Teachers' Perceptions about Grammar Teaching

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Abstract

This study investigates English as a second language (ESL) teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching. A 32-item questionnaire was administered to 11 ESL teachers in a language school in California. The results show that the participants generally believe that the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language when language learning is limited to the classroom. Grammar is also generally believed to be best taught explicitly, inductively or deductively, but not implicitly. The teachers tend to value error correction, and they seem to believe that grammar errors should be corrected even when they do not interfere with comprehensibility. It was also found that the teachers generally believe in the negative influence of first language (L1) on second language (L2), but they do not tend to believe in the positive influence of L1 on L2. The teachers also seem to believe that metalanguage should be used for learners of all proficiency levels. Furthermore, they generally believe that practice is of crucial importance to grammar learning. Finally, the teachers believe that their previous training greatly improved their confidence and skills in teaching grammar.

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Literature Review

This literature review will begin by discussing the power of beliefs and the rationale behind the study of teacher beliefs in education in general. A brief survey of studies that have looked at teacher beliefs in various areas of study will then be presented. After that, the role of grammar in language learning and the approaches to grammar teaching will be addressed, respectively. Finally, studies investigating teacher beliefs in teaching grammar will be pointed out and some research studies will also be described in greater detail.

Beliefs and Their Characteristics

Beliefs are powerful and they can greatly influence human behaviors. As Brown and Rodgers (2002) indicated, beliefs can cause couples to wed and soldiers to fight, or they can even sicken and heal. In addition, beliefs are also considered to be a central construct in all disciplines that deal with human behavior and learning (Fisherbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1988; Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). Despite its importance as well as power, defining what beliefs are is not an easy task. In fact, as Williams and Burden asserted, beliefs are extremely difficult to define and evaluate, but there seems to be a number of helpful statements that can be made about them. They postulated that beliefs seem to be culturally bound, to be formed early in life, and to be resistant to change. Beliefs may have been known for their complexity. For example, Beach (1994) pointed out that beliefs are complex and multifaceted. As an attempt to define beliefs, Woods (1996) wrote "Beliefs refer to an acceptance of a proposition for which there is no conventional knowledge, one that is not demonstrable, and for which there is accepted disagreement" (p. 195).

Teacher Beliefs

If beliefs have indeed that much power, they must be seriously studied in language learning and teaching as they may be factors that can have tremendous effects on the process of learning and teaching. In language learning and teaching, the role of learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning has generally been researched due to its influential nature. Particularly, Williams and Burden (2002) stated that there is a growing body of evidence to show that teachers are highly influenced by their beliefs, which in turn are closely related to their values, to their views of the world, to their conceptions of their place within it. These authors further noted that beliefs have been found to be far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems. Beliefs, as indicated by Williams and Burden (1997), are predictors of how teachers behave in the classroom. Likewise, Kagen (1992) stated that it has been found that a teacher's beliefs usually reflect the actual nature of the instruction the teacher provides to students. In a similar vein, teacher beliefs are of great importance for teacher education as they are known to be resistant to change (Batstone, 2006). It is necessary to have better insights into teachers' beliefs because they have clearly been seen as one of the crucial factors that affect teachers and their teaching activities. Munby (1983) postulated that a practically useful, contextually apt, and theoretically sound approach to improving teaching begins with understanding the teachers' point of view. However, Johnson (1994) noticed that teacher beliefs are not easy to define and study because they cannot be directly observable (cited in Farell & Lim, 2005).

Research on Teacher Beliefs

Munby (1982) urged for more attention to be directed particularly at teachers' beliefs. Similarly, Pajares (1992) even argued that teachers' beliefs should be an important focus of educational research. Therefore, research on teachers' beliefs has generally been widely done in various educational domains. For instance, teachers' beliefs about the uses of technology were examined by Lam (2000) and Lawrence (2001). Konopak and Williams (1994) looked at teachers' beliefs about vocabulary learning and instruction, whereas Olson and Singer (1994) did research on teachers' beliefs in teaching reading. In adult education, Dirkx and Spurgin (1992) investigated the influence of teacher's beliefs on their classroom practice. Zacharias (2005) did a survey of Indonesian teachers' beliefs about internationally published materials. Sakui and Gaies (2003) conducted a study to investigate a Japanese teacher of English's beliefs about writing and teaching writing. Mantero (2005) investigated teachers' beliefs about the needs of English language learners and their families in the United States. Especially, a large number of studies have been carried out to explore teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching. Some examples are Borg (1998, 1999), Borg and Burns (2008), Andrews (2003), Berry (1997), Burgess and Etherington (2002), Chia (2003), Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997), Schulz (1996, 2001).

The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching

The teaching of grammar has long been done in second and foreign language classrooms although, as Ur (1996) remarked, the place of grammar in foreign language teaching is controversial. Each method or approach to language teaching gives the teaching of grammar a varying level of importance in their syllabi or classroom activities. Ellis (2002) pointed out that in teaching methods such as Grammar Translation, Audiolingualism, Total Physical Response,

and situational language teaching, "grammar held pride of place" (p.17). Nevertheless, he also pointed out that the place of grammar in the syllabus has been challenged with the advent of communicative language teaching and natural methods. He then proposed that a grammar component should be included in the language curriculum to be taught alongside a communicative task-based component. Also, Ellis (2002) suggested that grammar should only be taught to learners who have already had a substantial lexical knowledge and are able to take part in message-focused tasks. Additionally, he argued that grammar should be taught separately, which is to say that no attempt should be made to integrate it with the task-based component. Moreover, he pointed out that areas of grammar known to cause problems to learners ought to be focused on. Finally, Ellis asserted that the aim should be to teach grammar as awareness and teachers should center on assisting learners to develop explicit knowledge. Regardless of how important grammar is considered in language learning, grammar remains being one of the essential factors to master a language. Ellis (2006) asserted that grammar has held and continues to hold a central position in language teaching. Similarly, Hinkel and Fotos (2002) noted that although grammar teaching has been a thorny problem among teachers, educators, methodologists, and ESL/EFL professionals, it has always been one of the mainstays in English language training all over the world.

