar Items and Students' Participation

Most teachers believe in the effectiveness of communicative activities, and think that practising grammar in a meaningful context is essential for students (see Table eight). However, their grammar classes are teacher-centred, lacking such activities. Also, most teachers say they sometimes use pair/group work activities in teaching grammar, but in most classes observed, teachers do not use such communicative activities to practice the grammar items. Practising the new grammar items will turn to be useless since the activities used to practice the new grammar items are taken only from used textbooks or new ones in which all exercises are answered before class (see tables seven and ten). This is in line with the previous studies, which claim that teachers' perception about grammar teaching is not always reflected in their practices. Teachers' classroom practices may not necessarily manifest their beliefs about grammar teaching, but it can be influenced by many contextual factors. Nishimuro and Borg (2013) mention in their experimental study that teachers follow explicit grammar instruction, thinking that this approach is crucial to the EFL model.

Related to the method followed in correcting students' mistakes, most teachers state that their students' mistakes should be corrected directly which is, surprisingly, reflected in their classes where most of them are observed getting students correct and evaluate their own mistakes. New trends of grammar teaching indicate that students' grammar mistakes must be corrected more carefully using different techniques in both explicit and implicit instruction. Also, teachers should draw learners' attention to grammar rules, whether simple or complex structures in-class activities, and through an effective use of correction such as playing games, encouraging a growth mind-set, applying self-correction, and giving individual feedback (Bitchener, 2018; Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2020; McCormick & Vercellotti, 2013).

In an open-ended question, teachers are asked about the role of practice in grammar classes and the problems they face in applying it. Most teachers claim that practice is crucial and improves language skills. They also think that it leads to a better performance in the rest of the language skills, as somehow all are interlinked to each other. However, most of them experience real difficulty to get students involved in communicative activities due to factors related to big number of students, and their students' motivations and needs to turn the focus on achievement exams rather than communication. The responses of another open-ended question about the role of L1 in grammar teaching practice, reveal that teachers think L1 has a negative influence on teaching grammar because forms that are present in L1, yet are not used in L2 or vice versa could cause a challenge for many students and impede L2 acquisition. Nevertheless, others think L1 can have a positive effect because some kind of comparison or association between L1 and L2 could be helpful for both teachers and students in terms of better explaining and understanding a specific

grammatical form. However, most teachers claim that they always focus on giving their students extensive practice using grammar items in meaningful contexts for communication. It is observed, surprisingly, that grammar items are neither introduced nor practiced in meaningful contexts. Most students are observed reading written answers in their textbooks or seen copying from others (see table ten). Therefore, most students are not engaged in real communicative activities to practice grammar items in meaningful contexts. This contradiction between teachers' perceptions and their practices needs to be investigated in a further study. Regarding students' participation, most teachers claim their students sometimes participate and use English in discussion in class. Such participation will be ineffective since teachers claim that they face problems in their grammar classes due to the students' inability to understand explanations in English (see table seven). The findings from this study are in line with findings from previous studies, which state that teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching do not, necessarily, reflect their practices in EFL classes (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Ferreira, 2014; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Farrell and Lim (2005) explain that this contradiction can be attributable to time constraints and abiding by the traditional methods of grammar teaching. Likewise, Shatat (2011) claims that the results of his study reveal that teachers' beliefs are inconsistent with their classroom practices due to factors such as time constraints, textbooks, students' needs and proficiency level. Similarly, Phipps and Borg (2009) report that teachers' beliefs are not always compatible with their actual practices when teaching grammar.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Material Used for Teaching Grammar

Concerning grammar textbooks, most of the teachers claim that these textbooks are slightly satisfying and unsuitable to the level of the students. Also, most of them claim that they use supplementary books and hand-outs on grammar in addition to the prescribed books as these books do not include enough exercises on grammar. Nevertheless, in most of the classes observed, teachers use the prescribed textbooks only. There might be other factors affecting teachers' inability to apply their thoughts, such as big number of students, limited time of class and students' motivations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study exposes the gap between the teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and their actual practices. As revealed from the results, there is a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and their perceptions of their grammar classes. Also, there is a negative correlation between teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and the observed classes. However, teachers' perceptions of their classes are mostly reflected in observation cards, and they are positively correlated. Further, the study reveals teachers' tendency towards traditional methods of teaching where the meaningful practice is overlooked. Most teachers of English are less aware of many emerging trends in ELT concerning grammar teaching. The main obstacle impeding proper teaching of grammar is the absence of meaningful practice in EFL classes. Most students are not engaged in communicative activities to practice grammar items. Also, the results reveal the ineffectiveness of teaching students who are using textbooks in which all exercises are done before class. Thus, teachers should make sure that students use either new textbooks or erase the answers from their textbooks before class.

In conclusion, the findings of this research illustrate the need for rethinking practice in EFL contexts. Teachers at the university level should be mindful of the significance of meaningful

practice. They should use new methods for teaching English, and apply additional activities of grammar other than those included in the prescribed textbooks. Students should be engaged in meaningful activities using structures in real-life contexts. They should be motivated to apply grammar structures learned in class to improve other language skills, and to practice English by incorporating more learner-centered practices. Also, educational institutions should design need-based Professional development programs to equip EFL teachers with modern teaching practices in grammar teaching. Assalahi (2013) mentions that there should be educational programs for teachers to address any predictable incompatibility between teachers' beliefs and the desired practices by providing teachers with the chances to reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices. This highlights the need for professional development programs for EFL instructors. There should be seminars, workshops and training programs to improve teachers' skills and enhance declarative knowledge about language.

Suggestions for Further Studies

The current study highlights the necessity of conducting further studies investigating the mismatch between Saudi teachers' perceptions and their actual practices in EFL contexts. Learners' perceptions of grammar teaching and the problems they face in studying grammar should be investigated. It is, therefore, necessary to carry out a detailed study about such difficulties facing teachers and learners in EFL contexts and take appropriate actions to solve them.

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