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TEACHER AND STUDENT VIEWS TOWARDS THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR
INSTRUCTION IN UAE UNIVERSITIES

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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MASTER OF ARTS

by
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TEACHER AND STUDENT VIEWS TOWARDS THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN UAE UNIVERSITIES

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American University of Sharjah, 2011

ABSTRACT

Grammar teaching has always been a very controversial topic in the field of second language acquisition. Whether or not to teach grammar remains an unresolved issue. However, there has been a common accord toward the value of teaching grammar. Learners need grammar integrated into communicative activities to reach both fluency and accuracy. Besides, the role of grammar instruction has also been raised from the perspective of students' and teachers' perceptions. Many studies have attempted to investigate what L2 students and teachers really think of grammar and whether there are discrepancies in beliefs between the two groups. Teachers' beliefs have received recent interest by researchers and have been acknowledged to be central in language teaching. In other words, teacher cognition, that is what language teachers think, know, and believe, is closely linked to instructional decisions and, thus, teaching practices. The store of beliefs and experiences of language teachers about language and grammar teaching influence the way they teach. The objective of my study was to explore teacher and student perceptions regarding the role of grammar instruction in learning another language, in this case English. By comparing the perceptions held by the teachers and the students, this study also aimed to look for any similarities and differences in perceptions between these two groups. In addition, the study sought to closely examine teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and looked

for any differences between native English speaking (NES) teachers and nonnative English speaking (NNES) teachers.

The methods used in this investigation included questionnaires and teachers' interviews. The results indicate that the majority of the teachers in this study appreciated the value of grammar for their students. In general, teachers believed that grammar is important to learn English, but the opinions slightly differed when comparing native and non-native teachers' results. In this sample, the NES teachers all agreed that grammar instruction was important and useful to learn a second language while not all the NNES teachers agreed on that. As far as students were concerned, they believed grammar teaching is necessary and useful for them to learn English. However, some discrepancies existed between the teachers and the students. There wasn't an agreement when it came to keeping grammatical rules in mind when writing. The students felt more than the teachers that they were keeping grammatical rules when they wrote (75% vs. 62%). The students all believed that the study of formal grammar was essential to the mastery of a second language compared to the teachers. The students were also more convinced of the importance to know grammar to learn English. A large majority of students (84%) believed that their communicative ability would improve most quickly if they studied and practiced the grammar of the language. Only 50% of the teachers believed so. Another major discrepancy (41%) regards the belief that there should be more formal study of grammar in classrooms. While 72% of the students believed there should be more formal grammar instruction, only 31% of the teachers believed so. Finally, a large majority of the teachers thought their students disliked the study of grammar while only very few students attested that they did not like grammar study. This study suggests some implications for teachers and language teaching and learning in general.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	x
DEDICATION.....	xi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Controversy over Grammar Instruction.....	1
The Purpose of the Study.....	3
Motivation for the Study.....	3
Research Questions.....	4
The Context of the Study.....	5
Overview of Chapters and Appendices.....	5
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	7
The Debate on Formal Grammar Instruction.....	7
Arguments against Grammar Instruction.....	7
Arguments for Grammar Instruction.....	8
The solutions to the Debate.....	11
Focus-on-Form Instruction.....	11
Consciousness-Raising.....	16
Discourse-Based Approach.....	17
Students' and Teachers' Perceptions about Formal Grammar Teaching.....	18
Students' and Teachers' Perceptions Discrepancies.....	18
Teacher Cognition and Grammar Teaching.....	21
Conclusion.....	24
3. METHODOLOGY.....	26
Design of the Study.....	26
The Participants.....	26
The Teachers.....	27
The Students.....	28
Data Collection Instruments.....	28
Questionnaires.....	28
Interviews.....	29
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....	30
Introduction.....	30
Students' and Teachers' Questionnaire Findings.....	30

Students' Results.....	30
Discussion of the Students' Results.....	33
Teachers' Results.....	37
Discussion of the Teachers' Results.....	40
Teachers' Prior Experiences.....	44
Comparison of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions.....	49
Comparison of NES Teachers' and NNES Teachers' Perceptions.....	53
5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	60
Conclusions.....	60
Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations for Further Research.....	60
Limitations of the Study.....	63
Final Thought.....	65
REFERENCES.....	66
APPENDIX.....	71
A. TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE.....	71
B. STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE.....	75
C. TEACHERS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	77
VITA.....	78

FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Students' Responses to the Questionnaire (n=56).....	33
2. Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire (n=16).....	40

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Background Data about the Participants (n=72).....	30
2. Students' Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar Instruction (n=56).....	31
3. Teachers' Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar Instruction (n=16).....	38
4. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	49
5. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	49
6. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	50
7. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	50
8. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	50
9. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	50
10. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	51
11. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	51
12. Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.....	51
13. NES Teachers' Responses.....	55
14. NNES Teachers' Responses.....	56

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wonderful family. I owe everything to my husband, children, and parents.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Controversy over the Value of Formal Grammar Teaching

Grammar teaching has been and continues to be a source of controversy and debate, which have led many second language researchers to rethink the status of grammar in language learning and teaching. The ups and downs that grammar instruction has experienced for many years are associated with the history of language teaching. The traditional methods of language teaching based on formal grammar instruction have often been unsuccessful in providing L2 learners with skills they need to communicate efficiently. Consequently, some researchers declared grammar teaching irrelevant. They opted for a zero grammar approach in second language classrooms and an exclusive focus on communication in the target language. They sustain that the teaching of grammar has only a minimal effect on the acquisition of linguistic competence in a second language. Krashen (1985), for instance, argues that acquisition only takes place when learners are exposed to as much input as possible which they are able to comprehend. On the other hand, there are those who argue for grammar teaching. White (1991) claims that some grammatical forms cannot be acquired solely on the basis of comprehensible input and that formal instruction may be necessary to ensure that learners obtain the data they need to acquire these forms.

Many empirical studies have revealed that focus on communication alone does not guarantee high levels of accuracy. Grammar is being rehabilitated (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998) and recognized for what it has always been: an essential, inescapable component of language use and language learning (Thornbury, 2001). Grammar instruction is necessary to achieve optimal second language learning. This revival doesn't mean though a return to the traditional ways of teaching grammar. Instead, the incorporation of grammar instruction in second and foreign language classrooms is seen through different perspectives, and the way structures are introduced is being reconsidered too. Larsen-Freeman (2001), for example, suggests that grammar should constitute a fifth skill that goes along with the four other skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For her, there is no doubt that grammar teaching is important for L2 learners "to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately" (p. 255). There has been a growing accord among researchers and teachers on the positive role of grammar instruction in second and

foreign language learning. It is recognized that form, meaning, and use are entwined and that grammar is one of the resources, along with adequate vocabulary and knowledge of cultural and discourse conventions, our learners need in order to communicate effectively.

In addition, it is important to know the attitudes and opinions of students and teachers on the role that grammar instruction plays in second language learning and teaching. In particular, according to Kern (1995), language learners are not always conscious of their own learning style but they surely hold, especially older learners, strong beliefs about how they should learn a language. These beliefs are usually based on the way they have been taught a language and the assumption that a particular type of instruction works best for them. Moreover, a few studies have indicated that students' perceptions were very important in order to have successful language learning. As an example, in a study reported by Kern (1995), ESL students aged between 19 and 25 showed dissatisfaction regarding the communicative program focused exclusively on meaning and spontaneous communication. The majority of the students in this study expressed concerns about the absence of grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Therefore, they felt that their learning progress was affected due to the lack of grammar study, which for them was the best way to learn English. Besides, the studies on students' and teachers' perceptions have revealed major discrepancies between the beliefs and attitudes of students and teachers, which can be detrimental to language learning and teaching.

Furthermore, teacher cognition has been acknowledged as fundamental in second language teaching. Indeed, teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about grammar instruction and how languages are learned and taught are crucial to understand why they teach the way they do. Teachers are implementing their practices based on their beliefs. Although many teachers wonder how formal grammar instruction can benefit L2 learners, their beliefs usually come from their years of teaching experience as well as their experience as language learners. Studies have shown that teachers rarely justify their teaching approaches by referring to research or any particular methodology (Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997). Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) state that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are very much shaped by their personal experiences. Consequently, understanding teachers' classroom practices means to understand their ideas of learning and teaching as well as the sources of influence that shape such ideas.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to look at teacher and student perceptions concerning the role of grammar teaching in learning English as a second language in two higher education institutions offering Intensive English Programs (IEPs). The focus of the study was on whether they believe grammar is important and effective for them to learn English and why they think so. This study also sought to find out the reasons of the positive or negative beliefs about formal grammar teaching, and look for any differences or similarities in opinions between the two groups. Last, the study looked deeper into NES and NNES teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences as a significant influence on the way they think of grammar and the way they teach it.

Motivation for This Study

The motivation for this study came from my personal experience as a language learner. I was taught English through the study of formal grammar, and I do believe that formal grammar instruction is necessary to some extent. However, I believe it is best if it is taught in meaningful contexts rather than in isolation. According to my own experience, the exclusive instruction of grammar out of context did not make me able to communicate in English. Not only do I want to know more about the role of grammar in SLA and its evolution through the years, but also how this role is perceived here in the UAE. Indeed, while many studies have been conducted to examine more carefully the beliefs and attitudes of students and teachers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and South American and East Asia countries, there has been little or no research in the UAE about the role of formal grammar teaching. Therefore, my study focused on the students' and teachers' perceptions about English grammar teaching in some UAE private institutions.

I believe my study is valuable in the sense that it provides some insights into whether or not grammar teaching is considered useful and important for both students and teachers, and why they think so. It is often assumed that many teachers believe that grammar is a cumbersome subject for students. This study provides the opportunity to compare the perceptions of two different groups, teachers and students. What do students really think of formal grammar in learning English? Do they really dislike it? How about teachers? Do they believe that formal grammar instruction is necessary and useful or ineffective to learn English? This study sought to answer those questions and provide explanations. The results, in fact, indicate some

divergence in opinions that could affect the way English is taught and learned. The results might alert teachers and suggest ways to reduce any discrepancies between students' beliefs and teachers' practices. As a matter of fact, previous work on attitudes and perceptions within language learning suggests that there is often a disparity between students and teachers (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Spratt, 1999). Such divergences in opinions are often found around the area of grammar teaching. For example, Brindley's (1984, cited in Nunan, 1991) study, involving adult migrants in Australia, found teachers more in favor of communicative activities, while students preferred more formal grammar teaching. More recently, Schultz's (2001) study described differences between teachers and students in two different language teaching contexts, the USA and Colombia, with students more favorable than teachers towards formal teaching of grammar and error correction. For this reason, I was interested in exploring student and teacher perceptions about grammar instruction. I was also interested in learning about the types of experiences that had formed those perceptions.

Research Questions

My research examined student and teacher views regarding formal grammar instruction in IEP classrooms. Therefore, my specific research questions were as follows:

1. Do the students and the teachers participating in this study believe that grammar is important to learn English, and if so, why?
2. What are the similarities or differences in perceptions, if any, held by the students and the teachers?
3. Are the teachers' beliefs about grammar influenced by any prior experiences?
4. Are there any differences between the native English speaking (NES) teachers' beliefs and the non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers' beliefs?

The Context of the Study

In the UAE, English is a compulsory subject taught from grades 1 to 12. At the university level, English is the language of instruction for all the majors except for Arabic ones. To be admitted to UAE universities, students are required to take the TOEFL and score a minimum of 520. Students failing to meet the requirement have to complete more IEP courses. The IEP offers classes for students to improve their skills in the English language in order to pursue their majors. Listening and speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and TOEFL preparation are taught so that students can not only learn and practice the different strategies to pass the TOEFL but also to perfect their vocabulary and their English in general on a multitude of subjects such as science, sociology, and media to name a few. Since grammar is an important part in the TOEFL and in the history of language instruction, the perceptions of the students and the teachers in the IEP on the place and importance of grammar instruction are both interesting and necessary to determine the real value of teaching grammar from both sides. Oftentimes, perceptions on the place of grammar instruction have been formed by experiences as students and teachers, as well as by individual goals for language learning and exposure to theory. This can explain why some students or teachers emphasize, de-emphasize, or ignore grammar instruction in classrooms. This study questioned whether teachers and students in the UAE believe formal grammar instruction in an ESL program is necessary to help students attain proficiency in English.

Overview of the Chapters and Appendices

Chapter 1 has described the purpose of the study and the motivation for it as well as the research questions. It has also explained the controversy around grammar instruction in second and foreign language acquisition.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the role of grammar instruction in second and foreign language acquisition. More precisely, it highlights the role of grammar instruction in the history of language teaching, the controversy around it, and some of the solutions to better integrate grammar into curriculums. It also reviews the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students on the importance of grammar instruction in language classrooms.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the participants and the instruments used to collect data, which were surveys and interviews.

Chapter 4 presents data analysis and the findings of the study. The findings are presented using figures and tables and are divided into three sections: students' attitudes towards the role of grammar in learning English, teachers' attitudes towards the study of formal grammar in learning English, and teachers' interviews.

Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study and findings, conclusion and implications, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and for further research.

Appendices are also included and consist of the students' questionnaire (Appendix A), the teachers' questionnaire (Appendix B), and the teachers' interview questions (Appendix C).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Debate on Formal Grammar Instruction

Views on grammar instruction can be placed between two extremes. On the one hand, there are adherents of explicit or formal grammar instruction, and on the other hand, there are those who disregard grammar teaching altogether, overlooking the guiding role that grammar teaching can play in language acquisition. The reason for this controversy lies in the fact that the traditional methods of language teaching, based on formal grammar instruction, have often been unsuccessful in providing L2 learners with skills they need to communicate efficiently.

Arguments against Grammar Instruction

According to Stern (1992), those against grammar instruction have argued that teaching grammar has no effect on L2 learners' competence. This position is represented by Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis that claims that as long as L2 learners are provided with comprehensible input in a condition of low affective filter, they will acquire the target language. According to Krashen (2002), the learning process should be natural. He firmly contests the idea held during the time of the Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual methods which assumed that the only way of developing grammatical competence in a second language was through direct teaching of grammar. Krashen (2002) states that most teachers and researchers at that time held the "skill-building" position; that is learners "learn language by first learning the rules consciously, then practicing them in output exercises, and [learners] fine tune [their] knowledge of rules by getting their errors corrected" (p. 1).

