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Grammar Teaching Beliefs and Practices Among EFL Teachers

A Literature Review



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Abstract

This review focuses on grammar teaching beliefs and practices among EFL teachers, specifically those teaching at the high school level. The aim of the review is to achieve an updated understanding of the relationship between beliefs and practices by reviewing the most recent studies on the topic. Moreover, this can aid teachers in developing a deeper understanding of the motivation behind their pedagogical decisions, which can serve to improve their practice. In total, ten studies were analyzed. When comparing the studies, we focused to a high degree on the method of data elicitation used. Findings indicate that there is divergence between teachers' beliefs and practices. Possible causes for this divergence are discussed, along with the importance of using observations in conjunction with other methods when studying this topic. This review highlights the need for a similar study in the Scandinavian context in order to verify whether conclusions are generalizable beyond their context. Finally, the possible pedagogical implications of the findings are presented.

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1. Introduction

Teaching must always be based on research (Skolverket, 2022b). However, in practice, teachers are faced with situations where they must rely on their intuition, which is shaped by their beliefs (Gill & Fives, 2011). Moreover, Gill & Fives argue that beliefs are “fundamental to understanding who teachers are and what they do” (2011, p. 9). In other words, teachers’ pedagogical decisions are based not only on research but also on their beliefs.

In a similar vein, beliefs affect grammar teaching, which is a central part of any language classroom. Over time, in different contexts, various grammar teaching methods and approaches have been employed, with varying degrees of explicit focus on grammar (Tornberg, 2017). Due to the lack of consensus regarding what teaching method is the most effective, along with the possible absence of clear instructions from steering documents, teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching play a considerable role in shaping their teaching practice (Borg, 2017). Therefore, studying their beliefs might help us understand their decisions. Moreover, it can be easier for teachers to improve their practice once they are aware of the beliefs by which they have been influenced.

There are previous literature reviews in this area, most notably Borg (2003), which covers teachers’ declarative knowledge about grammar, teachers’ beliefs about teaching grammar, as well as the relationship between cognition and practice. The reviewed studies express concerns about the inadequate knowledge of grammar among aspiring language teachers (Borg, 2003). In addition, despite teachers’ favoring more communicative approaches, formal grammar instruction still has a considerable role in the EFL classroom. The relationship between beliefs and practice is complex, given that these beliefs depend on several factors, such as previous experience as learners, as well as the influence of other factors such as classroom environment and students’ knowledge (Borg, 2003).

To our knowledge, there is a lack of recent reviews in this field, especially ones focusing on EFL teachers in high school/upper secondary. With our background as aspiring teachers at that level, we are interested in filling this gap, reviewing more recent studies. Thus, this review aims to explore what current research says about the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and

their practices as it pertains to grammar teaching. How does this relationship manifest itself in the EFL classroom? Is there a tension between beliefs and practice, or are they in complete harmony? Additionally, the aim is to achieve an updated understanding for the community of EFL teachers. These reflections could not only aid teachers in their classroom practice but also support students in reaching the goals of the Syllabus. Borg (2017) emphasizes the importance of motivating the reason for studying beliefs and practices, considering that a justification is needed apart from the fact that there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and practices. Therefore, this review aims to help teachers develop by recognizing the gap. They are more likely to change and improve their practice when they become aware of the dissonance.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section will explore the theoretical perspectives that are necessary for this review. As aspiring teachers in Sweden, this review needs to be put into our context if we are to be able to draw useful conclusions. In addition, communicative language teaching is a recurring theme in most of these studies and therefore needs to be clearly defined. Lastly, the definition of teacher beliefs varies between the studies, meaning that it is important for us to make sure that we use a clear definition throughout our review.

2.1 The Swedish context

In our Swedish context, English teaching focuses primarily on the “all-round communicative skills” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 34) in the English Syllabus for compulsory school (grade 7-9). While grammatical structures are mentioned as a part of the productive respectively the receptive skills (Skolverket, 2018), there is no obligatory grammatical content and specific structures that teachers must include in their teaching that is explicitly stated in the Syllabus (Skolverket, 2017). Those grammatical elements should only be included if they can clarify and enrich the students' communication. Furthermore, the assessment criteria emphasize the communicative skill (Skolverket, 2018), where grammar knowledge is assessed as a part of the whole rather than as a separate skill. As a result, the teacher is left with a great responsibility to interpret the Syllabus

and decide by themselves what, how, and when to include grammar teaching due to the crucial role played by the students' grammatical competence in their communicative competence (Lock, 1996). In addition, as Ljung and Ohlander (1993) describe, not only does grammar knowledge impact the ability to use correct and appropriate grammar in different situations and contexts, but also the specific meaning of the language produced. Therefore, grammatical knowledge is "a condition for all-round and creative communicative skills" (our translation) (Ljung & Ohlander, 1993. p. 8).