Some Approaches to Grammar Teaching

The ways grammar should best be taught differ from teacher to teacher, researcher to researcher, and methodologist to methodologist. Currently in second language literature, two approaches to grammar teaching that are often discussed are Focus on Form and Focus on Forms. The former refers to an approach to teaching grammar whenever errors occur during a meaning-focused activity, whereas the latter refers to teaching grammar in isolation. Long (1991)

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specified that Focus on Form "overtly draws students' attention to language elements as they

arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-

46). To clarify the point, Long and Robinson (1998) pointed out that "focus on form often

consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and/or one or

more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23).

Focus on forms, as Ellis (2008) indicated, refers to the type of instruction that seeks to isolate

linguistics forms in order to teach them one at a time as when language teaching is based on a

structural syllabus. In addition, Doughty and Williams (1998) noted "(T)o be clear, it should be

borne in mind that the traditional notion of *form*S always entails isolation or extraction of

linguistic features from context or from communicative activity" (p.3).

Besides teaching methodologies and approaches, teacher education in grammar teaching

also seems to play an important role in preparing teachers to teach grammar effectively and

confidently. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) reasoned that teachers will better be

prepared to meet students' learning needs when they have a firm grounding in the grammar of

the language they teach. Therefore, it is likely that in order to teach well teachers first need to

master the grammar of the language themselves. These two authors also indicated that teachers

can teach grammar explicitly by giving students rules and exercises with the right grammar

terminology or they can do it implicitly. Moreover, as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman

pointed out, grammar can be looked at from three dimensions: form, meaning, and use; therefore,

students need to learn how to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and

appropriately. Clearly, grammar may be taught in various ways such as explicitly (rules are

clearly stated and pointed out to the students), implicitly (rules are not pointed out but they are

expected to be understood implicitly through various forms of exposure), deductively (telling the

rules to the students first), inductively (students examining many examples to find out patterns), separately (grammar points or structures are taught in isolation), or integratedly (grammar is taught together with other learning activities). There seems to be no single optimal approach to grammar teaching that could apply in all contexts to all kinds of learners and teachers (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002).

Research on Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching Grammar

Due to its prominence in language learning and teaching, teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching have been the subject of study for many researchers. Borg (2003) classified research on language teacher cognition in grammar teaching into three groups: research on teacher's declarative knowledge about grammar, research on teachers' stated beliefs about teaching grammar, and research on teachers' cognition as indicated in their grammar teaching practices. Borg (2006) described each type of research in greater detail. Studies that examined teachers' declarative knowledge about grammar, as Borg noted, indicate that prospective language teachers' knowledge of grammar and grammatical terms and concepts is generally inadequate, so there may be a need to provide teachers in teacher education programs with more training on declarative knowledge about language. Reviewing research studies investigating stated beliefs about teaching grammar, Borg was able to come to three conclusions. First, teachers were generally found to value and promote grammar in their work. Second, while talking about their beliefs about grammar teaching, teachers usually refer to the influence of their views of their previous language learning experiences. Third, it was found that there is generally a wide discrepancy in aspects of grammar teaching between teachers' and students' views. Borg finally examined studies that looked at teachers' practices in grammar teaching and concluded that teachers' knowledge can have an apparent impact on how they teach grammar and teachers'

understanding of their students and of the classroom can also have an influence on what they do. He further added that teachers' beliefs and practices are not always congruent.

Some studies specifically investigated teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching such as Andrews (2003), Berry (1997), Burgess and Etherington (2002), Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997), and Schulz (1996, 2001). Andrews (2003) surveyed and tested one hundred seventy secondary school teachers of English in Hong Kong and interviewed seventeen of them. The results of the survey and the test showed that those teachers who were most in favor of teaching grammar inductively had a relatively high level of explicit knowledge of grammar, whereas those who had a relatively low level of explicit knowledge of grammar were the strongest supporters of a deductive approach to grammar teaching. The interview data indicated that thirteen out of seventeen teachers interviewed reported that their students had strong negative reactions to grammar. Nine teachers said that they were not enthusiastic about grammar teaching and more than a quarter of the teachers were not confident in their ability to handle grammar sufficiently. Overall, it was found that there was a disagreement among the teachers about the usefulness of explicit grammar knowledge for learners of a second language.

Berry (1997) investigated teachers' awareness of learners' knowledge of metalinguistic terminology. 372 undergraduate students in Hong Kong were invited to complete a questionnaire containing fifty items of grammar terminology and their ten teachers of English were also asked to complete the same questionnaire. In addition the teachers were also asked if they thought their students knew the terms and if they would like to use such terms in class. Berry found that there were wide discrepancies between learners' knowledge of metalinguistic terminology and their teachers' estimation. Moreover, it was also found that there were tremendous differences among the teachers surveyed in terms of their estimation as well as desire to use the terms in class.

Burgess and Etherington (2002) administered a questionnaire to 48 EAP teachers in British universities to explore their widely held beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching. The results they obtained showed that most teachers in their sample appreciate the value of grammar for their students and they also indicated that they possess a sophisticated understanding of the problems and issues involved. As these two researchers noted, the results they found can serve as evidence to support a favorable attitude to Focus on Form approaches among the sample surveyed.

Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) surveyed and interviewed 60 college ESL teachers (30 from New York and 30 from Puerto Rico) to compare what researchers say and what the practitioners surveyed indicate about conscious grammar instruction in the ESL classroom. They generally concluded that the perspectives the teachers surveyed regarding conscious grammar teaching reflected the ideas and findings found in the literature and supported by methodologists and curriculum developers.

Schulz (1996) conducted an explanatory study to compare student and teacher attitudes toward the role of explicit grammar study and error correction in foreign language learning. Questionnaires were administered to 824 foreign language students and 92 instructors at the University of Arizona. The students were found to have more favorable attitudes toward formal study of grammar than the teachers. More students than teachers agreed that students can improve their communicative ability more quickly if they study and practice grammar. Schulz also found that the majority of students and teachers think that studying grammar helps in language learning. Most teachers believed that it is broadly more important to practice a foreign language in situations simulating real-life than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns. On

the whole, Schulz concluded that there were large differences between students and teachers in terms of perceptions of the role of grammar and error correction in foreign language learning.

In another study, Schulz (2001) surveyed 607 Colombian foreign language students and 122 teachers to elicit their perceptions of the role of grammar and error correction in foreign language learning. The data collected were then compared with those of Schulz (1996). Schulz was able to find that there was relatively high agreement between students as a group and teachers as a group across cultures on the majority of the questions. The results also indicated that there were evident discrepancies between student and teacher beliefs within each culture and across cultures. Schulz went on to suggest that teachers should explore their students' perceptions so that the potential conflicts between student beliefs and instructional practices could be alleviated.

Using a questionnaire to investigate 176 English language teachers from 18 countries, Borg and Burns (2008) found that teachers showed strong beliefs in the need to avoid teaching grammar in isolation. The teachers also reported high levels of integrating grammar in their practices. To examine teachers' use of grammatical terminology in the Maltese English as a foreign language classroom, Borg (1999) interviewed 4 teachers before the class, observed their grammar classes, and interviewed them again after the classes. He found that teachers' decisions about the use of grammatical terminology in their work are influenced by an interacting range of experiential, cognitive, and contextual factors.

As indicated in the literature review above, extensive research has been done to examine teacher beliefs, and particularly teacher beliefs in teaching grammar. Discrepancies in beliefs about grammar teaching have been found between students and teachers, and even between

teachers and teachers within and across cultures. Although some studies on teacher beliefs in grammar teaching have been done the United States such as Schulz (1996, 2001), and Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997), it seems that only a small number of college or university teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in New York have been investigated. In comparison with the number of ESL teachers in the USA, much more research is needed to explore ESL teacher beliefs in teaching grammar so that a better insight into teacher thinking and perceptions may be obtained. In addition, ESL teacher beliefs in grammar teaching can also be compared to those of EFL teachers.

Statement of the Purpose

In an attempt to explore teacher beliefs in teaching grammar in the ESL context of the USA, this research study aims to survey current ESL teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching in general. Hopefully, the data collected may help to shed some light on teachers' perceptions about grammar teaching, and such perceptions may be used to compare with the current approaches to teaching grammar in the literature of second language acquisition. Particularly, this study will look at teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar in language learning, the optimal way to teach grammar, the way to deal with grammar mistakes, the influence of students' first language, the use of metalanguage, the role of practice, and teacher preparation for grammar teaching.

Research Questions

The research questions below will guide this research study.

1. What do ESL teachers consider to be the role of grammar in the classroom?
2. What do ESL teachers believe is the best way to teach grammar, inductively or deductively and implicitly or explicitly?

3. What do ESL teachers do when students make grammatical mistakes?

4. What do ESL teachers think about the role of L1 influence on L2 grammar?

5. What do ESL teachers think about the use of metalanguage in the language classroom?

6. What do ESL teachers think the role of practice in grammar teaching is?

7. Do ESL teachers think that they have been well prepared to teach grammar in the ESL classroom?

Methodology

This study applies survey research in that the data were obtained by administering a questionnaire to the participants. However, since the data collected from the questionnaire is both qualitative and quantitative data, this research study can be seen as a mixed research design. Particularly, although most items on the questionnaire are quantifiable, one final question is open-ended and it allows the participants to describe what they do. Therefore, the final item on the questionnaire is most related to qualitative data in nature.

Participants

The participants in this study are eleven ESL teachers at an English language school in San Diego, California, the United States of America. The school is one of the established English language education institutions that has been well- recognized in the world and has attracted a large number of regular students from many parts of the world to come and study English in the US. The students at the school are taught all language skills and grammar is included in the curriculum as a component. In terms of gender, five of the participants are females and six are males. Their age range is from 26 to 69, with a mean age of 39.3. The mode (most frequent age) is 26 and the median age is 40. The range of the participants' length of ESL teaching experience

is from 1 to 16 years, with a mean length of 6.7 years. The mode of length of ESL teaching

experience is 11 years and the median is 6 years. Moreover, seven of the participants hold a B.A.

degree; two hold a B.S. and two hold an M.A. degree. The background information of the

participants can be summarized as followed.

Table 1. The background information of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Years of ESL teaching experience	Degree held
Participant #1	41	Male	11	BA
Participant #2	40	Male	6	MA
Participant #3	46	Female	16	BA
Participant #4	30	Male	6	MA
Participant #5	69	Male	11	BS
Participant #6	42	Female	1	BA
Participant #7	45	Male	2.5	BS
Participant #8	26	Female	3	BA
Participant #9	36	Male	2	BA
Participant #10	32	Female	11	BA
Participant #11	26	Female	5	BA

Instrumentation

The instrument used to elicit data for this research study is a questionnaire (see

Appendix) designed by the researcher based on the questionnaire developed by Schulz (2001).

