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## “TEACHING GRAMMAR IS NOT MY MAIN RESPONSIBILITY”: EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT GRAMMAR TEACHING

*Research Article*

Tuğba Elif Toprak 

İzmir Bakırçay University

[toprak@bakircay.edu.tr](mailto:toprak@bakircay.edu.tr)

Dr. Toprak is an assistant professor of Applied Linguistics/ELT at Izmir Bakircay University, School of Foreign Languages. Her research efforts are largely situated in the fields of language testing and assessment, psycholinguistics and cognitive sciences.

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Tuğba Elif Toprak

[toprak@bakircay.edu.tr](mailto:toprak@bakircay.edu.tr)

### Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigated a hundred university EFL teachers’ beliefs about several issues in grammar teaching. Teachers’ beliefs about these issues such as the explicit and implicit teaching of grammar, its integration with other language skills, and the role of a teacher in grammar teaching were elicited by means of a questionnaire. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten volunteer teachers to obtain more in-depth information about teachers’ reported beliefs. These results were analyzed by using the descriptive statistics and in-vivo coding. The findings of the study demonstrated that most teachers believed in the centrality of grammar instruction to helping language learners attain a substantial proficiency in English. Moreover, it was found that most teachers favored an inductive, integrative and communicative approach to grammar teaching. Although teachers’ reported beliefs were, overall, in harmony with the literature on grammar teaching, there were no hints suggesting that teachers were aware of grammar theories or their beliefs were based on SLA/grammar literature. The findings indicated that the distinction between pedagogical dichotomies proposed in the literature seemed to blur in the practice since teachers frequently referred to personal and contextual features as the main factors shaping their beliefs and practices.

*Keywords:* grammar teaching, language teacher cognition, language teacher beliefs

### 1. Introduction

Teacher cognition can be defined as an intricate web of knowledge, beliefs, and values which may exert a drastic impact on teachers' thinking and behaviors (Borg, 2003; Borg & Burns, 2008; Calderhead, 1996; Richardson, 1996). A core part of the teacher cognition is beliefs that are assumed to be idiosyncratic in nature and stored as episodic memories (Nespor, 1987). Beliefs include evaluative and affective features that may function as filters. These filters can be activated when new information received is not compatible with the existing belief system (Pajares, 1992; Sakui & Gaies, 2003). Since the 1970s, teacher beliefs have been scrutinized in a plethora of studies that have been conducted to understand what teachers know, think, believe, and how these impact what teachers do in operational teaching settings (Zheng, 2013). This growing body of literature has demonstrated that teacher beliefs affect teachers’ instructional choices and practices to a considerable degree (Burns, 1992, 1996; Farrell & Kun, 2007; Kagan, 1992; Sang, Valcke, van Braak, & Tondeur, 2010; Smith, 1996; Woods, 1996). Particularly, investigating language teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching has been a lively research agenda over the last two decades (Bell, 2016; Graus & Coppen, 2016; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Underwood, 2012; Sanchez & Borg, 2014; Valeo & Spada, 2016; Watson, 2015a, 2015b) due to the centrality of grammar instruction to language proficiency (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004)

and the equivocal nature of SLA studies that explore the best ways of teaching grammar (Borg, 1998, 2006).

Previous research on language teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction has demonstrated that teachers' practices were practical and experiential rather than being based on SLA theories (Borg, 2003; Borg & Burns, 2008; Eisentein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Watson 2005b). Furthermore, relevant literature has also demonstrated that (i) psychological, contextual and experiential factors may impact teachers' theories in grammar teaching (Borg, 1999a, 1999b; Farrell, 1999; Sanchez & Borg, 2014; Valeo & Spada, 2016; Watson, 2015a), (ii) teachers' reported beliefs and practices are, overall, in harmony (Phipps & Borg, 2009) and (iii) teachers favor formal instruction of grammar which fosters the presentation and practice of grammar (Borg & Burns, 2008; Burgess & Etherington, 2002, Phipps & Borg, 2009; Graus & Coppen, 2016). Research on language teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction has largely focused on English language teachers' beliefs mainly in contexts such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore and Malta, where English is the official language. Thus, more research efforts may prove useful in EFL contexts where (i) English is learnt as a foreign language and mostly treated as a school subject, (ii) opportunities for using English for authentic purposes are relatively scarce, and (iii) attaining proficiency in English serve may serve gate-keeping purposes. In such contexts, grammar instruction may constitute a fundamental component of language teaching practices. As such, understanding the structure of the foreign/second language teachers' beliefs about grammar grows enormously in significance for teachers' actions tend to be in accordance with their beliefs (Farrell & Kun, 2007) and there is no indication that grammar teaching is becoming less important while there is continuing evidence that teachers promote grammar work (Borg, 2003).

