

Language Teachers' Beliefs About Teaching the Present Perfect Tense

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Abstract

The growing body of teachers' cognition research suggests that language teachers' decisions about grammar teaching are influenced by what they know, think, and believe. While previous research highlights that learning the present perfect tense is challenging for foreign language learners, little research discussed teachers' beliefs about how these challenges are addressed in language classrooms. To bridge this gap and contribute more broadly to teacher cognition research, this study sought to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching the simple present perfect tense to foundation year students at an English language center at a University in Saudi Arabia. The basic qualitative research design was adopted, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 teachers of English as a foreign language. The findings suggest that teachers had positive views about the value of teaching present perfect tense which were rooted in their apprentice of observation, pedagogical content knowledge and the textbooks. They viewed grammar as an integral component of language learning and perceived teaching grammar implicitly as an ideal approach to enhance language proficiency. However, their reported practices reflected conflicting explicit grammar teaching approach. The reported challenges to implicit grammar teaching were the learners' proficiency levels, lack of an equivalent grammatical structure in learners' native language, contrastive analysis, and translation. It was suggested that teachers' decisions about teaching the present perfect tense were driven by focus-on-form rather than focus on forms approach. The implications for teaching the present perfect tense are discussed and recommendations for future grammar teaching research are highlighted.

Keywords: teaching grammar, present perfect tense, second language acquisition, explicit grammar teaching, implicit grammar teaching

1. Introduction

The study of teachers' beliefs, also known as teacher cognition, is a fully-fledged domain of inquiry which pertains to the hidden or "the unobservable dimension of teachers' professional lives" (Borg, 2019, p. 1149). The growing body of research suggests that teachers' decisions and behaviors are shaped by "a complex range of unseen influences" including propositional knowledge gained in pre-service education, past learning experiences, and contextual affordances (ibid). Cross (2010) points out that there is a need to recognize "the social, practical, and contextual dimension of cognition" and understand "the teacher as a historical, sociological agent within larger (and political) contexts for practice" (p. 434). While the term 'belief' has been described as a "messy construct" (Pajares, 1992), it can be defined as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is 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" (Borg, 2001, p. 186). Discussions of language teachers' beliefs are usually prompted by questions about what dimensions of teachers' knowledge constitute legitimate knowledge-base and how these inform and/or are informed by practice. These dimensions include personal practical knowledge which is "understood to be experiential, situated, and storied, storied, embedded in daily classroom practices and constructed and reconstructed through personal narratives of life and classroom experiences" (England, 2017). To investigate the impact of teachers' beliefs on their classroom teaching practices, researchers tend to explore the relationships between knowledge, beliefs and also its alignment and/or dissonance with practice (Borg, 2006; Farrell & Lim, 2015). Research conducted on EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching suggests that there are discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices (e.g., Assalahi, 2013; Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009). The divergence between grammar teachers' beliefs and practices can be attributed to the conflict germane

to the evolution of the methodologies of teaching grammar (Doughty & Williams, 2007). It can also emerge from the issues around the complexity of teachers' knowledge-base and the influential factors that shape how it translates into practice (Borg, 2006). That is, teachers' decisions about how to teach grammar are shaped by several sources including their schooling, teacher education, and workplace affordances and constraints (Farrell & Lim, 2015). Exploring teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar in general and the present perfect tense (PPT) in particular is significant because it provides a deeper understanding of how teachers navigate their beliefs system and address concurrent challenges. As BaSaeed (2013) argue, Arab learners of English find PPT hard to learn, and research suggests that EFL teachers consider PPT a challenging linguistic feature to teach (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). To bridge this gap and contribute more broadly to research on teacher cognition in grammar teaching (Borg, 2006), the study sought to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching the simple present perfect tense to foundation year students at an English language center at a University in Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Teaching Grammar