Krashen believes that explicit grammar teaching is not a good idea since conscious learning of grammatical structures is considered to affect learners' production in the L2. Indeed, he explains that conscious knowledge of grammar has a limited function. Learners can use it only to edit or monitor their second language production. For Krashen, there is another way to develop competence in a second language. L2 learners acquire the grammatical rules of a language by understanding input containing these rules. The attention is not on consciously learning the rules but on understanding the message. The evidence for the "comprehension" or "input" hypothesis is supported by studies showing that students in comprehension-based second language classes constantly outperform those in traditional classes, at both the

beginning and intermediate levels. Other studies have shown the powerful impact of recreational reading (Krashen, 2003). There is also strong indirect evidence supporting the comprehension hypothesis. The grammatical system of any language is too complicated to be consciously learned, and many people develop high levels of competence without formal instruction. Furthermore, Terrell (1991), in his review on the role of grammar instruction, declares that “the ability to demonstrate grammatical knowledge on a discrete-point grammar exam does not guarantee the ability to use that knowledge in ordinary conversation, be it spontaneous or monitored” (p. 54). Weaver (1996) argues that grammar teaching is not helpful in the sense that no matter how students are taught grammatical concepts and language conventions they will not automatically make use of these in writing.

However, in recent years, a number of studies have been published contesting the input hypothesis. These studies typically show that after providing students with direct instruction, they improve in the use of the rules taught, and show more improvement than comparison groups. Consequently, recent research has restored positive views about grammar teaching and has begun to indicate that the lack of focus on forms and structures have brought some researchers, formerly in favor of meaning-based instruction, “[to] now believe that students need input on structure” (Frodesen, 2001, p. 234). Similarly, Ellis (2006) and Wu (2007) affirm that grammar is a fundamental part of L2 instruction. Ellis states that “there is now convincing indirect and direct evidence to support the teaching of grammar” (p. 86). The role of grammar is, thus, important in that “not only does it help learners to improve their writing skills, but also it helps them in reading and listening alike” (Wu, 2007, p. 48).

Arguments for Grammar Instruction

The adherents of formal grammar instruction believe that teaching grammar promotes grammatical accuracy and speeds up L2 learning (Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997). Ellis (2002), who supports formal grammar instruction, argues that consciousness-raising and explicit knowledge facilitates L2 learners’ intake to form implicit knowledge.

The first reason to support grammar instruction is the basic view that grammar is the fundamental base of any language; that is, it provides the learners with the structures they need in order to organize and get their messages and ideas across. It simply cannot be separated from language since it ties words together so that we can make sense of what someone is saying. One important aspect of grammar teaching,

according to Azar (2007), is that “it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear and write intelligible” (p. 2).

Moreover, achieving optimal second language learning is another reason to teach grammar. According to Frodesen (2001), grammar is an essential resource in transmitting accurate and effective communication. She further stresses the importance of grammar instruction by referring to the results of studies conducted on classroom immersion and naturalistic acquisition. These results revealed that when instruction is exclusively on meaning, “learners do not develop many linguistic features at target like levels” (p. 233). Indeed, without teaching grammatical knowledge, some learners will face fossilization and, in most cases, their speaking will become pidgin-like language. Their acquisition of the target language will be, somehow, incomplete although they can use the target language to communicate.

In addition to increasing the ability to communicate efficiently and appropriately, grammar teaching improves writing. Wu (2007) reports the new enthusiasm “in some educational circles for the idea that conscious grammar...could have the useful benefit of improving writing” (p. 51). Similarly, Frodesen (2001) suggests that grammar helps “writers develop their knowledge of linguistic resources and grammatical systems to convey ideas meaningfully and appropriately to intended readers” (p. 233). It is argued that many L2 students need advanced level writing proficiency for academic or professional purposes. According to Azar’s (2007) experience as an English teacher, students with no concept of grammar will also have difficulties to “grasp the principles of rhetoric which affect their academic writing” (p. 3). Students who cannot understand how a sentence is structured also cannot readily see how the sentences in a paragraph relate. Mulroy (2003) promotes some convincing arguments for the teaching of grammar to language learners:

Sentences always have and always will consist of clauses with subjects and predicates and of words that fall into classes fairly well described as verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Individuals who understand these concepts have a distinct advantage over others where the use of language is involved—and that means everywhere. (p. 118)

Indeed, some L2 students need advanced level writing proficiency for academic or professional purposes. The knowledge of grammar facilitates any writing that some

students will have to do in their careers. Similarly, many L2 students will have to write intensively, in English for example, if they aim to study abroad to get a degree. Other findings of classroom research have begun to indicate that students who have experienced grammar instruction have an advantage over those students who have not (Ellis, 2006; Frodesen, 2001). It is easier for them to correct their mistakes because they may only need to be reminded of a basic rule they have learned. Their level of grammatical accuracy is also higher. Frodesen's (2001) example of international students and permanent residents in the US exemplifies this fact. She explains that many international students going to America to study have learned English in their countries in classrooms and have received a large amount of explicit grammar instruction. On the other hand, most permanent residents have acquired English through exposure to the language "in oral contexts" (p. 235). She further argues that the writing of international students or EFL students in the United States may "demonstrate better skill in producing the complex structures typical of formal academic English" (p. 235). Error correction is another advantage of grammar teaching. Many believe that grammar instruction allows students to practice structures, makes them aware of their errors, and helps them to correct their errors. Schulz (2001) summarizes the results of her studies about grammar teaching and error correction. She suggests that teachers should give explicit feedback to students' errors during grammar lessons as it is potentially effective and sometimes necessary.

The importance and usefulness of teaching grammar, explicitly, could also serve to bring students' attention to promote what some researchers such as Larsen-Freeman (2001) and Ellis (2002) called "noticing." The basic idea behind noticing is that if the learners pay attention to the features of some grammatical structures, this will help them internalize the rule. In fact, this concept aims to develop awareness of rather than production of target forms through explicit grammar teaching. Hence, teachers should not evaluate students on accurate use of these forms in spontaneous speech. Optimistically, this awareness will, according to Ellis (2002), help learners notice target forms in future input and facilitate the acquisition of these forms as implicit knowledge. This kind of noticing can sometimes be necessary in order for the students to be aware of difficult structures in grammar. Noonan (2004) explains that noticing can be a means to rectify this weakness and help them "notice the gap: they recognize that the language features noticed are different from their current language" (para. 2). Larsen-Freeman (2001) believes that grammar should be conceived of as a

skill to develop rather than a transmission of knowledge. She argues that “it is better to think of teaching ‘grammaring’ than grammar” (p. 255). Grammar is not only a set of rules that teachers try to inculcate in students’ minds. The hope is to have students use grammatical structures “accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.”

The benefits of teaching grammar are, then, numerous. Grammar is an essential component of language, a system that learners can use for their communicative needs, a tool allowing them to say more than they already know. The failure of the traditional grammar-centered methods to lead to fluency in the target language brought some researchers and practitioners to consider and reexamine grammar teaching from a different perspective. Instead of claiming that grammar is irrelevant, many researchers and educators have more recently raised the question of how best to integrate grammar into language instruction.

For Azar (2007) and others, a consent in favor of including grammar in L2 curricula seems to have steadily formed. Azar explains that “through the eyes of many practitioners, grammar teaching is vibrantly alive and well... ever-evolving in innovative ways, and an integral component of effective second-language instruction for many students” (p. 2).

The Solutions to the Debate

Grammar acquisition is seen as a complex cognitive skill, and a number of processes are explored which lead to a better understanding of how grammar learning takes place. Therefore, different ways of acquiring knowledge are suggested. Recent research suggests that some attention to form is necessary for learners to acquire the target language.

Focus-on-Form Instruction

The increasing interest in the idea of focus on form and the suggestion that some attention to form should be encouraged in second language classrooms initiated from a reaction against a communicative approach which supports the exclusive use of meaning-focused activities in language classrooms. However, recent research has begun to indicate that the lack of focus on grammatical forms in communicative language teaching classrooms has caused many researchers to believe that students need input on form. Doughty and Williams (1998) state that the findings of studies that have been done in immersion and naturalistic acquisition contexts demonstrated

that “when classroom second language learning is entirely experiential and meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not entirely develop to target-like levels” (p. 2).

Considering that second language acquisition greatly differs from the natural first language acquisition, the majority of researchers agree that dismissing grammar altogether is not a solution. Instead, some have suggested that grammatical instruction in some way embedded in communicative activities could be an effective way to overcome the barriers in SLA. Some focus on form is necessary for learners to achieve accuracy as well as fluency in second language learning (Frodesen, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Not only does focus on form push L2 learners beyond communicatively proficient language to include target-like ability, but also “it may be part of a more efficient language learning experience in that it can speed up natural acquisition processes” (Doughty & Williams, 1998, p. 3). There has been a consensus on the fact that neither rule-based instruction nor meaning-based instruction alone can lead to successful second language acquisition. Moreover, Larsen-Freeman (2001) points out that focus on form is a way to balance grammar and communication. Indeed, it enables the teaching of grammatical structures in context and not in isolation because “grammatical structures not only have form, they are also used to express meaning in context appropriate use” (p. 252).

The notion of focus on form was first put forth by Long (1991) who defines it as an attempt that “overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (p. 45). Thus, a quintessential aspect of focus on form lies in its requirement that the focus must happen during a communicative activity and must not interrupt it. Later, Long and Robinson (1998) expanded the definition to “an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features, by the teacher and/or one or more students, triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production” (p. 23). It is important to mention that the syllabus in this case remains centered on communicative language teaching with no preselected forms to be taught by the teacher in any specific lesson. However, when a form is a problem for L2 learners, the teacher and/or the students can present this form explicitly in many different ways such as modeling, drilling, rule presentation, or error correction.

Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) also address the question of focus on form as “attempts to intervene directly in the process of interlanguage construction by drawing learners’ attention to or providing opportunities for them to practice specific

linguistic features” (p. 407). The word “form” is identified as including phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmalinguistic features of language. They further argue that focus on form occurs in discourse that is primarily meaning centered. It arises during classroom interaction; it is incidental. This instructional innovation has the advantage of balancing communication and form. While the emphasis is on authentic communication, the incorporation of grammatical elements is justified by teachers’ experiences on the value of explicit grammar instruction as facilitating learning.

Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) have also argued that focus on form instruction is different from two other kinds of instruction which are focus on forms and focus on meaning. Focus on forms refers to the formal teaching of L2 structures and rules without any consideration for authentic use of language. This kind of instruction has been at the heart of methods such as the grammar-translation method and Audiolingualism. In addition to being non-communicative because learners don’t engage in real life communication, these methods are teacher-centered since the teacher presents and explains to learners discrete points of grammar in separate lessons. On that matter, Doughty and Williams (1998) specify that the focus on form approach provides learners an advantage over the focus on forms method which is the “cognitive processing support provided by the overriding focus on meaning or communication” (p. 3). They further add that “the learners’ attention is drawn precisely to a linguistic feature as necessitated by a communicative demand” (p. 3). Focus on form, in contrast with focus on forms, is learner-centered since its goal is to respond to students’ needs when necessary. On the other hand, focus on form instruction is also different from the kind of instruction called focus on meaning. This approach is typical in methods such as the Natural Approach in which direct grammar teaching is excluded. Focus on form instruction, in contrast, allows occasional focus on L2 grammatical forms using various ways that can help students understand and acquire even the most difficult forms (Long & Robinson, 1998). Though focus on form instruction has the virtue of maintaining a balance between focus on forms and focus on meaning, Long and Robinson do not guarantee that it will lead students to ultimate achievement in a certain period of time because of different factors having to do with the quality, the amount of instruction, and the learners’ level of proficiency.

Although focus on form is considered to be incidental, studies conducted in focus on form expanded the initial definition to include focus on form where attention to form is preplanned. For example, Doughty and Williams (1998) mention that “there

is considerable variation in how the term ‘focus on form’ is understood and used” (p. 5). They talk about focus on form in terms of a proactive attention to form in which preselected forms are taught through communicative activities. A study conducted by Doughty and Varela (1998) attempted to examine the effects of a focus on the past using a science report task as context. The teachers in this study were assigned to provide focus on form through confirmation checks and recasts when the students failed to use the past correctly. This kind of focus on form is different from the kind originated by Long (1991) because the attention to form is planned rather than incidental and intensive rather than extensive.

The growing concern, regarding focus on form instruction, is now to determine what kind of focus on form is best. Should communicative activities be chosen according to the form that the teacher wants to focus on, or should teachers let any form arise during communicative activities? Planned focus on form involves the selection of linguistic forms during a meaning based activity through input or output, whereas incidental focus on form involves attention given to linguistic forms as they arise spontaneously during a meaning-focused activity. This area has been little documented, but according to Doughty and Williams (1998), both have various potential benefits for L2 learners. The advantage of planned focus on form is the intensive attention drawn on one specific linguistic form. On the other hand, incidental focus on form provides L2 learners with extensive attention on many different forms. The focus on form approach is innovative since grammar is now perceived as a fundamental part of a language that must be taught in meaningful contexts and not in isolation anymore. More and more researchers recommend the integration of focus on form in SLA classrooms as it has been revealed to be beneficial for learners.

The need for focus on form is usually triggered by students failing to communicate because of linguistic difficulties. Some focus on these problematic linguistic structures can help students maintain the flow of their communication. Without focus on form, “learners with limited L2 processing capacity experience difficulty in simultaneously attending to form and meaning” (Shak & Gardner, 2008, p. 388). It is even more necessary “when learners have acquired some communicative ability and when they run the risk of fossilizing” (Ellis, 2003, p. 78). De Keyser (1998) points out that certain kinds of forms are amenable to focus on form instruction. He argues that large amounts of vocabulary can be easily acquired with

little focus on form. This has been exemplified by observing immigrants who have acquired a large repertoire of vocabulary with little schooling and no second language instruction. However, they have also shown very little progress in terms of L2 phonology, morphology, or syntax. While focus on form may not be necessary for acquiring vocabulary, morphosyntax is more complex. De Keyser further discusses the relevance of focus on form in terms of linguistic variables such as Universal Grammar, the need for negative evidence, and the degree of complexity of L2. Regarding the first two variables, De Keyser states that

if a structure is part of UG and UG is accessible to [L2] learner, then all that is needed is sufficient input to trigger acquisition. If a structure is not part of UG or cannot be acquired without negative evidence, then a rather strong variant of focus on form, including rule teaching and error correction, will be required. (p. 43)

The third variable, the degree of complexity of L2, is also “a main candidate for focus on form” (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen 2001, p. 407). Ellis, among other researchers, has distinguished between rules that are hard to learn but easy to acquire and rules that are easy to learn but hard to acquire. Focus on form is considered to be useful to deal with the rules of the latter type. Moreover, as Swain (1995) (cited in Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen 2001) states, when output is forced, learners have to analyze forms overtly. This will facilitate the acquisition of difficult forms or structures. The advantage of focus on form has been seen in many empirical studies. Doughty and Williams’ (1998) study showed that learners who focus on form during communicative activities are more successful in developing their L2 than those who never focus on form or focus solely on meaning. Doughty and Verela (1998) examined the differences in the acquisition of English tense between ESL students who received corrective recasts and those who received teacher-led instruction, mostly in the form of lectures. By the means of pre-tests and post-tests, the results revealed that the students who received corrective recasts performed much better on post-tests than those who received teacher-led instruction.

