

The Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs of Grammar Instruction and Classroom Practices in the Saudi Context

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Abstract

Teacher cognition (Borg, 2015) of grammar instruction is a relatively new phenomenon that has yet to be explored in the Saudi context. While many studies have focused on the teaching of grammar in general (Ellis, 2006; Corzo, 2013; Braine, 2014), further research needs to be done - particularly when it comes to understanding teachers' beliefs of grammar and grammar instruction as well as their practices in the classroom. This case study investigates the relationship between teachers' beliefs of grammar and grammar instruction and their instructional practices. In the first stage, a sample of 30 teaching faculty members at the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Jeddah (UJ), in Saudi Arabia completed a survey discussing their beliefs related to grammar instruction. In the second stage, ten of these teachers were observed in classroom in order to explore the relationship between their beliefs and practices. In the third and final stage, open-ended questions were distributed to the teachers after the observations to better understand the factors that influence their beliefs. The findings reveal that teachers' beliefs are indeed reflected in their classroom practices. Students' proficiency level, attitudes toward the language, needs, learning styles, classroom environment, and teacher development are six factors that influence the transformation of teachers' beliefs regarding grammar and grammar instruction into practices. These findings will help broaden the discussion on how to improve the quality of grammar teaching, particularly in the Saudi EFL classroom.

Keywords: teacher cognition, grammar instruction, beliefs, classroom practice

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

With the growing influence of globalization and technology, the English language has become the leading language used as a medium for communication not only amongst native speakers (NS) of English but also amongst non-native speakers (NNS) around the world. According to Mahboob and Elyas (2014) English has an economic value in Saudi Arabia due to the large number of foreign companies that contribute to the economy of the Kingdom. Consequently, learning English has become a crucial part of the education system. The Saudi Ministry of Education (MOE) has responded to this by implementing English language instruction from an early age to achieve communicative competence (Al-Yami, 2008; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

In teaching and learning the English language, it is believed that grammar has always been an essential component, since it provides the speaker with the needed structures to organize words and ideas in a comprehensible form. It is through the use of correct grammar people tend to communicate efficiently and avoid misunderstandings. However, teaching grammar has always been an area of controversy (Ellis, 2006; Rama & Agulló, 2012; Corzo, 2013; Braine, 2014). The discussion has, for the most part, focused on the role of grammar in the English language teaching and the different approaches to grammar instruction. Due to the emergence of these new methods and approaches in the field of English language teaching, teachers tend to develop different opinions on grammar teaching. Teachers' decisions regarding how and when they teach grammar is based upon their cognition (Borg, 2003).

Teacher cognition is a new phenomenon to be explored in the Saudi context, specifically when it comes to teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction and their teaching practices. Therefore, in an attempt to better understand the decisions teachers make in English as a foreign language (EFL) grammar instruction,

concentration is given to teachers' beliefs of grammar teaching and the factors that shape their beliefs. The effect of the teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching practices has been investigated in many previous studies (Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Moini, 2008; Thu, 2009; Farahian, 2011; Rama and Agulló, 2012; Azad, 2013; Nagaratnam & Al-Mekhlafi, 2013; Hos & Kecec, 2014; Uysal & Bardakci, 2014). However, teachers' beliefs may not always be reflected in their instructional decisions when teaching grammar. Therefore, specific attention is given to the relationship between teachers' beliefs on grammar instruction and their actual classroom practices and what influences the mismatch between the two, if there is any. This relationship has been examined in previous studies (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Lee, 2008; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Le, 2011; Shatat, 2011; Hassan, 2013; Ferreira, 2014; Hos & Kecec, 2014). Nevertheless, to the best knowledge of the researcher and due to exhaustive search, it did not yield any published studies on this topic conducted in Saudi Arabia.

1.2 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is in twofold. Firstly, it aims to explore the beliefs of language teachers regarding grammar instruction. Secondly, it investigates the relationship between teachers' beliefs towards grammar and grammar instruction and their instructional practices with Saudi EFL students.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is to improve our understanding of the correlation between teachers' beliefs of grammar instruction and classroom practices. This knowledge helps teachers' make better instructional decisions when teaching grammar to Saudi EFL students, which could help and assist many teachers and trainers as to how to teach in an effective way, particularly in the Saudi EFL classroom.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer of the following questions:

- 1) What beliefs do teachers have towards grammar and grammar instruction?
- 2) Which instructional practices do they use when teaching grammar?
- 3) To what extent do teachers' beliefs match their instructional practices?
- 4) If there is no congruence between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices, what are the factors influencing the mismatch?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers' Cognition

Teachers' cognition has become an important area of research in the field of language teaching in the last fifteen years (Borg, 2015). Borg defines teachers' cognition (2003) as "what teachers think, know, and believe" (p. 81). It is "not only various categorizations of thinking, knowledge and beliefs, but also diverse operational definitions of conceptions, assumptions, values, principles, decision-making, attitudes and so on" (Borg, 2006, cited in Barnard & Scampton, 2008, p. 61). These definitions provide insight into the correlation between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices. Thus, research on teachers' cognition, and beliefs in particular, helps us understand how teachers' cognition can interfere with their classroom decisions.