2.2 Communicative language teaching

In the reviewed studies, Communicative language teaching (CLT) appears as a recurring term and, as such, needs to be clearly defined. CLT is a perspective on language teaching in which the main emphasis lies on interaction, both as a means and an end. The primary purpose is for learners to develop their communicative competence, of which the central aspect is being able to adapt language usage based on purpose, setting, and participants. Additionally, it involves being able to communicate in situations where one's language skills alone will not suffice (Richards, 2006).

In CLT, there tends to be an emphasis on implicit presentation of forms, eschewing technical terms in favor of using the target form in communication and relying on the context to help the students understand (Brown & Lee, 2015). In contrast, explicit presentation of forms means focusing on metalinguistic awareness of rules (Brown & Lee, 2015), with the idea that this knowledge will aid the learners in speaking grammatically correct English. In turn, explicit teaching can be divided into deductive and inductive presentations. According to Brown and Lee (2015), the former consists of the teacher presenting examples and explaining the grammatical rule in question, whereas the latter consists of more student participation, asking them to find and explain the rule at hand.

2.3 Teacher cognition and teacher beliefs

As previously stated, teachers' behaviors are affected by their thoughts, with external and internal factors playing a role. Borg (2019) defines those unobservable aspects as teacher

cognition. This term is broad and has become an umbrella term for all these unseen aspects which the teacher thinks, knows, and believes. We want to narrow our scope and, therefore, have decided to use the term teacher beliefs rather than teacher cognition. To our knowledge, there is no single agreed definition of “teacher beliefs”. Beliefs can be held about several issues, about students, learning, or specific areas of teaching (Borg, 2017) such as grammar as in our review. However, we will use Michaela Borg’s (2001) definition, according to which a belief is “a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior” (p. 1). Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs refer to the beliefs considering their pedagogical beliefs or relevant beliefs for their profession (Borg, 2001). The review might use synonyms since the studies use different terms, but we will interpret those like the above-given definition.

3. Method

As mentioned earlier, this review takes Borg (2003) as its point of departure. Due to the lack of reviews of more recent research, we decided to limit our scope to articles published in 2004 and onwards. After several literature searches, conducted via the Education Collection and Scopus databases with peer review filter turned on, we decided on the following search terms: “Teacher cognition”/ “Teacher belief*” / “teacher attitude*” / “teacher perception*” / “teacher view*” & “grammar teaching” / “grammar instruction” & “English as a second language” / “ESL” / “EFL” / “English”. In Education Collection, we searched in “Anywhere except full text”, yielding 85 results, after which we analyzed the titles and abstracts to determine their relevance. In Scopus, adding “L2” to our existing search terms and limiting our search terms to “Keywords in title, abstract, keywords” resulted in 56 articles, adding additional articles to our review. Finally, by sifting through the reference lists of these studies, also known as the snowball technique (Ridley, 2012), we expanded our set of relevant articles. This resulted in a total of ten studies, of which the earliest was conducted in 2009 and the most recent one in 2020. These studies were conducted in a wide variety of settings across the world, albeit none in a Scandinavian context.

Our interest is mainly in teachers in high school/upper secondary school, which is reflected in our choice of studies in this literature review. Moreover, this limitation facilitates comparisons between studies, allowing for more relevant pedagogical implications. Our search yielded numerous studies conducted in an ESL context. While these were of high quality, we deemed that the conclusions drawn from reviewing solely EFL can be more easily applied in a Scandinavian context. While useful, the search term “English” also generated articles focusing on L1-teaching, which is outside the scope of this review.

4. Literature Review

The reviewed studies have investigated EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding grammar teaching from different angles. Through interviews, questionnaires, observations, journal studies, or combining two or more of these approaches, they have reached conclusions generally in agreement with one another. According to Phipps and Borg, “research findings are the product of the manner in which data is elicited” (2009, p. 381), which is reflected in these studies. Consequently, this review is divided into subsections based on the methods used in the studies.

4.1 Single Method Studies

The studies using only one method for data collection focused on different aspects, logically reaching different conclusions. Badash et al. (2020) primarily explore and identify EFL teachers’ perceptions about teaching grammar and how those perceptions might differentiate from their declared practices, focusing mainly on the CLT aspect. Their only method was an online questionnaire aimed at EFL teachers, including five questions about their beliefs about grammar and how they would describe their practices. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through the questionnaire in 2019 from 221 EFL teachers. The participants, teaching at different levels, varying from elementary to high school, were working at various schools throughout Israel.

On evidence from this survey, there was a slight divergence between the teachers’ beliefs and their practices. The beliefs leaned more towards communicative teaching. However, in

practice, traditional grammar teaching was more prevalent. The reported isolated grammar practice is discussed by Badash et al. (2020), providing several possible reasons, such as teachers' personal experience from school, the 'teaching for the test' approach in the school context of Israel, and the lack of adequate training of CLT in their teacher education. Since different levels of teaching were examined, the authors could also conclude that the older the students were, the more CLT would be used when teaching grammar.