Grammar can be generally described as a system in which a set of words are arranged to convey larger meaning (Hartwell, 1985). Theorists approach grammar differently depending on the extent to which it can be instructed or acquired, and this divergence has sparked discussions about how to teach grammar in L2 classrooms. Doughty and Williams (2007) point out that there are three approaches to grammar teaching: explicit grammar teaching, implicit grammar teaching and eclectic approach utilizing a combination of explicit and implicit grammar teaching. As they suggest, such debates constituted a 'theoretical and empirical vacuum' and have led to a more perplexed view about how to draw learners' attention to linguistic features in L2 classrooms. The advocacy of attention to grammar rules in instructed input has gained wide currency and Focus on Form has become a central aspect of language teaching (Ellis, 2006). As Doughty and Williams (2007) suggest, "when second language learning is entirely experiential and meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to target-like levels" (p. 2). This heightened interest into grammar can be seen in influential ELT theories. The Communicative Language Teaching approach, for instance, puts more emphasis on communication but considers grammatical competence as a key element of the communicative competence.

The Focus on Form notion can be attributed to Michael Long (1988, 1991) who coined this term to differentiate it from Focus-on-FormS (with an s). Focus on FormS (FonFs) refers to the traditional synthetic approaches to language teaching and curriculum design which view grammatical rules or language elements as the focus on instruction. Curriculum writers who follow Focus on FormS sequence linguistic items (phonemes, words, collocations, morphemes, sentence patterns, notions, functions, tones, stress and intonation patterns, and so on) according to their frequency or difficulty (Long, 1991). Focus on Form (FonF) can be defined as an approach to learning in which teachers draw learners' attention to a linguistic form in response to certain learning needs (ibid). This can be attained through engaging learners in activities, drills, and tasks to enhance comprehension and use of the target form in meaningful situations. It can also comprise direct explanation of the differences between L1 and L2. The rationale behind the FonF approach is to enable learners to acquire a particular form to promote their communicative language competence (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen 2002). Several differences between FonFs and FonF can be identified with regards to the nature of learning and how linguistic items are presented in textbooks. Long (1991) posits that in FonFs linguistic items are taught discretely according to the sequence presented in textbooks and learners figure out how to use them in communication. Language content is presented through behaviorist models such as the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods which emphasize repetitions of linguistic patterns until desired native-like levels of language production is attained. Thus, learners in FonFs are considered as passive agents and their needs are ignored. Teachers conduct explicit grammar teaching and learners indulge in meaningless repetitions of linguistic patterns and memorize short dialogues and error-free activities (Doughty & Williams, 2007)).

The Focus on Meaning (FonM) approach came about as a response to the behaviorist models of SLA. Unlike FonFs where the focus is on language items, FonM pays more attention to the learner and the learning processes (Long, 2000). It posits that language is acquired naturally as learners immerse in authentic language settings without much attention to linguistic items (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen 2002). Linguistic items and grammar rules are thus implicitly learnt rather than explicitly presented and consciously practiced. It assumes that the presentation of language through comprehensible communicative input leads to subconscious internalization of language patterns. However, despite its useful contributions in SLA, FonM still suffers from several problems with regards to its suitability in foreign language contexts (Doughty & Williams, 2007). Several challenges may discourage the ideals of native-like outcomes such as lack of access to communication opportunities outside the classroom and low motivation on the part of students.

In contrast, in FonF, learners' attention is directed to linguistic forms as they arise in meaningful communication

(Doughty & Williams, 2007). It is analytic in the sense that linguistic items (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on) are selected for focused intervention to enhance communication in L2 (Long, 2000). Learners' needs are also considered the driver for explicit instruction of grammatical points rather than externally imposed by a designated syllabus (Doughty & Williams, 2007).