2.2 Teachers' Beliefs

In order to understand what is meant by teachers' beliefs, it is important to define the term "belief". According to Borg (2001), beliefs are defined as

A proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, as evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior (p. 186).

Moving from a general definition of beliefs, Borg (2001) proposed a definition for teachers' beliefs in particular as "used to refer to teachers' pedagogic belief, or those beliefs of relevance to an individual's teaching" (p. 187).

2.3 Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar Instruction

2.3.1 Factors Affecting Teachers' Beliefs

When it comes to teachers' beliefs regarding grammar and classroom practices, an important question to ask is - what are the factors that shape their beliefs? According to Richardson (1996), there are three different experiences that are considered to be factors in shaping teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction: personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge (cited in Renzi, 2005). In agreement with Richardson, Borg (1999) presented three factors that affect teachers' beliefs:

prior language learning experience, teacher education, and classroom practices. Several researchers have reported that prior language learning experiences (schooling) often impact teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching (Ellis, 2006; Mattheoudakis, 2007; Busch, 2010; Hassan, 2013). Similarly, several studies have shown that teachers' education influences their beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction (Ellis, 2006; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Busch, 2010; Borg, 2011), while Mattheoudakis (2007) stated that teachers' education has no or little influence on their beliefs. The impact of teachers' classroom practices on teachers' beliefs has also been proven by Phipps and Borg (2009), Moini (2009), as well as Nurusus, Samad, Rahman, Noordin and Rashid (2015).

2.4 Studies about Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar Instruction

Due to the emergence of new methods and approaches in the field of language teaching, teachers tend to develop different opinions on grammar teaching. Therefore, a number of studies have been conducted on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching. Some teachers view grammar teaching as learning the rules, others view it as practicing form, and still others believe it is about understanding how grammar helps deliver meaning. Thu's study (2009) indicated that teachers believe the study of grammar is important for the mastery of the language and should not be taught implicitly - rather it should be taught explicitly, inductively or deductively. The teachers also believe that grammar errors should always be corrected, even when the language is comprehensible. Lastly, the teachers surveyed reported that practicing the language plays a major role in mastering the English language.

Azads (2013) findings revealed that the teachers believe grammar is an inseparable and essential component in language teaching. The teachers also preferred explicit grammar instruction and contextualized use of grammar within communicative activities, rather than the decontextualized use of grammar as was used in the Grammar Translation Method. These teachers also favored integrated approaches to grammar teaching that focus on both form and meaning. Furthermore, a study conducted by Uysal & Bardakci (2014) findings of the study delete revealed that most teachers preferred explicit grammar teaching, mechanical drills, use of L1 and repetition - all of which are considered traditional approaches to grammar teaching.

In Farahian's study (2011) most teachers value teaching grammar through meaningful communicative activities, yet they were required to teach it explicitly through the present, practice, produce (P.P.P) approach although they were aware of some of focus on form (FoF) instruction. Also, Hos and Kekecs (2014) findings revealed that the majority of teachers were in favor of teaching grammar within communicative language teaching methods (CLT) and only a few were in favor of using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM).

Further, Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi (2013) revealed that most teachers were in favor of teaching grammar implicitly rather than explicitly, yet they believe that some explicit instruction of the rules and emphasis on grammar practice is necessary. Moreover, a study carried out by Burgess and Etherington (2002) indicated that most teachers were in support of Focus on Form instruction (FoF) since the EAP context requires students to develop a high level of grammatical accuracy and communicate effectiveness. In this case, FoF instruction was used based on student preferences.

2.5 The Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar and Classroom Practices

Some researchers have stated that teachers' beliefs are considered to be one of the most crucial factors that impact their instructional decisions, particularly in teaching grammar (Kagan, 1992, cited in Çapan, 2014; Borg, 1999; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Wood (1996) provided insight into teachers' decision-making process regarding materials, activities and instructional practices. His contribution to investigating language teachers' planning processes is his notion of BAK (Beliefs, Assumptions and Knowledge) - factors that effect the decision making process (as cited in Barnard & Scampton, 2008). Similar to Wood, Johnson (1994) reported that "teachers' beliefs influence their judgment and perception, the classroom activities they use, and it can contribute to the improvement of teaching practices and teacher education programs (as cited in Moini, 2008, p. 143)."

2.6 Studies about the Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar and Classroom Practices

There have been a number of studies on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and its relationship to their actual practices when teaching grammar. Farrell and Lim (2005) findings of the study implied that teachers' beliefs are not always reflected in their practices due to time constraints and abiding by the traditional approach to grammar teaching. Likewise, Shatat (2011) findings showed that teachers' beliefs were inconsistent with their classroom practices due to factors such as time constraints, textbooks, and students' needs and proficiency level.