Likewise, Baleghizadeh and Farshchi (2009) used a single questionnaire in their study. Their aim was to investigate possible differences between state high schools and private language institutes regarding teachers' beliefs about the role of grammar and their approaches to grammar teaching. They used a simple closed questionnaire with a five-point scale to collect quantitative data. Using a format adopted from a previous study by Burgess and Etherington (see Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009), the questionnaire covered grammar teaching methods and possible difficulties in the EFL classroom for both students and teachers. In total, 117 EFL teachers participated in the study, and since their availability determined their participation, the data sampling was not random. The teachers surveyed were all active in Tehran, Iran. Half of them taught in state high schools and the other half in private language institutes.

The comparison done in the study showed that the beliefs of state high school teachers and private language institute teachers agree more than they disagree. Grammar plays an equally important role in the two settings. Both groups of teachers acknowledge "the difficulty of the transference of knowledge about grammar (declarative knowledge) into actual use of that knowledge in communication (procedural knowledge)" (Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009, p. 25) as a hindrance in the EFL classroom. Additionally, there is no difference in their beliefs about the correction of grammar errors, problem-solving grammar, the use of grammatical knowledge, and the extent to which comparisons and contrasts of grammar structure are valuable for students' learning. However, the study shows a difference in the beliefs about explicit grammar teaching. The state high school teachers prefer and believe in a more explicit grammar teaching approach, which students also tend to prefer, while private language institute teachers approach their grammar teaching with communicative tasks and an inductive teaching method. They preferred focusing on meaning and using authentic material compared to the state teachers.

While the previous two studies have used questionnaires, Fitriyani et al. (2020) opted for interviews to shed light on the factors which shape Indonesian EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar in a context where CLT and implicit grammar instruction are considered the norm. However, despite this being the recommended method, previous studies in Indonesia indicate low grammar knowledge among students. In their study, data was collected through open-ended interviews, an optimal method for gathering "rich and accurate data" (Fitriyani et al., 2020, p. 14), allowing teachers to express a wide range of thoughts and beliefs.

The eight interviewed EFL teachers from six different secondary schools in Jakarta maintained that grammar was central to their teaching. Explicit teaching received favorable assessments, especially regarding important topics such as tenses. Accurate and correct writing was of significant importance to these teachers, especially for future higher education endeavors, consistent with other studies in this review. Conversely, there were mixed feelings about implicit instruction, with the "non-believers" pointing to lack of time as one of the reasons. In addition, students need a certain level of English for implicit teaching to be effective.

These beliefs originated mainly in classroom experience rather than language teaching research. Additionally, despite the curriculum seeming to favor inductive grammar teaching, one of the sampled teachers persisted with what she perceived was the most effective method for her specific class's needs. At the same time, the teachers who had positive experiences of implicit grammar teaching continued in that fashion. Thus, there is evidence of a definite harmony between teachers' beliefs and practices.

4.2 Dual Method Studies

The upcoming studies gathered data using two methods, opening up a more comprehensive range of conclusions, especially regarding teachers' practice. Having examined teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices, Phipps and Borg (2009) argue for a more positive view on the tensions between teachers' grammar beliefs and practices, as they provide a "valuable focus for both research and teacher development" (Phipps & Borg, 2009, p. 381). Moreover, they argue that beliefs must be viewed in relation to one another in a system where certain beliefs exert more influence than others. According to Phipps and Borg, the relationship between beliefs and

practices cannot be studied in a vacuum, arguing that external factors such as curriculum, time constraints, and high-stakes examinations affect the extent to which teachers' beliefs can be implemented into their practices. In several studies in this review, teachers struggling with these factors are a recurring theme.

In their study, Phipps and Borg (2009) gathered data by observing three experienced EFL teachers working at a preparatory school for an English medium university in Turkey for 18 months. Each observed lesson was always followed by an interview, allowing the teachers to reflect on their practice. In conjunction with this, four one-hour interviews served to explore further the teachers' beliefs and how they have developed over this time.

The results were divided into three subcategories. When it came to presenting grammar, two of the interviewed teachers presented grammar as an end rather than as a means for conveying different meanings, findings which are consistent with Badash et al. (2020). Despite knowing that this contradicted their beliefs about effective language teaching, both teachers could provide ample reason for their choices in the form of student expectations and the importance of keeping their students engaged.

This trend continued when it came to the prevalence of controlled practice. Despite not believing in the benefits of gap-fill exercises, they were a mainstay in their grammar classes for other reasons, such as classroom management. While one of the teachers valued pair-work for providing opportunities to use the target language, she was initially hesitant due to the inability to monitor the students' output. Thus, she was more concerned with accuracy over fluency, fearing that errors might become permanent. However, as she realized this tension, due to her persistence, she successfully implemented pair-work, making her practices more aligned with her beliefs.