Shak and Gardner (2008) discuss studies that have been done on focus on form instruction on the second language proficiency of young learners. The findings of these studies have revealed that focus on form had a positive effect on young learners. In their own study, Shak and Gardner looked closely at the focus on form tasks that are likely to generate the most interest in children. Stimulating and visually

attractive focus on form activities are usually believed to attract children's attention and foster their intrinsic motivation. The studies conducted on the efficacy of focus on form in second language classrooms offer useful insights for teachers to consider. However, according to Pool (2005), there is still a need for research since all "[those studies] have taken place in settings that appear to be well-funded, adequately supplied with teaching and learning materials, and generally free of classroom discipline problems" (p. 50). Not only that, most studies of focus on form instruction have been conducted in only a few countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and Japan. Current research should be directed toward examining how focus on form is accomplished in diverse settings and what effect different types of focus on form have on L2 acquisition. Pool further mentions that no empirical study has been done yet in settings in which the classes are overcrowded, the materials outdated, and the teachers unqualified.

Research on focus on form "has been increasingly motivated by theoretical rather than pedagogical considerations" (Ellis, 2001, p. 35). Nonetheless, the various types of focus on form instruction and the options available have been described through the literature. They are valuable to teachers and researchers as well. It is the choice of experienced teachers, novice teachers, and administrators to explore those new insights and make use of them to create new techniques to best integrate focus on form based on the local realities and needs of their classrooms.

Consciousness-Raising

Another solution to the problem as to whether or not formal grammar should be taught was put forth by Schmidt (1990, 1995) who proposes the notion of consciousness-raising (C-R) activities in L2 classrooms. Related to the notion of focus on form, C-R is based on the belief that acquisition involves conscious processes such as attention. Therefore, helping learners to attend to language items may help them acquire them. Pointing out features of the L2 grammatical system is thus a form of C-R. Rutherford (1987) defines the term C-R as simply "the drawing of the learner's attention to features of the target language" (p. 189). Rutherford and Sharwood-Smith (1988) underline the importance of C-R activities and provide a comprehensive definition of the role of C-R as "intended to embrace a continuum ranging from intensive promotion of conscious awareness through pedagogical role articulation on the one end, to the mere exposure of the learner to specific grammatical phenomena on the other" (p. 3). An example of these activities can involve the teacher asking the

learners to observe the underlined surface structure or giving examples and asking the learners to induce the rules. In other words, learners are expected to use intellectual effort to understand the form. Any difficulty in understanding the target feature leads to clarification in the form of further explanations and examples.

Ellis (1993) also brings attention to the difference between C-R and traditional methods of the teaching of grammar, in which the goal is to inculcate correct grammatical structures and habits directly. The particularity of C-R resides in the fact that learners do not necessarily have to produce. Hence, it may simply exist at the level of understanding and remembering. For Ellis, C-R activities will seek to get learners to understand a specific grammatical structure and grasp the concept behind it. Learners are not required to produce or practice that specific structure. Another critical difference, pointed out by Nunan (1991), is that C-R activities are “derived from genuine interactions and authentic texts” (p. 150) and are also largely communicative in nature.

One fundamental aspect of C-R is the role of noticing. One function of C-R is to assist L2 learners to “notice the gap” between their own production and that of native speakers. Not only can noticing be a means to rectify a weakness in their production but it also helps learners to notice the difference between their current language and the linguistic forms noticed (Schmidt, 1995). In general, the use of C-R tasks can help students develop students’ ability to form their own hypotheses about grammar as a process of learning and can be considered a good facilitator for language acquisition.

Discourse-based Approach

Many other ways to teach and integrate grammar into L2 curriculums have been proposed such as the discourse-based approach (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Recent literature has been supporting the importance of teaching grammar through meaningful contexts. It has been accepted that language is more effectively learnt when learning materials are organized around discourse types rather than grammatical sets. It is particularly useful for many grammatical concepts like the tense-aspect system. Many ESL/EFL teachers still continue to teach grammar and the tense-aspect system in decontextualized sentences, depriving L2 learners of contextual clues that are crucial to determine the function of the structures. Larsen-Freeman (2001) states that the problem for L2 learners is not tense-aspect verb form but when to use it. Larsen-Freeman stresses that teachers who focus on linguistic form during a

communicative activity are more effective than those who never focus on form or those who teach form out of context and in isolation. This kind of approach will help to promote learners' awareness of "form-meaning relationships" (Collins, 2007, p. 301).

Nunan (1991) points out that grammar is closely related to meaning and discourse. Therefore encouraging students to explore this relationship will help them to better inform their grammatical choices according to the context and discourse in consideration. To present and practice grammar through discourse, teachers should use more authentic materials (Celce-Murcia, 2007). In conclusion, grammar teaching is much more effective and interesting to L2 learners when it is integrated into meaningful situations or contexts. Discourse-based grammar can be an alternative to the traditional way of presenting grammar, which is most of the time based on decontextualized sentence-level exercises.

The following section reviews the question of formal grammar teaching through the attitudes and opinions of teachers and learners. There are only a handful of studies which have tried to touch upon students' beliefs regarding grammar teaching in language learning.

Students' Perceptions and Teachers' Perceptions about Formal Grammar Teaching *Student and Teacher Perception Discrepancies*

Some studies carried out in foreign language situations seem to indicate that students find error correction and grammar instruction helpful in language learning (Schulz, 1996, 2001). While instructors differ greatly in their opinions on the importance of grammar teaching in learning a language and even more so in their approaches to teaching grammar, students do not always share the instructors' view of the role of grammar in their language learning. How do students feel about studying grammar when learning a language? How important is it to them? How do they go about studying it? In fact, Schulz's (1996) study on students' and teachers' views on error correction and the role of grammar instruction in a foreign language revealed that many students have a more favorable attitude towards grammar instruction than their teachers. The students also believed that in order to master a language, it was necessary to study grammar. On the other hand, more teachers than students believed that it was better to practice language in simulated real life situations than to study grammatical forms explicitly.

Peacock (1998) pointed out various gaps between teachers' and learners' beliefs on foreign language learning, which were also observed in Schulz's study. He found that learners were much more in favor of error correction and grammar exercises than their instructors, while instructors rated pair and group work much more highly than the learners. Peacock concluded that there is a high probability that this has a negative effect not only on the learners' progress but also on their satisfaction with the class and their confidence in their teachers. Schulz (2001) replicated this study with 122 FL teachers in Colombia and 607 of their students, as well as 92 teachers in the United States and 824 of their students in order to establish a comparison between the groups across cultures. Data comparisons indicated relatively similar patterns between students as a group and teachers as a group across cultures on most of the questions. However, there were a number of discrepancies between student and teacher perceptions within each culture. Important discrepancies, particularly regarding the role of formal grammar instruction in language learning, were also apparent when comparing the results of the Colombian students and the US students together on the one hand, and the Colombian teachers and the US teachers on the other hand. Schulz's (2001) US study revealed "perturbing differences" (p. 348) between student and teacher beliefs on how foreign languages are learned. For example, while 80% of the students believed that "the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of the language," only 64% of the teachers shared this view. The study with the Colombian students and teachers revealed stronger discrepancies about how foreign languages are learned. For example, while 76% of the students said they liked the study of grammar, only 30% of the teachers felt the same as students did. When looking only at the student comparisons across the two cultures, the discrepancies of opinions are high, indicating that the Colombian students had a considerably greater preference for explicit grammar instruction than the US students.

On the basis of these findings, it was argued that these discrepancies between teacher and student views about the role of formal instruction and error correction may reduce the "pedagogical face validity" (Schulz, 1996, p. 349) of instruction in the eyes of the learners, negatively affect student motivation, and consequently be harmful to learning. Similarly, Horwitz (1990) also talks about the existence of a mismatch in perception between students and teachers on the use of grammar which may often result in negative effects. The goal of her study was to determine students'

beliefs on language learning so that teachers could take them into consideration while teaching. Kern (1995) believes that an awareness of this mismatch is important in understanding conflicts that could result in lack of motivation or anxiety.

Kumaravadivelu (1991) also commented on this issue by stating that “the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes” (p. 98). In other words, researchers like Kumaravadivelu (1991) and Schulz (1996), believe that a correspondence between teachers’ and students’ beliefs results in effective teaching and learning. In fact, the similarity between students’ and teachers’ beliefs is viewed as productive to learning and motivating to students and teachers as well. In contrast, a conflict between teachers’ and students’ perceptions is likely to affect learning negatively. Johnson (1995) points out that students can misunderstand the intentions and expectations of teachers, which can interfere with their learning. Kumaravadivelu (1991) articulated ten possible sources of mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation: cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, and attitudinal. This mismatch between teachers’ and students’ perceptions is based on the idea that students have their own opinions about language learning. This idea became more encouraged and accepted within the communicative approach, which advocates a more student-centered classroom.

Nunan (1995) found in his study important mismatches between teachers and students’ perceptions about the importance of some classroom activities such as formal explanations, error correction, pair work, and vocabulary games to name a few. The only activity that both teachers and students valued or rated high was conversation practice. Nunan suggested to teachers to make the objectives of the curriculum and the reasons behind each activity clear to students.

Despite this mismatch between teacher and student views, Borg (1998, 1999) and Macrory (2000) assert that research evidence also suggests that teachers may take learner wishes and preferences into account in their decision making around grammar teaching. One main reason for this appears to be that explicit grammar teaching accomplishes several classroom management needs. These include appeasing student concerns about lack of grammar, contributing to the pace of lessons, and making fluency work more appropriate to students (Borg, 1998).

Teacher Cognition and Grammar Teaching

A new body of research has been focusing on the cognitive basis of teachers and what influences their teaching. According to Borg (2003), an extensive literature on teachers' beliefs exists specifically in relation to language teaching. Educational research on teachers' beliefs shares three basic assumptions. First, teachers' beliefs influence perception and judgment. Second teachers' beliefs play a role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practices. Third, understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and teacher education programs (p. 439). In the area of language teaching, teacher beliefs have been examined to see how personal beliefs and knowledge of the pedagogical systems of teaching have informed the instructional practices and decisions of teachers of English as a second language (e.g., Borg, 2003). In a recent article, Phipps and Borg (2009) assert that there is sufficient evidence that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning

- may be powerfully influenced (positively or negatively) by teachers' own experiences as learners and are well established by the time teachers go to university
- act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience
- may outweigh the effects of teacher education in influencing what teachers do in the classroom;
- can exert a persistent long-term influence on teachers' instructional practices are, at the same time, not always reflected in what teachers do in the classroom
- interact bi-directionally with experience (i.e., beliefs influence practices and practices can also lead to changes in beliefs). (p. 381)

Some researchers have explored the teaching of grammar from the perspective of teachers' beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, theories, and perceptions, or what Borg (1998) calls teachers' "pedagogical systems" (p. 10). Borg believes that "little attention has been paid to L2 teachers' perceptions of the role of grammar teaching in their work and to the manner in which instructional decisions regarding grammar teaching are informed by teachers' pedagogical systems" (p. 10). In another article, Borg (2003) points out the poor level of teachers' grammatical knowledge as revealed by some studies. Borg reports a study done by Andrews (1994) which aimed to examine TEFL trainees. A questionnaire was used to ask 82 trainers on initial TEFL

training courses to rate the grammatical knowledge/awareness of the trainees they had worked with. The findings revealed that more than 50% of the trainees had insufficient level of grammatical knowledge/awareness, which the trainers described in terms of “knowledge of grammar, the ability to reflect on and analyze it, and skill in handling grammar in the classroom” (p. 97). It is even more surprising when the same study was extended to compare the explicit knowledge of grammar and grammatical terminology of four groups: non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers of English, NNES prospective teachers of English, native English speaking (NES) prospective teachers with a background in English Studies, and NES prospective teachers of modern languages. The latter outperformed the former on the 60-item test they took. The explicit knowledge of grammar and grammatical terminology of the non-native speaker teachers was significantly better than that of the native speakers.

Many other empirical studies have been aimed to examine practicing English teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about the importance of knowing about grammar for their work. For example, Borg (2003) reported a study conducted by Chandler (1998) on practicing English teachers’ attitudes towards grammar teaching. The study revealed “an outdated practice in grammar teaching and a lack of awareness of the role of language understanding in aspects of their work” (p. 98). Another interesting study on teachers’ perspectives on grammar teaching was conducted by Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997). They used questionnaires with a total of 60 university teachers of ESL in New York and Puerto Rico, and informal interviews with eight of these, to examine their views about formal grammar instruction. The majority of the ESL teachers in the USA and Puerto-Rico who participated in the study advocated grammar instruction in L2 classes. To illustrate this position, one teacher responded with the following argument:

It would seem that many practitioners have come to believe that individuals whose goal is to develop excellent English for use in academic or business environments can achieve greater accuracy and control through some measure of grammar instruction. (p. 252)

However, while the majority of the teachers felt grammar should be taught, the Puerto Rico teachers seemed to favor formal grammar instruction more than the New York teachers. This is explained by the more traditional approach to language teaching in Puerto Rico, as one teacher in the Puerto Rico group clarified, “grammar

has always been part of our language learning experience. We see no reason to abandon it totally” (p. 247). Another interesting finding of this study is the way the teachers justified their beliefs about the importance of grammar teaching. The teachers articulated that it is “their experience as teachers and learners which emerged as a particular powerful influence on their views about grammar teaching” (p. 255). Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) conclude that “it is interesting that [the EFL teachers who participated in the study] rarely justified their approaches by referring to research studies or any particular methodology” (p. 255).