The questionnaire consists of two sections, one collecting biographical data and another

collecting the main data to answer the research questions. The section for demographic data asks

the participants to provide their gender, age, length of ESL teaching experience, and the degrees

they possess. The main questionnaire section is made up of 31 items that require the participants

to respond with their level of agreement. The items are on a four-point Likert-scale (4=strongly

agree, 3=agree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree). The final item is an open-ended question that asks the respondents to specify their special ways to correct students' grammar mistakes.

Procedures

The procedures involved in conducting this study are as follows. First, the questionnaire was designed by the researcher based on the one used by Schulz (2001). Second, the questionnaire was initially read by a native English speaking American student who is currently doing his masters degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at a university in California. Third, the questionnaire was once more reviewed by a professor with a PhD in Applied Linguistics who is now working at a university in San Diego, California. Therefore, the questionnaire has consistently been seen as having face and content validity.

The researcher met with the director of the language school where the participants work and handed her the questionnaire for her review and approval. The director then gave permission to the researcher to survey her teachers. However, as each teacher has a different teaching time and day, the researcher asked the director to help to distribute the questionnaire to the teachers and she agreed with the conditions that one cover letter (see Appendix) must be attached to the questionnaire stating the clear purpose of the survey and that she would not be certain of the response rates of the questionnaire because she will not force any teacher to complete it. The director also provided some information about the school policy and curriculum. Basically, grammar is taught in the school and all teachers can be assigned to teach grammar. The text book used for grammar lessons is a series of SPIN! Grammar, Vocabulary, and Writing by Pinkley and Kocienda (2003). Twenty questionnaires were distributed but only eleven of them were returned, with a response rate of 55%.

Data analysis

First, responses from the questionnaires will be grouped according to the item groups that attempt to answer the research questions. Particularly, for example, research question 1 (RQ1) were answered based on the responses to items numbered 1, 2, 26, and 27 and RQ2 were answered by items numbered 3, 12, 8, 10, 5, 17, 14, 29, 31, and 24. If the mean scores of an item are over 2.50, it is inferred that the participants generally agree with the item. On the other hand, if the mean scores are below 2.50, it is concluded that the teachers generally disagree with the item. Additionally, teachers' responses to item numbered 32 were coded and described to find out what other special ways the participants use to correct the grammar mistakes that their students make while talking.

Results

In this section, the results of the study are presented according to the research questions. A brief summary of the result of each research question is first described. Next, a table showing the questionnaire items and the mean scores is provided.

RQ1: What Do ESL Teachers Consider to Be the Role of Grammar in the Classroom?

Broadly speaking, the teachers in the sample agree that the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language when language learning is limited to the classroom. Besides, they also believe that it is more important to practice a second language in situations simulating real life than to analyze and practice grammar patterns. In other words, they tend to prefer grammar in real-life communication to analyzing grammar points and structures. Moreover, they also generally believe that students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the target language. On the whole, the

ESL teachers in the sample believe that grammar learning helps in the process of foreign or second language learning (see Table 2).

Table 2. The role of grammar in the classroom

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
1	The formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a FL/L2 when language learning is limited to the classroom.	3.36
2	Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.	2.82
27	It is more important to practice a L2 in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.	3.18
26	The study of grammar helps in learning a FL/L2.	3.18

RQ 2: What Do ESL Teachers Believe Is the Best Way to Teach Grammar, Inductively or Deductively and Implicitly or Explicitly?

The results show that the teachers broadly favor teaching grammar explicitly by clearly stating and pointing out the rules to the students (see Table 3). It was found that the teachers do seem to believe in teaching grammar implicitly. In addition, they also generally believe that grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the grammar points. Nonetheless, they do not believe that grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the teachers' and students' preference. They also do not believe that the difficulty of the target grammar points affect the way they should be taught. Interestingly, the participants basically disagree with the statement that grammar should only be taught or mentioned when a particular grammar point appears in the material or communication (in context).

Table 3. The best way to teach grammar

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
3	Grammar is best taught explicitly. That is, rules should be clearly stated and pointed out to the students.	2.73
12	Grammar should best be taught either explicitly or implicitly depending on the confidence of the teacher in explaining about the grammar points.	2.27
8	Grammar is best taught inductively (students examining many examples to find out patterns).	3.0
10	Grammar is best taught deductively (telling the rules to the students first).	2.36
5	Grammar is best taught implicitly. That is, grammar rules should not be pointed out but they should be understood implicitly through various forms of exposure.	2.0
17	Grammar should best be taught either explicitly or implicitly depending on the difficulty of the grammar points.	2.27
14	Grammar should only be taught or mentioned when a particular grammar point appears in the material or communication (in context).	1.90
29	Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the grammar points.	2.73
31	Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the teachers' preference.	2.45
24	Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the students' preference.	2.18

RQ 3: What Do ESL Teachers Do When Students Make Grammatical Mistakes?

In general, the participants are likely to take error correction very seriously. That is, they do not believe that errors should only be corrected when they interfere with comprehensibility. It may be inferred that the participants believe that teachers should correct grammatical mistakes in class even when such mistakes do not affect the comprehensibility of their utterance. In the same vein, it was found that the teachers surveyed do not ignore grammar mistakes for the sake of students' confidence and fluency. Most importantly, they, in some sense, do not tend to strongly believe in using recasts in error correction. Put it another way, the participants do not stop their students, when they make mistakes while talking, to repeat what they have just said in a

corrected version to indirectly raise their awareness about the mistakes. Furthermore, the

teachers in the sample generally disagree with the statement that they will correct students'

grammar mistakes immediately when they occur (see Table 4).