A recent study was carried out by Ferreira (2014) revealed a mismatch between the teachers' beliefs and practices. Phipps and Borg (2009) also revealed that teachers' beliefs are not always aligned with their actual practices when teaching grammar. Based on teachers' experiences, some beliefs may seem ineffective in a particular class due to students' needs and expectations, or classroom management concerns which led to the disconnect between

teachers' beliefs and practices.

In contrast, Lee (2008) findings revealed that teachers' beliefs are mostly reflected in their classroom practices. Educational and professional experiences and the context of instruction influenced teachers' practices when teaching grammar. Furthermore, In support of the previous study by Lee (2008), Les (2011) findings indicated that the teachers' beliefs were reflected in their grammar teaching practices since their belief was shaped by their experiences. Similarly, findings of study conducted by Hassan (2013) revealed that there is a parallel between what teachers believe about grammar teaching, which is shaped by their on learning experiences, and what they do in class when teaching grammar.

Nevertheless, according to Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi (2013), "there has been little investigation of the attitudes and beliefs of pre-service student EFL teachers with regard to grammar instruction within the overall context of the gulf countries" (p. 79). As previously mentioned and to the best knowledge of the researcher, there have not been any studies conducted on this subject in the Saudi context. Drawing on the importance of the issue, this study attempts to contribute to improve the teaching of EFL in Saudi Arabia by investigating the relationship between teachers' beliefs towards grammar and grammar instruction and their instructional practices when teaching Saudi EFL students.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Context

The study was conducted at the ELI at the University of Jeddah (UJ), a governmental university in Jeddah, a coastal city in the western province of Saudi Arabia (KSA). UJ provides intensive English language courses to the first year undergraduate students, which concentrate on developing the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. A total of 30 female Saudi EFL teachers, with various qualifications and experiences, participated in the study. All participants majored in the English language with either a BA or MA as their highest qualification and their teaching experience varied from less than one year to more than ten years.

3.2 Research Design and Instrument

This study adopts an exploratory case study in order to provide a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the research question. A combination of quantitative and qualitative evidences providing multiple sources of evidence to strengthen the research findings. The researcher utilized two self-completed questionnaires, closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires adapted and modified from Shatat's (2011) study, and a classroom observations checklist for data collection.

3.2.1 Questionnaire Validation

Prior to the actual distribution of the questionnaires, both closed and open-ended questionnaires were tested for validity by eight assistant professors and experienced EFL teachers and assistant professors of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) for suitability and clarity. According to their recommendations, the statements in the piloted questionnaire were modified to enhance face validity and content validity.

3.3 Data Analysis Method

Since the study collected both qualitative and quantitative data, qualitative and quantitative analysis methods were used for analysis. For the closed-ended questionnaire, all responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics using SPSS. In order to analyze the qualitative data from the second questionnaire that contained open-ended questions, responses must first be categorized into themes (Creswell, 2012). Thus, thematic analysis was used to analyze and categorize the data according to themes and SPSS was then used for descriptive analysis.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

These following stages provide a general outline of the data collection procedure in this study.

3.4.1 First Stage

The first questionnaire, comprised of closed-ended questionnaire, elicits the teachers' beliefs on grammar and grammar instruction. Questionnaires were distributed to fifty teaching faculty at the ELI at UJ. Only thirty teachers agreed to participate.

3.4.2 Second Stage

After collecting the questionnaires, ten of the participating teachers agreed to be observed in the classroom teaching grammar. This was done to explore the relationship between their beliefs, based on their responses in the questionnaire, and their actual practices in the classroom.

3.4.3 Third Stage

As a follow-up to the observation, the teachers were given a second questionnaire that consists of five open-ended questions. The focus of this questionnaire was to better understand the factors that influence or shape teachers' beliefs and classroom practices.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their approval was obtained through a consent form attached to the questionnaire and most importantly an approval from the UJ, the university included in the study, was obtained prior to that of the participants' approval. It is important to ensure that each participant completed the consent form before participating in the study and to ensure that her privacy will be respected.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Most Common Beliefs Regarding Grammar Instruction

A total of thirty teachers participated in the study and agreed to complete the close-ended questionnaire, the first instrument used in the data collection process. This questionnaire contains two sections with a total of twenty-two statements; the participants' background information; qualifications and experience, and statements related to their beliefs about grammar and its instruction. The purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit EFL teachers' beliefs on grammar and grammar instruction. In order to investigate the participants' beliefs, the percentage and frequency of responses was calculated.

4.1.1 Data Analysis

Findings based on teachers' beliefs on grammar and grammar instruction can be seen in following tables.

4.1.1.1 Teachers' Beliefs Regarding the Role of Grammar in Teaching English

The following statements explore teachers' beliefs regarding the first category: the role of grammar in teaching English.

