

Exploring Saudi Teacher's Beliefs about Grammar Learning and Teaching

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Abstract – The purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' reported beliefs about their practices in classrooms of foundation year students. It aims to explore such beliefs specifically in relation to teaching and learning grammar within a Saudi context, at the English Language Institute (ELI) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU), as well as factors that can influence their beliefs and their preferences of certain grammar teaching approaches. It further examines the teachers' beliefs regarding some of the main aspects of grammar learning and teaching such as learning grammar by discovery and integrating grammar teaching in adults' classroom.

Keywords: teachers' beliefs, learning grammar, grammar teaching, integrating grammar.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the last 20 years, the study of teachers' beliefs and cognition has developed "as a major area of enquiry in the field of language teaching" (Phipps and Borg, 2009, p. 380). As alluded to by Johnson (1999), the teacher's beliefs are described as the "rock" that a teacher stands upon. To contextualise this, it can refer to the significant role that our beliefs play in forming certain practices when teaching the English language. Furthermore, Borg (2003a, p.81) defines teacher's cognition as, "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe and think". Thus, the field of teacher cognition is important in order to understand teachers' thought process and their mental lives, which are integral in shaping effective teaching and learning (Freeman, 2002). Consequently, I have chosen to explore the beliefs of Saudi teachers within my context. It is envisaged that this will shed light on some of the key concepts concerning learning and teaching grammar, more specifically to ascertain whether or not other Saudi teachers that mirror my circumstances have similar beliefs or issues. This may also include issues relating to explicit learning and teaching, the way that grammar is presented, techniques for corrective feedback and the role of practice.

As Breen (1991, p. 232) suggests:

By uncovering the kinds of knowledge and beliefs, which teachers hold and how they express these through the meanings that they give to their work, we may come to know the most appropriate support we can provide in in-service development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teachers' Beliefs in Grammar Learning & Teaching

This literature review is structured around three broad categories: a) the key concepts of grammar learning and teaching, b) teachers' beliefs in general, with the added emphasis on its

importance in developing language teaching and finally, c) the factors that have an influence on the teachers' beliefs. In reviewing such areas, this will ensure a greater depth of analysis for the main themes that is addressed in the small-scale research in the following chapter of extension of learning.

2.2. Grammar Learning & Teaching

The position and type of grammar teaching in language learning has been an area of discussion within second language acquisition for the last 50 years (Ellis, 2001). Nassaji and Fotos (2011) clarify what this discussion centers around, stating "the controversy has always been whether grammar should be taught explicitly through a formal presentation of grammatical rules or implicitly through natural exposure to meaningful language use" (p. 1). Since the prevalent teaching methods were based on structural syllabuses such as grammar translation methods and audiolingualism, grammar was regarded as a primary focus. However, the arrival of the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology cause a shift in the status of grammar; even though SLA research postulates that explicit grammar instruction is necessary for language learning, as formal instruction contributes in learners attaining high levels of accuracy (Ellis, 2001).

2.2.1. Practicing grammar. Based on my teaching experience, I have found that one of the learners' main problems in learning grammar is their ability to accurately use grammatical rules during grammar exercises, but when they are required to use the same structures in free and spontaneous communication, they are unable to do so. Therefore, one may propose that teachers must help learners in developing their fluency, as opposed to concentrating on accuracy of grammatical structures, by providing extended activities that focus on form and communication (Ur, 2011). Moreover, giving learners the chance to use the language within meaningful situations, which is referred to as contextualised grammatical structures, is considered a good idea proposed by Hedge (2000). Scrivener (2011) also suggests situational presentation before practicing, which can be used in the PPP methodology. Both approaches can help learners understand the meaning and the functions of the structures and facilitate them in transferring new structures to relevant situations (Scrivener, 2011).

Larsen-Freeman (2001) and Ur (2011) argue that one approach to teaching grammar is unlikely to work equally well in class for all learners. Moreover, despite the various options available to teachers in grammar teaching, Ellis (2008) asserts, "it is probably premature to reach any firm conclusions regarding what type of formal instruction works best" (p. 646). However, there are various options available to teachers in order to enhance the learning process by helping learners to construct form-meaning connections by integrating grammar teaching with other skills. This will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.2. Grammar integration. Mitchell (2000) emphasizes that grammar teaching must be integrated with meaning based activities and tasks, which provides opportunities for language use. He also states that TBL is a balanced approach that aims at linking focus on form instruction with communicative language use. Alternatively, Ellis (2006) suggests useful options for this is to integrate grammar teaching with other skills: this is the focus on forms approach, which follows the PPP model by starting with an explicit prior teaching of grammar, followed by controlled practice of the taught grammar items and finally moving to a freer communicative practice of the target grammar. Secondly, pre-planned focus on form,

where learners are required to accomplish a task successfully by using predetermined grammar structures. Finally, grammar teaching can be incidental in the form of reactive corrective feedback on errors in case they arise in communicative settings.

Richards and Lockhart (1996) propose that the study of the teachers' thought process of their classroom practice may address questions such as 'What do teachers believe about learning and teaching?'. Woods (1996) further states that teachers' verbalisations are the source of the individual prepositions posited in their networks of beliefs, assumptions and knowledge.

2.3. Teachers' Beliefs

Beliefs are generally defined by Pajares (1992) as "an individual's judgment of the truth or falsity of a proposition, a judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, intend, and do" (p. 316). Woods (1996) further defines them, as "an acceptance of a proposition for which there is no conventional knowledge" (p. 195). In accordance to this context, Johnson (1995) specifically describes teachers' beliefs as mental activities that help in understanding language teaching. Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001, p. 1) further state that the study of teachers' beliefs "forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work".

2.3.1. Factors influencing teacher's beliefs. Pajares (1992) proposes that the majority of early beliefs held by teachers are most likely rooted in their beliefs systems and can be difficult to adjust or remove. Moreover, teachers' beliefs are largely influenced by their learning experiences, echoing Lortie's (1975) "apprenticeship of observation", which takes place when students spend thousands of hours observing their teachers in school. As Freeman (1992, p. 3) explains, "the memories of instruction gained through their apprenticeship of observation function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do in the classroom".