Phipps and Borg (2009) argue that beliefs are multidimensional and that their findings show that teachers' practices are influenced by competing beliefs of varying strength. While the teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching were not always aligned with their practices, their core beliefs about learning were clearly an influence on their actions. In addition, these core beliefs were "firmly grounded in experience" (Phipps & Borg, 2009, p. 388), while their peripheral

beliefs about language learning, while supported by theory, did not prove effective in their classrooms.

In another study, Sato and Oyanedel (2019) used a questionnaire distributed to numerous EFL teachers across Chile to gather quantitative data regarding their beliefs about how an L2 is learned, how grammar should be taught, as well as obstacles towards integrating grammar into communicative activities. In addition, three focus-group interviews were held to gather qualitative data, providing depth to complement the survey data. However, teachers' views of their practice and the actual are not always perfectly congruent. Therefore, the lack of observations should be kept in mind.

The results from the survey indicated favorable beliefs regarding communicative teaching among the entire sample. There was also support for group work, with increased practice opportunities emerging as one of the main reasons. Simultaneously, however, there was a hesitance towards corrective feedback, one of the cornerstones of communicative language teaching.

There were inconsistencies between the survey and interview data, which is in line with the earlier assertion from Phipps and Borg (2009). For instance, despite the positive attitude to group work displayed in the survey, the interviewed teachers expressed concerns about motivation and engagement. Moreover, textbook limitations only serve to compound this issue, with the quality of the group activities receiving plenty of criticism. Finally, the interviews indicated there were reservations about neglecting grammar, with the teachers mostly agreeing that there are benefits to be reaped from explicit knowledge of grammar.

Similar to the findings of Fitriyani et al. (2020) and Phipps and Borg (2009), the interviewed teachers attributed their beliefs to teaching experience as well as external factors such as students' expectations. Another similarity to Phipps and Borg (2009) is that several different beliefs at odds with one another affect teachers' practice. On one hand, they see the benefits of CLT. On the other hand, there were concerns with students not taking communicative exercises seriously, resulting in a lack of engagement, and teachers eschewing CLT for more traditional lessons. Thus, this study concludes that there is a tension between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices, albeit for valid reasons.

In a similar study, methodologically speaking, conducted by Deng and Lin (2016) in an EFL context in China, beliefs about grammar teaching were examined. Deng and Lin studied beliefs from the perspective of students and English teachers, but we have mainly focused on the teacher's perspective of the study in our review. The purpose of the study was also to examine whether the teachers' actual classroom practices match their stated beliefs. Two different methods were combined, quantitative data collected through questionnaires and qualitative data through interviews with some of the participants. Thirty-five EFL teachers from a middle school in the JiangXi province answered the questionnaires for teachers. One questionnaire was aimed at their grammar teaching beliefs and the other one at their grammar teaching behaviors. With inspiration from earlier studies, beliefs from 6 different approaches to grammar teaching (form-focus, meaning-focus, inductive learner-centered, deductive, drilling, and metalanguage) were examined. Also, the questionnaire was adjusted to fit the Chinese context. The exam-oriented education in China and the consequences the focus on correct language forms brings to the teaching are worth considering. This context also brings an increased focus on the communicative competence from the recent examination reforms and the new curriculum. A change in prior beliefs can therefore be expected.

Interviews were used to examine the data of the questionnaires further, and four teachers were selected to participate, one interview with each teacher. Only three questions were included in the interview, which asked about the necessity and purpose of grammar teaching, which approaches were used and encouraged, and lastly, if their practice and beliefs differentiated according to themselves.

The study showed a stronger belief in language meaning compared to language form. In addition, the teachers indicated a preference for inductive teaching in the classroom, as opposed to deductive teaching. Despite this, the findings also indicate the value teachers held for drilling activities and metalanguage. This inconsistency can partly be explained by teachers considering drilling activities more easily understandable for the students. Furthermore, Deng and Lin (2016) conclude that "participant teachers' behaviors are influenced by the beliefs they hold, and their beliefs have a guiding role in their behaviors" (Deng & Lin, 2016, p. 6) regarding the balance between meaning and form-focused grammar teaching. The expressed inconsistency of teachers'

inductive beliefs and their preferred deductive practice is explained by Deng and Lin as consequences of the limited time in the EFL classroom, but also the students' poor English competence. Interestingly, the interviews mostly confirm the findings from the questionnaire and do not provide any new findings. The importance of grammar is highlighted, and the participants confess that their beliefs do not always match their actual classroom practice.

Ezzi's (2012) study used a questionnaire and observations to gauge the practices and beliefs regarding grammar teaching of 80 in-service teachers (levels 7-12) in Yemen. The questionnaire can obtain both quantitative and qualitative data thanks to the mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions in the form of 4-scale answers (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). Their answers showed contradictory patterns, most notably the belief that grammar should be learned formally while also not supporting grammar-only lessons and drills.