### 1.1. The present study

Although EFL teachers may be presented with a substantial body of information about grammar teaching theories and methods in teacher education programs, they may resort to their own maps while making their journeys along this wild and vast territory (Kagan, 1992). In a sense, these maps could be viewed as EFL teachers' beliefs that are the products of their mental lives, educational and professional biographies, and institutional and social factors. Previously, Phipps and Borg (2009) examined the tensions in the grammar teaching beliefs and practices of three university teachers of English working in Turkey through a qualitative design which employed observation and interviews. The study revealed that teachers' beliefs and practices were overall in harmony and teachers adopted a focus-on forms approach to grammar which involves presentation and practice of grammar. Since the majority of studies on teachers' grammar beliefs were conducted in non-EFL settings, studies conducting in EFL settings may offer useful insights, assuming that grammar teaching remains to be an indispensable part of language teaching practices in many EFL settings. Hence, the present study sets out to contribute to the growing body of literature on EFL teachers' cognition by examining a hundred university teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching in Turkey, an EFL setting. Specifically, the present study aimed to understand whether EFL university teachers (henceforth, teachers) believed:

- (i) in the effectiveness of explicit vs. implicit and inductive vs. deductive grammar teaching;
- (ii) the position of grammar in instructional sequences makes a difference;
- (iii) teachers' main responsibility in grammar teaching is presenting the rules;
- (iv) practice is crucial for the effectiveness of grammar teaching;
- (v) there are differences between young learners and adults in terms of grammar learning;

- (vi) teaching terminology is essential to grammar teaching and
- (vii) grammar needs to be taught integrated with other skills.

It is hoped that the present study not only contributes to the body of literature on language teacher cognition but also sheds lights on language teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and factors underlying these beliefs in an EFL context.

## 2. Methodology

This section gives basic information about the design, participants, and tools of the study.

### 2.1. Design

The study utilized a descriptive and interpretative design and a mixed-methods approach. At the descriptive level, it aimed to understand the beliefs that teachers held about grammar teaching by using a questionnaire. At the interpretative level, it sought to gather more in-depth insights into teachers' beliefs and understand the personal, social, and institutional factors that might underlie these beliefs by using semi-structured interviews.

### 2.2. Participants

A hundred university teachers who were teaching English at preparatory language schools of several large and mid-sized universities in Turkey participated in the study. 79 of the teachers were female while 21 of them were male. 37 teachers had less than four-year experience in teaching English, while 35 teachers had five to ten years of experience. On the other hand, 24 teachers were more experienced in teaching English (11-15 years) and four teachers had more than 15 years of experience in teaching English. While 77 teachers were graduates of ELT departments, 23 of them attended English Literature, Linguistics, and Translation Studies departments during their undergraduate education.

The present study adopted snowball sampling (a.k.a. network or chain sampling) (Wiersma, 2000) technique in which participants help reach out to more participants working in the same institution. The preparatory language schools in which the participants worked offer English programs at different language proficiency levels to enhance undergraduates' competence in general English (Kırkgöz, 2007). Learning objectives across these levels are evaluated by in-house tests, and teachers are required to teach in line with these objectives. Information about teachers' experience in teaching English and their graduation background is provided in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. *Years of experience in teaching*

Years of experience	0-4	5-10	11-15	15+
N of teachers	37	35	24	4

Table 2. *Teachers' graduation background*

Graduation	ELT	Other*
N of teachers	77	23

Note: \*(English Literature, Linguistics, and Translation Studies)

As Table 2 reveals, 77% of the teachers held a bachelor degree in ELT (77%). Therefore, it was assumed that the majority of teachers were knowledgeable about SLA/grammar theories and research.

### **2.3. Data collection and analysis**

A Likert questionnaire adopted from Borg and Burns (2008) was used to collect the quantitative data. This questionnaire was chosen since it is comprehensive in scope and covering a number of significant issues pertaining to grammar teaching. The questionnaire included 15 items, and these items covered a range of crucial issues in grammar teaching; such as the role of explicit teaching, the position of grammar in instructional sequences, the role of the teacher, the importance of practice, deductive and inductive learning, differences between teaching grammar to adult and young learners and the integration of grammar with other skills. The questionnaire elicited the teachers' responses on a five-point scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). These items and descriptive statistics about the participants' responses are given in Table 3.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten volunteer teachers to achieve a deeper understanding of their beliefs and obtain more information about the issues investigated through the questionnaire. Eight teachers were interviewed face-to-face, while two were contacted via telephone. Interview questions were an elaborated version of the questionnaire items and aimed to infer the reasons underlying teachers' responses on the questionnaire. During the interviews, which lasted around ten minutes, the researcher took notes. While the questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively by using descriptive statistics, qualitative data gathered through interviews were analyzed using in-vivo coding.