There are also other influences that have been researched extensively within this field. Burns (1996, p. 162) discusses 'organizational exigencies' and how awareness of the institutional context can have a great impact on decisions towards lesson planning and content. For example, "contextual factors, such as a prescribed curriculum, time constraints, and high-stakes examinations" can have a significant effect on the degree to which language teachers' beliefs of effective language teaching can be reflected in their teaching practices (Richards & Pennigton, 1998, cited in Borg, 2003a, p. 94-95). In terms of the contextual factors, this may hinder the language teachers' ability to implement teaching practices that reflect teachers' own beliefs. For instance, Ng and Farrell (2003) found that although teachers believed in the valuable use of elicitation techniques when correcting errors, they chose to correct their students' errors directly because it was considered faster and sufficient within their context.

Furthermore, certain studies have concluded that many teachers form their beliefs and decisions based on their classroom experiences, which in turn have an influence on their overall approach. As Borg & Burns state, "teachers base instructional decisions on their own practical theories" (2008, p. 458). Moreover, they can base their beliefs on their educational principles that can be derived from a particular method or approach (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

3. METHODS

This study adopts a mixed method approach, which combines collecting quantitative with qualitative data and it is designed to be exploratory in nature. In adopting such an approach, qualitative data is used to capture the hidden meanings that the quantitative data fails to address, thereby adding a greater depth to the quantitative results (Brannen, cited in Dörnyei, 2007). Nevertheless, conducting a mixed methods study can be quite challenging as it includes diversity of data instruments which is time consuming to analyse and report.

3.1. Research Questions

In order to achieve a clear objective for this investigation, two research questions have been posed:

- 1) What beliefs do EFL Saudi teachers generally hold regarding key issues in learning and teaching grammar and the rationales they provide for their preferences regarding some discussed issues?
- 2) What are the influential factors that had an impact on teachers' beliefs and how do they affect their beliefs?

3.2. The Questionnaire ^[1]

The questionnaire was piloted on five teachers of English who are working in the ELI, Saudi Arabia and two teachers who are doing their MA in the UK. It is an adapted version of the survey used in Borg and Burns (2008). Choosing this particular questionnaire is due to the clarity and inclusiveness of most of the current issues related to grammar learning and teaching as it is designed based on an extensive review of literature on survey design (Borg & Burns, 2008).

The first section of the questionnaire includes a section for background information, including details about their ELT experience, their highest qualifications as well as their current level of students. Section 2 is comprised of 13 statements on a five-point Likert-scale, displaying respondents' agreement or disagreement concerning their beliefs about grammar learning and teaching, in relation to key issues relating to this area, such as the role of explicit instruction (e.g. 4, 12), the importance of grammar practice and drills (e.g. 3, 8), integration of grammar instruction with other skills (e.g. 5), inductive and deductive learning (e.g. 10), the importance of explicit knowledge (e.g. 2,8,13).

I intended to conduct follow-up interviews that would allow teachers to expand on their responses, and whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement in the questionnaire, the interview would provide a greater exploration of their underlying beliefs.

3.3. Interviews

In total, four interviews were conducted over a one-month period via Skype, and audio recordings were taken after obtaining the teachers' permission. Conducting telephone

[1] See Appendix 1: attached the online questionnaire along with the email attachment.

interviews has certain benefits in comparison to face-to-face interviews, as the interviewees may be less distressed if the interviewer is not physically present. It is far more economical to conduct telephonic interviews, especially when the participants are in a different country (Bryman, 2012).

I invited 10 teachers for follow up interviews after completing the same online questionnaires as an email attachment. I added the ten questionnaire responses to the larger sample of 48 teachers who responded through a web-based questionnaire. Six of the ten teachers I approached agreed to be interviewed and wrote their names at the bottom of the questionnaire and I chose four for interviews.

These four interviewees were chosen using a specific sub-sample of the 10 aforementioned teachers as outlined in Tables 1 & 2. Four teachers were selected using specific criteria from two questionnaire responses: 1) teacher's years of experience in ELT and 2) teachers' highest qualification.

Table 1 Choosing Interviews based on years of ELT Experience

Years of ELT Experience	Population	Interviewees
0-5	6	2
6-10	3	1
10+	1	1

Table 2 Choosing Interviewees based on Highest Qualifications

Highest Qualification	Population	Interviewees
Bachelors	4	2
Master's	2	1
Doctorate	0	1

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Section 1: Background Data

From the analysis of the qualitative data (i.e. questionnaire), the results revealed varying outcomes. As shown in Table 3, the years of teaching experience was quite diverse, ranging from five years or less to more than 10 years; however, 0-5 years was the largest sample 58.6%. Moreover, the majority of the teachers graduated from KAU and specialised in English language, English literature and linguistics. Regarding the Master's qualification, 37.9% of the teachers completed their Master's degree in language education, including TESOL, ESP and a Master's in Applied Linguistics and Translation. Other qualifications include PGCE and CELTA, while none of the teachers responded with a PhD qualification.

Table 3 Years of ELT Experience

Years	N	%
0-5	34	58.6
6-10	15	25.9
10+	9	15.5

Table 4 Highest ELT Qualifications

Qualification	N	%
Bachelor's	36	62.1
Master's	22	37.9
Doctorate	0	0.0

Section 2: Beliefs in Learning and Teaching Grammar

The analytical process of the questionnaire data was executed by calculating the frequencies and percentages and the results were listed in their respective tables. Statistical analysis of the quantitative questionnaire responses were conducted using Microsoft Excel 2011. Moreover, Pearson coefficient correlation analysis was utilised to indicate the strength of the relationship between different areas of beliefs using the Pearson test. Table 5 summarises all of the responses, while Figure 1 displays the results of the teachers' responses more clearly by combining the results into three categories for each statement (i.e. 'agree', which includes "agree" and "strongly agree", "Unsure" and "disagree", which includes "disagree" and "strongly disagree").