In the location and context of this study, deductive grammar teaching is the status quo, given that Yemeni teachers must follow a specific textbook (Ezzi, 2012). Previous research shows that this results in grammar being taught discretely with little regard for context. Students' grammar ability to use their grammar knowledge in speech is limited. Consequently, understanding teachers' beliefs is a necessity, given that they are the key to improving practices.

Judging by the survey results, most teachers held the belief that grammar should be learned formally, expressing doubts about the merit of learning grammar through communication. Interestingly, they were simultaneously against grammar-only lessons and drills, preferring to teach grammar incidentally, i.e., attending to grammatical structures if they appear during a lesson. These two results contradict one another, indicating that their beliefs are not particularly refined. In addition, the surveyed teachers believed that students' errors in oral work must be corrected while also not considering grammatical correctness to be necessary for communicating well. Consequently, the survey indicated that the teachers' beliefs were not particularly cohesive, and they simply had not found a set of teaching techniques that produced consistent results.

The observations were not always consistent with the data gathered from the questionnaire, specifically regarding inductive approaches, which is consistent with previous research in the field. Teachers were implementing certain aspects of inductive teaching while

neglecting others, such as letting the students discover grammar rules. Therefore, the tension between beliefs and practices might be explained by a misunderstanding. Half the teachers think they are teaching inductively, in spite of the fact that they are not. Thus, the only clear denominator was that the teachers were inconsistent with applying their beliefs in practice.

According to research cited by Ezzi (2012) there is still a need for grammar instruction in order to achieve accuracy, resulting in grammar teaching once again becoming a natural part of language teaching. In the location and context of this study, deductive grammar teaching is the status quo, given that Yemeni teachers must follow a specific textbook. Previous research done in Yemen shows that this results in grammar being taught discretely with little regard for context. Students' grammar ability to use their grammar knowledge in speech is limited. Consequently, understanding teachers' beliefs is a necessity, given that they are the key to improving practices.

Ezzi (2012) concludes that teachers' beliefs are not always consistent with their practices, and they avoid strategies despite believing in their effectiveness. Their beliefs include contradictions, making it difficult to assess whether they are consistent with practice. Compared to most other studies in this review, such as Badash (2020) and Phipps and Borg (2009), teachers were more skeptical of communicative language teaching.

Finally, among our reviewed studies that used two methods for data elicitation, Underwood (2012) used questionnaires and interviews to explore teachers' grammar beliefs in the context of curriculum reforms in Japan. Using the former, data was gathered using a total of ten teachers from three different schools, whereas, with the latter, the participants were six teachers working at the same school. The interviews were divided into two focus groups consisting of three teachers each.

Underwood (2012) reached similar conclusions to several previously mentioned studies based on the findings. There is a disconnect between theory and practice usually caused by external factors, such as university entrance exams, hindering teachers from moving away from traditional grammar teaching. The transcriptions from the focus group meetings, as well as the survey data, revealed that teachers have a positive attitude towards integrating grammar into communication exercises. Similar to other studies, accuracy in writing arose as a critical reason for teaching grammar, along with its importance when it came to conveying meaning. While

consistent with previous research, the data suggests an even more positive outlook than earlier, with teachers seeing both motivational and instrumental advantages to this new approach. Once again, however, there were concerns regarding whether students would be able to attain a high level of accuracy due to the time allotted to communicative exercises leaving little room for explicit grammar teaching. Another similarity to other studies is the role of high-stakes examinations, which heavily favor accuracy over fluency. Additional factors that emerged from the survey data also included teachers reporting insufficient time for preparation. The younger teachers also noted the influence of senior colleagues and parents, who favor an approach with tangible results, i.e., one which provides solid evidence that the students are making visible progress.

To conclude, the teachers are hesitant to adopt the reforms of CLT, mainly due to external factors rather than them not believing in integrating grammar into communication. Consequently, there is tension between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices. This study also demonstrates the need for tests to be aligned with curricula in order for teachers to be able to teach the way specified by the curriculum.

4.3 Multiple Method Studies

Underwood (2017) did a follow up on his 2012 study, aiming to shed light on how the previously mentioned integration of grammar teaching into communicative work is progressing, as well as how "attitudinal, social and context-related factors" (Underwood, 2017, p. 3) influence said integration. In contrast to his previous study, however, observations and a journal study were used in addition to interviews and questionnaires to augment depth (Underwood, 2017). In this study, four EFL teachers participated, having been chosen based on factors such as qualifications, experience, and the courses they were teaching at the time.

Interestingly, the results were generally akin to those from 2012, with teachers citing high stakes examinations such as university entrance exams as reasons for being hesitant to use integrative approaches, despite having positive attitudes toward them. Additionally, while one teacher, in her journal, cited pressure from colleagues as an obstacle, she stayed true to her beliefs, insisting that integrating grammar into speaking was the most effective method. She was

eventually rewarded with her students scoring high on examinations. However, the two teachers who predominantly opted for grammar-translation activities also held negative beliefs about the new curriculum, showing harmony between beliefs and practices. The results showed a clear correlation between the importance placed on entrance exams and unwillingness to implement integrative approaches to grammar. With that said, the complexity of teaching means that several different factors could be at play. For example, certain teachers found that they had difficulties integrating grammar teaching with communicative work despite attending workshops.