1.3 Previous Research

The bulk of language teacher cognition research examined the contextual factors that shape teachers' beliefs or the decision-making processes in teaching grammar (Birello, 2012; Borg, 1998, 2001; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Johnson, 1992). Borg's (1998) seminal work suggests that teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching are shaped by the interaction of their "pedagogical systems, educational and professional experiences and context of instruction" (p. 9). In addition, grammar teachers demonstrated conflicting perceptions towards grammar instruction. They assumed that formal grammar instruction had no effect on improving learners' communicative abilities, but their classroom practices reflected explicit grammar teaching techniques including error analysis, reference to L1, and mechanical drills. Farrell and Lim (2005) also suggest that the discrepancies between stated beliefs and actual classroom practices can be attributed to contextual factors that impinge on the belief system such as the time constraints. That is, while teachers had positive attitudes towards the inductive approach to grammar teaching, their ambitions were discouraged by the challenges of time limits set by the school syllabus. Phipps and Borg (2009) demonstrate that teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching are not always aligned with their teaching practice. Teachers practices in their study were aligned with the focus-on-forms approach to grammar teaching although they expressed preference for meaning-focused approaches. They suggest that presenting grammar form and function, controlled practices and group work for oral activities were instances of tension between teachers' held beliefs and practices. Assalahi (2013) posits that compatibility between teachers' beliefs and grammar teaching practices can be assigned to the harmony between teachers' propositional knowledge and contextual factors such as the school curriculum. Inconsistency between hidden beliefs and teaching practices however originates from several influential factors such as apprentice of observation, and pre-service teacher education. Similarly, Nishimuro and Borg's (2013) argue that teachers' preference for decontextualized presentation and explanation of grammar rules, structural analysis, and translation in L1 were shaped by teachers' beliefs that students had to master grammar forms before using it for communication. Similar underlying beliefs of teaching the present perfect tense (PPT) were also reported. Hence, teachers introduced the PPT first, explained its structure, compared it to other tenses and then teachers presented guided-practice activities. The study also revealed that teachers predominantly believe in the importance of the terminology of the tense (PPT), but they use L1 to explain it to L2 learners.

1.4 The Research Questions

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching the present perfect tense. The following research questions were addressed to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar in general and the simple present perfect tense in particular at an ELC in Saudi Arabia.

- 1) What are EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar in an English language centre (ELC) at a university in Saudi Arabia?
- 2) What are the teachers' beliefs about teaching the simple present perfect in an English Language centre (ELC) at a university in Saudi Arabia?
- 3) What are the perceived challenges of teaching present perfect tense in an English Language centre (ELC) at a university in Saudi Arabia?

2. Research Design

This study explored teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching based on the tenets of the interpretive paradigm. According to interpretivism, there are multiple realities and individuals have subjective rather than objective representations of these realities (Crotty, 1998). Social phenomena cannot be explained objectively by applying the scientific methods but should be socially constructed through the interpretation of the participants' lived experiences (Merriam, 2009).

2.1 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore teachers' beliefs about teaching the present perfect tense. Following Creswell (2012), the basic qualitative approach was adopted to enable the researchers to construct meaningful interpretations of the phenomena under investigation through the eyes of the research participants. This entails understanding how people make sense of their experiences, construct their realities and what meanings they attach to their lived experiences with the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

According to Merriam (2009) researchers adopting the basic qualitative approach can utilize this approach to uncover the participants' beliefs about a certain phenomenon. Hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 EFL female Saudi EFL teachers in an English Language Centre (ELC) at a Saudi university.

2.2 Sampling

The convenience sampling approach was used to choose the subjects of this research based on ease of access and availability of the participants (Cohen et al., 2000). All 13 participants had an MA in TESOL or equivalent in English language teaching and their teaching experiences ranged from five to fifteen years. They were considered convenient because of their availability and also their years of experience in teaching English in the context of this study. While adopting other sampling techniques can reduce selection bias, convenience sampling is considered a trustworthy approach that is widely used in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2000). Pseudonyms were used to anonymize the identities of the participants and their consent to participate in this research was obtained.

2.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis approach was employed to thematize teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were first transcribed verbatim and then initial reading of the interviews was conducted to highlight emergent themes. Subsequent reading focused on coding and categorizing the themes. Next, the coding process was tabulated into four main themes and ten categories (Table 1).

3. Results

The data analysis revealed interesting findings about the underlying beliefs of teaching the present perfect tense (PPT) reported in this study. The participants believed that grammar is a crucial component in the language learning process, and they perceived the implicit grammar teaching approach as an ideal method for learning grammar. They highlighted several challenges of teaching PPT and how they address these issues. However, their reported practices revealed some tensions with the declared beliefs. The discrepancy between beliefs and practices seems to be driven by some influential elements such as teachers' past learning experiences (apprentice of observation) and the curriculum (textbooks) as the main sources that shape their belief systems.