Table 4. Approaches to correcting grammar mistakes

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
20	Teachers should not correct students' grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility.	2.09
7	When my students make grammar mistakes when talking, I will ignore them so that they can be more confident and more fluent.	2.36
11	When my students make grammar mistakes while talking, I will stop them to repeat what they have just said in a corrected version to indirectly raise their awareness about the mistakes.	2.45
19	When my students make grammar mistakes when talking, I will immediately correct them so that they can be more accurate and easier to understand.	1.90
32	If you have any special way to correct your students' grammar mistakes, please specify: When my students make grammar mistakes while talking, I will………....................................……………………	

The open-ended item numbered 32 was answered by eight of the 11 ESL teachers who

participated in the study. Four of those who provided their own specific ways to correct students'

grammar mistakes while talking indicated that they wait until their students have finished talking

and then correct them. For example, they wrote.

Participant 11: I will wait until they are finished speaking, and then correct them. I will not correct a student on the spot and midsentence. I'll only correct the student if they make a grammar mistake that we have already discussed.

Participant 9: I will let them finish their thought and then correct. If there are many mistakes, I take it to the board.

Participant 8: I will point out the error after they are finished talking.

Participant 7: I will wait and make correction at the end with similar examples if my objective is to get the students to speak in communicative form. If it is a drill exercise, I will make an immediate correction for all level students.

These results confirm the quantitative results presented in Table 4. In addition, other participants reported using some other ways to deal with grammar mistakes students make while talking.

Participant 6: I will ask them to repeat their sentence to give them a chance for self-correction.

Participant 3: I will write the sentence containing the mistakes, circle the mistakes and try to have them figure it out on their own first.

Participant 2: I will sometimes use gentle correction being careful not to stop their trains of thought.

Particularly, one of the participants refused to provide any specific way to deal with error correction. Instead, she wrote that it depends on the focus of her lessons.

Participant 10: It depends on the focus. Am I correcting grammar learned? Am I correcting fossilized errors? Is the focus fluency?

Concerning error correction, generally, it was found that almost all teachers avoid correcting students immediately when the mistakes occur although each teacher differs greatly in their own individual methods to provide correction. Moreover, the teachers in the sample did not directly state that they focus on fluency, but the majority of the responses to item 32 on the questionnaire show that they tend to value fluency and content of the students' utterance by letting students finish expressing their thoughts and ideas.

RQ 4: What Do ESL Teachers Think about the Role of L1 Influence on L2 Grammar?

The results basically show that ESL teachers surveyed tend to believe that students' first languages have a significant influence on their ability to learn English grammar (see Table 5). They also seem to believe in negative transfer. That is, students learning English make mistakes

because of their first language influence. However, the participants do not seem to believe in positive transfer. They do not think that learners' first languages may facilitate ESL students' grammar learning.

Table 5. The role of L1 influence on L2 grammar

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
15	Students' native languages significantly influence their ability to learn English grammar.	2.73
13	Many ESL students make grammar mistakes because of their native language influence.	3.36
25	Many ESL students learn grammar well because their native language grammar is similar to that of English.	2.18

RQ 5: What Do ESL Teachers Think about the Use of Metalanguage in the Language Classroom?

Another issue being investigated in the present study is ESL teachers' perceptions about the use of metalanguage in grammar classes. Contrary to popular beliefs, the teachers in this study disagree with the statement: Metalanguage should only be used with advanced English language learners. In other words, the participants do not think that metalanguage should only be used with advanced learners of English (see Table 6). The teachers, in general, however, believe that it is necessary to use metalanguage in grammar teaching. Moreover, they also think that metalanguage should be introduced and used in grammar classes for learners of all proficiency levels so that grammar lessons can be taught and learned more quickly.

Table 6. The use of metalanguange in the classroom

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
16	Metalanguage (terms used to describe language such as pronouns, prepositions, or relative clauses) should only be used with advanced English language learners.	2.0
30	Metalanguage should be introduced and used in grammar class for learners of all proficiency levels so that grammar lessons can be taught and learned more quickly.	3.09
18	It is necessary to use metalanguage (technical or grammatical terms such as nouns, verbs, preposition, relative clauses, subjunctive, and objects…etc) when teaching students grammar.	3.0

RQ 6: What Do ESL Teachers Think the Role of Practice in Grammar Teaching Is?

Although practice can often be considered very necessary in language learning, it is important to find out what ESL in-service teachers think about the role of practice in grammar teaching. The results from the survey indicate that the participants seem to consider that practice is of crucial importance for students to master grammar points (see Table 7). Additionally, they are also likely to believe that grammar should be practiced both in oral and written form. Generally, practice is likely to be deemed as one of the essential factors to master grammar.

Table 7. The role of practice in grammar teaching

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
4	Grammar should be mainly practiced in oral communication.	2.0
21	Grammar should be practiced both in oral and written form.	3.72
28	Practice is of crucial importance for the students to master grammar points.	3.64
6	Grammar should be mainly practiced in written forms.	1.73

RQ 7: Do ESL Teachers Think That They Have Been Well Prepared to Teach Grammar in the ESL Classroom?

The results show that the teachers believe that their previous training greatly improved their confidence and skills in grammar teaching (see Table 8). In addition, they think that they have been well prepared to teach grammar. Finally, the participants reported enjoying teaching grammar. Although the participants reported having been well prepared to teach grammar, the mean scores do not appear to be very high, just slightly above 2.50.