Furthermore, in Asia, a common misconception persists that CLT and grammar teaching are mutually exclusive (Underwood, 2017). In addition, while the curriculum favors a more communicative approach, this is still not reflected in high-stakes examinations, which consist predominantly of grammar and vocabulary questions. Other factors include, but are not limited to, class sizes, lack of motivation, and the aforementioned uncertainty on how to implement CLT.

To conclude, this study shows a varying degree of tension between teachers' grammar beliefs and practices. Similar to Underwood's 2012 study, outside factors, most notably examinations, play a vital part in determining classroom practices. While the teachers' journals provided insight into their thought processes, similar findings could have been reached solely through interviews. On the other hand, the observations did offer additional accuracy on different features of the teachers' practice, such as the extent to which communicative objectives were implemented.

Finally, Souisa and Yanuaris (2020) used multiple methods while studying the perceptions of grammar, focusing on EFL teachers in Ambon City, Indonesia. The stated purpose of this mixed research approach was to get the complete picture by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. A questionnaire collected quantitative data about teachers' grammar strategies, in which 63 senior high school teachers participated, from both state and private schools. After that, based on three criteria, five of the teachers were selected for in-depth interviews to examine their beliefs and strategies for grammar further. Those five were also included in classroom observations, and the researchers had access to their lesson plans and

teaching materials. By observing the classroom, the actual practice could successfully be comprehended and analyzed without being filtered or manipulated by the teachers.

Based on evidence from this analyzed data, the teachers are convinced of the usefulness of grammar in the EFL classroom. Their beliefs are based on their experiences and conceptual knowledge about grammar teaching and theories. The observations made it clear that the participants' practice and conceptual knowledge were primarily based on a traditional grammar method. However, the quantitative data showed a more complex picture, where the focus on meaning and communication were valued, and the grammar should be applicable in purposeful ways. In addition, results from the questionnaire showed that most teachers prefer to teach grammar with a deductive approach, but, once more, the observed approaches contradict these results. During the observations, all of the teachers used an inductive approach. Furthermore, the study found that different grammar teaching methods were used, depending on the content and context. The prescriptive grammar model was preferred by almost all of the participating teachers.

5. Discussion

While reviewing the studies, a number of issues emerged, such as choice of method, the extent to which external factors affected teachers' practices, as well as the possible impact of the geographical spread. These will be discussed, along with possible pedagogical implications from our findings.

5.1 Methodological Pluralism

The reviewed studies investigated the topic utilizing different methods, ranging from single to multiple methods, including quantitative and qualitative data. Despite this, the vast majority of the studies reached the same conclusions; there is a slight divergence between teacher beliefs and practices, and the beliefs tend to be more communicative compared to their more traditional teaching practice. However, an important question appears when we examine the conclusions. Can conclusions be drawn about teachers' actual practice without any classroom observations?

Four out of ten studies used classroom observation as one of their methods, while the others only used questionnaires or interviews to elicit a picture of their practice. Furthermore, with the exception of Phipps and Borg (2009) and Underwood (2017), data was gathered during a relatively short period of time, which also should be considered when evaluating results.

A non-observation method can be questioned because when interviewing teachers or using questionnaires, the teachers presumably describe their practice in a refined way. Badash et al. (2020) take this into consideration by specifying that they are examining the teachers' declared practice, making no claims that this is equivalent to actual practice. Moreover, teachers might experience their practice differently in comparison to the researchers or students, which may impact the findings and the conclusions. In line with this, Sato and Oyandel (2019) emphasize the importance of using classroom observation while studying teaching behaviors, which contradicts their chosen methods. They mention the possible challenge to implement a large sample of observations but argue for more significant benefits and that it should be implemented in future research. Therefore, we find that, without observations, it is difficult to make a completely accurate assessment of teachers' practice.

Even though there is no notable difference between the findings from studies using observations and the ones that do not, we find it reasonable to question the conclusions drawn from studies without any classroom observation. The methods are not perfectly aligned with the proclaimed aims of the studies, which must be considered when future research on this topic is conducted. Given that extensive scale observations can be challenging to organize, we would encourage active teachers to observe colleagues' classrooms and the other way around. While this would probably take place on a much smaller scale compared to the reviewed studies, it could still improve their teaching. By doing this, possible differences between their beliefs and practice can be identified and reflected upon. Brown and Lee (2015) argue for reflective practice and classroom observations as essential parts of teacher development. Without identifying the possible gaps, the teachers cannot improve their teaching, which should be an ongoing process in their profession.