## **3. Results and discussions**

This section reports on the results obtained through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

### **3.1. Overall results**

Below, Table 3 lists the questionnaire items and teachers' responses in percentages. Items 1 and 2 elicited teachers' beliefs about explicit and implicit grammar teaching. Items 4 and 13 addressed teachers' beliefs about the distinction between teaching grammar to adults and young learners. Item 7 investigated teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Item 12 addressed teachers' beliefs about deductive and inductive grammar teaching. Item 10 elicited teachers' beliefs about the use of terminology in grammar instruction. Item 5 investigated teachers' beliefs about how to position grammar while sequencing activities. Items 9 and 11 investigated teachers' beliefs about the role of teachers in grammar instruction. Items 3 and 8 addressed teachers' beliefs about the significance of practice in grammar teaching. Finally, Item 6 elicited teachers' beliefs about the integration of grammar with other language skills.

Table 3. Percentages of responses for each item

Items	SD	D	NI	A	SA
1. Teachers should present grammar to learners before expecting them to use it.	6%	25%	10%	40%	19%
2. Learners who are aware of grammar rules can use the language more effectively than those who are not.	3%	25%	8%	51%	13%
3. Exercises that get learners to practice grammar structures help learners develop fluency in using grammar.	0%	18%	16%	50%	16%
4. Teaching the rules of English grammar directly is more appropriate for older learners.	4%	27%	21%	35%	13%
5. During lessons, a focus on grammar should come after communicative tasks, not before.	7%	27%	14%	34%	18%
6. Grammar should be taught separately, not integrated with other skills such as reading and writing.	48%	40%	4%	6%	2%
7. In a communicative approach to language teaching grammar is not taught directly.	1%	9%	18%	46%	26%
8. In learning grammar, repeated practice allows learners to use structures fluently.	1%	12%	11%	54%	22%
9. In teaching grammar, a teacher's main role is to explain the rules.	27%	49%	11%	10%	2%
10. It is important for learners to know grammatical terminology.	20%	38%	17%	20%	5%
11. Correcting learners' spoken grammatical errors in English is one of the teacher's key roles.	21%	46%	14%	17%	2%
12. Grammar learning is more effective when learners work out the rules for themselves.	1%	15%	18%	42%	24%
13. Indirect grammar teaching is more appropriate with younger than with older learners.	3%	12%	15%	45%	25%
14. Formal grammar teaching does not help learners become more fluent.	0%	21%	16%	49%	14%
15. It is necessary to study the grammar of a second or foreign language in order to speak it fluently.	6%	27%	15%	45%	7%

To better detect the overall direction of teachers' answers, the results were collapsed into two categories for each item—"agree" comprised of agree and strongly agree and "disagree" comprised of disagree and strongly disagree. Figure 1 below shows these combined results.

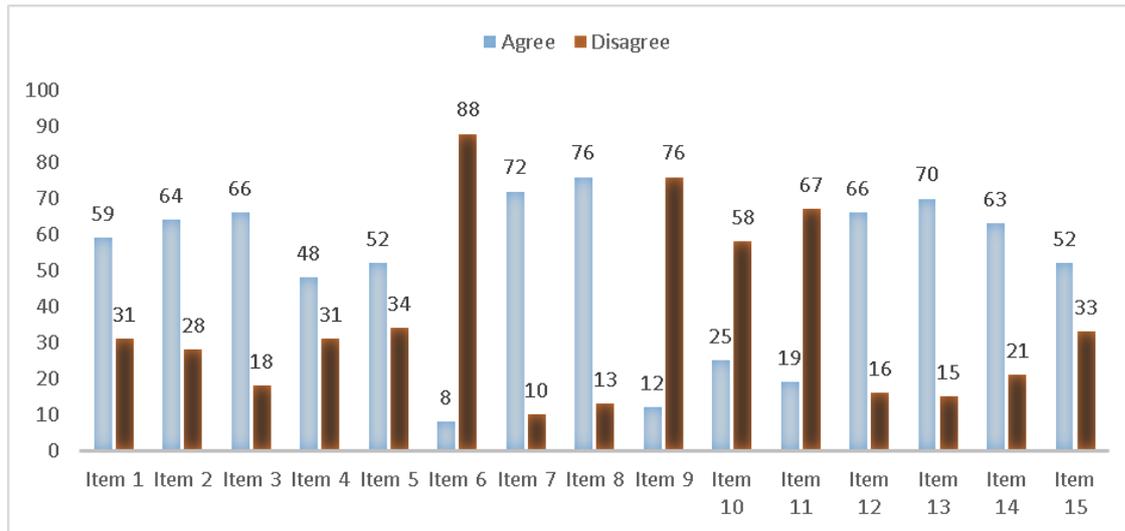


Figure 1. Responses given to questionnaire items

### 3.2. Explicit and implicit grammar teaching

Explicit knowledge is held consciously, learned, and retrieved via controlled processing when language learners come across with linguistic difficulties while using the target language (Ellis, 2006). On the contrary, implicit knowledge is procedural and is held unconsciously. Several scholars propose that explicit teaching of grammar is not relevant to language acquisition, and even if it is conducted, the effect of grammar teaching would be peripheral (Krashen, 1981; Sheen & O'Neill, 2005). The main issue regarding explicit/implicit teaching dichotomy is whether to teach explicit rules directly or to develop activities that enable learners to discover the rules for themselves (Ellis, 1998).