Table 8. Teacher preparation in grammar teaching

Item number	Questions	Mean scores
9	The previous training you received greatly improved your confidence and skills in teaching grammar.	2.90
22	As an ESL teacher, I have been well prepared to teach grammar.	2.82
23	I enjoy teaching grammar.	2.73

Discussion

Concerning the role of grammar in the classroom, Borg (2006) highlighted that teachers generally reported that they valued and promoted grammar in their work. In addition, Burgess and Etherington (2002) also found that the majority of the teachers they examined indicated that they believed that grammar could be viewed as a framework for the rest of the language. In general, previous research seems to show that grammar is generally regarded as an important element in language learning. Moreover, Schulz (2001) found that over 58% of the teachers investigated in Colombia and the US agreed with the statement that the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign language. Also, more than 73% of the teachers in Schulz's study agree that studying grammar helps in learning a foreign or second language.

Similarly, Schulz (1996) found that 74% of the teachers surveyed agreed with the statement (studying grammar helps in learning a foreign or second language). Schulz (2001) also found that more than 80% of the teachers believe that it is more important to practice a second language in situations simulating real-life than to study and practice grammatical patterns.

Like the results from past research, this study found that ESL teachers in the sample believe that formal study of grammar is of crucial importance to language learning. That is, the results of the present study further confirm those of previous studies in terms of the overall role of grammar in the language classroom. The respondents also tend to believe that studying and practicing grammar in the classroom help improve students' communicative ability most quickly. It can be inferred that the teachers see grammar learning as an important component to help their students achieve communicative ability. Clearly, their goal of helping their learners to attain a good ability to communicate does involve the formal study of grammar in the classroom.

This seems to contradict what is often referred to as the zero position on grammar teaching as advocated by some researchers such as Dulay and Burt (1973) and Krashen (1982). Although it has been argued that grammar should not be taught in the language classroom, the teachers in this sample believe that it is necessary and essential to teach grammar in the classroom as learning grammar formally can facilitate foreign or second language learning. In this study, Schulz's (2001) findings are confirmed in that the teachers in this study think that studying grammar formally is essential to eventual mastery of a second language, and the study of grammar is believed to help in second language learning. Besides, the teachers in the present study, like most of those in Schulz's, agree that it is more important to practice a second language in situations simulating real life than to analyze and practice grammar patterns. Therefore, on the whole, the findings concerning the role of grammar in the classroom in this

research study are generally congruent with those of other studies such as Burgess and Etherington (2002), and Schulz (1996, 2001)

The issues of how grammar should be taught have long been discussed in the literature. Borg (1999a) showed that consensus about how grammar is best taught has not been achieved. However, by and large, as Ellis (2008) observed, explicit instruction has been found to be more effective than implicit instruction. He also pointed out that a tentative and general conclusion, in terms of inductive and deductive instruction, might be that deductive form-focused instruction is more effective than inductive form-focused instruction, but it is possible that this may partially depends on the learners' preferred learning styles (Eisenstein, 1980, cited in Ellis, 2008). Burgess and Etherington (2002) found that over 90% of the teachers in their study agree that their students expect them to present grammar points explicitly. However, they also ascertained that less than 50% of the teachers agree that explicit discussion of grammar rules is helpful for their students. In addition, Chia (2003) found that most teachers prefer to teach grammar rules explicitly because they believe that their students internalize the rules better compared to using an inductive approach. Similarly, in the present study, the teachers generally agree that grammar is best taught explicitly. Such a belief seems, in terms of explicit instruction, to be in agreement with general research results reviewed by Ellis (2008). Nonetheless, interestingly, the teachers in the present study also show that they think grammar is also best taught inductively, which is contrary to the tentative and general conclusion made by Ellis (2008). In other words, although research has shown that deductive instruction seems more effective than inductive instruction, the ESL teachers in this sample are likely to believe that grammar is best taught inductively. Moreover, the results in the present study indicate that the teachers basically think that grammar can also be best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the grammar points. This

finding seems to show the teachers' flexibility in terms of the approaches they employ to teach grammar. They do not seem to be extremely loyal to one of the two approaches but seem to use either an inductive or a deductive approach to grammar teaching depending on individual grammar points. Such a belief may easily be tenable as there seems to be no universal optimal way to teach language in general and grammar in particular. Therefore, an eclectic approach may be more feasible and effective for various kinds of learners' learning preferences, styles, proficiency levels, and ages. The flexible use of teaching approaches can also help teachers deal with different grammar points more effectively and quickly in the language classroom, where time for formal instruction is limited. The teachers in this study appear to believe in the effectiveness of explicit, inductive or deductive but not implicit approaches to grammar teaching. Possibly, it can be inferred that they may think that it may be too hard for their students to learn grammar implicitly. Such an interpretation, however, is highly speculative due to lack of further verification from the teachers.

Errors in language learning seem to occur very frequently and they are almost unavoidable when learners have not fully mastered the language. The core issue of discussion in the literature of second language acquisition is whether errors should be corrected at all and how they should be corrected. Seedhouse (1997) found that teachers seem to avoid direct, overt, and negative evaluation of learners' linguistic errors. Burgess and Etherington (2002) also found that the teachers in their sample tended to disagree with the statement that teachers should only correct errors of form which interfere with communication. In this study, the teachers also seem to disagree with the statement that teachers should not correct students' grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with comprehensibility. On the other hand, they do not think that grammatical mistakes should be ignored so that students can be more confident and fluent.

As indicated in the results, eight of the 11 teachers in the study provided their own ways of correcting errors. Overall, they all tend to wait until the learners have completed talking, and then correct the students' mistakes. It could be inferred that the teachers are likely to value fluency and content in their students' talks, but they also do not ignore grammar mistakes. Individual teachers tend to use a distinct way to correct errors. While participant number 11 only corrects grammar mistakes that have been discussed in class, participant number 6 asks her students to repeat the sentence so that they may have a chance to correct themselves. Also, it seems that error correction may not be an easy issue to investigate as participant number 10 stated that error correction must depend on the focus of her lesson. However, as participant number 7 pointed out, he will make an immediate correction for all students if it is a drill exercise.