As described earlier, the number of methods used in the studies varied. Unsurprisingly, in our view, we noticed more complex findings when studies used multiple methods to collect data.

Using multiple or mixed methods for collecting data can help make findings more reliable, improve the quality of the study, and contribute to a deeper understanding. Furthermore, conflicting findings from different data elicitation methods in a study will make researchers aware of possible flaws and ensure the study's accuracy. Correspondingly, Borg (2019) argues for methodological pluralism when studying teacher cognition and, for that reason, disagrees with the arguments about qualitative research being the most suitable. Quantitative questionnaire data is still beneficial because of the accessibility, convenient scale, and possibility to provide a large sample. Thus, by combining quantitative and qualitative measures, a more vivid picture of the topic can be explored. At the same time, Borg (2019) emphasizes that chosen methods must be well-designed and fill the stated aim of the study in order to be relevant and valuable. Consequently, when the methods used fulfill their purpose, findings and conclusions can help teachers develop their grammar teaching while relying on plausible reasons.

5.2 Lack of Congruence Between Beliefs and Practices

Throughout the literature, numerous reasons for the lack of congruence between teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices emerged. Phipps and Borg (2009) mentioned the need for seeing grammar teaching beliefs as a part of an extensive belief system consisting of core beliefs and peripheral beliefs. Due to the complex nature of teaching, there will arise situations where teachers' beliefs are at odds with one another. For example, the teachers observed by Phipps and Borg (2009) indicated that they firmly believed in the merits of CLT. However, one of their core beliefs was that an organized classroom is a prerequisite for an optimal learning environment, and consequently, they opted for traditional, deductive grammar teaching. This sentiment was echoed by the teachers participating in the study by Sato and Oyanedel (2019). Their questionnaire responses were heavily leaning toward integrated grammar instruction, whereas their reported practice showed a mixed picture.

Regarding pair work and group work, a lack of engagement was once again an issue. Student needs and expectations were cited as one of the critical reasons for this inconsistency, once again showing teachers' language learning beliefs being overruled by their general beliefs about learning (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019). The common denominator seems to be that teachers'

decisions are heavily influenced by their experience. While they have an ideal scenario in mind, the complex nature of their work forces them to adapt to the situation at hand.

This need for adapting to student factors is further illustrated in several other studies, such as Deng and Lin (2012). Their data revealed that teachers, while believing in the benefits of implicit grammar teaching, felt the need to teach grammar explicitly, fearing that their students would not pick up on grammatical details in authentic language due to their perceived low level of English. Furthermore, the students are used to pattern drilling exercises and teacher-centered lessons (Deng & Lin, 2012). Thus, in a similar vein to Sato and Oyanedel's (2019) study, there is a discrepancy between how the teachers believe teaching should be done and what they believe is possible to implement in their practice. This discrepancy is aptly demonstrated by one of the interviews, where one of the teachers described the roles of teachers and students in the classroom as follows: "Well, in Chile, teachers speak and students listen. . . . My students expect the same from me". (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019. p. 119)

Fitriyani et al. (2019) reported similar findings to Deng & Lin (2012), with the teachers being heavily influenced by perceived student needs, attributing higher test scores as one of the reasons why they believe explicit grammar teaching is more effective than implicit. However, it should be considered that these tests were constructed by the interviewed teachers. Therefore, these results should be taken with a grain of salt. Finally, Baleghizadeh and Farshchi (2009) pointed to students' expectations as a possible reason for the prevalence of explicit teaching in Iranian state high schools, having a more substantial presence in practices than in beliefs. However, the teachers surveyed also maintained that both formal instruction and exposure are integral to learning and that these methods should not be viewed as opposites (Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009).

Another theme emerging from these studies is that teachers seem to be hampered by external factors such as time constraints. For example, the teachers surveyed by Deng and Lin (2012) opted for deductive teaching and explaining grammar directly to their students, leaving practice to be done on their own in order to cover the curriculum content as quickly as possible. This idea also holds for the Japanese context studied by Underwood (2012), where there were concerns that curriculum recommendations meant there was not enough time allotted to

grammar, an area believed to be vital by the surveyed teachers. The teachers who wanted to plan more lessons in accordance with CLT, on the other hand, were concerned with not having enough time for preparation, leading them not to follow their beliefs (Underwood, 2012).

These time constraints are compounded by the external pressures to adapt teaching towards standardized examinations, whose importance to parents and school leaders should not be underestimated (Underwood, 2017). It is also not uncommon for the content in these examinations to not be aligned with CLT, which becomes problematic given the direction in which the Japanese curriculum is headed (Underwood, 2012). However, this situation is not unique to the Japanese context, as proved by other studies in this review. Deng and Lin (2012), as well as Badash et al. (2020), reported similar findings, with teachers being forced to teach grammar in a rule-based manner instead of focusing on communicative skills. One of the teachers interviewed by Underwood (2017) argues that this situation might persist if examination content and teachers' beliefs continue to be misaligned. Students will keep asking for formal grammar instruction, and as mentioned earlier, student expectations and needs play a huge part in determining effective classroom practice. However, there are still indications that teachers can follow their belief in CLT while still helping their students succeed in standardized examinations (Underwood, 2017). Moreover, the body responsible for the university entrance exams in Japan maintained that while grammar and translations would remain central components, communicatively leaning skills were still necessary to achieve a high score, a sentiment confirmed by several studies (Underwood, 2012). In addition, one of the teachers sampled by Underwood (2017) helped her students achieve high scores on the aforementioned tests by integrating grammar into skills teaching, despite the criticism from senior colleagues and parents, giving further strength to the previous assertion.