With a total of 100% divided between 63.3% SA and 36.7%, the first statement received total agreement among the participants. Similarly, the second statement received a high level of agreement with a total of 70% divided between 30% SA and 40% A, which indicates that most teachers believe that grammar is a fundamental element of second/foreign language learning and English classes should devote a lot of time to grammar teaching.

Table 1. Beliefs regarding the role of grammar in teaching English (1)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
1	Grammar is an essential component of second/foreign language	Strongly Agree	19	63.3%	100
		Agree	11	36.7%	
2	English classes should allocate plenty of time to teach grammar rules	Strongly Agree	9	30.0%	100
		Agree	12	40.0%	
		Do not know	6	20.0%	
		Disagree	3	10.0%	

Table 2 displays teachers' beliefs concerning the role of mastering grammar rules in relation to students' communicative competence. Two thirds of the participants, 66.7%, think that mastering rules enables students to become more competent in communication.

Table 2. Beliefs regarding the role of grammar in teaching English (2)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
3	Mastering the rules of grammar enable the students to become competent in communication	Strongly Agree	10	33.3%	100
		Agree	10	33.3%	
		Do not know	4	13.3%	
		Disagree	5	16.7%	
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.3%	

Table 3 displays teachers' perspectives concerning the idea that teaching grammar rules is unnecessary for learning a second/foreign language. This statement received a high level of agreement among participants, 70%. Teachers either disagree or strongly disagree that a language can be learned without grammatical instructions, which indicates the importance of grammar teaching based on their beliefs.

Table 3. Beliefs regarding the role of grammar in teaching English (3)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
4	Learners can learn a second/foreign language without teaching them grammatical rules. (i.e. similar to how children learn their mother tongue)	Strongly Agree	5	16.7%	100
		Agree	2	6.7%	
		Do not know	2	16.6%	
		Disagree	12	40.0%	
		Strongly Disagree	9	30.0%	

4.1.1.2 Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Approaches to Grammar Instruction

The following statements tend to explore teachers' beliefs regarding the second category: approaches to grammar instruction, which investigates teachers' beliefs regarding different approaches to grammar instruction.

As can be seen in Table 4, the majority of teachers believe in the importance of learning grammar through exposure to the language in a natural context and practices that are always communicative in nature. The teachers also believe in the importance of focusing on meaning and developing students' fluency. This table reveals that the majority of teachers are in favor of (FonM).

Table 4. Beliefs regarding Meaning-Focused-Instruction (FonM)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
5	Grammar instruction can help learners develop their English fluency	Strongly Agree	15	50.0%	100
		Agree	12	40.0%	
		Do not know	2	6.7%	
		Disagree	1	3.3%	
6	Grammar teaching should focus on meaning	Strongly Agree	12	40.0%	100
		Agree	17	56.7%	
		Do not know	1	3.3%	
7	Learners learn grammar best through exposure to language in natural contexts	Strongly Agree	17	56.7%	100
		Agree	9	30.0%	
		Do not know	3	10.0%	
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.3%	
8	Practice of grammar must always be within a communicative context	Strongly Agree	16	53.3%	100
		Agree	11	36.7%	
		Do not know	3	10.0%	
9	A teacher should correct students' spoken grammatical errors only when they cause difficulty in understanding the meaning	Strongly Agree	10	33.3%	100
		Agree	9	30.0%	
		Do not know	5	16.7%	
		Disagree	6	20.0%	

Table 5 shows that most teachers believe grammar instruction, with concentration on forms, can develop learners' language accuracy. They believe that mastering the rule enables the students to become more competent communicators. This table implies that most teachers are in favor of (FoFs) grammar instruction.

Table 5. Beliefs regarding Focus on forms (FoFs) (1)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
10	Grammar instruction can help learners develop their English accuracy	Strongly Agree	15	50.0%	100
		Agree	12	40.0%	
		Do not know	2	6.7%	
		Disagree	1	3.3%	
11	Grammar teaching should focus on the form	Strongly Agree	10	33.3%	100
		Agree	19	63.3%	
		Do not know	1	3.3%	
12	Grammatical accuracy is one of the most important criteria by which language performance should be evaluated	Strongly Agree	13	43.3%	100
		Agree	12	40.0%	
		Do not know	4	13.3%	
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.3%	

Table 6 shows a high level of agreement among participants. Two third of the participants, 70%, believe in the importance of correcting learners' mistakes immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits. More than half the participants disagree with the use of L1 to explain grammar rules or the use grammatical drilling and the fact

that they are essentials to the successful learning of new language forms. In addition, 56.7% the participants do not believe that memorizing grammar rules is essential to the successful learning of new language forms and 20% are not sure. These traditional techniques are used in the grammar translation method (GTM) and audio-lingual method (ALM) for grammar teaching, which are associated with (FoFs) instruction.