It seems undeniable that there must be certain types of transfer between learners' first language and second language; however, it seems that research has been inconclusive. It is, therefore, interesting to know what practitioners think about the issue as they are those who are in the classroom with learners. Ellis (2008) stated that the focal claim of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was that differences between the target language and the first language resulted in learning difficulty and similarities in learning ease. Nevertheless, as Ellis commented, such a claim has not been proven by research. The results in this study seem to show that the teachers generally believe that students' first languages significantly influence their ability to learn English grammar. Furthermore, they tend to believe in negative transfer but not positive transfer. That is, they seem to believe that many of the mistakes ESL students make are because of learner native language influence, whereas they are likely to disagree with the statement that "Many ESL students learn grammar well because their native language grammar is similar to that of

English." It could be said that the data seem to show that the teachers tend to agree with the first part of the claim of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

Ellis (2008) stated that when teachers choose to use metalanguage, they are treating language as an object rather than utilizing it as a tool for communication. Borg (1999) presented three positions in discussing the role of grammatical terminology in second language classroom: (1) arguments against terminology advanced by researchers such as Krashen and Terrell (1983), Halliwell (1993), Bialystok (1981) and others, (2) arguments in favor of terminology supported by some researchers such as Hutchison (1987), Faerch (1985), and Berman (1979), and (3) argument that says the use of terminology depends on learner variables supported by some other researchers such as Larsen-Freeman (1991), Jeffries (1985), Swan (1994), Chalker (1984), and Stern (1992). However, Burgess and Etherington (2002) stated that the use of grammar terminology in the classroom may be understood as a necessary part of an explicit approach to grammar teaching, and they also indicated that terminology is needed for teachers and students to talk about grammar. In their study, Burgess and Etherington found that more than half of the teachers indicated that they believe that their students consider grammar terminology as useful. In addition, Borg (1998) found that the teacher in his study had positive feelings about the role of grammatical metalanguage in language learning. The findings of the present study seem to suggest that the teachers generally think that metalanguage is necessary in grammar teaching, and it ought to be introduced and used in grammar class for learners of all proficiency levels. It may be said that the teachers tend to be in favor of the use of terminology in ESL grammar classes. Indeed, the results could be considered as practitioners' position on the use of grammatical terminology, and such a use may save both them and their learners a decent amount of precious time in the classroom. Using metalanguage with beginners can be contentious.

Nevertheless, probably if they are introduced to metalanguage since the initial stage of language learning, it may be more beneficial for both teachers and learners in later stages of the learning process in grammar learning in particular.

Practice has often been seen as an essential factor for success in language learning. Burgess and Etherington (2002) found that 75% of the teachers in their study believe that frequent practice of structures can help learners improve their grammatical accuracy. The results of the present study show that the teachers generally agree that practice is of crucial importance to master grammar points, and they also seem to believe that grammar ought to be practiced both in oral and written form. The findings are likely to suggest that these ESL teachers do believe that practice plays an important role in grammar learning and teaching. In addition, they also seem to think that practice in grammar should be proportionately allocated between oral and written mode. This seems to be congruent with the response to item number 27 on the questionnaire, where the teachers generally agree that practice should be similar to real life situations. Apparently, if learners want to use a certain grammar structure in both oral and written form, they should be provided with situations simulating real life. In reality, grammar is utilized in both spoken and written form, so the teachers' beliefs are relatively reasonable.

Another noteworthy issue in grammar teaching is teacher preparation. Research studies of teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching done in the US by researchers such as Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997), and Schulz (1996, 2001) have not examined teacher preparation. In this research study, the teachers generally believe that their previous training tremendously improved their skills and confidence in grammar teaching. Moreover, they reported that they have been well-prepared to teach grammar. Importantly, the teachers generally enjoy teaching grammar. The results seem to suggest that past training programs the teachers in the sample had must have

been good and helpful. It may be safe to assume that such programs have at least made the teachers feel confident in teaching grammar. It could be inferred that if teachers enjoy the teaching of grammar, they might feel comfortable and enthusiastic about grammar teaching. As a result, such enthusiasm and comfort may be contagious, and ESL learners may also be enthusiastic and comfortable to learn grammar so that their English may not only be fluent but also accurate.

Limitations of the Current Study

Like any other studies in the field, this study is far from perfect. One of the notable limitations of this study is the small sample size, only 11 participants. Therefore, no attempt has been made to generalize the results. In addition, like most survey research, this study cannot further clarify the responses provided by the participants. Particularly, it would have been more insightful to have an interview with each of the participants to examine the ways they provide corrective feedback in greater depth. Additionally, other statements on the questionnaire can also be further investigated by asking teachers to provide reasons for their responses.

Despite these limitations, it is felt that this work may represent a step toward a better understanding of ESL teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching in the US. Although the sample is relatively small, it does represent an authentic English language school in the US, and the results may shed some light on teachers' beliefs in the role of grammar in the classroom, their perceptions of the best approach to teach grammar, their opinions about how errors should be corrected, their perceptions of the influence of learners' first languages on ESL learning, the use of metalanguage, the role of practice in grammar teaching, and their feelings about their previous training.

Suggestions for Further Research

Using questionnaires to investigate teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching has been quite

effective, but it fails to explore the intricate aspects of teachers' beliefs. Therefore, it is suggested

that future studies on teachers' beliefs should first use a larger sample size so that generalization

may be possible. Additionally, to have more insightful and complete data, classroom

observations and interviews with individual teachers should be used to supplement the data

collected from the questionnaires. Moreover, this study has specifically looked at in-service ESL

teachers. Future research may also examine pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs. It may also be

interesting to investigate the perceptions of teacher trainers and directors of teacher training

programs.