Table 5 Teachers' Beliefs about grammar learning and teaching

Statement	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Unsure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. Teachers should present grammar to learners before expecting them to use it.	6.9	15.5	6.9	39.7	31.0
2. Learners who are aware of grammar rules can use the language more effectively than those who are not.	3.4	19.0	20.7	36.2	20.7
3. Exercises that get learners to practice grammar structures help learners develop fluency in using grammar	5.2	8.6	1.7	60.3	4.1

4. Teaching the rules of English grammar directly is more appropriate for older learners.	6.9	24.1	22.4	41.4	5.2
5. Grammar should be taught separately, not integrated with other skills.	27.6	55.2	1.7	8.6	6.9
6. In learning grammar, repeated practice allows learners to use structures fluently.	3.4	8.6	3.4	55.2	29.3
7. In teaching grammar, a teacher's main role is to explain the rules.	17.2	43.1	3.4	31.0	5.2
8. It is important for learners to know the grammatical terminology.	6.9	25.9	12.1	39.7	15.5
9. Correcting learners' spoken grammatical errors is one of the teacher's key role.	5.2	24.1	15.5	41.4	13.8
10. Grammar learning is more effective when learners work out the rules for themselves.	0.0	17.2	12.1	44.8	25.9
11. Indirect grammar teaching is more appropriate with younger than with older learners.	10.3	13.8	22.4	31.0	22.4
12. Formal grammar teaching does not help learners become more fluent.	3.4	20.7	19.0	39.7	17.2
13. It is necessary to study the grammar of second or foreign language in order to speak it fluently.	5.2	32.8	10.3	41.4	10.3

4.1. Quantitative Data

An overall view of the sample suggests high levels of agreement for the importance of practice and drills in developing language fluency. This produced a mean score of 4 and over 84.5% were in agreement and strong agreement as highlighted in table 6. A closer analysis shows that responses on these two statements correlate positively and this relationship is strong and significant ($N=48$, $\rho=0.65$, $p > .001$) as teachers who agreed with statement 4 tend to agree with statement 6. (See table 9)

Table 6 Significant Correlations of two variables (4 & 11).

Groups	N	Mean	SD	p
Explicit learning is better for adult learners	58	3.13	1.06	.001
Implicit grammar teaching is better for young learners	58	3.41	1.27	

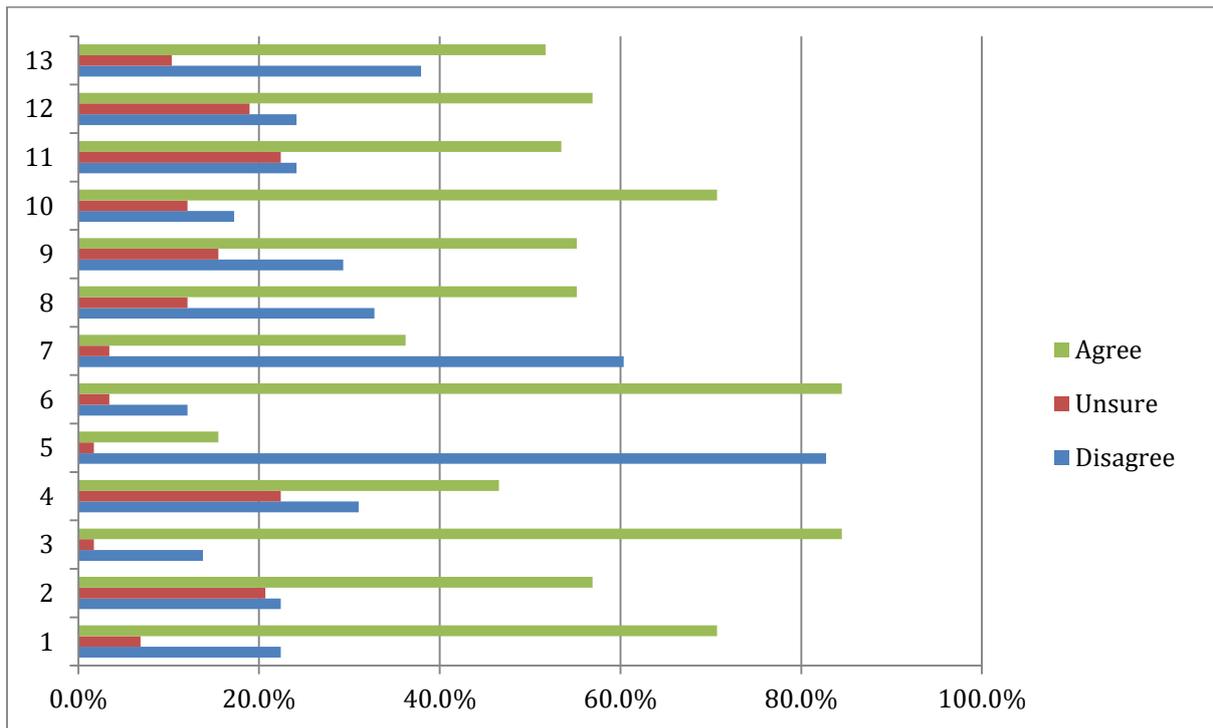


Figure 1: Responses to statements about grammar learning and teaching.

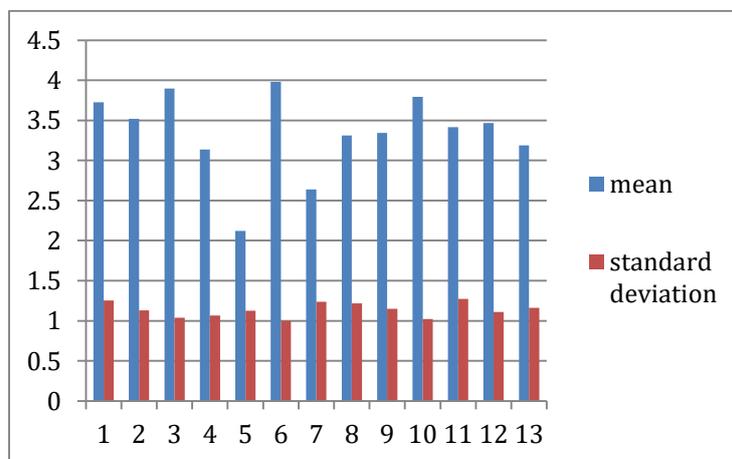


Figure 2: Mean levels for all questionnaire statements

4.2. Qualitative Data

With regards to the interviews, each of the interviewees was a Saudi teacher, with three of them possessing a bachelor's degree. (See Table 7)

Table 7 Profile of Interviewees

Teachers	Years of ELT Experience	Highest Qualifications
Sarah	6	BA in English Language
Rola	11	MA in Linguistics
Hana	5	BA in English Language and Literature
Rana	3	BA in English Language

Semi-structured interviews were employed and the data (after they were transcribed in full) was coded and categorised through a process of “qualitative thematic analysis”. This process involves being familiarized by the data, searching for key themes within them, and then finalize it by categorising and labelling the issues (Newby, 2010).