3.1 Centrality of Grammar in L2 Learning

The analysis of teachers' beliefs showed that the majority of the participants perceived grammar to be a central component of second language acquisition. With two exceptions, eleven teachers recognise the vital role of grammar teaching in enhancing the linguistic repertoire of EFL learners. They reported that grammar facilitates comprehensible input, and enhances linguistic accuracy and fluency. Teachers 1 and 10 suggest that grammar plays a fundamental role in EFL language learning. They argued that mastery of grammar is crucial to enabling learners to build a strong foundation and progress successfully in their language acquisition journey. Teacher (10) counted on her years of experience as an authority to the positive perceptions of grammar. As she suggests "I have been teaching English for more than 15 years; grammar plays an essential part in teaching the language, primarily because grammar encompasses the core of the language" (Teacher 10). Teacher (1) also concurs that grammar "is important because it is an integral component of language". She assigns this importance of grammar to its role in "helping learners acquire skills" and "therefore, it is crucial to follow the rules to support learning the language" (Teacher 1). Another reason for positive perceptions of grammar is teachers' rooted conviction that teaching grammar boosts accuracy in communication. As Teacher 2 indicated "Learners need to know how to construct sentences and differentiate the meaning to use the grammatical rules in different contexts" (Teacher 2).

The participants also believe that developing grammatical competence among L2 learners develops EFL language skills albeit with different variations. It seems that teachers believe that grammar facilitates comprehension which leads to accuracy development. Teacher 5 thus assumes that learning grammar enhances reading and writing performance more than speaking skills. As she said "Understanding grammar forms is crucial in reading because it makes comprehension easier. Furthermore, they [learners] should understand grammar so they can write accurately". This teacher suggests that grammar is not an important part of speaking since "speaking skills do not restrict understanding; second language learners can easily state their opinions without the correct knowledge of grammar (Teacher 5.)

Unlike Teacher 5, Teacher 9 reported that speaking and reading comprehension boost L2 learners' confidence and self-esteem. She posits that:

"If learners know the grammar, learners can feel more confident in speaking. In addition, they can understand the text they read. So, grammar is essential for productive skills, such as writing and speaking.

They [learners] can learn the grammar from the passages and the audio for reading and listening (Teacher 9).

Concurring with teacher 9, Teacher 6 suggested that grammar teaching entails improving the productive skills of speaking and writing.

“You know, the students deliver information and convey ideas. When they speak or write, they need grammar. If they do not have grammar, it will be tough for them to speak and write” (Teacher 6).

However, she seemed to underestimate the effect of teaching grammar on developing receptive skills in listening and reading. As she indicates,

“When it comes to listening and reading, I do not think grammar is needed in the learning process in the same way as it is in speaking and writing.” (Teacher 6)

3.2 Grammar Enhances Accuracy and Fluency

Language proficiency, accuracy and fluency surfaced as remarkable themes derived from teachers' accounts of grammar teaching. The participants expressed the positive influence of grammar in attaining accuracy and fluency in a foreign language. Using metaphor, Teacher 10 depicted her portrayal of teaching grammar to boost learners' accuracy and fluency:

“Grammar is like the notes for music, providing a platform for accuracy. Furthermore, accuracy springs forth into fluency. So, you can learn the language without gaining accuracy. Therefore, grammar enables students, whether they are L1 or L2, to acquire the accuracy to become fluent learners of the language” (Teacher 10).

Likewise, Teacher 3 pointed out the eventual impact of teaching grammar on fluency and accuracy. She stated, ‘Grammar will not help with fluency initially. Still, I think they [learners] can correct themselves more quickly when they are sure about the rule and know it very well’ (Teacher 3, Date). Teacher 3 also believed in the positive role that grammar plays in addressing self-observed shortcomings in learning the language. For this teacher, grammar seemed to enable the explicit detection of errors in the early stages of learning a language, promoting the accuracy of productive skills, followed by automatic detection and spontaneous correction of these errors, which in turn promotes fluency.