The results revealed that more than half of the teachers gave an opinion in favor of explicit grammar teaching (19% strongly agree, 40% agree). This belief was also reflected in the approval rate on Item 2 which suggested that being aware of grammar rules would offer language learners an advantage (13% strongly agree, 51% agree). The disposition towards explicit grammar teaching and rule learning is a common theme in grammar research. For instance, Jean and Simard (2011) stated that both teachers and learners found rule learning as important while Scheffler (2012) maintained that explicit attention to grammatical form can contribute to spontaneous production as well. Similarly, in our particular case, Teacher 4 stressed the impact of students' expectations on the amount of grammar work they carry out and stated:

Though I really don't like teaching grammar explicitly and try to avoid doing so, my students make me do it. From time to time, I catch them looking at me with empty eyes and they seem bored. When I start explaining the things explicitly, and by contrasting the rules with Turkish, they appraise my efforts and want me to do this all the time. They say "Teacher, we understand that way better, why don't you just explain the rules in detail rather than hitting the bush around?"

Another participant, Teacher 5, based her actions on her experiences as a language teacher and learner. She stated that:

I prefer doing explicit grammar teaching and explaining every bit in detail when we deal with structures that I believe are harder for learners to acquire. Deciding which ones are harder and which ones are relatively easy is a matter of experience and

knowledge, both as a teacher and language learner. For example, most students find it difficult to understand present perfect tense in English. In such cases, I provide direct and explicit explanations.

These comments provided by Teachers 4 and 5 hint that teachers reported beliefs about grammar teaching and practices in the classroom could be shaped, to a considerable extent, by contextual factors and teachers' teaching and learning background.

### **3.3. Teaching grammar to young learners and adults**

Teachers were asked to report their beliefs about the distinction between teaching grammar to adult and young learners. On Item 4, 48% of the teachers embraced the idea that direct grammar instruction suits adult learners better, while 31% disfavored it. On Item 13, which suggested that indirect grammar instruction suits young learners better when compared to adult learners, the tendency towards using indirect grammar teaching with young learners seemed more strong and evident. On that item, 70% of the teachers agreed, and 15% of them disagreed with the statement. Overall, these results suggest that most teachers believed that direct grammar teaching suits adult learners better while indirect grammar teaching may be beneficial for younger learners. To illustrate, Teacher 3 stated:

Now as a teacher, I am teaching only adults. In the past, I taught at a primary school. Based on my experience, I can tell you the difference. Young learners, especially very young learners absolutely don't seem to benefit from direct grammar teaching. I have a young kid myself, and I teach him English. I don't attempt to explain anything to him because this would be useless. We just study vocabulary and pronunciation. Even if I explain grammar rules in the best simple way, I don't think he would understand.

Remarks made by Teacher 3 suggest that teaching experiences he had in his professional and daily life made him think that there are distinctions between young and adult learners and these distinctions may impact the way both groups learn languages better. Although Teacher 3 did not refer to any SLA/grammar theories and research while concluding this distinction, the relevant literature supports his beliefs about the difference between adult and young learners regarding grammar teaching. For instance, Krashen (1981) argues that the difference between adult and child learning stems from the period which is called Piaget's formal operations stage, and proposes that the ability to use grammar consciously calls for a meta-awareness of language that emerges during formal operations stage. When learning process includes formal instruction, adults may perform better in all areas, even in pronunciation (Luque Agullo, 2006). While adults need high verbal and analytical abilities to reach high levels of proficiency (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003), on the other hand, child language learning can be defined as to be implicit, automatic, and domain-specific (Doughty, 2003).

### **3.4. Grammar instruction and communicative language teaching**

Item 7 elicited teachers' beliefs about the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and direct grammar teaching. The majority of the teachers (72%) believed that grammar is not taught directly in CLT. Item 7 did not state that grammar teaching was not regarded as important in CLT or teachers did not apply CLT but indicated that direct grammar instruction is not practiced. Under CLT, grammatical competence is not limited to sentence-level morphosyntactic features; includes broader elements of discourse, sociolinguistic rules of appropriacy, and communication strategies, and receives attention in line with the communicative needs of learners (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1991). When asked about to elaborate on her ideas about CLT and grammar teaching, Teacher 6 remarked:

There is a wrong assumption that grammar teaching is not practiced if you opt for a communicative approach. I believe the opposite. We need grammar to communicate

our ideas and needs more appropriately. We need to teach and learn grammar. I try to implement the communicative approach in my classes, and I dedicate time and effort to grammar as well. But I don't teach grammar directly, and this does not mean I don't teach it at all. I carry out activities that help learners to understand the rules themselves.