The data concerning the teachers' beliefs revealed several interesting issues; the important parts of the answers will be presented under two broad categories. Thus, key issues in (1) grammar learning and (2) grammar teaching were extracted and will be demonstrated within the results by using direct quotations from the teachers.

4.2.1. Beliefs about grammar learning. According to Woods (1996), teachers' assumptions about language learning determine the way they teach the material. Therefore, I aim to present the teachers' reported beliefs about certain issues related to grammar learning in the following section.

4.2.1.1. The importance of explicit knowledge. Two teachers expressed reasons behind their agreement for the role of conscious knowledge, as it is mainly situated around monitoring language use to avoid mistakes, which implies accurate language use:

When learners are aware of the rules, they will avoid making mistakes and help them to use the rules they have been taught in the situations where it is needed. (Rana)

It helps in transforming the information from a person to another, if I want to make sure that I am understood, it has to be said in a correct way. (Rola)

4.2.1.2. Inductive vs deductive learning. As demonstrated in Table 8, two teachers revealed a greater emphasis on deductive, rather than inductive work, and expressed strong views against inductive grammar learning. For example:

Sometimes when [learners] start guessing they get confused. Sometimes the first information they get from their friends just sticks in their minds. (Sarah)

If you leave the student confused for a long time...they might get the wrong result. A wrong grammatical rule, for example or a wrong part in a grammar rule can stick in their mind and this is not what we aim for. (Rola)

Table 8. Deductive Vs. Inductive Learning

Learning Strategy	Sarah	Rola
Deductive	-Suitable for academic and adult learners. -Meets learners' Preferences -Students are used to deductive learning.	More straight forward and assures their understanding of the rules.
Inductive	-Confusing. -Discovering the wrong rule may lead to incorrect understanding of the role.	-Misleading for adult learners. -Figuring the wrong rule affects their learning.

In contrast, the other two teachers reported their use of deductive approaches in their classrooms, although they showed a strong desirability for learning grammar by discovery:

Discovery learning is better for learners because that way they are going to be able to use the grammatical rules before even being taught those rules... Then they are going to be able to use them easily, because they were able to detect where they are in the first place. (Hana)

I think it is better to involve them because when they pick it up themselves, they will remember it definitely, because they are the ones who did it. There is a Chinese proverb. It says that, "I hear, I forget, I see, I remember, I do and I understand". So when a person does something, he will probably remember it. (Rana)

4.2.2. Beliefs about teaching grammar.

Effective instruction is formed by teacher's various beliefs and theories which they bring to the classroom. (Wood, 1996).

4.2.2.1. Explicit grammar teaching. Teachers were asked about what they believed was the best method in teaching grammar. All four teachers reported their preferences for 'focus on forms approach' (Ellis, 2006), which adheres to the PPP model whereby they do not expect learners to use the language accurately and effectively without prior explicit presentation of the rules. For example, Hana expressed her views as:

"Well I present grammar, for example, with a fun activity in the beginning that introduces this grammar rule or whatever; a game, a group work. Then I get into the rules and then I ask students to give me examples using the rules that they have learnt". (Hana)

Whereas Sarah and Hana took into consideration her learners' background when deciding to adopt an explicit approach on grammar teaching:

"Sometimes I try to see how much they know about the new grammar rule before I explain it, so I would have an idea about how much background they have. If the grammar rule I feel is complicated and new for them, I would start immediately

explaining it in a direct way. I explain the usage and the structure formally “ (Sarah)

“it depends on how I see the reaction of the students. If they have good reference of what I’m speaking about, then I can start directly”. (Hana)

Moreover, the other two teachers (Rola & Rana) had similar views in presenting grammar, favouring the use of visual aids or fun games to attract their learners’ attention and as a means of motivation.

“It is much more effective to explain the rules directly because they need guidance. They need someone to explain the rules” (Rola)

Also, two of the teachers referred to talking about grammar as a way of raising learners’ awareness of the rules. Two teachers expressed different approaches to explicit grammar teaching such as talking about grammar:

“There are a lot of videos on YouTube and they’re very interesting. They’re educational videos actually, giving the rule in a fun way. So they watch that video and then we can speak about that rule after watching the video. Then they can use it.” (Hana).

“A lot of students find the same rule we talked about, in the reading passage. I let them explain why they will use this rule here, and they explain the differences between the different sentences.” (Sarah)

4.2.2.2. The role of controlled practice in learning grammar. Although the teachers’ beliefs were not clear regarding their explanation how grammar practice is formally implemented in their classrooms, all four teachers referred to the course book for application of the rules and they all agreed to the importance of practice as a way of developing language fluency and accuracy. Therefore, using the fluency practice activities suggested by Ur (1996) as a basis, I attempted to classify the different views held by the teachers in relation to the specific forms of practice they used and those they found beneficial (See Table 9)

“I think this practice is really important to assure that students really understood what they have been taught...By practice they are not going to forget what they have been taught...” (Hana)

Sarah expressed the importance of practice in developing language proficiency for conscious awareness of the rules (declarative knowledge) to unconscious use of language (procedural knowledge); she further explains the role of practice in developing fluency:

“...They are not fluent when they are thinking about it [the rule]. But by the time they know the rule effectively, they practiced it a lot, then I think they will use it correctly unconsciously... when they practice it a lot, they do not have to think about it”. (Sarah)

Furthermore, Rola believes that free and controlled practice helps in promoting “perfect” use of language, while Rana believes in the importance of controlled grammar practice because

“it helps learners to use the language effectively”. Thus, it is evident that they both see that it is important in developing language accuracy and fluency.