3.3 Form-Focused Approach

The majority of the participants reported mixed views about how to teach PPT. Both explicit and implicit grammar teaching techniques were present in their propositional knowledge, but it seems that their procedural knowledge was ultimately driven by Focus-on-Form. This means that some conflicts about how to teach grammar were present and this perplexity is viewed in positive light. That is, seven participants believed that grammar should be taught implicitly and that no overt efforts should be exerted by teachers to draw learners' attention to PPT. Teacher (9) seems to advocate implicit grammar instruction to facilitate learning language naturally. As she said “My personal opinion is that I like the idea of teaching grammar implicitly because students can acquire the language naturally through context and communication. Therefore, they know how to speak correctly without caring too much about grammar (Teacher 9). Teacher 5 also concurs that, ‘we should present grammar implicitly unless questions arise, or unless it is proven that the students are struggling to form the grammar forms’ (Teacher 5, Date). She justified her decision about choosing implicit grammar teaching on grounds of simplifying of language learning. As she argues, explicit forms teaching makes learning unnecessarily complex.

“Since I am teaching grammar, I remember that the more I go into depth about teaching forms or the meaning of grammatical rules, the more complicated it is for students to grasp it. Thus, I feel that there is a lot of confusion [with explicit teaching]” (Teacher 5).

Similarly, Teacher 7 supports implicit grammar teaching and thinks that students and teachers should spend more time on developing connection with the linguistic input rather than on deciphering grammatical structures. As she said

“If they can connect to the video or reading, they can invest their time and feel connected. If they feel a connection to the video, they will find it more engaging and motivating to invest their time in as opposed to learning a mere grammar rule” (Teacher 7).

Likewise, Teacher 11 believed in implicit grammar teaching. She viewed explicit grammar teaching as mere instruction of grammatical terminologies and focuses on mechanical rather than meaningful language learning. As she stated, “I believe that grammar should be taught implicitly. As I said, the focus should be more on ways

the language functions rather than adopting a definition style” (Teacher 11).

In order to facilitate implicit grammar teaching, teachers emphasized the use of the timeline to draw learners attention to conceptualizing PPT and its relationship with the past and future tenses. As teacher 3 said “Usually, I draw a timeline to draw the learner’s attention to show where is past tense, and where is the present perfect. And the use of *since* and *for* with the present perfect (Teacher 3). Teacher 10 also indicated that she liked “to explain what the present perfect is by using the timeline, by showing where the present perfect is and explaining why it is called the present perfect. I explain to learners that it is between the past and the now (still not finished), and I have the notion that it is an action that is not over yet (Teacher 10).

Teachers also used activities to enhance authentic language use of the PPT such as roles play, information gap activities, writing essays and controlled practice. As teacher 4 said,

“We do not start with the form; we begin with the meaning. “I employ the situational technique. So, I would come up with a role play. The students would be engaged. Using everyday scenarios that include the grammar point is a situational practice method I use” (Teacher 4.)

Role plays thus were considered as an important activity for teacher 8 to provide context of using the PPT.

“I usually use activities that involve role-play. I would ask the learners to talk about a city they have been to. So, I would say we are talking about the city now and ask, what grammatical rule are you using?” (Teacher 8).

Despite teachers espoused views of implicit grammar teaching, their reported practices revealed contradictory explicit grammar instruction. These perceptions of explicit grammar teaching reflect both personal view, past learning experiences and can also be seen to comply with contextual affordances such as the language school curriculum. As teacher 1 said “So, you have to teach grammar explicitly. Still, learners whose level is advanced know a lot about the language, so in this way, they can use/be taught the rules when you give them examples of the specific rule that you want them to learn. In this way, they will be able to use the rules (Teacher 1).

Teacher 9 also reported that she also applied explicit grammar teaching in alignment with the syllabus. As she indicated ‘What I usually do in the ELI classes is that I teach it explicitly because we have a specific grammar lesson every day’ (Teacher 9). Similarly, Teacher 13 pointed out that follows the explicit grammar teaching technique which is driven by the deductive language teaching to provide more scaffolded language learning. As she said,

“We usually do an explanation, which is the presentation of grammatical points. I’ll ask students some questions, trying to activate their background knowledge if they have any knowledge about the lesson. I am trying to explain the new rule and then do some exercises. I always have this stage of why we put this here. Why is this correct? Why did we put this? Why did we not set this here? And so on. I always make sure to let them think about their answers” (Teacher 13).