In Schulz’s (2001) cross-cultural study, the comparisons between the Colombian teachers and the US teachers also suggest that, overall, the Colombian teachers were more in favor of traditional language teaching, and held stronger beliefs regarding the effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction and error correction. The teachers as a group showed important differences in their belief systems. Schulz (2001) argues that these differences in opinion could be attributed to teachers’ own language learning experiences among other factors. She writes,

Sources of teacher beliefs are quite complex. Without doubt, teachers’ preparation and in-service development (including professional readings) play a role; so does their own professional experience in observing student success rates with particular forms of instruction. But their own language learning experience (i.e., the way they were taught) has surely colored their perceptions as well. (p. 255)

In addition, the significant body of work on teachers’ beliefs indicates that teachers’ cognition consists of a set of personal and professional understandings of teaching and learning which exert a significant influence on instructional decisions (Borg, 1999). In other words, it is believed that English teachers are guided by mental acts that have been shaped by, the knowledge, beliefs and teacher education about teaching and learning grammar that they have accumulated through the years. Since beliefs shape teachers’ personal knowledge and beliefs consist of opinions, attitudes, and experiences, this explains how and why different teachers have different reasons for selecting a particular content, different emphasis on the same content, and different styles of teaching and different modes of learning.

Another perspective on the relationship between cognition and practice in formal instruction is provided by Farrell (1999), who investigated 34 pre-service teachers of English in Singapore. This study revealed how their beliefs and choices

were influenced by their own language learning experiences. For example, some of the trainee teachers wrote that as teachers they rejected the deductive approach because it had not worked for them as English learners. Other teachers responded that the way they had been taught English, whether it was deductively or inductively, was effective for them. Such findings illustrate the impact of teachers' educational background on what they think and teach.

In a study conducted by Borg (1998), five EFL teachers were studied in order to examine the pedagogical system they employed to teach grammar. The results suggested that the decision to teach grammar explicitly did not necessarily imply a belief on the teachers' part that such instruction promoted language learning. In fact, one teacher explained that he decided to integrate some explicit grammar teaching in his lesson because he felt that the students would respond positively to it. According to Borg (1999), there is still too little attention regarding the teaching of grammar. There is a lack of descriptive data about L2 teachers' practices when teaching grammar and a lack of insight into the cognitions that underlie these practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter described the role of grammar instruction in the history of language teaching and learning. The place and the role of grammar in language teaching have changed over the years. Richards and Rodgers (1986) state that in the early twentieth century, the structural view of language prevailed and this was characterized by the belief that "learning a language entails mastering the elements of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence" (p. 49). In the late 1960s, the functional view of language gained prominence. This resulted in the emergence of the Communicative Approach to language teaching, which emphasizes the "communicative ends of learning" rather than the "structural means of teaching" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 159). This position along with the fact that L2 learners don't acquire fluency despite the many years of formal grammar teaching brought many researchers and practitioners to declare grammar instruction unnecessary to learn a second language.

The disagreement over the role of grammar teaching is still a reality. Despite the different views about the role of grammar in language learning, the importance of grammar cannot be denied. Grammatical competence is essential for communication.

There is now broad agreement that learners need opportunities to engage in communication. Having learners participate in a variety of tasks which encourage them to negotiate meaning when communication problems arise is considered essential so that they develop fluency as well as accuracy. Ellis (2005) asserts that “proficiency in an L2 requires that learners acquire both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which caters to fluency, and a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which caters to complexity and accuracy” (p. 210).

The role of grammar instruction has also been highlighted through students’ and teachers’ perceptions. Some studies have indicated that students wanted grammar and believed that it was necessary to study grammar to learn a second language. In addition, many studies have revealed that there were major discrepancies between students’ and teachers’ beliefs as to the importance and efficacy of formal grammar. Recently, a lot of attention has been paid to teacher cognition or the store of beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and experience susceptible to greatly influence teacher practices. Research has indicated that teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching and their pedagogical choices were influenced by prior personal and/or professional experiences as language learners or experienced teachers.

Although this literature review presents valuable information about the role of grammar instruction in language learning and teaching, there has been no research done on how students and teachers view grammar instruction in learning English in a UAE context. Moreover, there hasn’t been much research in the UAE comparing students’ and teachers’ perceptions and examining the possible reasons for such perceptions.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate IEP students' and teachers' perceptions towards the role of formal grammar instruction in universities in Sharjah. Part of my study was modeled on a study conducted by Schulz (1996) on students' and teachers' perceptions about explicit grammar instruction and error correction. I partially replicated Schulz's study. I was interested in the first two research questions of her study; that is, to investigate student and teacher perceptions about explicit grammar instruction and to look for any discrepancies between the two groups. The questions of her survey dealing with the importance of formal grammar teaching were used in my study to elicit student and teacher opinions about explicit grammar teaching and how foreign/second languages are learned. Therefore, the focus of the study was on whether they believe grammar is important and effective for them to learn English and why or why not. This study also sought to find out the reasons for the positive or negative beliefs about formal grammar teaching, and look for any differences or similarities in opinions between the two groups. Last, the study will look deeper into native English speaking (NES) and Non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences as a significant influence on the way they think of grammar and the way they teach it. The specific research questions for study were:

1. Do the students and the teachers participating in this study believe that grammar is important to learn English, and if so, why?
2. What are the similarities or differences in perceptions, if any, held by the students and the teachers?
3. Are the teachers' beliefs about grammar influenced by any prior experiences?
4. Are there any differences between the native English speaking (NES) teachers' beliefs and the non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers' beliefs?

In the design of the research, elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined. To answer the research questions, data were collected by means of the following methods:

- Questionnaire for students
- Questionnaire for teachers
- Teachers' interviews

The two questionnaires consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions were given to the participants of the study: students (see Appendix A) and teachers (see Appendix B). On one hand, the closed-ended questions consisted of attitudinal statements using a 5-point Likert format. The statements were short and simply phrased and solicit students' and teachers' opinions regarding the role of formal grammar instruction in language learning, and English in particular, in intensive English programs (IEP) in two universities. On the other hand, the use of open-ended questions served to reinforce the credibility and qualitative aspect of the study. It also allowed me to extract more details and explanations to better understand students' and teachers' views towards this issue, and particularly the reasons behind their perceptions. In addition to the teachers' questionnaire, three teachers volunteered to be interviewed in order to tap into their attitudes and beliefs about formal grammar teaching.

The collected data from the questionnaires were descriptively analyzed and graphed in order to find percentages for each response of the different statements, and whether there were similarities or differences in the way the teachers and students in this study perceived the role of grammar instruction in language learning. All information gathered from the quantitative instruments is presented in tables and charts. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews were categorized by carefully reading and identifying responses. The teachers, who were interviewed individually for approximately 10-15 minutes each, were asked to reflect on the responses they provided in the questionnaire as well as on their general approach to grammar teaching and its role in language learning.

The Participants

Teachers

A total of 16 teachers teaching in the IEP in two different universities, the American University of Sharjah and Sharjah University, in the UAE, were involved in the study. The group of teachers was composed of eight NES teachers and eight NNES teachers. There were also nine males and seven females. Their years of teaching experience varied from 10 to 26 years. There were seven Americans, one

British, one Jordanian, one Pakistani, one Tunisian, one Indian, two Iraqis, one Algerian, and one Palestinian. They all taught English, here in the UAE and/or overseas. The results were not broken down by institution because the American University of Sharjah and Sharjah University were similar in that they were both higher education institutions and had IEPs. In both universities, English was taught as a second language with a concentration on listening and speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Among the 16 teachers, three volunteered to be interviewed in addition to answering the questionnaire.

Students

Altogether, there were 56 students from both universities. While the students from the American University of Sharjah were males and females, the students from Sharjah University were only females since the surveys were distributed in the Women's College. Specifically, there were exactly 29 males and 27 females. They were between 17 and 19 years old. Their nationalities varied especially in the American University of Sharjah. Most of the students were Arabs with Arabic as their mother tongue. The other students were Iranians, Nigerians, Djiboutian, and Russians. The female students from the Women's College of Sharjah University were all UAE nationals with the exception of one Syrian. Besides, these students had been studying the English language since primary school. At the university level, they belonged to different levels of proficiency in English ranging from level one, the lowest, to level five, the highest. The students in this study were in levels one, three, four, and five.

Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were designed in order to collect data for this study, one for the teachers and another one for the students. Some of the test items were adopted from Schulz (1996) and slightly revised. Each questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section one provided information about participants' background such as gender, years of teaching experience, and whether NES or NNES for teachers. Section one of the students' questionnaire asked them to provide gender, nationality, institution name, and level of proficiency. Section two focused on what participants thought about the role of formal grammar instruction in language learning and whether or not grammar was important for them to learn English. For that, a 14-item questionnaire for teachers and a 9-item one for students were designed to elicit

responses to different statements on teaching grammar. This section of the questionnaire used a Likert-type scale (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree), which is the most widely used method of scale construction because it is a simple, versatile, and reliable method. Section three was a set of four open-ended questions for the teachers and only one open-ended question for the students. These questions asked the participants to reflect on the importance of grammar teaching in learning English. The teachers' data were distributed and collected through the IEP administrations. From the 22 questionnaires distributed at the American University of Sharjah, eight were returned. Out of the 15 questionnaires distributed in the Women's College of Sharjah University, eight were returned. The students' data were collected by some of the participating teachers who administered the questionnaire in classrooms. That way, they ensured that students understood how to complete the surveys, assisted them in answering the questions, and stressed to students how important it was to read the statements attentively and to answer them frankly.

Interviews

To support the teachers' questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were used. The aim of the interviews was to gain insight into the factors that influenced teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction. In other words, by interviewing some of the teachers, I hoped to gauge their perceptions of explicit grammar teaching in language education. I also hoped to discover the origins of these perceptions. The interviews were useful in the sense that they provided me with useful information that suggested implications for teaching. They gave me a more in-depth picture of what some teachers really thought of grammar teaching and where their beliefs came from. They talked about their language learning experience as well as their years of experience as English teachers. The interviews also made me aware of the fact that teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching are definitely influenced by their prior experiences as language learners and teachers. These valuable insights helped me address my third research question more thoroughly.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis and the findings of the study. Two sources of data were used in order to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions about the role of formal grammar instruction in two IEPs, in the American University of Sharjah and Sharjah University, in the UAE. They were questionnaires for students and teachers as well as teachers' interviews.

Results are divided and presented based on two groups: students' data results and teachers' data results. The first section presents the students' responses. The second section presents the teachers' responses, and the third section deals with the differences in perceptions between the students and the teachers. Tables and graphs are used to illustrate, summarize, and explain the data in this chapter.

As shown in Table 1, the total number of participants was 70. The students were 56 and the teachers 14 from the two institutions mentioned above.

Table 1: Background Data about the Participants (n=72)

Students (n=56)		Teachers (n=16)	
Male	Female	Male	Female
(n=29)	(n=27)	(n=9)	(n=7)

Students' and Teachers' Questionnaire Findings

As mentioned earlier there were two versions of the surveys: one was given to the students and another one to the teachers to elicit their beliefs and attitudes towards the effectiveness of grammar instruction in learning English in ESL classrooms. The questionnaires were also used to compare the perceptions of these two groups and see if any discrepancies could be found.

Students' Results

Table 2 summarizes responses, expressed in percentages, for perceptions regarding the role of grammar for the group of students. The nine statements of the students' questionnaire are represented in frequency counts. In addition, students'

responses to the questionnaire are also represented in a graph in Figure 1 to illustrate the range of the responses.

Table 2: Students' Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar Instruction (n=56)

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I believe it is important and useful for me, as a student, to study grammar to learn English.	79%	21%			
2. The formal study of grammar is essential to master English when learning English happens only in the classroom.	41%	59%			
3. The study of grammar helps in learning a second language.	50%	44%	4%	2%	
4. I believe my communicative ability improves quickly if I study and practice grammar.	39%	45%	16%		
5. I believe my writing improves quickly if I study and practice grammar.	53%	45%	2%		
6. It is more important to practice English in real-life situations than to study grammar.	38%	43%	12%	5%	2%
7. I like the study of grammar.	27%	39%	20%	9%	5%
8. There should be more formal study of grammar in my classroom.	27%	45%	15%	11%	2%
9. I usually keep grammar rules in mind when I write in English or read what I have written.	29%	46%	21%		4%

In general, the students' responses revealed a positive attitude towards the study of grammar in learning English. In fact, all the students (100%) strongly agreed or agreed that it is important, and useful for them to study grammar.

As for the second statement, which sought to find out whether the students thought that the formal study of grammar is essential to master English, the results, indicated in Table 2, revealed that all the students had a very favorable opinion. Indeed, 41% of the students strongly agreed and 59% agreed with statement #2. It seems that the students had no doubt as to the importance of formal grammar in the mastering of English when learning is limited to the classroom.

The students' responses to the third statement, "the study of grammar helps in learning a second language," showed again a positive belief that studying grammar helps them to learn English in their case. As illustrated in Table 2, 50% strongly agreed and 44% agreed with the third statement. Only 2% disagreed with the same statement, and 4% of the students had a neutral opinion.

Another important result concerned whether or not their English improved quickly if they studied and practiced grammar. The fourth statement in Table 2 shows that 39% strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they believed their English improved quickly if they studied and practiced grammar. The percentage of undecided on this statement was 16%, but no one disagreed that studying and practicing grammar improved English learning.

In response to statement #5, the majority of the students seemed to strongly believe that studying and practicing grammar helped to improve writing. Precisely, 53 % strongly agreed and 45% agreed with the fact that the study and the practice of grammar helped to improve their writing in English. Only a very small percentage of 2% of the students were neutral about this fifth statement.

Related to the skill of writing, statement nine sought to determine if the students usually kept grammar rules in mind when they wrote in English or read what they had written. Although the results to this statement varied, the majority strongly agreed (29%) or agreed (46%) with it. 21% were undecided and only 2 out of 56 students (4%) strongly disagreed.

In addition, it seems that it is more important to practice English in real-life situations than to study grammar for 81% of the students. However, as represented in Table 2 for the sixth statement, 7% believed that it was not important and 12% had a neutral opinion.

Regarding the statement "I like the study of grammar," the opinions were disparate since only 66% admitted to like studying grammar while 14% admitted that they did not and 21% were undecided.

Results also indicated that a large majority of the students thought there should be more formal grammar study in the classroom. Indeed, 27% strongly agreed and 45% agreed with that while 11% disagreed, 2% strongly disagreed, and 15% were undecided.