### 3.5. Teaching grammar inductively and deductively

The issue of teaching grammar inductively or deductively was investigated by Item 12. In deductive teaching, a grammatical structure is presented initially and then practiced in one way or another, constituting the first P in the Present-Practice-Produce sequence (Ellis, 2006). In inductive teaching, on the other hand, learners are first exposed to examples of the grammatical structures and are asked to arrive at a generalization on their own; there may or may not be a final explicit statement of the rule. The majority of the participants seemed to believe that grammar learning is more beneficial when learners deduce the rules on their own (24% strongly agree, 42% agree). On this issue, Teacher 6 stated that:

I prefer showing grammar in context, in action, in authentic reading passages for instance. This way, I can ask students why the author uses a particular structure, which is, in this case, the structure that I want to draw their attention to. Then, I wait for them to discover the rule for themselves.

However, on specific occasions, the teachers may resort to explaining rules, as indicated by Teachers 2 and 3 respectively:

If I feel that it won't take a lot of time for my students to discover the rules, I go for an inductive approach. If I feel that they will have difficulty in the discovery and we will spend precious lesson time, I explain the grammar rules to save time. (Teacher 2)

I rarely explain grammar to my students. I am more in favor of an inductive approach. There are certain times when I realize that my students need explanation. So, I make explanations in those rare times. (Teacher 3)

These results indicated that although teachers believed that it would be more efficient if students inferred the rules themselves, in actuality, they sometimes resorted to the deductive teaching of grammar. On some occasions, teachers may have to resort to the deductive teaching of grammar to meet the expectations of students. For instance, Vogel, Herron, Cole and York (2011) demonstrated that language learners prefer the deductive approach in which they are presented the rules. Also, pedagogical dichotomies (e.g. inductive vs. deductive grammar teaching) proposed in the relevant literature may become blurred to save "precious lesson time" or make sure that learners do not struggle in understanding grammatical structures. Borg (1999a) also suggests that the distinction between these pedagogical dichotomies seems to blur in the practice since teachers may make decisions based on contextual factors. In our particular context, each preparatory language school has its curriculum which specifies the course objectives, topics to be covered and exams that need to be taken in detail, and consequently, each teacher working in these schools needs to stick to the plan. Therefore, teachers' resorting to the deductive teaching of grammar due to contextual factors would be understandable.

### 3.6. Teaching grammar terminology

Borg (1999c) suggests that if students possess substantial knowledge of grammatical terminology, this knowledge can provide an economic and shared means of communication about language. Furthermore, the knowledge of terminology can facilitate diagnostic work, help learners to function more competently, and increase learner autonomy. Although relevant literature proposes that metalinguistic background and maturation exert an impact on grammar terminology use (Stern, 1992) and adult learners may benefit more from the use of terminology

(Ur, 1996) when compared to young learners, only a quarter of the teachers (25%) agreed with Item 10. The remaining 75% disagreed with the idea, and this disagreement was also reflected in their responses during interviews. Eight interviewees out of 10 advocated that the use of terminology was useless in language classes. The interviews revealed that the main reason for this reaction had something to do with the belief that there are far more crucial things to teach about grammar than its terminology. For instance, Teachers 4 and 8 remarked respectively:

I sometimes teach grammatical terminology if I feel that they will not be confused. I am not in favor of using terminology a lot. This is not what the students need primarily. (Teacher 4)

Students don't need to learn about the terminology of grammar. It would be better for them to know the use of grammatical structures. (Teacher 8)

On the other hand, Teacher 1 advocated the use of terminology to an optimal extent while stating:

I don't promote my students to learn grammatical terminology except some basic ones like the subject, object and possessive pronouns or verb, adjective. I want them to learn these basic ones; this would be feasible. When I say fast is both an adjective and an adverb, they would easily understand what I mean.

The explanation provided by Teacher 1 may hold true for teachers who practice grammar teaching in their classes but also avoid using grammar terminology as much as they could or rely on more common and basic terms such as “tense”, “adjective” and “preposition”.

### **3.7. The position of grammar in instructional sequences**

Item 5 elicited teachers' beliefs about the position of grammar in instructional sequences. More than half of the teachers rendered an opinion in favor of a focus on the grammar after the communicative tasks, while 34% of the teachers believed that grammar should receive attention before the tasks are given. This situation may indicate a tendency towards inductive teaching of grammar among teachers, in which students are initially exposed to grammatical structures and try to infer underlying rules themselves. One of the teachers who did not agree with a focus on grammar before completing a task and chose to deal with it in the remaining parts of the lesson was Teacher 7 who remarked:

Firstly, I implement activities that have a hidden grammatical focus. Then, I focus on grammar. I go for communicative activities in my lessons, and after we finish these activities, we focus on grammatical points. This way, students also have the chance to reflect on grammar rules and understand these rules better.