Teacher 9 also indicated that she teaches PPT explicitly to ensure learners understand the rule in question. As she emphasized “I usually implement several steps. First, I write the sentences at the beginning of the class. I try to elicit information from students. For example, I say, who can read the sentences? What are the parts of these sentences? Then, they tell me that this is the verb, the subject, etc. I do this until they understand the grammatical rule, I want to teach today.” (Teacher 9). Teacher (3) also emphasized her preference for grammatical analysis and guided practice when she introduces new grammatical rule. As she said,

“I analyze the sentences in terms of subject, verb, and object. In this way, the learners can see the structure of the sentence. Then, we have to apply it to the exercises we have. I reemphasize the rule when we have the writing exercise because this is a suitable topic for structuring sentences. And I revise it again for them” (Teacher 3).

Another important finding that surfaced in the data is the way teachers conducted explicit grammar teaching especially when they implement contrastive analysis, sequencing, and translation. The participants suggest that since PPT is an issue for Arabic language learners, it is important for teachers to find ways to scaffold it through contrastive analysis. As teacher 6 said “we should talk about the difference between English and Arabic. We should also talk about the history of English and Arabic. So, I feel like teaching the culture of both languages” (Teacher 6).

Teacher 7 also indicated the concept of sequencing tenses to account for the lack of PPT in learners’ native language. As she said,

“I mean for Arabic speakers; I discovered that I must teach the past simply before trying to teach the

present perfect. First, we teach the simple past on its own, and then, when we move to the present perfect, I have to teach it in conjunction with the past simple” (Teacher 7).

The participants also explicitly reported using Arabic, albeit sparingly, in teaching PPT. Hence, L1 was used to correct prevalent errors committed by learners when using the present perfect tense. For example, Teacher 9 suggested that the lack of an equivalent tense in Arabic is why EFL students struggle to learn and practice PPT. Therefore, she introduced the Arabic explanations of the tense to her students:

“They could not understand the idea behind using PPT in English. This maybe the case because we do not have the same rules in our native language (Arabic Language). I do not know the reason for this. But I saw them! They could not understand what I was trying to teach them. So, I tried using a little grammar-translation (Teacher 9).

Teacher (12) explained that recognizing the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 helps students understand and use PPT correctly. As she said,

“I compare and give examples to make it clear to them. Well, I don’t usually use it because we do not have it in Arabic. Nevertheless, I give them some sentences and try translating the present perfect into Arabic. They understand that the tense in Arabic is different from English. Then, they will understand the rule and the differences between the two languages. And that helps a lot (Teacher 12.)

3.4 Challenges to Form-Focused Approach

A central theme that emerged in the analyzed data pertains to challenges teachers encountered in their day-to-day grammar teaching in the context of this study. These challenges include learners’ proficiency levels, problematic nature of PPT, learners’ preferences to memorize grammar. The participants reported that the simple present perfect tense is a challenging linguistic pattern for EFL/ESL learners. Teacher 1 described that,

“Teaching the simple present perfect tense is problematic because it is similar to the past tense, and students tend to confuse using it with the simple past (Teacher 1).

Teacher (2) added that “the concept of the simple present perfect tense does not exist in the Arabic language; it is so similar to the simple past tense that student gets lost” (Teacher 2).

Another challenge to meaningful PPT learning is that L2 learners tend to memorize the PPT rule rather than use it in natural contexts. As Teacher 4 said,

“The Arab learners memorize the form, but they do not understand it. And that is a pity. For example, they do not understand the present perfect, even though it has been taught in school. Furthermore, they are lost when we change the form—for example, when the simple present perfect is contracted (Teacher 4).

Teacher 10 added that the PPT is difficult to teach and is sometimes perplexing for teachers themselves because of the difficulty to contextualize its authentic use for L2 learners.

“As I said, they tend to use continuous tenses, but the present perfect and past perfect are less used because I still struggle to find ways to use them and clarify the context. The present perfect is always a question mark for the students” (Teacher 10).