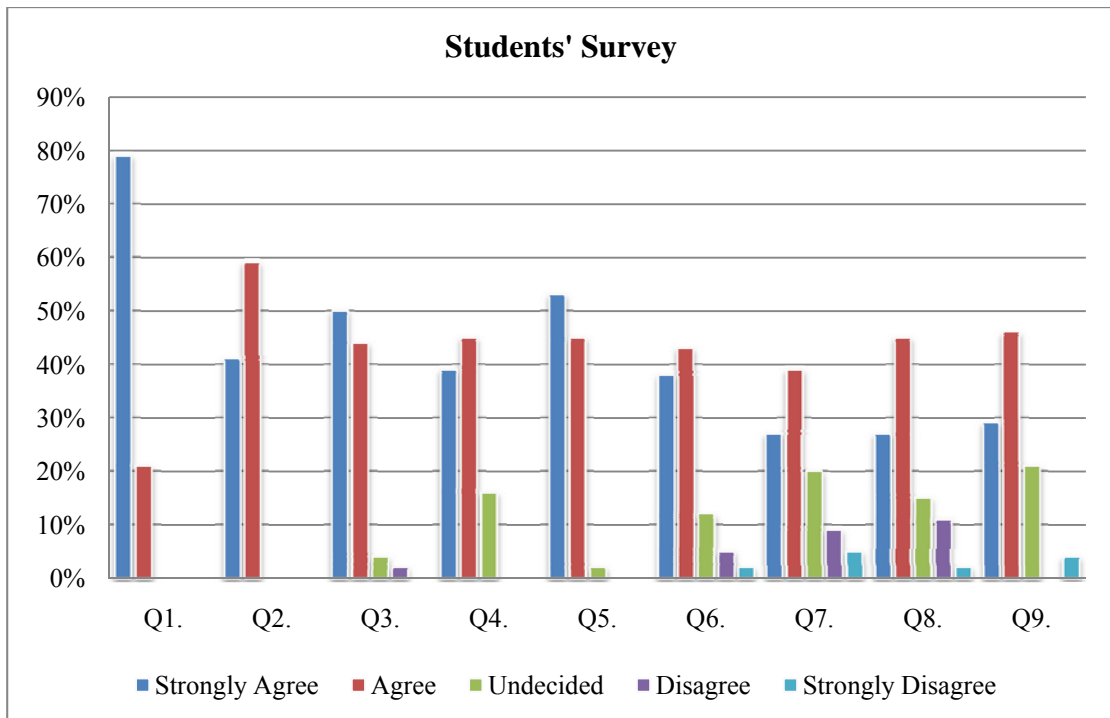


Figure 1: Students' Responses to the Questionnaire (n=56)

Discussion of the Students' Results

Results of the students' questionnaire showed that in general the students in this study held a strong positive belief that formal grammar instruction played a positive role in language learning. All the students were unanimous on the fact that the study of grammar was important for them as students. Qualitative analysis of written responses gives several explanations of such students' perspectives. In their answers to the open-ended question at the end of the students' questionnaire (see Appendix B), almost all the students justified their belief about the importance of grammar teaching. They all responded in some way that studying grammar was fundamental. 24 students believed that grammar is the most important component of a language. As an example, one of them wrote, "It is important to teach grammar in English because it is what English is based on." Another wrote, "It's important because it's the first step to learn a language." One student commented that grammar teaching was "definitely important even if the students think it is difficult and boring."

Another agreement in the responses concerned the belief that the formal study of grammar was essential to master English. Some students were convinced that the study of grammar was necessary since, as one student put it, it teaches "the rules of using the words in the right form." Similarly, another student remarked that grammar

“will help to use the correct sentences to communicate more easily.” Another interesting response was that grammar was the key to learn a language “the right way” or students will keep making the same mistakes over and over “forever.” Other students mentioned the importance of grammar to be able to fully learn English. For example, one student wrote, “I think that we need grammar because even if I know a lot of vocabulary I will not be able to use it in a sentence if I don’t study grammar.” Another student said, “It is important for a person to have the ability to speak more fluently and use good and right sentences not fragments.”

The findings of the students’ questionnaire also revealed that a large majority of the students believed the study of grammar helped in learning a second language and English for that matter. As an example, one student stated, “I think grammar [has] helped me in learning English.” Another wrote, “Grammar teaching is very important to improve my English.” Students’ responses seemed to be in line with the part of the literature on the role of formal grammar instruction in L2 learning. Indeed, many researchers have valued formal grammar instruction and highlighted its many benefits to learners.

Though students attached large importance to learning grammar, they also believed that practicing English in real-life situations was more important than studying grammar. Almost all the students believed in the study of grammar in learning English and they also answered positively to the importance of learning English through real-life situations. This seems to suggest that the students considered communicative activities as important as studying and practicing grammar. Moreover, the students felt that their speaking skills improved quickly if they studied and practiced grammar. Many students wrote that grammar was an essential element to improve fluency. One student commented on this issue by writing, “Grammar is the key to speak English very well.” Other students mentioned that grammar “helps us to speak English fluently and be able to communicate with others easily” or that “grammar helps to talk more confidently and fluently.” Some students believed that grammar could help them choose the right words when speaking. According to one of them, without grammar rules their “English may not make sense.” Similar statements were found in other students’ responses on the usefulness of grammar in speaking, such as “it is the key to speak English very well.” Through these students’ responses, there was evidence that students did believe that fluency greatly contributes to

successful language learning. Only one student commented that grammar was important in writing but “in speaking, it doesn’t do much.”

In addition, the students had similar perceptions about the fact that formal grammar instruction was beneficial for writing in English. The students massively agreed that grammar was helpful in writing. Particularly, they thought that they needed to apply grammatical rules when writing in English. Many students explained that a good control of these rules made it easier for them to spot their mistakes and write properly in English. These opinions reflect, again, what has been said in the literature on grammar teaching about the positive effects of grammar in L2 writing. These opinions also supported the finding of the study conducted by Zeng (2004, cited in Pazaver and Wang, 2009) that learners appreciated grammar instruction as a tool for communicating in a correct and acceptable way, and especially for writing. In the present study, some of the students mentioned in the open-ended question that they thought that writing essays was an important element to succeed in their education. In fact, they saw a positive connection between grammar instruction and effective writing. The same findings were also portrayed in another study conducted by Pazaver and Wang (2009) on Asian students’ perceptions of grammar teaching in the ESL classroom.

A few other students wrote in the open-ended question that grammar was helpful in reading and understanding English. They said it was particularly useful to understand articles, stories, or other kinds of readings. On this matter, one student asserted that grammar helped her to understand the “tense” in the piece of writing she read. Another student claimed that, without grammar, it would be difficult to understand long and complex sentences. Another student sharing the same belief thought that knowledge of grammatical rules facilitated the understanding of academic reading. His words were, “Grammar will help me understand things in my studies especially other subjects that are in English language.”

On the other hand, several students felt that grammar was a tool for all the skills. One clearly stated, “Teaching grammar is important to learn English because it help the student in his writing and speaking and the other skills.” Another student worded the same belief, “Grammar helps everyone to read, write, listen and speak, and understand English in general.”

An important finding worth discussing was statement #7 of the students’ questionnaire regarding whether students liked the study of grammar. Only 66%

admitted to like grammar. Though this percentage is more than half of the students, it does not really match the unanimity of the students on the fact that studying grammar is important and helpful to learn English. In other words, it was clear that students felt that grammar acquisition was important. Though they did not always like it, they recognized that it was necessary. The students' responses reflected that of Schulz's (2001) study in which a big majority of the Colombian students valued grammar instruction even though they did not necessarily like to study it.

It is interesting to speculate about possible reasons to explain the perceptions held by this group of students. The strong favorable perceptions of the students toward grammar teaching could be explained by the way second or foreign languages are taught or tested in the UAE. For example, many university entrance tests like the TOEFL assess students on their accuracy level. Consequently, it is important for UAE students to study and practice grammar. Besides, one student wrote that studying grammar was very important because "without grammar we can't pass TOEFL."

Those perceptions could also be the result of students' own experiences that learning a language has been effective by the study of grammatical rules or what Schulz (2001) called "rule awareness" (p. 255). The answers to the open-ended question at the end of the students' questionnaire revealed that those students are accustomed to formal grammar learning and expect it. The students seem to be convinced about the usefulness of grammar in writing and speaking in English even though some students mentioned that grammar was boring.

In addition, the importance that students give to formal grammar instruction can depend on their current language proficiency. Pazaver and Wang (2009) asserted that some of the students who participated in their study thought that formal or explicit grammar was inadequate in meeting their current communicative needs. These students had a relatively high proficiency with the language and had studied formal grammar in the past. They felt they had different needs with regard to how they used English.

According to Schulz (2001), students' perceptions on the value of formal grammar instruction could be due to different factors:

Perceptions could also be due to a myth, passed on from generation to generation of learners, regarding the usefulness of grammar study; or they could be based on actual personal experiences that convinced the majority of

learners that their learning has been helped by rule awareness and corrective feedback. (p. 255)

Teachers' Results

A total of 16 teachers from the American University of Sharjah and the Women's College of Sharjah University agreed to answer the questionnaire. This group of teachers was also composed of eight native English speakers and eight non-native speakers. The teachers' experience in teaching English as a second language ranged from 10 to 26 years.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of information about their gender, years of experience, and nationality. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 12 statements which aimed to find out teachers' perceptions towards the role of formal grammar instruction in L2 learning. These statements were designed for quantitative analysis, and Likert scale formatting was used to range their responses from strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. In addition, four open-ended questions were designed to obtain qualitative responses regarding teachers' opinions on whether they thought formal grammar instruction was important and why. The open-ended questions also aimed to understand the origins of such beliefs that teachers held about teaching and learning grammar. Teachers' interviews, providing an additional source of qualitative analysis, were conducted to clarify teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

Table 3 summarizes the findings of the teachers' questionnaire. In general, the findings revealed a favorable attitude toward the role of formal grammar instruction in L2 learning. Teachers' responses are also illustrated in Figure 2, showing the frequencies of their answers.

Table 3: Teachers' Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar Instruction (n=16).

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. The study of grammar helps in learning a second or foreign language.	56%	38%		6%	
2. For adolescents or adults, the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when language learning is limited to the classroom.	50%	38%		12%	
3. I believe it is important for students to know grammar in order to learn English.	50%	38%		12%	
4. Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.	13%	37%	19%	31%	
5. I believe grammar teaching helps to improve writing.	69%	31%			
6. Generally, there should be more formal grammar study in FL/L2 courses than is presently the case.	6%	25%	38%	31%	
7. Students usually keep grammar rules in mind when they write in a FL/L2 or read what they have written.		62%	19%	19%	
8. It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.	31%	50%	13%	6%	
9. I enjoy doing grammar lessons.	12%	50%	19%	19%	
10. If I had the choice, I'd rather not teach grammar at all.	6%	13%	6%	56%	19%
11. Students generally like the study of grammar.		38%	25%	31%	6%
12. The knowledge of grammar helps my students to be able to correct their mistakes.	6%	75%	13%	6%	

Regarding statement #1, a large majority believed that the study of grammar helps in learning a second or foreign language. While 56% strongly agreed and 38% agreed with this statement #1, only 6% disagreed.

Again, a sizeable majority of the teachers (88%) strongly agreed (50%) or agreed (38%) with statement # 2, “For adolescents or adults, the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when language learning is limited to the classroom.” 12 % of the teachers disagreed with the same statement.

In terms of the importance of grammar in learning English, 50% strongly agreed and 38% agreed. 12% disagreed, believing that grammar was not important in learning English.

The fourth statement, which sought to discover whether teachers thought students’ communicative ability improved most quickly if they studied and practiced the grammar of the language, showed divided opinions. 50% of the teachers strongly agreed or agreed with that statement. The other half of the teachers were either undecided (19%) or disagreed (31%).

Moreover, the results demonstrated that 31% strongly agreed and 50% agreed with statement #8, “It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.” 6% of the teachers disagreed and 13% were undecided.

As far as writing is concerned, all the teachers shared the same opinion on the usefulness of grammar teaching in writing. In Table 3, the results for statement #5 showed that 69% of the teachers strongly agreed and 31% agreed that grammar teaching helped students to improve their writing. However, whereas all the teachers believed in the efficacy of grammar instruction to improve writing, they were not all convinced with the fact that students usually keep in mind grammar rules when they write in an L2 or read what they have written. Only 62% agreed with statement #7 while 19% were undecided and 19% disagreed.

Grammar teaching was also believed to help students to correct their mistakes. The results for statement #12 revealed that 6% strongly agreed and 75% agreed that the knowledge of grammar helped students to be able to correct their mistakes. 6% disagreed and 13% were undecided.

When asked about whether they enjoyed doing grammar lessons, a total of 62% admitted they did, 19% admitted they did not, and 19% were not sure (see statement #9 in Table 3). Besides, a majority of the teachers strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement #10, “If I had the choice I’d rather not teach grammar at all.”

However, few teachers, 19%, admitted they would not teach grammar if they had the choice. 6% were undecided.

When asked about whether students generally liked the study of grammar, the teachers were divided on this issue. Only 38% of the teachers thought the students liked grammar while 37% did not think so. 25% of them were undecided (see Table 3, statement #11). Similarly, as shown in statement #6, a total of 31% strongly agreed or agreed there should be more formal grammar study in L2 classes than was presently the case. 31% disagreed with this and 38% were undecided.

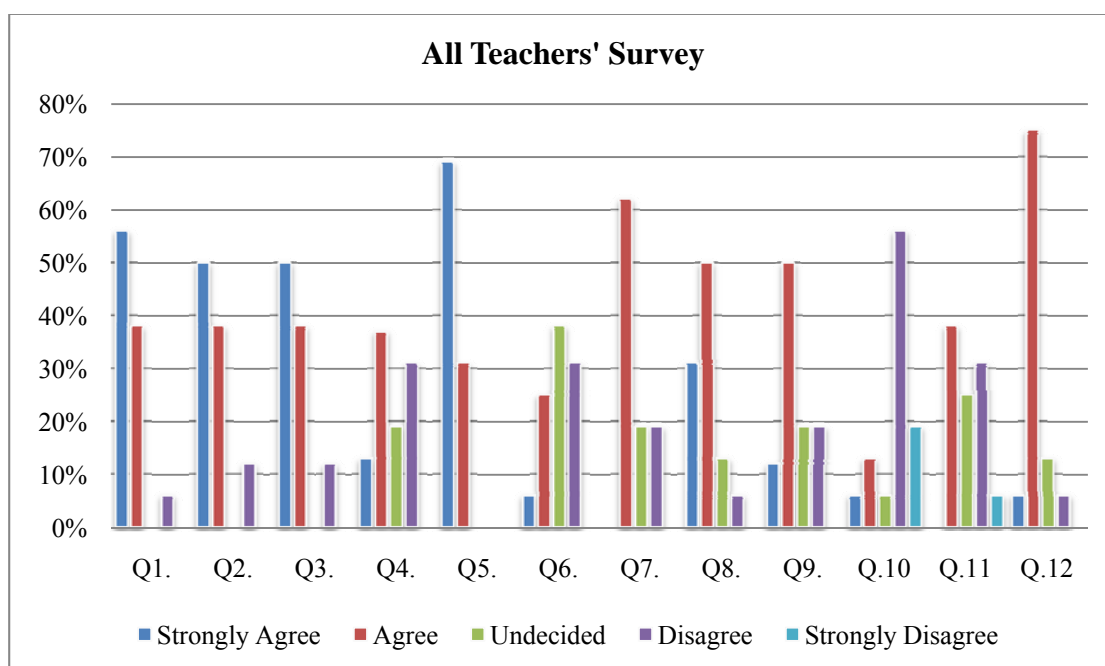


Figure 2: Teachers' Responses to the Questionnaire (n=14)

Discussion of the Teachers' Results

In general, findings revealed that this group of teachers responded positively to the fact that the study of grammar helped in learning a second language (94%). Qualitative analysis of teachers' responses to the open-ended question #1 supported this positive attitude toward grammar. The majority of the teachers expressed their opinions about the importance of formal grammar instruction in second language learning and teaching. They gave many reasons as to why they thought grammar instruction hindered or improved English learning. Almost all the teachers articulated positive reasons for grammar instruction. The first reason many teachers gave was

that grammar was an undeniable component of language, which helped students to improve their English. One teacher gave the following response:

Grammar is an essential part of any language. When a student masters the grammatical rules of the language, he/she will be able to understand, speak and write correctly.