On the other hand, the teachers who gave a strong opinion about focusing on grammar before communicative tasks might believe that students should master grammatical rules first and then use these rules while they are working on the following communicative tasks. These participants might also think that knowledge of grammar has a liberating force that equips learners with necessary mental faculties needed to work on these tasks. The issue of positioning grammar in instructional sequences was dealt with in a comprehensive meta-analysis study conducted by Shintani, Li and Ellis (2013) who concluded that a combination of grammar presentation/input processing and production activities may be most effective. Rather than applying a strict sequencing, different tasks can be employed to provide students with input by listening or reading or to exploit grammar productively in speaking or writing.

During interviews, the participants provided different answers on the issue of sequencing. Teacher 5 treated the subject as a matter of sequencing grammatical activities among themselves as he stated:

I sequence grammar teaching activities from the simple to complex, from familiar to unfamiliar, from individual to collaborative or from the guided to free ones.

However, Teacher 4 acknowledged that she did not devote any attention to sequencing grammar activities that she used and remarked:

I do not sequence activities on my own. I follow the course book to this aim.

### **3.8. The role of teacher in grammar teaching**

Items 9 and 11 elicited teachers' beliefs about the role of a teacher in teaching grammar. 76% of the teachers believed that explaining grammar rules is not the main duty of a teacher. Only 12% of them agreed that this was teachers' primary responsibility. Traditionally, teachers are regarded as input providers and knowledge transmitters in grammar teaching (Luque Agullo, 2006). However, the majority of the teachers opted for a facilitator or elicitor role rather than a presenter role. This tendency was reflected in the interviews conducted, as put forward by Teachers 8 and 10:

I don't explain grammar points at all; I help my students discover them. (Teacher 8)

I don't explain grammar in detail. I have more important things to do in my classes. So, I let the students see grammar in context, especially in reading passages. (Teacher 10)

On the contrary, there were also several teachers who explicitly stated that they had to act as presenter of grammar, if not all the time, but to a substantial extent due to contextual factors such as students' demands, curriculum, textbooks, and exams. These factors were identified in the statements of Teachers 1, 5 and 9 when they stated:

I don't want to spend much time on teaching grammar, but I have to do so at least to some extent because the curriculum and course books urge me to do so. (Teacher 1)

I teach grammar for almost 10-15 minutes in a course hour, which is 45 minutes. If it were up to me, I wouldn't dedicate that much time to teaching merely grammar, but students want me to do so. (Teacher 5)

The level of students is important. I teach beginners. They don't know much about the language, feel intimidated and expect explanations about grammar from me. I explain grammatical structures, and these explanations are mostly in the mother tongue, Turkish. (Teacher 9)

Item 11 elicited teachers' beliefs about whether correcting learners' grammatical errors in speaking was one of the teacher's key responsibilities or not. Only 19% of the participants agreed that correcting spoken grammar mistakes is one of the roles of the teachers, while 67% of them favored the opposite. This opposition may derive from the belief that during the activities where the focus is fluency, errors related to accuracy should not be corrected. It may also be a reflection of the idea that error correction does not work. However, Borg (1999b) suggests that grammar work that focuses on students' errors in fluency activities legitimize these activities and encourages reluctant students to welcome such activities more willingly. The interviews revealed that the teachers handled the job of error correction with a critical eye. To illustrate, Teachers 1 and 7, when asked about how they deal with error correction, made the following comment:

In accuracy work, I provide immediate feedback, however in fluency work, I never interrupt the students. I never give them the correct form. I ask questions about the problematic part, or I draw their attention to it, for instance, I use a rising intonation or questioning voice. (Teacher 1)

If my students are beginners, I immediately correct their mistakes to prevent errors from sticking up. During the fluency work, I correct their mistakes after they finish their speech. I draw their attention to the problem by asking a question, repeating the error or providing both the correct and incorrect form. So, they stop and think about it. (Teacher 7)

The same attitude was observed with most of the teachers interviewed. They claimed that they made a distinction between accuracy and fluency work while handling an error. Put differently; they stated that they did not interfere with the students during speaking activities but provided immediate feedback on errors that were made during writing activities. One interesting solution was proposed by Teacher 5 who stated:

Both in fluency and accuracy work, I don't correct the students immediately. I summarize the errors of the students in a table and go through the table with them. I think when we do so, the students become much more aware of their errors, and this systematic analysis may lead to self-monitoring in later phases.