Table 6. Beliefs regarding Focus on forms (FoFs) (2)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
13	Learners' mistakes should always be corrected immediately to prevent the formation of bad habits	Strongly Agree	7	23.3%	100
		Agree	14	46.7%	
		Do not know	3	10.0%	
		Disagree	4	13.3%	
		Strongly Disagree	2	6.7%	
14	Teacher should use learners' L1 to explain grammar rules	Strongly Agree	2	6.7%	100
		Agree	8	26.7%	
		Do not know	5	16.7%	
		Disagree	12	40.0%	
		Strongly Disagree	3	10.0%	
15	Memorizing rules is essential to the successful learning of new language forms	Strongly Agree	4	13.3%	100
		Agree	3	10.0%	
		Do not know	6	20.0%	
		Disagree	8	26.7%	
		Strongly Disagree	9	30.0%	
16	Grammatical drilling is essential to the successful learning of new language forms	Strongly Agree	7	23.3	100
		Agree	4	13.3	
		Disagree	5	16.7	
		Strongly Disagree	14	46.7	

Table 7 reveals that most teachers do not believe in the effectiveness of explicit teaching when teaching grammar, meaning that they also do not believe the main role of the teacher is to explain rules.

Table 7. Beliefs regarding explicit language teaching (deductive approach)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
17	In teaching grammar, a teacher's main role is to explain the rules	Strongly Agree	1	3.3%	100
		Agree	8	26.7%	
		Do not know	5	16.7%	
		Disagree	12	40.0%	
		Strongly Disagree	4	13.3%	
18	In teaching grammar, teachers should inform students the rules and then let them do related exercises	Strongly Agree	5	16.7%	100
		Agree	3	10.0%	
		Do not know	1	3.3%	
		Disagree	6	20.0%	
		Strongly Disagree	15	50.0%	
19	Direct explanation of grammar is more straightforward to ensure students' understanding.	Strongly Agree	4	13.3%	100
		Agree	3	10.0%	
		Do not know	6	20.0%	
		Disagree	8	26.7%	
		Strongly Disagree	9	30.0%	

In Table 8, teachers gave their opinions concerning implicit grammar teaching. This table shows that most teachers prefer to teach grammar implicitly and they believe that grammar instruction is more effective when students work out the rules by themselves after being exposed to examples.

Table 8. Beliefs regarding implicit language teaching (inductive approach)

S. No	Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Total
20	Teachers should begin teaching a new grammar point by giving examples.	Strongly Agree	14	46.7%	100
		Agree	13	43.3%	
		Do not know	2	6.7%	
		Disagree	1	3.3%	
21	The teacher's role is to help learners induce the grammar rules by themselves	Strongly Agree	6	20.0%	100
		Agree	16	53.3%	
		Do not know	3	10.0%	
		Disagree	5	16.7%	
22	Grammar learning is more effective when learners work out the rules by themselves	Strongly Agree	13	43.3%	100
		Agree	12	40.0%	
		Do not know	4	13.3%	
		Disagree	1	3.3%	

4.1.2 Discussion

This section answers the first research question of this study, which is: what beliefs do teachers have toward grammar and grammar instruction. Remarkably, the thirty teachers participating in the study seem to hold similar

beliefs regarding grammar and grammar instruction. According to the data, it seems that all teachers believe in the importance of teaching grammar. In alignment with the finding of with Hos and Kecec (2014), the teachers also believe in the importance of focusing on meaning and developing students fluency through communication, which indicates that majority of teachers are in favor of (FonM). The majority also reports that they do not believe in the effectiveness of explicit teaching of grammar or that the main role for the teacher is simply to explain rules. In addition, as in agreement with Uysal and Bardakci's findings (2014), the data reveals that most teachers are in favor of Focus on forms (FoFs) grammar instruction and traditional techniques such as drilling, memorizing grammar rules, and using L1 – methods that are often used in the grammar translation and audio-lingual methods. Moreover, unlike Thu (2009), and Azad (2013) studies that indicate teachers believe that grammar should not be taught implicitly rather it is better to be taught explicitly. Similar to Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi's study (2013) teachers in this study, tend to believe in the efficiency of implicit grammar instruction, where students work out the rules by themselves after being exposed to examples, rather than being given explicit grammar instruction. According to the findings, it appears teachers believe in the value of both grammar instruction and communication competence. Therefore, it seems that teachers are in favor of FoF as found in the CLT as an attempt to find a balance between FoFs that concentrates on forms and FonM that focuses on meaning or communication. FoF that create a students centered classroom, which is similar to Burgess & Etherington (2002) findings.

4.2 Teachers Classroom Practices

Once the initial questionnaires were collected, ten of the participating teachers agreed to be observed while teaching grammar lessons. A classroom observation checklist was constructed in order to observe the teachers' actual classroom practices when they teach grammar.