Another said,

Grammar is a component of language without which accuracy can simply be jeopardized. It really polishes the learners' language and helps give a good impression about their command of the language.

For many teachers, grammar should be taught for the sake of accuracy and communication. Some teachers believed that grammar teaching improved accuracy and enabled students to better communicate. One teacher wrote, "Mastering the grammatical rules can help a lot in deciphering the meaning of any sentence. Besides, the students can copy these rules to produce new sentences." Again, in response to the same open-ended question, another teacher conveyed the belief that grammar teaching helps to improve fluency as "using accurate grammar in speaking or writing indicates a mastery of sorts. It increases the ability to communicate." He further stated, "Teaching grammar explicitly shows students how to achieve this goal." Other statements included the fact that grammar helps to "communicate more than just basic messages. Clearly, grammar of a language must be used properly."

Another important reason for the usefulness of grammar was the ability for students to correct their mistakes, which improved English learning. As stated by one teacher, grammar "improves English learning because students are able to correct their own mistakes when they know the grammatical rules of the language." This position reflected statement #12 of the teachers' questionnaire regarding whether the knowledge of grammar helps students to correct their mistakes. Another teacher gave a similar view on whether grammar helped students to understand his grammar corrections in their writing. He also believed that students were "better able to correct them." To further illustrate this view, the same teacher pointed out in the interview that "grammar provides a student with a reference for self-correction and helps them create meaningful sentences." The other teacher who was interviewed believed that grammar teaching was necessary in the sense that "students need to know why something is correct or incorrect in English. Otherwise, they will continue to make the same mistakes."

The results showed that, whereas not all the teachers agreed on the importance for the students to know about grammar to learn English, they all shared the same opinion as to the usefulness of grammar in composition even if students did not always keep in mind the grammar rules while writing. The majority of the teachers mentioned this in the first open-ended question of the questionnaire. As an example, one teacher said that grammar “helps them to write better” when they “focus on a particular aspect of speech.” Another teacher mentioned that grammar “helps a lot to write properly.”

The interviews gave further evidence for the importance of grammar in writing. One of the teachers who were interviewed articulated that grammar was “helpful to all of the skills. Grammar will help students be a better speaker, a bit of a better reader, but, most of all it will help them improve their writing.” The other teacher also believed that grammar was “especially important in writing”.

Other teachers believed in the importance and usefulness of formal grammar instruction only if certain conditions were respected. For example, some teachers mentioned two important factors such as students’ proficiency level and the integration of grammar into communicative activities. These teachers believed that grammar was important but not always necessary. One said, “For children the purely communicative approach is best since they are beginners. However, grammar is important for older students with higher proficiency.” Another teacher believed that grammar teaching was necessary at lower levels. She wrote,

Students need to begin somewhere. Grammatical structures give them something to work with particularly at the lower levels. I feel it hinders learning only when topics are “beaten to death” or if there is no connection made to how students can use the grammar in real-life. There should always be communicative follow-up [plus] lots of other post activities to use the grammar in my opinion.

Another teacher talked about how adults wanted to know how to use what they had learned “in different contexts.”

Speaking of communication and real-life situations, the results of the questionnaire also showed that the majority (81%) believed that it was more important to practice English in real life situations than to practice grammar. 6% disagreed and 13% were undecided. These percentages do not mean that the teachers were favoring a focus on communication over grammar. Instead, they seem to suggest that these

teachers support the necessity to teach grammar in communicative and authentic situations. One teacher argued that “if grammar is taught through explanations of rules then it hinders the learning process but if it is taught in a communicative and creative way, then it improves the learning process.”

When asked about whether students should learn grammar explicitly to become proficient, two of the three teachers interviewed believed in the usefulness of formal grammar teaching along with communicative activities. One specified that “students want and need some formal grammar rules, but we should also get them to learn the grammar rules through communication, reading stories, and writing.” The other explained her position as follows:

If students are beginning level and have no formal background in the English language, then teaching grammar explicitly can help establish a basic framework of knowledge. However, if the students are mid to advanced level, then it should be taught only in context and in spurts.

These opinions also reflect why or why not the teachers believed there should be more formal grammar in L2 classrooms. According to Table 3, views were divided regarding the suggestion to increase the formal study of grammar in classrooms. 31% of the teachers believed that there should be more formal grammar instruction in English classrooms. 31% disagreed with it and 38% were undecided. These numbers seem to suggest that teachers opted for a balance between formal grammar and communication. There was a belief that formal grammar instruction along with meaningful situations was necessary in L2 classrooms for different levels of proficiency.

It is interesting to notice that only two teachers (12%) disagreed that grammar instruction is essential when learning is limited to the classroom. Also, only two teachers (12%) disagreed that grammar helps in learning English in general. One of them explained his position through the open-ended questions. He thought that grammar was neither helpful in learning an L2 nor essential to master an L2 even if the learning was limited to the classroom. This NNES ESL teacher, who had 18 years of experience, believed that a language is learned through vocabulary, speaking, and listening and not through grammar teaching. In the first open-ended question (see Appendix A), which meant to identify why teachers thought grammar teaching improved or hindered English learning, this teacher wrote, “In absence of enough vocabulary and a good knowledge of L1, the grammar rules only tend to confuse the

learner at early stage.” He also justified his beliefs by referring to his own language learning experience. He said, “It was only after I had learned enough English that I began to follow English grammar.” The other teacher, also a NNES teacher, who believed grammar teaching and learning was not important to master a second language and English in particular, volunteered to be interviewed. This female teacher strongly believed that grammar was not a key element in learning a second language. According to her, students are capable of learning how to communicate without learning grammatical structures. She mentioned that a language could be learned through lots of listening, reading, and practice. Students “need practical vocabulary and do not necessarily need to understand grammatical patterns.” However, she admitted that grammar is helpful in writing because “writing is different than colloquial language.” She believed grammar was more useful for students with high proficiency than for beginners or students with low proficiency in language.

Another finding worth discussing was that only 62% of the teachers confessed to enjoying teaching grammar, yet 75% would still teach grammar even if they had the choice not to. In other words, the majority of the teachers welcomed grammar practice even if they did not always enjoy teaching it. Surprisingly, only 38% of the teachers thought that their students liked studying grammar. 37% thought their students did not like the study of grammar and 25% were undecided. One teacher commented on that issue by saying, “Students want grammar but it does not mean they like it. It is just necessary for them to pass the TOEFL. They continue to make the same mistakes over and over.”

Teachers’ Prior Experiences

Research has indicated that teachers have a vast array of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues including beliefs about students and classroom practices (Borg, 1998, 2003; Schulz, 2002). These beliefs are said to be derived from a teachers’ prior experiences, school practices, and individual personality (Borg, 2003). Within TESOL, there has been a growing concern to understand, and account for, the underlying belief systems of language teachers and the impact these have on their classroom practices (e.g., Borg 1998, 2003; Farrell 1999). Johnson (1994) articulates that teacher beliefs are not easy to define or study because they are not directly observable. Teacher beliefs consist of implicitly held assumptions and perceptions about teaching and learning and reflect the nature of the instruction the teacher

provides to students. Furthermore, the influence of English language teachers' belief systems on grammar teaching has gained interest and consists of a relatively new field of investigation, which has attracted many researchers.

The qualitative data of the questionnaire seemed to support the connection between beliefs and prior experiences. According to Schulz, there is no doubt that teachers' preparation and in-service development (including professional readings) play a role, so does their own professional experience in observing student success rates with particular forms of instruction. But their own language learning experience (i.e., the way they were taught) has surely colored their perceptions as well." (p. 255)

In the questionnaire, the teachers were asked whether their prior experience as a language learner influenced the way they thought of grammar and the way they taught it. All the teachers were affirmative on this question. Teachers' prior experiences as language learners were either positive or negative. Many teachers confessed that their language learning experience made them realize the kinds of problems students might face in grammar. One teacher said that her experience learning a second language influenced the way she perceived grammar because it made her more aware "of the problems inherent in grammar and more capable to solving them."

Other teachers experienced the benefits of formal grammar instruction as a language learner. As an example, one teacher thought that grammar instruction was important for students because she, as a language learner, needed grammar to understand and improve her English. She was convinced that grammar teaching would "help students manipulate language with more ease." Similarly, one NES teacher admitted in the interview that the way he learned Spanish, through "formal and traditional grammar teaching," made him feel that it was important for students "to know grammar terminology and formal grammar rules to use the language properly."

Some other teachers stated that their language learning experience influenced the way they taught English. Some employed some grammar-based activities they had experienced as learners in their L2 classrooms in their own practice. One teacher evoked how much she benefitted from the extensive feedback on grammatical errors she had received as a language learner. She further mentioned that it had influenced her practice as she personally experienced the benefits of formal grammar instruction. Her own words were, "I used to have a lot of feedback on grammatical errors. It

helped a lot so I am doing the same sometimes at the end of my classes.” During the interview, one of the teachers affirmed that the way he learned a second language made him “very grammar based as a teacher.” He added,

I taught lessons in terms of the grammar point. In other words, I built the lesson around the grammar point I was teaching. So, if we were studying the present perfect, I would bring in readings with the present perfect, movies, exercises, etc.

A second teacher, who learned English through immersion and who was also interviewed, did believe that grammar was important to build foundational skills but that it was not always necessary to teach it explicitly. She said,

The way I learned English definitely influences the way I teach it. I do not teach my students grammar unless I see that there is one specific grammatical error that the majority of students are struggling with. I also like teaching grammar in context. Instead of using textbook examples and worksheets, I teach grammar using sentences that students have written for previously submitted assignments.

One of the teachers, not in favor of grammar teaching, held his belief from his language learning experience. He clearly stated that grammar teaching was neither helpful nor important to learn a language. He wrote the following: “It was only after I had learned enough English that I began to follow English grammar.”

Based on their prior experiences as language learners, some teachers realized the importance of formal grammar instruction to learn a second language. As one said, “I tried learning a second language the communicative way with no explicit grammar and it was a disaster.” Another teacher wrote, “I think I can’t learn without some explicit grammar instruction.”

Many teachers recognized the advantages of formal grammar instruction as well as the disadvantages. They remembered how tiresome it could be for some students and how concentrated it was. On this issue, one teacher commented, “We used to have much grammar and it had made us what we are today, accurate with a sensitive grammar monitor. However, language lessons were boring and few of us could make it.” Another teacher talked about the positive and the negative aspects of formal grammar instruction as he remembered that he benefitted from explicit grammar instruction when he learned Spanish. However he also admitted that there

was “way too much of it.” That’s why he tries “to limit explicit grammar instruction to twice a week.”

The 16 teachers also answered with “yes” to the open-ended question asking if there was any connection between their beliefs and their experience as a second language teacher. They admitted that their many years of teaching English to L2 learners have shaped their beliefs and practice. The answers revealed three main points. First, teachers’ professional experience helped them to better identify common students’ errors and focus on problematic structures. Second, teachers realized the importance of formal grammar instruction and how helpful it has been in teaching the different skills. Third, it opened their eyes to the necessity of teaching formal grammar in L2 learning but using different approaches.

To illustrate the fact that teachers’ professional experience helped them identify and categorize students’ errors, one teacher wrote, “My experience as a teacher influenced my thoughts and teaching because it made me realize the kind of grammatical errors learners make during L2 learning and the need for more formal teaching of grammar.” Another teacher explained that his experience as a teacher has shown him how to “present grammar and the types of activities to choose.” Furthermore, having professional experience, he knew what points he needed to focus on and the ones he could skip. A third teacher, in line with these statements, stated she had “generalized certain mistakes for specific student population.”

Some teachers said that formal grammar teaching was helpful for teaching other skills as they sometimes felt “the need to use grammar in reading, listening, and writing classes.” It also helped “in clarifying some exercises.” However, one teacher wrote that his experience showed him the ineffectiveness of grammar teaching: “Students who know grammar usually fail to apply it efficiently when speaking or writing.”

Certainly, professional experience has not only confirmed the fundamental place of grammar instruction but also made some teachers recognized the necessity to teach grammar differently. One teacher said,

Grammar is grammar no matter how long I have been teaching English. On the other hand, modern technology, seminars, and conferences, can definitely help a lot in improving one’s way of teaching and tempt teachers to use or try different strategies.

The interviews also revealed interesting points such as the need to determine formal grammar instruction “by course objectives and style of learning” or that grammar should be contextualized, that is “eliciting rules from given contexts.” One of the teachers who was interviewed, said this:

As an educator, I have noticed that students learn grammar best through context. Repetitive textbook exercises that are usually out of context do not help students improve their grammar in real-life situations. I also use newspaper articles and other types of authentic texts to reinforce grammar. I have read and continue to read scholarly articles that reinforce this methodology.

These experiences, as teachers and language learners combined, made them build a strong opinion on the best ways to learn a language. One word that was the most cited was “practice.” For almost all the teachers, practice combined with other factors of learning was believed to lead to successful English learning. The best way for some teacher was “by creating situations and involving students in these situations.” According to one teacher, “practice is the best way for learning. You hear you forget, you see you remember, and you practice you do.” Another teacher insisted on the importance of studying then practicing in a communicative way, as he wrote that students needed “to study, practice, study, practice.”