3.5 Sources of Teachers Beliefs

Teachers’ decisions about teaching PPT can be attributed to two main factors: past learning/teaching experiences, and the workplace curricular demands. Teachers accounts of their decisions to conduct explicit/implicit grammar teaching appear to depend largely on sound rationale. Teachers’ perceptions of PPT as problematic issue for Arabic language learners emanated from their experiences with learning PPT and also their learners struggle with this. Teacher (10) promulgation of the importance of explicit grammar teaching was based on her past experiences of learning English. As she discussed, direct and explicit teaching of discrete grammar rules seemed to be viable approach for learning English.

“I think I have experienced both the explicit and implicit teaching of grammar. I grew up in a sort of traditional methodology of teaching, whereby grammar is always taught explicitly. Each skill was looked at separately. There was no integration within the context. Grammar was not taught within a context, and I always say this works very well to understand every part of grammar. And then to know how to use it in a different situation” (Teacher 10).

As Teacher 6 also explained that PPT was an issue for her as a Chinese learner of English as a foreign language. As she explains,

“PPT was an issue—I would say a disaster, to be honest—with Arabic- and Chinese-speaking students

because they do not have the present perfect tense in their language system. So, it is like teaching them something they are not familiar with; they do not have a background for it” (Teacher 6).

Other teachers who were not native speakers of Arabic also came to the same conclusion about using Arabic in teaching PPT. However, they adjust their beliefs based on their learners’ needs. Teacher 9 attributed the use of Arabic in teaching the present perfect tense to simplify language learning for her students when they struggle with learning or using PPT.

“So, when I feel that there is no way with themes and communicative approaches, I go for the translation method to make their life easier. This is especially the case if I notice that they do not care much about learning the language because the students feel English is just a requirement to pass the preparatory year” (Teacher 9).

The textbooks endorsed in the context of this study was also another driver for teachers’ decision-making about forms-focused or form-focused approaches to grammar teaching. It seems that the textbook presents PPT in authentic situations (e.g., dialogue) and also grammatical rules discretely presented for explicit language teaching. Three teachers, 12, 10 and 9 suggested that the syllabus (textbook) provides sufficient context for authentic grammar learning.

“I use examples related to some topics we covered during the lesson. Because my purpose here is to teach students how to communicate well, I use real-life examples. I provide language input that should be appropriate and authentic. It should be culturally relevant and authentic because it aims to use the language, not just teach grammar points (Teacher 12).

It seems that teachers’ perceived effectiveness of the textbook as a source of contextualized input has led them to utilizing it fully in teaching grammar. As Teacher 10 indicate,

“We are permitted to follow what is in the book, which is very contextualized, and this helps them put context around what they are learning. It helps learners understand what they are doing. So, definitely, at the moment, everything we do is contextualized” (Teacher 10).

Concurring with teachers 12 and 10, teacher 9 also believes that the textbook exercises are valuable for providing authentic reading and speaking activities for practicing PPT by L2 learners. As she said,

“After they learn the new rule, I try to make a context for that new rule. So, from reading and speaking tasks, they can explain why they should learn that grammar rule” (Teacher 9).

As Teacher (12) also explained, the textbook is a great source for “Providing examples that express real situations will help students acquire the language naturally” (Teacher 12).

It seems that the textbook sequence assists teachers in contextualizing grammar teaching. In this regard, Teachers 12 and 10 specified what varieties of exercises and drills the textbook offers for each lesson. As teacher 10 explains,

“Sometimes, I use communicative drills to communicate the form, use and meaning and teach them about the past tense” (Teacher 10).

Table 1. Thematic analysis of teachers’ beliefs on theaching PPT

Theme	Category
Centrality of Grammar in L2 learning	Facilitates comprehensible input, Enhances linguistic accuracy and fluency.
Forms-focused Approach	Explicit Grammar Teaching Implicit Grammar Teaching Contrastive analysis & translation
Challenges to Form-Focused approach	Learners’ proficiency levels Problematic PPT Foreign Language Context (difficulty to use grammar rules in authentic contexts)

4. Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that teachers’ decisions regarding grammar operate in tension between deeply held and stated beliefs. Despite teachers’ agreement on the central role grammar plays in language learning and also on the implicit grammar teaching approach, their reported practices demonstrate conflicting

explicit grammar teaching approach. This finding supports the findings of previous research (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Assalahi, 2013; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009) which suggest that teachers' deeply held beliefs do not necessarily translate into practice due to a complex set of reasons. This study supports previous research findings conducted in tertiary education settings (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Assalahi, 2013). Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) for instance posit that teachers' explicit grammar teaching method was not aligned with their beliefs that grammar should be taught implicitly. Teachers' beliefs in this study also reflect common themes in the literature about the difficulty of teaching grammar (Daughy & William, 2007) and in particular teaching the present perfect tense (BaSaeed, 2013).