4.2.1 Data Analysis

The findings based on classroom observations of teachers' classroom practices can be seen in the following tables:

Table 9. Teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar

Classroom practices	Observed		Not observed	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Teacher focuses on teaching grammar.	9	90%	1	10%
2. Teacher devotes a lot of time to teach grammar.	9	90%	1	10%

Regarding the importance of grammar instruction, this table reveals that grammar instruction is highly important to EFL teachers. They tend to focus on teaching grammar and spend a lot of time teaching it.

Table 10. Teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar

Classroom practices	Observed		Not observed	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
3. Teacher adopts task-based task for teaching grammar.	0	0%	10	100%
4. There is no direct grammar instruction.	0	0%	10	100%
5. Teacher focuses on fluency	0	0%	10	100%
6. Teacher focus on accuracy.	10	100%	0	0%
7. Teacher focuses on accuracy more than fluency.	6	60%	4	40%

With a total of 100%, this table shows that grammar is taught through direct instruction with a concentration on accuracy rather than fluency.

Table 11. Teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar

Classroom practices	Observed		Not observed	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
8. Teacher focuses on the meaning.	7	70%	3	30%
9. Teacher uses authentic material to teach grammar.	1	10%	9	90%
10. Teacher teaches grammar within communicative context.	1	10%	9	90%
11. Teacher corrects students' grammatical mistakes only when it causes difficulty in understand.	1	10%	9	90%

This table reveals that the EFL teachers observed do not apply Meaning-Focused-Instruction when teaching grammar. Most teachers teach grammar in isolation rather than exposing the student to the language.

Table 12. Teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar

Classroom practices	Observed		Not observed	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
12. Teacher focus on accuracy.	10	100%	0	0%
13. Teacher focuses on accuracy more than fluency.	6	60%	4	40%
14. Teacher focuses on the form	10	100%	0	0%
15. Teacher always corrects students' grammatical mistakes	9	90%	1	10%
16. Teacher use students L1 to explain grammar rules.	4	40%	6	60%
17. Teacher compares how the rule is used in use students L1 (Arabic) and the English language	4	40%	6	60%
18. Teacher uses grammatical drilling.	8	80%	2	20%
19. Teacher asks or requires students to memorize grammar rule.	9	90%	1	10%

This table reveals that most EFL teachers adopt Focus on forms (FoFs) when teaching grammar. Teachers tend to focus on accuracy through focusing on form. With results of 90 and 80 percent, teachers apply traditional techniques for grammar instruction, which are generally used in GTM and ALM, such as drilling and memorizing grammatical rules. However, only 40% used students L1 to explain grammar rules or compared how the rule is used in students' L1 (Arabic) and the English language.

Table 13. Teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar

Classroom practices	Observed		Not observed	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
20. Teacher uses direct grammar instruction	10	100%	0	0%
21. Teacher explains the grammatical rules then provide examples.	7	70%	3	30%
22. Teacher encourages students to discover rules by themselves.	4	40%	6	60%
23. Teacher uses examples instead of explaining the grammatical rules.	4	40%	6	60%

This table shows that 70% of the EFL teachers in this study teach grammar explicitly by explaining grammatical rules directly, then providing examples rather than teaching the rules implicitly where teachers use examples to explain the rules and encourage the students to discover the rules themselves.

4.2.2 Discussion

This section provides answers to the second research question, which looks at which instructional practices teachers use when teaching grammar. Interestingly, the ten observed teachers, to some extent, adopt similar instructional practices when teaching grammar. Based on the results, all the EFL teachers observed spent a lot of time concentrating on grammar. The findings also indicate that most teachers are in favor of direct grammar instruction and tend to teach grammar in isolation. In agreement with Azad (2013) and Uysal & Bardakci's findings (2014), most teachers use Focus on forms (FoFs) when teaching grammar and focus on language accuracy and form more than meaning. In addition, the majority of language teachers taught grammar explicitly rather than implicitly. Moreover, traditional grammar techniques, such as drilling and memorizing grammatical rules, were used by most of the teachers, whereas only a few used students L1 to teach and compare grammatical rules.

4.3 Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices

To explore the consistency between teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction and their actual classroom practice, the third research question addressed in this study is: to what extent are teachers' beliefs match their instructional practices? To answer this question, a profile of each participant's beliefs and classroom practices was created based on the data collected from both the questionnaire and classroom observations (see Appendix A).