Table 9 Kinds of Practice used by the four teachers.

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Kinds of Practice</i>	<i>Explanation given</i>
Sarah	Controlled drills Awareness (using texts for the book)	-Help learners automatize Declarative to procedural knowledge -Conscious to unconscious learning provides repletion of the target grammar.
Rana	Awareness	-Helps learners to notice the structure. -Helps learners use the language effectively and accurately.
Rola	Structure based discourse composition	Develops fluency, helps in promoting perfect use of language.
Hana	1-Controlled and Meaningful drills. 2-Free sentence composition. 3-structure based discourse composition.	-Assures learners' understanding of the rules. -Help learners use the rule. -Practice helps learners remember the rules.

4.2.2.3. Use of grammar terminology. The teachers held different views on the use of grammar terminology. While Hana was uncertain about its usefulness, Rana considered the use of grammar terminology as an important aspect to help in facilitating language learning:

“I prefer...to make them understand or know the names of the terminology itself ...because it helps them understand this is the verb the action thing... so it helps them avoid making mistakes, and I think it helps them perform better”. (Rana)

Sarah indicated grammar terminologies should be treated differently with the learners by basing it upon the learners' level. As for beginners, she prefers not to use grammar terminology as it can confuse them and she reported that her use of Arabic to explain the rules was more effective for those learners. As for advanced levels, Sarah explained that if a student is “excellent” and they asked for an explanation of rules, then using terminologies would be helpful.

However, she went on to express different views about the role of having knowledge of grammar terminology in language learning. For instance, she feels that the use of grammatical terminology is “confusing” and it makes the rule more “complicated”. She further states that, “it is unnecessary even in the exam, they won't even use these terminology. The most important thing for me is to understand which verb to use.” Similarly, Rola states that, “Grammar terminology doesn't hinder and it doesn't help either”.

4.2.2.4. Grammatical error correction. With regard to grammar error correction, the teachers reported beliefs were varied as to when they focus on correcting their learners' errors during fluency-based oral activities, and what techniques they use in carrying out this correction. (See Table 10). For instance, Sarah reported that she preferred to initiate self-repair for her students in order to initiate self-correction:

“I sometimes give the student herself a chance to correct herself. I just tell her, “what did you say? Do you think what you said is correct?” Then she thinks again; she corrects herself immediately. Peer correction will also raise their awareness to notice their mistakes and others. (Sarah)

Rola explained that she uses recasts in the form of reformulations, as she is more concerned about her learners' fluency and confidence, while Rana believes in the importance of the immediate correction for learners' errors:

“If she makes a mistake, I will correct it immediately, because she needs to know that she has done a mistake, so I correct as soon as possible... I prefer to correct any mistake right after she ends the statement or the sentence. I repeat the sentence with the correction” (Rana)

Table 10 Beliefs about correcting oral grammatical errors

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Techniques of correction</i>	<i>Time for correction</i>	<i>Stated belief</i>	<i>Explanation given</i>
<i>Sarah</i>	Elicitation, Clarification requests. 3- Peer correction	Accuracy Work (All errors) Fluency work (Not all errors)	Correcting learners errors is a teacher's key role	Learner will notice the gap and be aware of their mistakes and their peers'
<i>Rana</i>	Explicit immediate correction Reformulations	Immediate ASAP	Correcting errors is an important role	Learners need to be corrected
<i>Rola</i>	Recasts-reformulations	Post-fluency based activities	Correcting learner errors is not the teacher's key role	Affects student's confidence and self-esteem.
<i>Hana</i>	Elicitation-explicit correction with metalanguage explanations	Post activities Immediate	Corrective feedback is important	Interrupting learners to correct them affects their learning

4.2.2.5. Grammar integration with other skills. The PPP model is mostly preferred by all of the interviewees and is considered as a way of preparing learners for skills work. It can be inferred from the responses, that all four teachers are likely to favour an integrated approach to grammar teaching, referring to the course book as guide in helping them implement such an approach for grammar teaching:

“It has the grammar reference at the end of the book. It explains everything, like it gives the summary of the grammar rule and all the examples. Also it has a lot of exercises and it's integrated with other skills. I like it; I feel it really helps the students to learn the language” (Sarah)

Interestingly, the teachers defined grammar integration differently (see Table 11) and perceived integrating grammar in their classroom as presenting grammar in context through the use of videos and games, and then applying the rules by practicing them in skills work, mainly by speaking and writing.

Table 11 Teachers' Definitions of Grammar Integration

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Sarah	<i>"...like when we teach them a certain rule in grammar, we can use the same rule in speaking and in reading and in other skills". She adds grammar is reinforced when applied and used in other skills (Hana)</i>
Rola	<i>"Grammar integration means that grammar is part of other skills learning".</i>
Hana	<i>Because grammar is the most important part in English, it is already integrated with other skills.</i>
Rana	<i>To combine grammar teaching with other skills. E.g. for example, let us say my students took the present continuous. After the explanation and everything, maybe they should speak and describe somebody in the classroom. Or write!</i>

4.2.3. Factors influencing teachers' beliefs. Elicited factors influencing the teachers' stated beliefs are summarised in Figure 3. Based on mainstream educational research, it can be suggested that there is a relationship between factors such as the teachers' learning experience, professional development, contextual, and with the teachers' cognition, as such factors may have an influence on the teachers' overall beliefs and practices (Borg, 2003a). Thus, when the teachers were asked whether they had considered new ways in teaching grammar, Sarah and Rana said:

"New ways? Not really. I feel that we just have to follow everything in the book and we have to teach it all the same way; that's why" (Sarah).

"No. So far, I feel that my students are happy with the way I am teaching. Definitely, everybody has to think of new ideas, but so far, doing plenty of exercises is quite enough" (Rana).