Naturally, the next question is how harmony between beliefs and practices in conjunction with strong test results can be achieved more often. As it turns out, part of the answer lies within teacher training, the final recurring reason for misalignment between teachers' grammar beliefs and practices in these studies. Badash et al. (2020) highlight this issue, with teachers' practice being negatively affected by a lack of confidence in their grammar skills. On the other hand, in the case of Underwood (2017), there was a reluctance towards integrated approaches to grammar

teaching due to some teachers' limited understanding of how to enact this change in practice. This sentiment is echoed by Ezzi (2012), suggesting that pre-service training alone will not suffice. Teachers need to stay up-to-date on research and continually improve their practice through workshops as well as individual reflection on their practice.

In addition to the phenomena outlined above, the studies also alluded to other issues. For example, teachers' experience, both from practice (Badash et al., 2020) and as learners themselves (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019), were reported as having a noticeable impact on teachers' practice. The teachers interviewed by Sato and Oyanedel (2019) also pointed towards textbook quality, especially when it came to the suggested group activities, hindering them from enacting their beliefs in practice. All in all, these insights serve as an example of the complexity of teaching. If teachers are to achieve harmony between their grammar teaching practices with their beliefs, the aforementioned external factors need to be considered.

5.3 The Possible Impact of the Geographical Spread

There was a considerable geographical spread in the studies included in this review, with the vast majority being concentrated in Asia or the Middle East, with a notable absence of European representation. Consequently, there is a need for studies carried out in the Scandinavian context. While all our findings might not manifest themselves in the same way in every context, there are common denominators. For example, in any context, teachers would benefit from having more time to prepare their lessons and for the curriculum to be less crowded. The latter would ensure that every grammar item could be covered in more detail instead of being "a box that needs to be checked".

On the other hand, there are clear differences between our context and the ones in the studies reviewed. Firstly, the national tests in Sweden are just one out of several aspects taken into consideration in grading (Skolverket, 2022a). Consequently, it can be argued that there is less pressure on teachers to "teach to the test" in Sweden. Secondly, teaching cultures and curricula, which affect teacher education, will inevitably vary between contexts.

All in all, there are both pro-and counter-arguments concerning the relevance of these studies for our context. Consequently, we believe the relationship between teachers' grammar

teaching beliefs and practices requires further studies, particularly in an EFL context in Scandinavia and Europe. It is essential to examine teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and practices in similar ways as the reviewed studies in order to see whether or not the same conclusions can be drawn in our school context. Those findings would be more relevant and applicable for teachers here and are, therefore, essential to study.

6. Conclusions

This review was conducted with the purpose of providing an updated summary of what research says about the relationship between grammar teaching beliefs and practices among EFL teachers. In recent years, this relationship has been studied comprehensively in a multitude of contexts. Overall, the studies reviewed in this paper suggest that there is tension between beliefs and practices among EFL teachers teaching at the high school/upper secondary level, with Borg's (2003) review reaching similar conclusions regarding this relationship.

While there was a considerable geographical spread in the studies reviewed, the majority reached similar conclusions. Thus, there is ample reason to believe that the conclusions could, to some extent, apply to other contexts than the ones studied. At the same time, however, all EFL learning contexts are to some extent unique, which must be considered. Therefore, there is a gap to be filled regarding studies in a European EFL context, which could serve to prove or disprove the findings discussed above. In such a study, observations are highly recommended in order to achieve an accurate understanding of teachers' practice, as highlighted in the discussion. Furthermore, methodological pluralism serves to improve the reliability of results further. Contrary to practice, beliefs are not visible to the naked eye, which must be reflected in the choice of method.

We noticed a lack of longitudinal studies throughout our review. It would be interesting to see if observations during an extended period of time would reach the same conclusions or if that would shed light on other aspects of this topic. Other angles worth considering for future research in this area, all of which emerged while writing this review, include examining whether teacher beliefs change over time. What could cause teachers' beliefs to change? Additionally,

one could study student teachers' beliefs, what they look like before they start their training, and the extent to which theoretical perspectives might change their beliefs. We hope that the current review will provide a useful reference for those wishing to take on this task. As demonstrated by this review, teachers' beliefs undeniably affect their practice, making them an essential object of study if we are to improve teaching practices.

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