4.3.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 14 presents teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction and their actual teaching practices (see appendix A). It illustrates the correlation between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding grammar instruction. The table shows that while the teachers tend to have various beliefs, their views on grammar and grammar instruction are similar to some extent. It also shows that most of their beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices. The information presented in the table was transferred into graph form for further interpretation (see Figure 1). This graph indicates that the participating teachers agree with a total of 63% of the statements in the questionnaire, which aimed to elicit their beliefs about the role of grammar and various approaches to teaching grammar. Additionally, the graph reveals that 76% of teachers' stated beliefs are reflected in their practices. Although the majority of participants' beliefs indicate the value of teaching grammar within a communicative context and through the exposure to language in natural contexts, they do not apply this in their classes. Moreover, most teachers believe in the effectiveness of teaching grammar implicitly rather than explicitly, yet all the participants adopt explicit grammar teaching in their classrooms, highlighting the inconsistency between their beliefs and practices. Opposing the findings of Farrell and Lim (2005), Shatat (2011) and Ferreira (2014), it can be said that, most of the time, teachers' beliefs match their classroom practices. To some extent the participants tend to have different beliefs though they use similar practices to teach grammar which in aligned with the findings of Lee (2008) and Phipps and Borg (2009).

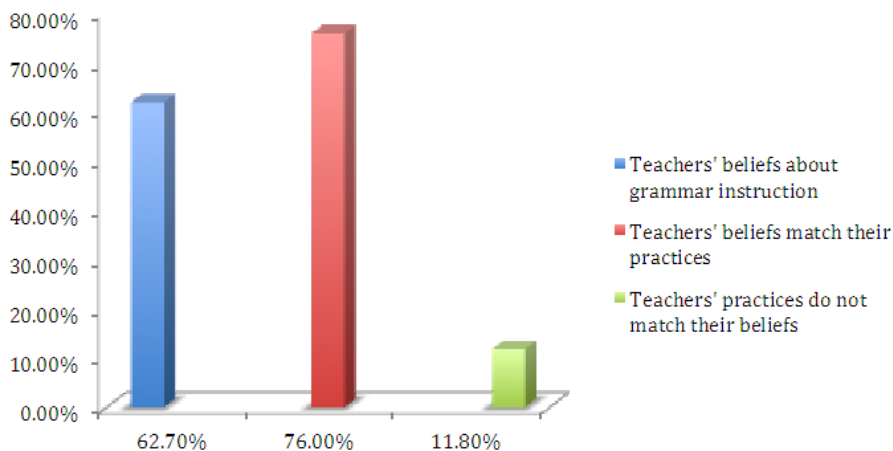


Figure 1. The relationship teachers' beliefs and practices

4.4 Factors Affecting Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices

As an attempt to better understand the factors that shape teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction and to investigate the factors which lead to an inconsistency between beliefs and practices, a follow-up questionnaire consisting of four open-ended questions was distributed to participating teachers after the observation. The collected data from the open-ended questions was categorized according to themes and SPSS was used for descriptive analysis.

4.4.1 Factors That Shapes Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

4.4.1.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

Based on the literature, the participants were asked if their beliefs and practices regarding grammar and grammar instruction were shaped according to their grammar learning experience, teaching experience, and qualification and training.

Table 14. Factors that shape teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction

Factors	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Grammar learning experience	7	70%	3	30%
Teaching experience	9	90%	1	10%
Qualification and training	9	90%	1	10%

These questions showed a high level of agreement among the participants. The majority of participants agreed that their grammar learning experience, teaching experience, and qualification and training have had a huge impact on their beliefs and practices. Similar to the findings of Borg (1999), Ellis (2006), Busch (2010), and Hassan (2013), 70% stated that past grammar learning experiences was an influential factor in shaping their beliefs and practices. Teacher 1 stated:

As an outcome of the common schools, I always hated the traditional ways that my teachers used to use in teaching, especially, in grammar but ironically I find myself sometimes using those strategies because, so far, most of the students I have taught come to class, sit and expect the teacher to do all the work for them.

Moreover, unlike Mattheoudakis' (2007) findings, 90% of the participants believe that their teaching experience impacts their beliefs and teaching practices. Teacher 4 stated: *"It does affect my teaching in terms of finding a suitable way of delivering grammar instructions."*

Lastly, in alignment with Phipps and Borg (2009), Moini (2009), and Nurusus, et al's findings (2015), qualification and training also received 90% of agreement among the participants regarding its effect on shaping their beliefs and practices. Teacher 8 stated: *"When I was studying at UQU to get a higher diploma in Education, I was introduced to various methods of teaching. Currently, I am applying what I have learnt on my students"*.

In agreement with the previous statement, teacher 10 stated, *"I'm trying to apply all that I learned in the class."*

4.4.2 Factors That Influence the Transformation of Teachers' Beliefs into Practices

This section aims to address the last research question: if there is no congruency between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices, what are the factors influencing the mismatch?

4.4.2.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

In the last question in the open-ended questionnaire, participants were asked if are there any differences between their beliefs about grammar teaching and their actual practices in the classroom. They were asked to explain what the reasons for any mismatch between them could be.

Table 15. Are there any differences between teachers' beliefs and practices?

Yes		No	
Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
6	60%	4	40%

This table reveals teachers' perspectives regarding the match up between teachers' beliefs and actual practices. On one hand, 60% of the teachers are aware of the inconsistency between their beliefs and actual practices. This awareness can help the teacher develop and find ways to put her beliefs into practice. On the other hand, 40% were not aware of the mismatch between their beliefs and actual classroom practices.