### **3.9. The Importance of practice in grammar teaching**

The analysis revealed that 66% of the teachers believed that exercises that help students practice grammar would enhance learners' fluency in using grammar while 18% of the teachers believed the opposite. The concept of fluency used mentioned on Item 3 refers to the ability to use grammar smoothly and easily –not only in the context of speaking but also in the context of writing. There was some evidence suggesting that grammar practice was seen to be useful. A similar belief was presented on Item 8, which stated that repeated practice allows learners to use grammatical structures fluently. While 76% of the teachers agreed with the statement, only 13% of them showed disagreement. Thus, it could be concluded that majority of the teachers believed in the effectiveness of practice in developing the fluency in using grammar.

Practice in grammar teaching may provide several benefits. For instance, even pattern practices that lack meaning may provide some input for creative language construction. Moreover, such practice could also create room for rule learning, either as a context for deducing the rules or as a setting to apply the rules and obtain feedback (Krashen, 1981). Teachers may assume that activities that help practice newly learned grammar structures besides rendering a chance of reinforcement, may also give teachers and learners the opportunity to see if they are doing fine. Additionally, grammar practice may consolidate students' understanding of grammar and provide teachers with diagnostic information about students' needs (Borg, 1999b). Practice, in that sense, would act as a source of feedback. Teachers 2 and 9, for instance, made the following comments on the issue of practice:

During the practice part of the lessons I give learners some tasks to see whether they have understood grammar and during the writing tasks, I check their writings and give them immediate feedback. I do that in productions tasks, especially in writing. Because I don't want to interrupt them in speaking, and their mistakes become much more obvious and understandable in written format. So, we can work on them. (Teacher 2)

I check whether students have learned grammatical features or not through the practices we make in class or homework. I think practice is really helpful because it shows if we

need any further grammar work or points to the weaknesses or gaps that need to be dealt with. (Teacher 9)

As can be understood from these comments, a repeated practice was regarded as a way to recycle language forms and obtain diagnostic feedback. When students work on tasks that are created to link form, meaning and function, they could enhance their understanding of grammar. They may get the chance to progressively structure and restructure the language using inductive learning, which helps them to grasp how grammar works in context (Nunan, 1998).

### **3.10. Integrating grammar with other skills**

Item 6 addressed the issue of integrating grammar with four skills. 88% of the teachers gave strong beliefs to the notion of embeddedness and objected to the idea that grammar should be dealt with isolation. Only 8% of the participants agreed with the idea that grammar should be taught separately. For instance, Teachers 6 and 10 made the following comment on the integration of grammar with other skills:

I just don't explain the grammatical rules to my students directly. I want them to see the grammatical structures in reading passages. Then, I try to elicit these rules. After practicing the grammatical structures, I want them to use these structures in writing and speaking tasks. In production tasks, we can understand whether they really have understood the structures and use them for communicative purposes. Besides, I believe that studying grammar in integration with other skills like reading, writing, and speaking is more meaningful than focusing on only mechanical exercises. (Teacher 6)

Especially reading activities provide a meaningful context for studying grammatical features. On the other hand, speaking and writing activities enable me, as a teacher, to see if my students have successfully acquired these features or not. If yes, we can move forward and recycle these features later, if not we can devote some more time to the teaching and practice of grammar. (Teacher 10)

It can be concluded that activities that directly target language skills such as reading and writing were regarded by teachers as a meaningful context for working on grammar. The significance of grammar to fluency was also dealt with through Items 14 and 15. On Item 14, 63% of the teachers agreed with the idea that direct grammar teaching does not promote fluency while 21% of them agreed with the idea. On Item 15, which suggested that studying grammar is essential for speaking a language fluently, 52% of the teachers agreed, 33% of them disagreed with the statement. Thus, it is safe to posit that the participants gave contradictory responses about the "liberating force of the grammar" as Widdowson (1990) puts it. While more than half of the teachers reported their belief in the necessity of studying grammar to speak a language fluently, 63% of the teachers believed that formal grammar instruction did not foster fluency.

## **4. Conclusions and implications**

The present study aimed to explore EFL university teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching regarding several issues such as deductive/inductive and explicit/implicit teaching of grammar, the role of a teacher in teaching grammar, sequencing grammar activities and integrating grammar teaching with other skills. Overall, findings obtained through the questionnaire demonstrated that most of the teachers believed that knowledge of grammar was central to a substantial level of proficiency in language and learners who possess the knowledge of grammar can use the target language more effectively when compared to those who lack it. On the other hand, the results revealed that teachers seemed to believe that learners would benefit

more from an inductive approach to grammar teaching in which learners try to work out the rules themselves. Teachers also made a distinction between teaching grammar to young and adult learners regarding the benefit they could obtain from formal grammar instruction, especially embracing the idea that young learners benefit more from the indirect teaching of grammar. Teachers regarded grammar practice as beneficial to increasing fluency in using grammar, yet they did not support the idea of teaching terminology to a great extent. Another issue that was presented to the evaluation of teachers was about the role of a teacher in grammar teaching. Majority of the teachers refused the idea that it is teachers' main responsibility to explain the grammar rules and correct grammatical mistakes that students make during speaking tasks. When it comes to practical considerations including the sequencing of activities and integration of grammar with other skills, the great majority of teachers embraced the integrative teaching of grammar and more than half of them agreed that grammar needs to be dealt with after students work on communicative tasks.