Others mentioned immersion as an important factor for learning English. Being in an English environment or being exposed to the language for many hours during the day would force students to use English rather than, according to one teacher, “slipping into Arabic or their native language the minute the class is over.”

In addition, a combination of strategies and use of technology would enhance students’ learning. For example, one teacher noticed that students had different sources from what old generations used to have. Nowadays students do not depend on the teachers’ lectures anymore but have a vast array of choices to help them boost their learning. He cited the Internet where students would have access to many sites on learning English, without forgetting movies, music, and reading.

Most of all, the motivation, the confidence, and the positive attitude towards English of the students themselves were key factors contributing to better English learning. Some teachers emphasized the fact that encouraging students and building their confidence could facilitate English learning and teaching. According to one teacher, there is not a best way to learn English. Instead, there could be

a good teacher, a good student, and a conducive environment to learning. Students should know that learning a language cannot happen overnight. It is a slow process that requires patience, motivation and perseverance. The power of reading should not be undervalued.

Comparison between Students' and Teachers' Perceptions

Some interesting comparisons between students' and teachers' perceptions can be made. Large majorities of students and teachers agreed that the study of grammar was important and helped in learning a second language, and English in particular. Some discrepancies, though, can be noticed regarding certain statements in the questionnaire. Tables 4 through 12 summarize responses (expressed in percentages) for perceptions regarding the role of grammar for both students and teachers. They also show the discrepancy rate in the responses between students and teachers. Each table illustrates the comparison between students and teachers on similar statements on the questionnaires. The statements were similarly worded to allow comparisons.

Table 4: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: The formal study of grammar is essential to eventual mastery of a second language when language learning is limited to the classroom.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	100%	0%	0%
Teachers	16	88%	0%	12%
Discrepancies		12%		12%

Table 5: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: the study of grammar helps in learning a second language

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	94%	4%	2%
Teachers	16	94%	0%	6%
Discrepancies		0%	4%	4%

Table 6: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: It is important to know about grammar to learn English

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	100%	0%	0%
Teachers	16	88%	0%	12%
Discrepancies		12%	0%	12%

Table 7: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.

Statement: It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	81%	12%	7%
Teachers	16	81%	13%	6%
Discrepancies		0%	1%	1%

Table 8: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	84%	16%	0%
Teachers	16	50%	19%	31%
Discrepancies		34%	3%	31%

Table 9: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: I believe grammar teaching helps to improve writing.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	98%	2%	0%
Teachers	16	100%	0%	14%
Discrepancies		2%	2%	14%

Table 10: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.

Statement: Generally, there should be more formal grammar study in FL/L2 courses than is presently the case.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	72%	15%	13%
Teachers	16	31%	38%	31%
Discrepancies		41%	23%	18%

Table 11: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar

Statement: Students usually keep grammar rules in mind when they write in a FL/L2 or read what they have written.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	75%	21%	4%
Teachers	16	62%	19%	19%
Discrepancies		13%	2%	15%

Table 12: Student/Teacher Attitudes toward the Role of Grammar.

Statement: Students generally like the study of grammar.

	No.	SA/A	U	SD/D
Students	56	66%	20%	14%
Teachers	16	38%	25%	37%
Discrepancies		28%	5%	23%

Some striking discrepancies between the students and teachers in their perceptions regarding the role of grammar can be noticed. As evident in the summary in Tables 4 through 12, significant discrepancies (higher than 10%) exist between students' perceptions and those of teachers.

The tables also show some similarities in perceptions between the two groups. For example, both students and teachers clearly indicated that the study of grammar helps in learning a second language. In addition, they were also in accord about the idea that grammar is not sufficient to learn English and that communicative tasks are

as important. The two groups also shared the same opinion as to the efficacy of grammar in improving writing.

However, there wasn't an agreement when it came to keeping grammatical rules in mind when writing. The students felt more than the teachers that they were keeping grammatical rules when they wrote (75% vs. 62%). A small discrepancy of 12% can be found in Table 4 regarding whether the study of formal grammar is essential to the mastery of a second language. The students showed more enthusiasm (100%) than the teachers (88%). The students were also more convinced of the importance to know grammar to learn English since Table 6 showed a discrepancy of 12%.

A larger majority of students (84%) believed that their communicative skills would improve most quickly if they studied and practiced the grammar of the language. Only 50% of the teachers believed so. The number of teachers who disagreed with this statement was larger than that of students, showing a discrepancy rate of 31%.

Another major discrepancy (41%) regards the belief that there should be more formal study of grammar in classrooms. The group of students showed a stronger belief than the group of teachers (72% vs. 31%).

Furthermore, 66% of the students versus 38% of the teachers thought students like to study grammar. In other words, 37% of the teachers thought their students disliked the study of grammar while only 14% of the students attested that they did not like grammar study.

These comparisons of teacher and student perceptions about aspects of formal instruction have shed light on important divergences between the positive attitudes of students towards formal grammar teaching and less enthusiast attitudes of teachers regarding the same issue. It seems likely that the divergence of opinions between students and teachers can have some repercussions on learning. The possible reasons to explain students' positive attitude towards grammar teaching were already mentioned in the discussion of students' responses in chapter 4. They reported to like the study of grammar because it helped them to write and speak better. They also believed grammar was important to master English and expressed their desire to have more formal grammar instruction in classrooms. The teachers agreed less with the students on these issues.

These differences in opinions between students and teachers are in line with Schulz's (1996) study on students' and teachers' perceptions towards the role of formal grammar instruction and error correction in a US context. Her study also reported some considerable discrepancies. She states that "any sizeable discrepancy in teacher and student perceptions regarding the efficacy of instructional practices can be detrimental to learning, regardless of the methodological convictions of the teacher" (p. 358). Students' perceptions are very important. According to Schulz (2001), students' beliefs are important in many aspects of language learning such as motivation, learning strategies, and learning styles, to name a few. Teachers should take into account their students' perceptions when teaching to avoid any obstacle between teaching and learning. Schulz (1996) recommends that "in order to establish pedagogical credibility and increase their students' commitment to and involvement in learning, teachers make an effort to explore students' beliefs about language learning and to establish a fit between their own and their students' expectations" (p. 343).

Comparison between NES and NNES Teachers' Perceptions

It would be common to expect considerable agreement among the members of the same profession regarding approaches to building knowledge and skills in their discipline. However, these ESL teachers, as a group, showed important discrepancies in their belief systems. Teachers' perceptions are more complex because of their belief systems. They carry personal experiences not only as ESL teachers but also as language learners. There is no doubt that L2 teacher education and preparation along with their own professional experiences play a crucial role in shaping those perceptions and attitudes. Teachers have taught English for many years, observed students, and noticed which forms of instruction were most successful to teach and learn English. Most importantly, teachers' own language learning experience and the way they were taught surely have an influence on their perceptions.

The teachers' results demonstrated some striking and interesting discrepancies when compared between native English speaking (NES) teachers and non-native English speaking (NNES) teachers. Table 13 summarizes the NES teachers' responses to the questionnaire, and Table 14 summarizes the responses of the NNES teachers.

Tables 13 and 14 illustrate that there wasn't any unanimity regarding the role of formal grammar instruction as fundamental to the mastery of a second language. It was even surprising to discover that 25% the NNES teachers disagreed with this

belief, whereas all the NES teachers agreed on the importance of formal grammar instruction to master a second language.

On one hand, the same point could be made for statements #1 and #3 of the teachers' questionnaire. Again, all the NES teachers responded positively to the idea that grammar helps in learning a second language. They all also believed that it is important for students to know grammar in order to learn English. However, some NNES teachers disagreed with these two statements, which created discrepancy rates of 12% for statement #1 of the questionnaire, 25% for statement #2, and 24% for statement #3.

On the other hand, the NNES teachers agreed more than the NES teachers on the belief that students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice grammar (62% vs. 38%). The NES teachers showed more hesitancy than disagreement towards this belief since 37% of them were undecided.

Table 13: NES Teachers' Responses

Statement	SA/A	U	D/SD
1. The study of grammar helps in learning a second or foreign language.	100%		
2. For adolescents or adults, the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when language learning is limited to the classroom.	100%		
3. I believe it is important for students to know grammar in order to learn English.	100%		
4. Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.	38%	37%	25%
5. I believe grammar teaching helps to improve writing.	100%		
6. Generally, there should be more formal grammar study in FL/L2 courses than is presently the case.		50%	50%
7. Students usually keep grammar rules in mind when they write in a FL/L2 or read what they have written.	38%	38%	24%
8. It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.	74%	13%	13%
9. I enjoy doing grammar lessons.	62%	13%	25%
10. If I had the choice, I'd rather not teach grammar at all.	12%	12%	72%
11. Students generally like the study of grammar.	37%	37%	26%
12. The knowledge of grammar helps my students to be able to correct their mistakes.	88%	12%	

Another intriguing discrepancy can be found in statement #6 regarding the suggestion that there should be more formal grammar instruction in classrooms. While the NNES teachers did not all agree on the importance of formal grammar in the mastery of a second language and in learning English compared to their NES counterparts, the majority of them (63%) believed that there should be more formal study of grammar in classrooms. None of the NES teachers believed so. They were either undecided (50%) or in disagreement (50%).

Table 14: NNES Teachers' Responses

Statement	SA/A	U	D/SD
1. The study of grammar helps in learning a second or foreign language.	88%		12%
2. For adolescents or adults, the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when language learning is limited to the classroom.	75%		25%
3. I believe it is important for students to know grammar in order to learn English.	76%		24%
4. Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.	72%		38%
5. I believe grammar teaching helps to improve writing.	100%		
6. Generally, there should be more formal grammar study in FL/L2 courses than is presently the case.	63%	24%	13%
7. Students usually keep grammar rules in mind when they write in a FL/L2 or read what they have written.	88%		12%
8. It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.	88%	12%	
9. I enjoy doing grammar lessons.	63%	25%	12%
10. If I had the choice, I'd rather not teach grammar at all.	37%		63%
11. Students generally like the study of grammar.	38%	12%	50%
12. The knowledge of grammar helps my students to be able to correct their mistakes.	76%	12%	12%

Statement #7 showed a difference of 50% in agreement. The NNES teachers were more convinced that students usually keep grammatical rules in writing (88% vs. 38%). The results of statement #8 indicated an agreement on the importance of teaching English through meaningful and real-life situations. A difference in opinions of 14% can be noticed though. The NNES teachers showed a stronger belief in practicing English through real-life situations than their NES counterparts (88% vs. 74%).

The NNES teachers were also the ones who demonstrated less disagreement (63% vs. 76%) for statement #10 of the questionnaire, "If I had the choice I would rather not teach grammar at all." The majority of the teachers in both groups disagreed with that statement suggesting the necessity to teach some grammar.

Nevertheless, 37% of the NNES agreed with that statement against only 12% of the NES teachers.

As far as believing whether students liked the study of grammar (see statement #11 in Tables 13 and 14), the results showed that the NNES and NES teachers shared almost the same percentage of agreement (38% vs. 37%). However, it is interesting to notice that 50% of the NNES teachers believed that the students did not like studying grammar versus only 26% of the NES teachers.

These discrepancies in perceptions from the two groups of teachers are quite interesting. One would have assumed that NES teachers would be those less in favor of formal grammar teaching. The literature usually reports that NNES who were taught English through focus on forms, hold a stronger adherence to the formal teaching of grammar. The NES teachers, however, had a less positive opinion about grammar teaching since they did not learn their native language, English, through the traditional methods of grammar teaching. Schulz's (2001) study, on US and Colombian students' and teachers' perceptions about the role of formal grammar instruction and error correction, revealed that the NNES teachers expressed their conviction that they themselves had benefited from formal grammar instruction in their own language learning, which explained their positive attitude for explicit grammar teaching and for more of it in classrooms. The NNES Colombian teachers also all agreed that many of their students were helped by a focus on forms and that many students demanded grammar study. Schulz adds,

Although the Colombian teachers interviewed proclaimed to follow communicative approaches in their classrooms, none of them cited second language acquisition (SLA) literature to support their beliefs. Interestingly, some Arizona FL teachers with whom I had similar conversations anchored their opinions in the professional literature rather than in their own learning or teaching experience. (p. 255)

In this study, the answers exposed some divergent opinions on certain statements of the questionnaire. Having said that, it is important not to forget that, in general, the teachers of the two groups held positive attitudes towards grammar instruction. It is worth noting that the NNES teachers showed less enthusiasm to the teaching of grammar, yet they thought it was an essential part of language.

Contrary to the NES teachers, the sample of the NNES teachers did not all agree on the first three statements of the questionnaire. However, they explained, in

the open-ended questions, that “grammar is grammar”; it is an “essential component of language” without which other skills can not fully develop. They all believed that grammar helps to improve writing, but the NNES teachers agreed more on the benefits of grammar to improve students’ communicative ability. They also showed a larger enthusiasm for having more formal grammar teaching in classrooms compared to NES teachers who did not agree.

It is worth mentioning that even though NNES teachers may have been taught English through the Grammar-Translation method or the Audiolingual method, this does not necessarily mean they thought it was the best way to learn a second language. To put it differently, their language learning experience might have been either positive, making them strong followers of grammar teaching, or negative, making them skeptical towards the efficacy of grammar teaching. Not only that, their experience as language learners could also have taught them to go beyond just formal grammar teaching in learning English. As an illustration, a large majority of NNES teachers believed in the importance of communicative activities to learn English.

In this specific sample, three NNES teachers admitted they would rather not teach grammar at all if they had the choice compared to only one NES teacher. Their answers to the questionnaire and open-ended questions showed that these teachers did not think that grammar was *not* part of language learning. One NNES teacher from India, who disagreed with the belief that grammar was important to learn English, did not reject it either. He thought learning a large amount of vocabulary along with lots of listening and reading was a better approach to learn English at early levels. He wrote, “In the absence of enough vocabulary and a good knowledge of L1, grammar rules only tend to confuse the learner at early stage.” He added, “It was only after I had learned enough English that I started to follow English grammar.” The second NNES teacher also thought higher proficiency level students would benefit more from formal grammar instruction than students with lower proficiency.

Some NES teachers also mentioned that grammar was useful for different levels of proficiency. Learners’ proficiency level has been discussed as one of the important variables that determine whether or how much explicit grammar should be given. Some researchers (Celce-Murcia, 1991; DeKeyser, 1998) argue that grammar instruction benefits intermediate or advanced learners rather than beginning level learners, but no research provides empirical evidence. Other researchers such as Weslander and Stephany (1983, as cited in Long, 1998) propose that it is best to

provide formal instruction to ESL students when they are at early stages of learning. In addition, results from a study conducted by Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) reflect this contradictory opinion among researchers. In their study, several teachers were asked when it was best to provide grammar instruction. Seven teachers agreed that grammar should be taught at the beginning level of proficiency, five teachers thought it should begin at the intermediate or advanced level, and five teachers supported instruction at every level. The rationale behind the argument for early grammar instruction is based on the belief that learners will have a “good foundation to build on” by the practice of correct usage (Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997, p. 250).