Sarah referred to the students' preferences, learning experience and needs as key factors that determine her choice of the deductive approach in teaching grammar (See Table 4):

- "Maybe the students got used to [deductive learning] from school"

- "I think what they focus on is just they want to understand the rule, memorise it, and they want to get good grades in the exam. I'm talking about academic learning, when they want to study just to succeed in the language and to pass the exam" (Sarah)

Rola explains that the direct way is her primary method of teaching grammar, and this is based on her teaching experience, which lasted for more than 11 years. She goes on to explain that, "this is a conclusion that I found out from my experience of teaching students. I have experience of about eleven years now. It's better to give them the rule first, and then you practice the rule in exercises, and then they can start practising applying the grammatical

rule in their discussion, or in conversation exercises, like role-play, or other kind of dialogues.”(Rola)

Rana stated that her methodology in teaching grammar has evolved, as she used to implemented the traditional method of grammar teaching based on the way she was taught; however, after observing her colleague’s class, it made her think of involving students in learning grammar by discovery. Moreover, Hana believes that exposing learners to language first is more effective as it prepares them for the new grammatical rules; she further reported that this was used in her learning experience and she finds it effective.

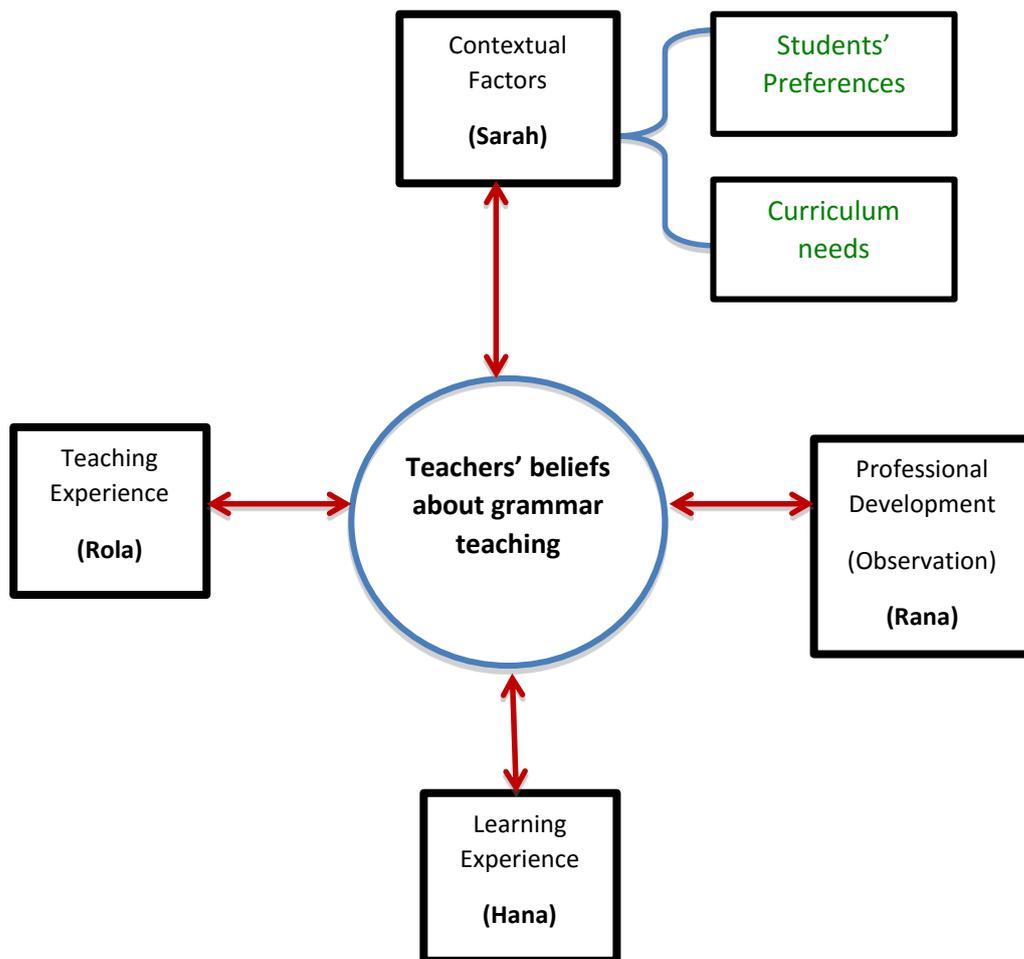


Figure 3: Factors behind teachers’ beliefs in grammar teaching

5. DISCUSSION

This discussion will effectively be based on answering the two main research questions raised in the methodology section, relating the findings of the study and evaluating any correlations that is found in the literature.

In addressing the teachers’ educational background, those who held Bachelor’s degrees, as well as those who had less than four years of ELT teaching experience constituted

as the largest group of the sample. These qualifications are quite surprising as there were no Saudi teachers holding degrees in language education specifically, as Saudi teachers who majored in education predominantly teach in state schools. In addition, there are other majors that were highlighted within the results that are not relevant to ELT; namely three of the teachers majoring in early childhood education, English language and media studies and commerce. These indicate that the sample of English language teachers is not all highly qualified.

5.1. Research Question 1

As mentioned previously, the first question aims at exploring teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching grammar. The results revealed that the teachers held uncertain and opposing views as to whether implicit grammar teaching was better for young learners. The same percentage of teachers' uncertainty was, also found by (Borg and Burns, 2008), who felt this could be due to teachers finding it difficult to articulate their beliefs, as it is considered a new activity for them.

One major finding of the study is that the teachers expressed strong beliefs of disagreement towards isolating grammar teaching from other teaching skills. This finding is not surprising as it is again similar to Burns & Borg (2008), who found that over 84 % of teachers showed a strong preference for integrating grammar teaching with other skills. Additionally, Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (2002) found that teachers combined explicit grammar instruction with free communicative language use. Similarly, in Andrews's study (2003), teachers viewed grammar teaching as integrated with meaningful contexts. Having said that, the participants that were interviewed in this study revealed that grammar integration with other skills may not be well understood by teachers, as many of them defined grammar as being taught separately to some extent.