Along with the results obtained through the questionnaire, semi-structured interview questions that were posed to ten volunteer teachers shed lights on the issues of interest. Interviews revealed that most teachers relied on their past experiences as language learners, teachers and even as parents while making instructional decisions. Although the majority of teachers giving their thoughts during interviews made clear that they opted for the inductive teaching of grammar and regarded grammar as a facilitative component of communication, they sometimes had to teach grammar explicitly for the sake of teaching it due to several factors. These factors were identified to be students' desire to receive explicit grammar instruction, keeping up with the other teachers teaching in the program and saving valuable class time. Even so, most teachers reported that they come up with meaningful ways to present grammar in context, mainly embedding grammar into reading activities. During speaking activities which mostly focused on fluency, teachers reported not to correct students' grammatical mistakes and to work on the problematic issues after the task is done. It was clearly seen that teachers reported beliefs were influenced by personal and contextual factors to a considerable extent. In his comprehensive review of the literature on teacher cognition in grammar teaching, Borg (2003) concluded that the interest among language teachers in formal grammar instruction has not faded, grammar teaching was held valuable especially by language teachers working in FL settings, and teachers referred to their previous language learning experiences. The same situation was also observed in the present study since teachers referred to their past language learning and teaching experiences and did not reveal any signs that research was guiding their beliefs and practices.

In general, the beliefs of the teachers who participated in the study about several issues such as the inductive/deductive and explicit/implicit dichotomy, the use of terminology, teaching grammar to adults vs. young learners displayed the range of ideas and findings reported in the relevant literature. However, there was little conflict concerning the need for attention to grammar in EFL classes. This need did not indicate a preference for direct and formal grammar instruction or ban explicit/implicit grammar teaching from EFL classes. This need also seemed to be in accordance with a less extreme position to grammar teaching, such as the one adopted by Long (1991). Long's (1991) approach suggests that grammar teaching should be embedded in communication, include fewer explicit explanations but more tailored interactional modifications that facilitate comprehension. In contrast to Krashen's (1981) viewpoint which defends the idea of excluding grammar instruction from language classes, Long's (1991) stance to the grammar instruction seems more applicable.

Furthermore, there was no explicit or implicit reference to SLA research, or to any kind of research indicating that teachers made these remarks informed by relevant research. This finding corroborates with the findings obtained by Eisentein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997)

who demonstrated that teachers were articulate about their beliefs about grammar and referred to several factors such as students' wants and syllabus expectations affecting these beliefs. Although teachers' reported beliefs did not seem to be informed by research on SLA and in particular on grammar teaching, they reflected the tenets of a communicative approach to grammar teaching, a situation that was observed in previous studies as well (Eisentein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997).

Insights gathered from the present study may also shed lights on the discrepancies between what research suggests, what is taught to prospective language teachers in teacher education programs and what practicing teachers believe and do in classroom settings. For instance, pedagogical dichotomies (e.g. inductive vs. deductive) discussed in the relevant literature may become blurred to save lesson time or help facilitate students' understanding. In another case, although candidate teachers may be advised to opt for a more discovery-based and inductive approach to grammar teaching by using the target language, practicing teachers may resort to a more teacher-led and deductive grammar instruction partly or mostly in the native language. Borg (1999a) also suggests that the distinction between these pedagogical dichotomies seems to blur in the practice since teachers may make decisions based on contextual factors. In our context, each preparatory language school has its curriculum which specifies the course objectives, topics to be covered and exams that need to be taken in detail, and consequently, each teacher working in these schools needs to stick to the plan. Therefore, teachers' resorting to the deductive teaching of grammar due to contextual factors would be understandable.

Finally, although the present study helped understand the language teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction by using a mixed-methods design, it did not evaluate to what extent these teachers' reported beliefs were reflected in their teaching. Studies investigating teacher cognition may provide higher education administrators, policymakers and teacher educators with insights about how to structure pre- and in-service teacher education programs and foster teacher development and reflective thinking. Thus, more research that focuses on the realities of classroom contexts and the real applications taking place in these contexts needs to be conducted. Moreover, these research efforts need to be made during longer periods of time and by using various data collection tools, and the findings of language teacher cognition research need to be communicated to language teachers.

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