In the last question in the open-ended questionnaire, teachers also stated their point of view regarding the factors most influential in creating the inconsistency between their beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction and their actual classroom practices.

Table 16. Factors that shape teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction

Factors	Frequency	Percent
Students' level	9	90%
Students' attitudes	6	60%
Students' needs	4	40%
Students' learning styles	3	30%
Classroom environment	2	20%
Teacher development process	7	70%

This table shows that students' proficiency level and a teacher's development process are considered to be the most significant factors creating a mismatch between their beliefs about grammar and grammar instruction and their actual classroom practices. 70% believe that their development process impacts their instructional decisions. Teacher 3 stated: *Sometimes there is a small gap between what I have recently learned and my old methodology because they keep overlapping as I continue growing.*

Moreover, students' proficiency level is considered to be another important factor, with an agreement of 90%. Teacher 2 stated:

When I use to teach beginner levels, I used to teach them grammar in the traditional way because their language isn't strong enough to let them analyze the structural patterns and derive some information from it. As I moved to teach "intermediate level", I began to incorporate the contextual way of learning grammar.

60% of teachers consider students' attitudes towards the language as an important factor, and 40% of the teachers also believe in the role of students' needs in switching between and changing their grammar instructional practices. Furthermore, with 30% and 20% respectively, students' learning styles and classroom environment were reported to have the least impact on teachers' classroom practices when teaching grammar. Regarding students' learning styles, teacher 1 stated, *"I usually use both inductive and deductive approach because whether I use one approach or another, it always depends on my students' learning style and their needs."*

And regarding the classroom environment teacher 4 stated: *"The classroom size, sometimes, force me to teach grammar explicitly rather than involving the students in communicative activities since we don't have enough space."*

Generally, in agreement with Phipps and Borg (2009) and Shatat (2011), students' proficiency level, attitudes, needs, learning styles, classroom environment, and the teacher development process are presented as six factors that influence the transformation of teachers' beliefs regarding grammar and grammar instruction into practice.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to explore the beliefs and practices of thirty Saudi EFL university teachers toward grammar and grammar instruction. The primary aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the beliefs of the participating teachers towards grammar and grammar instruction and their instructional practices with Saudi EFL students. It aimed to discover the factors that affect teachers' beliefs about grammar and its instruction and explore the dominant factors that led to the transformation of beliefs into practices. Interestingly, all thirty participants seem to hold similar beliefs regarding grammar and grammar instruction and remarkably, the teachers tended to adopt similar instructional practices when teaching grammar. Based on the results, all EFL teachers who participated focused on teaching grammar and spent a lot of time concentrating on teaching it. The findings also indicate that most teachers use Focus on forms (FoFs) to teach. Moreover, the findings of the study illustrate that teachers' beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices yet

they had a few inconsistencies. Most teachers believe in the effectiveness of teaching grammar implicitly rather than explicitly, yet all the participants adopt explicit grammar teaching in their classrooms, which shows the inconsistency between their beliefs and their practices. The findings also reveal that students' proficiency level, attitudes, needs, learning styles, classroom environment, and the teacher development process are six factors that influence the transformation of teachers' beliefs regarding grammar and grammar instruction into practice.

5.1 Implications

The results obtained from the study will help teachers understand how and why they teach grammar in a particular way. The university can conduct several workshops on professional development and training sessions for the teachers on communicative language teaching and specifically in grammar teaching with the consideration of students' needs, learning styles. Such training would lead to an improvement in the quality of teaching at the university.

The study will help raise awareness amongst researchers who are interested in studying grammar teaching in the Saudi context with the aim of innovating their practices to better meet the needs of students studying in foundation year programs.

5.2 Limitations

Though the findings of the study were beneficial, there are some important limitations that need to be taken into consideration. First, the study attempted to investigate the impact of teachers' beliefs, both males and females, about grammar and grammar instruction and their grammar teaching practices with Saudi EFL students. However, according to the social and administrative regulations at the colleges and universities in Saudi Arabia, accessibility to the male section of the university was difficult. Therefore, the study was limited to female teachers only. Secondly, the findings of the study cannot be generalized from sample to population since the sample in this study is limited to thirty participants and ten for classroom observations. Thirdly, due to time constraints, open-ended questionnaires were used instead of interviews to collect data.

5.3 Suggestions for further research:

Based on the findings of the current research, the researcher recommends the following:

- 1) Further research in this topic should use interviews to collect data in order to elicit more detailed responses from the participants.
- 2) Additional research on a larger sample is required for generalization, which can be done in different instructional contexts, schools, colleges and universities, both public and private.
- 3) Further research in this topic should target EFL teachers of both genders, male and female, to ensure the accuracy and generalizability of data.

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