Another high percentage of agreement was expressed regarding the importance of practice in developing language fluency and therefore a greater value towards inductive grammar learning. The teachers held the highest views towards the importance of practice in order to develop their learners' fluency, wherein 84.5 % of them agreed to the key role that controlled practice played in developing language fluency. Yet again, this is not a particularly surprising result as Borg and Burns (2008) also found that teachers expressed strong positive beliefs in the role of practice for fluency development. Moreover, Barnard and Scampton (2008) reached a similar conclusion, which revealed 84 % of the teachers held positive views and felt productive practice was important in the learning process.

Although more than 70% of the teachers that were surveyed favoured presenting grammar before use, the four teachers that were interviewed showed a strong tendency towards explaining grammar explicitly. This is similar to Burgess and Etherington (2002) who found that teachers in their studies favoured explicit grammar instruction. In addition, the teachers in the present study did not seem to have clear image or an understanding for the role of explicit knowledge in grammar teaching. This mirrors Barnard and Schampton (2008) and Burgess and Etherington (2002) as the research conducted in both these studies did not produce conclusive results about the role of conscious knowledge in developing language fluency. In contrast, the teachers' interviews demonstrated that they viewed the role of explicit knowledge as a way to help learners use the language more accurately.

Although more than 46% of the surveyed teachers have shown preference for direct formal grammar instruction for adult learners, 60% of the teachers do not see their main teaching role to solely focus on explaining grammar rules. However, 70 % of the teachers' responses represent their agreement about learning grammar by discovery. This high level of preference for learning grammar by discovery learning, also existed in Burn and Borg's study (2008), where teachers showed high desirability of discovery learning. This finding was further illustrated by teachers' responses in the interview, where different views regarding learning by discovery or inductive learning were expressed in Table 7.

Regarding using grammatical terminology in explicit grammar instruction, more than half of the teachers reported their beliefs on the usefulness of using grammatical terminologies in teaching grammar. This may be based on the belief that the strategies that are adopted in teaching English grammar is similar to Arabic grammar, as most of the students come from the same educational background of the teachers' whereby they are introduced to grammatical terminology while learning Arabic. On the contrary, there are some criticisms against the effectiveness of using grammatical terminology in the language classroom. For instance, Halliwell (1993) states that encouraging learners to learn grammatical terminology may develop their ability to talk about the language as opposed to using; this reflects a similar situation of the students within my context. However, Hedge (2000) asserts that the use of grammatical terminology can be beneficial for advanced learners who are able to understand it, as well as analytic learners who prefer learning grammar by using terminologies.

More than half of the teachers considered correcting learners' errors as a key role for language teachers, which, compared with Borg and Burn's (2008) results, found that 49.5 % of the teacher do not view it as a key role. Teachers' beliefs about error correction can be aligned more appropriately with the students' responses in Schulz (1996, 2001), as 90% of the students expressed a need to be corrected. Similarly, all the teachers in the interviews viewed grammatical accuracy as integral to language and communication. They further expressed different techniques in correcting grammar in the class (as highlighted in Table 9) as one of the teachers reported the instructional activities as a factor in deciding which errors to correct (e.g. accuracy and fluency work). This shows that teachers have some awareness of when to correct learners, whereas one of the teachers (Rana), who has three years of ELT experience, preferred correcting learners immediately.

5.2. Research Question 2

The data in the questionnaire revealed no apparent association between the teachers' beliefs and aspects pertaining to their educational background; whether it was highest qualification or years of experience. However, the qualitative data showed how individual learning and teaching experiences, as well as contextual factors (e.g. curriculum, peer observations) had a significant influence on their beliefs about grammar learning and teaching.

When discussing their beliefs, the teachers referred to many factors that affected their choice of structuring explicit grammar lessons and grammar instruction. For instance, Sarah emphasised the learners' needs and preferences in determining her choice of deductive teaching, whereas Rana discussed the contribution from her peer observation in changing her views towards teaching grammar. Burgess and Etherington (2002) suggested that teachers'

similar preferences for explicit grammar teaching may be relevant to their students' past educational experiences of grammar-based language learning, and this mirrors the case in the Saudi context, as Sarah showed her awareness of the learners' educational background, resulting in forming her decisions in teaching grammar.

The above interpretations are in accordance with Borg's findings (1998), particularly in relation to the influence of student' preferences. Professional development on teachers' pedagogic decisions showed that teachers were influenced with such similar factors. In addition, Sarah revealed conflicting beliefs because, despite her belief that formal grammar work does not develop the learner's fluency, she still uses it in her classroom practice. This is in line with Phipps and Borg (2009), who found that there are some factors that lead teachers to teach in ways that are contrary with their beliefs, such as students' expectations and preferences. As Borg (1999, p. 26) concluded from findings on research into teacher's cognition of grammar teaching, "the teachers' decisions in teaching grammar were often influenced by their conflicting cognitions about language, learning in general, L2 learning, grammar teaching, students and self". Though both studies were qualitative in nature and based on actual observations of teachers' practices, they gave me clear insights over the nature of teachers' beliefs and the factors influencing them.

In accordance to the findings from Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997), the teachers that were interviewed in this present study were in favour of the explicit formal grammar teaching. This is further similar to their Puerto Rico group of teachers' belief, as they referred to the set syllabus and learners' preferences as factors for shaping their stated beliefs. In addition, the teachers consistently referred to the course book in their interviews, either for forming their presentation of grammar or providing grammar practice. This could be reflected on their reliance of the assigned textbook *New Headway Plus*, as it is structured to begin with grammar presentation in each unit and provides an ample amount of controlled grammar exercises, as well as a reference at the end of the book.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter has generated a great deal of discussion as a direct result of the findings from the conducted experiment. Thus, a summary of these findings are as follows:

- 1- The teachers highly 84.5 % supported the importance of controlled grammar practice in developing fluency along with accuracy.
- 2- Although the 82.8 % majority of teachers favoured grammar integration with other skills, all four of the teachers' comments on integrating grammar teaching with other skills implied that they viewed it as a separate grammar lesson. This could be a result of the limited alternatives available to the teachers, as well as their course book in constraining their method of presenting grammar.
- 3- Although the questionnaire results revealed high responses of 70.7 % preferences for inductive grammar learning, two of the teachers in the interviews strongly favoured the deductive approach. With reference to videos and games in presenting in grammar rules, they were considered as a "fun way of learning grammar".