The sample of NES teachers responded positively to the teaching and study of grammar. Many of them learned a second language through some grammar instruction and experienced some of its benefits. As an example, one NES wrote, “I think I benefitted from explicit grammar instruction when I learned Spanish.” Another one said, “I think I can’t learn without some explicit grammar instruction.”

The comparisons between NES and NNES teachers are inconclusive. However, they provide evidence of the complexity of teachers’ beliefs and perceptions in language learning and teaching. The influence of prior experiences cannot be questioned.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 summarizes the discussion presented in the previous chapter, followed by implications for teachers and recommendations for further research.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions towards the role of formal grammar instruction in two universities offering intensive English programs.

In general, the findings obtained from the questionnaires and interviews provided evidence of a strong belief on the parts of both students and teachers that formal grammar study plays a positive role in second language learning. Students did feel that formal grammar instruction was important to learn English, as it was a tool "to speak, listen, read and write correctly." Teachers viewed grammar instruction as a valuable part of an integrated approach to language teaching. Most of them insisted on the fact that grammar was an essential component of any language without which "accuracy would be compromised." The teachers were unanimous in believing that the teaching of grammar helped in improving students' compositions in English even if they did not always keep in mind grammatical rules when writing. The interviews and the qualitative data revealed that teachers' practices and beliefs of formal grammar instruction were incontestably influenced by their experiences as language learners and practicing teachers.

Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

This study offers many implications for teachers and English learning and teaching as well as some implications for further research. The findings of this study provide some interesting insights into the way students think about and approach grammar in their language study. While these responses may be interesting as they reflect students' attitudes toward grammar study, they may also have some implications for teachers and for classroom English instruction. The discrepancies in students' and teachers' perceptions are believed to have an impact on the successful or unsuccessful learning and teaching of a language. The literature supports the idea that students and teachers may come from very different educational backgrounds.

Teachers and students who have contrasting ideas about the role of grammar instruction may experience conflict in the classroom, which may affect learners' motivation (Schultz, 2001). Students who are not motivated may become disappointed with the language learning process. According to Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005), "the beliefs of teachers and students are important for understanding the process of learning, because they can help us to prevent those conflicts that may augment frustration, anxiety and lack of motivation on the part of the student, or even their giving up the learning of the foreign language" (p. 132). Therefore, for many researchers, it is necessary to try to understand where the similarities and differences lie, as there will often be differences between students' and teachers' perceptions regarding language learning, and understanding these differences may thereby reduce conflict.

In order to come to an understanding, researchers studying students' attitudes toward grammar study have recommended that teachers survey their own students as to their beliefs with regard to this topic. Others, such as Horwitz (1988), have suggested a dialogue between students and teachers. Indeed, mismatches between teachers' and students' beliefs could be avoided by "discussions about the nature of language learning" as a regular part of language instruction. Teachers should let the students know that they are aware of their beliefs and needs. This dialogue or these surveys can serve to help teachers to become aware of students' changing needs and ideas of language learning. In addition, they can help students to become more aware of each other's perceptions along with those of their teachers. Moreover, they can help students to be open to new methods of language teaching and learning other than the ones they have already been exposed to. They can realize that new ways of learning English are also helpful to learn English. In this way, students would at least become aware of alternatives even if they have their own preferences. Many researchers, such as Schulz (1996) and Kumaradivelu (1991), contended that the knowledge of students' views and conceptions is the first step towards more effective teaching.

The interviews and open-ended questions have also put forth the belief that teachers' lessons are not the only way to achieve proficiency in the target language. L2 students play an important role in the learning process, and their personal involvement and efforts are essential for optimal language learning. Teachers in this study mentioned the necessity for students to become more active and independent in

their learning. Many teachers in this study suggested that teachers could help students to become more active and independent by “grasping the students by their emotions,” trying to “boost their confidence and motivation,” and “encourage[ing] them to have a positive attitude towards English” as learning a second language is a “long process.”

In addition, teachers should determine students’ needs and why students are learning a second language. Students, in this study, need English to pursue their academic goals. As students in the UAE, English is the medium of instruction in most universities. All the majors except for Arabic are taught in English. Students will have to write and read extensively in English in order to fulfill the requirements of their majors. Grammar teaching along with other important skills related to writing and speaking seem to be necessary for these students. Most of the time teaching a second language involves a combination of many skills of which accuracy constitutes an essential part at university levels. Through the students’ responses in this study, there was evidence that students did believe that fluency greatly contributes to successful language learning. They were also convinced that grammar would help them attain that fluency. In other words, these findings suggested that the students privileged both accuracy and fluency. They strongly showed an interest to be accurate and fluent at the same time. They also firmly stated that they believed this would be reached through grammar study. Horwitz (1988) argues that “beliefs stressing the importance of target language accuracy are a contributing factor to anxiety reactions in foreign language (p. 292). In addition, these students’ beliefs about accuracy and fluency resonate with researchers’ assertions that accuracy and fluency are the goals of language learning and grammar instruction should be integrated into communicative and meaningful activities in ESL programs.

The data gained through the analysis of the questionnaire showed that teachers’ beliefs are greatly influenced by prior experiences as language learners and teachers. Teachers’ beliefs play a critical role in improving second language instruction. Uncovering these beliefs can contribute to an understanding of how to refine and improve teaching and learning. Some teachers in the study suggested second language teachers should keep themselves up-to-date with the research in language teaching and learning. As one teacher suggested, attending conferences or workshops, reading papers, or using modern technology “can definitely help a lot in improving one’s way of teaching.” Teachers’ beliefs are very complex and the differences between NES and NNES teachers found in this study cannot be

generalized. However, the results seem to show a common accord on the fact that grammar teaching is necessary at a certain point, for a certain level, and for a certain purpose. Even though the findings from this study are not intended for generalization because each case is unique to its context, the insights gained from the findings can trigger and inspire practitioners to reflect on and reexamine their beliefs. Besides, beliefs change with time. The literature reports that experienced teachers have different beliefs about language learning and teaching than less or novel teachers. In this study, there was no teacher with less than ten years of teaching experience. Further research may be useful to investigate the extent to which teachers' beliefs change over time.

Undoubtedly, more and a different kind of research would be needed to investigate the extent to which teachers' beliefs are influenced by prior experiences regarding grammar instruction. It would be particularly interested to focus on the dichotomy between NES teachers' vs. NNES teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching and find out their methods or approaches of grammar teaching. Another area of research would be to examine and compare teachers' beliefs about grammar and actual classroom practices in order to discover whether classroom practices converge or diverge from beliefs about grammar teaching. Future research could also examine the effects of grammar instruction on students' learning in order to determine if formal grammar instruction is an efficient way to improve L2 students' proficiency. A specific example could be to investigate the relationship between grammatical knowledge and writing proficiency.

I also believe that teacher education programs could provide teacher trainees a course or other opportunities to make sense of the theoretical and practical aspects of grammar teaching. By connecting their personal pedagogical knowledge influenced by their beliefs and theoretical knowledge gained in their training, teacher trainees would be enabled to discover, judge, or develop alternative conceptions of grammar teaching and make it more effective. This would also encourage trainee teachers to identify and interpret their attitudes and beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching in different contexts. Peacock (2001) suggests that "work on beliefs should be an integral part of TESL core courses" (p. 189). He adds that ESL trainers should encourage guided reflection among trainees.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was the very limited size of the sample. It would be possible to replicate it on larger populations and different teaching contexts. One reason for this limitation was the difficulty to get the teachers to answer the questionnaire. I also had to search for teachers who would agree to give the students' questionnaire to some of their students. To that can be added the unwillingness of teachers to be interviewed. These problems encountered when submitting the questionnaire could be explained by the busy schedule of the teachers. I had to submit my surveys through the associate director of the IEP at the American University of Sharjah. This person kindly asked the teachers to fill in the questionnaire and to return them to her. Unfortunately, this effort only resulted in six filled in questionnaires. I was not even lucky with the teachers to whom I gave the questionnaire personally. The associate director predicted that not many teachers would answer because of the length of the questionnaire which would be time consuming. As far as Sharjah University is concerned, I was lucky enough to know a friend who works there and asked her colleagues to fill in the questionnaire. In addition of their busy schedule, the teachers might also feel annoyed by such surveys because they seem to see a lot of them from AUS MA students.

Another limitation of the study could be the length of the questionnaires which limited the collection of additional data. Further questions, especially in the teacher questionnaire, could have explained why some teachers thought their students did not like grammar. Moreover, a question including the impact of teacher education on teacher beliefs could have shown whether teacher education influenced their beliefs about language learning and teaching and grammar instruction in particular.

Moreover, the study took into consideration students' and teachers' perceptions only in universities. It would be interesting if public and private secondary schools could be considered as well. This would lead to a comparison between the perceptions of teachers and students in secondary schools and university levels towards the role of formal grammar instruction in ESL classrooms. It also would be interesting to examine the consequences of other variables on teachers' and students' perceptions such as background, gender, level of proficiency, experience, and so on. For instance, a comparison between male and female students' beliefs and male and female teachers' beliefs could have brought more insights into this study.

Final Thought

I think this small study is very interesting because it not only dealt with the ongoing debate on the role of grammar teaching in second language acquisition but also with students' and teachers' perceptions towards this issue.

Language learning is a cognitive process. In trying to understand how students learn, we need to understand how they think and feel, what they believe in, and how this affects their feelings and decisions. Language learners, especially adults or university level students, bring an array of beliefs to the classrooms. These beliefs can be related to their preferred way of learning, feelings that facilitate or inhibit learning, or whether they believe they have a capability for second/foreign language learning (Ellis, 1994). Just as students' motivation is an important factor for successful language learning, students' attitudes and beliefs have a strong effect on their success as language learners. Failure to recognize students' beliefs can lead to students' anxiety.

Teachers also bring to the classroom attitudes, values, experiences, theories, and assumptions that they have built over time about language teaching and learning. The literature asserts that these beliefs affect their decisions and actions in the classroom. In order to successfully complete the task of teaching-learning exchange, teachers and students need to know about each other's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Mismatch between students' and teachers' beliefs often result in increased anxiety or affective filters.

The IEP students in this study perceived grammar as very important and thus believed in a need for more of it. The students defined grammar as the basis of the language, the knowledge of which will help them write and speak correctly, which in turn will give them confidence. UAE ESL teachers need to pay attention to students' cognitive and affective natures, needs, interests, and motives for learning English in order to improve language teaching and learning.

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APPENDIX

A: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Teachers' Perceptions about English Grammar Teaching

The objective of this questionnaire is to examine teachers' perceptions toward English grammar teaching in UAE universities. Please note that data provided will be used for analysis as part of my thesis research in the Masters of TESOL Program in the American University of Sharjah. This survey is anonymous and participation is voluntary. There is no obligation to respond to all the questions or you can choose not to participate. I appreciate your time in filling out this survey.

Gender: Male Female

Nationality (optional): _____

Native speaker of English? Yes No

How long have you been teaching? _____

1. The study of grammar helps in learning a second or foreign language.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. For adolescents or adults, the formal study of grammar is essential to the eventual mastery of a foreign or second language, when language learning is limited to the classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I believe it is important for students to know grammar in order to learn English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. Generally speaking, students' communicative ability improves most quickly if they study and practice the grammar of the language.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I believe grammar teaching helps to improve writing.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Generally, there should be more formal grammar study in FL/L2 courses than is presently the case.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Students usually keep grammar rules in mind when they write in a FL/L2 or read what they have written.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. It is, generally, more important to practice English in situations simulating real life (i.e., interview, role plays, etc.) than to analyze and practice grammatical patterns.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I enjoy doing grammar lessons.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. If I had the choice, I'd rather not teach grammar at all.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Students generally like the study of grammar.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. The knowledge of grammar helps my students to be able to correct their mistakes

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Please answer the following questions

1. Why do you think that grammar teaching improves or hinders English learning?

2. Does your experience **as a teacher** influence the way you think about grammar and the way you teach it? If so how?

3. Does your experience as **a language learner** influence the way you think about formal grammar and the way you teach it? If so, how?

4. How do you think students can best learn English?

Thank you for your time and participation.

Please fill in the information below if you would like to be interviewed. The interview should take about 15-20 minutes and will discuss more issues about formal grammar instruction in language classrooms.

Yes, I would like to be interviewed.

If yes, Name: _____ Mobile: _____ E-mail: _____

No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

B: STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Students' Perceptions about English Grammar Teaching

The objective of this questionnaire is to examine students' perceptions toward English grammar teaching in some UAE universities. Please note that data provided will be used for analysis as part of my thesis research in the Masters of TESOL Program in the American University of Sharjah. This survey is anonymous and participation is voluntary. There is no obligation to respond to all the questions or you can choose not to participate. I appreciate your time in filling out this survey.

Gender: Male Female Nationality (Optional):

Grade level: _____

University name: _____

How long have you been studying English? _____

1. I believe it is important and useful for me, as a student, to study grammar in order to learn English.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. The formal study of grammar is essential to master English when learning English happens only in the classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. The study of grammar helps in learning a second language.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I believe my communicative ability improves quickly if I study and practice grammar.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I believe my writing improves quickly if I study and practice grammar.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. It is more important to practice a foreign language in real-life situations (i.e., ask and answer questions, engage in role-plays or other simulations, etc.) than to study and practice grammatical patterns.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I like the study of grammar.

Strongly Agree Agreed Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. There should be more formal study of grammar in my classroom.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. I usually keep grammar rules in mind when I write in English or read what I have written.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagreed Strongly Disagree

Why do you think that grammar teaching is or is not important to learn English?

Thank you for your time and participation.

C: TEACHERS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Is English your L1 or L2?
2. If English is your mother tongue, what second language did you learn?
3. Did you learn English through grammar instruction?
4. Did you learn any other language through formal grammar?
5. Do you believe that the way you learned English influenced the way you perceive grammar? Why?
6. Do you believe that the way you learned English influenced the way you teach it? Why?
7. Does your experience as a teacher influence your practice? Did you change the way you perceive and teach grammar?
8. Do you believe L2 learners should learn grammar explicitly to become proficient in English?
9. Which skills do you believe grammar instruction might be helpful for?

VITA

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