Moreover, while teachers' beliefs in the context of this study were not consistent with their approaches to grammar teaching, their awareness of the sociocultural affordances appeared to inform their decisions but did not distract their focus-on-form approach. That is, while teachers at times seemed to be obliged to use translation and contrastive analysis to scaffold learning PPT, but they were very selective and implemented these strategies insofar as it facilitates focus-on-form not focus-on-forms. Their aim was to improve comprehensibility of input and maximize output through activities that ranged from role-plays, information gaps and mechanical drills. It seems that the teachers were aware of the distinction between 'skills-getting' or grasp of PPT and "skills-using" which is geared towards enhancing free-practice in authentic contexts (Rivers, 2018). As Larsen-Freeman (2001) explains, grammar teachers should consider form, meaning and function when teaching grammar. This finding however does not appear to be the case in Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) who found out that teachers believed in implicit grammar teaching, but their practices reflected focus-on-forms exemplified by structural analysis and mechanical drills. It is also different from and Nishimuro and Borg (2013) who found out that teachers limited their teaching to explicit instruction and analysis of grammar rules as indicators of teacher-led rather than students-centered learning.

Moreover, it seems that teachers' decisions about grammar teaching is not merely a choice of form-focused or forms-focused approaches to be implemented in classroom settings. It is rather a complex decision-making that takes into consideration several factors at play including students' proficiency level, their orientations towards language learning, and the curricular mandates. This suggests that teachers are active decision makers and are aware of the contextual factors that impinge on their choices of their approach to grammar teaching in the best interest of their students (Borg, 2019; Cross, 2010). Their beliefs seem to be driven by the affordances and constraints situated in the context of this study such as teachers' apprentice of observation (Lortie, 1975), the proficiency level of their students and the content of the textbooks which provides context for form-focused or forms-focused approach. These findings seem to resonate with previous research which suggests that teachers' knowledge base about how to teach grammar in general and PPT in specific are shaped in part by the context in which it is implemented (Borg, 1998; Farrell & Lim, 2005) and also teachers' personal views about how to teach grammar (Assalahi, 2013; Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013). As Borg (1998) suggests, teaching grammar is shaped by the interaction of teachers' "pedagogical systems, educational and professional experiences and context of instruction". This finding however is in contrast with Assalahi (2013), who found out that in teachers' beliefs were largely shaped by the theoretical knowledge gained in teacher education programs and that these were conflictive with the grammar translation method implemented in teaching grammar.

The study has implications for classroom practitioners and researchers of teachers beliefs about grammar teaching. First, the findings shed light on the complex nature of teaching PPT and the factors that influence teachers' decision making about which approach to follow in the classroom. The findings also provide useful insights into how the contextual affordances and constraints of teaching PPT can influence teachers' orientations to grammar teaching. However, as demonstrated in this study, teachers should be viewed as active decision makers who can achieve their vision of teaching grammar according to the form-focused approach while also address the contextual challenges. This understanding acknowledges teachers as active knowers and whose personal practical knowledge should be considered as a legitimate knowledge base (England, 2017). As Freeman and Johnson (1998, p. 397) argue "the core of new knowledge-base must focus on the act of teaching itself, it should center on the teacher who does it, and the pedagogy by which it is done".

However, despite the useful insights presented in this study, they must be interpreted with caution and only in light of the context in which it is implemented. While interviews provided an in-depth lens to unearth the reported practices of teaching PPT, future research might consider triangulation of methods. These may include classroom observations to provide richer accounts of the realities of teaching PPT and how it can be enhanced in EFL contexts.

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