Pedagogical Implications

This study may give ESL teachers in the US a chance to reflect on their beliefs in grammar

teaching. Teachers sometimes need to see how powerful their beliefs are, so they may understand

the rationale behind what they actually do in the classroom. As teachers always have reasons for

what they do in their teaching activities, it seems that their beliefs do play an essential role in

forming their actions and behaviors in the language classroom. The results of the present study

may hopefully provide some food for thought for researchers and ESL teachers who are

interested in this topic. Furthermore, researchers interested in this topic may find it interesting

and important to work more closely with ESL classroom teachers to uncover their belief systems

in grammar teaching so that better insight might be obtained to inform teacher trainers.

Hopefully, the issue of ESL teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching will receive more due

attention in the research agenda of the field of second language acquisition, in teacher training

curriculum and classroom practices. Probably, what teachers believe may even be more influential than the training they receive, and such beliefs may have a great impact on what learners believe in grammar learning in particular and language learning in general. Thus, teachers' beliefs may appear to be pervasive in all aspects of language learning and teaching. The results of the present study may also be useful for teacher trainers who need to be aware of ESL teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching, so they can help teachers teach grammar more effectively by thoroughly addressing the issues during their training programs. Second language acquisition and educational researchers may ill afford to ignore the study of teachers' beliefs in language teaching and learning, especially in grammar teaching.

Conclusion

The study reported has attempted to explore some ESL teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching in the US. The results have painted a tiny picture of the beliefs these ESL practitioners have in grammar teaching. Even though the results of the study may not be generalizable, they may help to show what some American ESL teachers think about the teaching of English grammar and related issues. It is hoped that this study may serve as a catalyst in arousing teachers' and researchers' interests in studying teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching in a larger scale. As the US is a country where there are a large numbers of ESL learners and teachers, the number of studies investigating American ESL teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching can be considered relatively small. Therefore, more research on teachers' beliefs in grammar teaching is sorely needed.

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Appendix

Dear Teachers,

My name is Thu Tran. I am currently a doctoral student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at Alliant International University. I am doing a research study investigating English as a second language (ESL) teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching. I would like to invite you to take part in my study as participants by completing a short survey questionnaire (two pages). I will leave this invitation and survey questionnaire with your Academic Director. Please save some time to complete and return it to her as soon as you can. You will not be asked to disclose your identity and your work place will not be stated in the report. The information you provide will be of great importance to shed more light on ESL grammar teaching. I highly appreciate your cooperation.

You are welcome to contact the researcher at any time if you wish to know more about the study. My personal details will be provided below.

Thu Tran

Alliant International University

Phone: 858 635 4328

Email: ttran@alliant.edu

Please turn the page and complete the questionnaire.

Survey questionnaire on ESL teachers' beliefs in teaching grammar

(partially adapted from Schulz, 2001)

Dear participants,

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. You will not be asked to provide your name so your identity will be completely anonymous to the researcher.

Please provide some of your biographical information

☺Gender : M…. F….. ☺Age:……… ☺Length of ESL teaching experience:……years

☺ Degree held: AA   BA   BS   MA   MS   EdD   PhD

<u>**Directions**</u>: **Please read the questionnaire items carefully and circle the answer you agree**.

4= strongly agree
3= agree
2= disagree
1= strongly disagree

1. The formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when l
2. Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the
3. Grammar is best taught explicitly. That is, rules should be clearly stated and pointed out to the students.
4. Grammar should be mainly practiced in oral communication.
5. Grammar is best taught implicitly. That is, grammar rules should not be pointed out but they should be u exposure.
6. Grammar should be mainly practiced in written forms.
7. When my students make grammar mistakes when talking, I will ignore them so that they can be more co
8. Grammar is best taught inductively (students examining many examples to find out patterns).
9. The previous training you received greatly improved your confidence and skills in teaching grammar.
10. Grammar is best taught deductively (telling the rules to the students first).
11. When my students make grammar mistakes while talking, I will stop them to repeat what they have just s their awareness about the mistakes.
12. Grammar should best be taught either explicitly or implicitly depending on the confidence of the teacher
13. Many ESL students make grammar mistakes because of their native language influence.
14. Grammar should only be taught or mentioned when a particular grammar point appears in the material or
4= strongly agree **3= agree** **2= disagree** **1= strongly disagree**
15. Students' native languages significantly influence their ability to learn English grammar.
16. Metalanguage (terms used to describe language such as pronouns, prepositions or relative clauses) shoul language learners.
17. Grammar should best be taught either explicitly or implicitly depending on the difficulty of the grammar

18. It is necessary to use metalanguage (technical or grammatical terms such as nouns, verbs, preposition, rel when teaching students grammar.
19. When my students make grammar mistakes when talking, I will immediately correct them so that they ca
20. Teachers should not correct students' grammatical errors in class unless these errors interfere with compr
21. Grammar should be practiced both in oral and written form.
22. As an ESL teacher, I have been well prepared to teach grammar.
23. I enjoy teaching grammar.
24. Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the students' preference.
25. Many ESL students learn grammar well because their native language grammar is similar to that of Engli
26. The study of grammar helps in learning a foreign or second language.
27. It is more important to practice a second language in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role pl grammatical patterns.
28. Practice is of crucial importance for the students to master grammar points.
29. Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the grammar points.
30. Metalanguage should be used to introduce and used in grammar class for learners of all proficiency level learned more quickly.
31. Grammar is best taught either inductively or deductively depending on the teachers' preference.
32. If you have any special way to correct your students' grammar mistakes, please specify: When my studer will………..

Thank you for your cooperation!