- 4- 55 % of the teachers reported that grammatical terminology facilitates language learning; whereas two of the teachers in the interviews felt that it was not important, “even in the exams” and, “it doesn’t hinder nor facilitate language learning.
- 5- In reporting their beliefs about grammar teaching, the teachers referred to the influence on their views of their prior language learning experiences and contextual factors. Also, conflicting beliefs of one of the teachers emerged from the data.
- 6- Teachers believe in the importance of explicit grammar knowledge in facilitating accurate language use.
- 7- Teachers favoured explicit grammar instructions, specifically the deductive approach with reference to the course book in forming their grammar presentation and practice.

7. CONCLUSION

Professional development and real teaching practice demands other alternatives and models to experience and reflect upon, which can help adjust existing beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Seeking professional development is essential and teachers need to attend workshops and conferences to be well informed of the new techniques for teaching grammar along with the research evidence to show the effectiveness of new methods in teaching grammar. Also, reflecting on our practices and looking up to develop them would give us clear maps of areas of improvements in our inner selves. Therefore, it is significantly important to find ourselves as teachers, by identifying and recognising our beliefs. By means of reflection, teacher can always question their beliefs and practices, in regards to strengths and weaknesses, whereby what works good for their class and what needs improving.

Wallace (1991, p.58) suggests “equipping students’ teachers with the techniques to go on developing professional competence is considered as an initial competence”. Therefore, as teachers, it is vital to further develop professional competence by self-evaluation and self-development. For example, as part of future development, I will keep in mind the view from Bailey et al. (2001, p.7), who assert that “continued professional growth and excitement” can also help us resist negativity in our teaching context, as when we care and keep in mind developing ourselves we keep ourselves motivated as language teachers.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

1 (Email Attachment)

Questionnaire

Exploring Teachers' Beliefs about Learning and Teaching Grammar in a Saudi Context

Dear teacher,

The aim of this questionnaire is to ask about your beliefs regarding how grammar is learned and taught in adult EFL classrooms. Please note that the data collected from this questionnaire will be used as part of a Master's study and your answers will be treated confidentially. This will take less than **10 minutes**.

Section 1: Personal Information

Please tick the most appropriate response:

- Highest academic qualification:
 - A bachelor's degree in _____
 - A master's degree in _____
 - A doctorate in _____
 - Other, please specify _____

- What level are you teaching?
 - Beginner
 - Elementary
 - Pre-intermediate
 - Intermediate

Section 2: Beliefs about Grammar Learning and Teaching

Please express your opinions freely considering the following statements. For each statement below, please tick the most appropriate choice, which best reflect your opinion.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Teachers should present grammar to learners before expecting them to use it.					
b. Learners who are aware of grammar rules can use the language more effectively than those who are not.					
c. Exercises that get learners to practice grammar structures help learners develop fluency in using grammar.					
d. Teaching the rules of English grammar directly is more appropriate for older learners.					
e. Grammar should be taught separately, not integrated with other skills such as reading and writing.					
f. In learning grammar, repeated practice allows learners to use structures fluently.					
g. In teaching grammar, a teacher's main role is to explain the rules.					
h. It is important for learners to know grammatical terminology.					
i. Correcting learners spoken grammatical errors in English is one of the teacher's key roles.					
j. Grammar learning is more effective when learners work out the rules for themselves.					
k. Indirect grammar teaching is more appropriate with younger than with older learners.					
l. Formal grammar teaching does not help learners become more fluent.					
m. It is necessary to study the grammar of a second or foreign language in order to speak it fluently.					

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

Note:

If you are willing to participate in an interview regarding the study please write your contact details below:

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Please note that Interviews will be set at a time at your own convenience.

Appendix B

2 (Online Questionnaire)

Exploring Teachers' Beliefs in Learning and Teaching Grammar.

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Exploring Teachers' Beliefs in Learning and Teaching Grammar.



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Main Survey Page

Note that once you have clicked on the CONTINUE button your answers are submitted and you can not return to review or amend that page

1. Years of Teaching English Experience

0-5
 6-10
 greater than 10

2. What is your Highest Academic Qualification? [More Info](#)

A bachelor's degree
 A master's degree
 A doctorate

Please provide details of your highest qualification below

3. Which level are you teaching?

Beginner
 Elementary
 Pre-Intermediate
 Intermediate

Beliefs about Grammar Learning and Teaching

For each statement below, please select the most appropriate choice which best reflects your opinion.

4. Statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Usure	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Teachers should present grammar to learners before expecting them to use it.	<input type="radio"/>				
b. Learners who are aware of grammar rules can use the language more effectively than those who are not.	<input type="radio"/>				

c. Exercises that get learners to practice grammar structures help learners develop fluency in using grammar.	<input type="radio"/>				
d. Teaching the rules of English grammar directly is more appropriate for older learners	<input type="radio"/>				
e. Grammar should be taught separately, not integrated with other skills such as reading and writing.	<input type="radio"/>				
f. In learning grammar, repeated practice allows learners to use structures fluently.	<input type="radio"/>				
g. In teaching grammar, a teacher's main role is to explain the rules	<input type="radio"/>				
h. It is important for learners to know grammatical terminology.	<input type="radio"/>				
i. Correcting learners spoken grammatical errors in English is one of the teacher's key roles.	<input type="radio"/>				
j. Grammar learning is more effective when learners work out the rules for themselves.	<input type="radio"/>				
k. Indirect grammar teaching is more appropriate with younger than with older learners.	<input type="radio"/>				
l. Formal grammar teaching does not help learners become more fluent.	<input type="radio"/>				
m. It is necessary to study the grammar of a second or foreign language in order to speak it fluently.	<input type="radio"/>				

[Continue >](#)

Survey testing only

[Check Answers & Continue >](#)