



Teachers' Reflection towards Current Issues on Grammar Teaching and Learning: EFL Teachers Voices

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore EFL teachers' beliefs towards teaching and learning grammar with the help of some reflective questions. Reflection is alleged to be the utmost beneficial tool to help teachers to discover their beliefs; it is thought to be able to improve their classroom practices as well. In this study, the participants were 30 teachers teaching English at some senior high schools in Bandung. The data collections were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The initial consisted of 20 statements concerning grammar teaching and the latter has conducted in the form of an in-depth interview to gain more information from the participants. The finding indicates that the participants did well in reflecting on the issue of grammar teaching and they were able to articulate their beliefs on the matters being investigated; the choices whether to choose explicit grammar teaching or implicit grammar teaching differ among participants. Based on these findings, the teachers should be able to create meaningful practices such as combining both implicit and explicit grammar teaching so that the students can always be motivated to learn due to the diverse ways of delivering materials.

INTRODUCTION

The way how grammar should be taught has become a long deliberation among scholars. The question of whether grammar should be taught implicitly or explicitly is one that is still being contested (Alenezi, 2019). The former declared teachers have been advised to teach grammar in context as an alternative to stand-alone grammar lessons and units. It merely means that teachers should approach grammar as both an integrated component of language arts skills such as reading, writing, and speaking, as well as an essential aspect of students' day-

to-day language experiences (Crovitz & Devereaux, 2019). However, the latter has its judgment on the drawbacks of teaching grammar implicitly. One of the arguments is teaching grammar in context seems burdensome that most teachers have already had several workloads instead of teaching.

Besides, some research in the umbrella of deductive grammar teaching believes that this traditional grammar method works best as their teaching instructions. In the quantitative study, from 112 participants, many of the respondents still hold firmly to the belief that grammar is central to language learning and that their EFL/ESL students need direct grammar teaching (Richard, Gallo & Renandya, 2001); in the quasi-experimental research, the findings have shown the effectiveness of a deductive and explicit approach to teaching grammar (Spada & Yasuyo, 2010; Anderson, 2016; Hafid & Nuepahmi, 2019). However, the studies were limited to the quantitative study in which data were in the form of numerical ones. There is hence a need to explore the belief of the participants and do an in-depth interview to discover more.

On the other hand, inductive teaching grammar recently seems to become more popular than the grammar teaching mentioned above. Its notion is in line with what the current Indonesian Curriculum has attempted to reach. The chairman of the Indonesia ministry of education and culture in his speech says that teachers should become a facilitator in the classroom. Also, there should be a change in the teaching and learning process, from transferring knowledge or giving information by the teacher to the students to allowing students to find information by themselves. In Oman, the newly implemented curriculum urges a shift from deductive to inductive grammar teaching. It adopts a holistic view of language which posits that grammar should no longer be viewed as a set of rules to be taught in isolation; instead, grammar should be taught inductively in context (Maqballi, Mirza, & Shahraki, 2019).

Furthermore, communicative language teaching seems to correspond to the idea of teaching grammar inductively. There have been countless scholars investigating these issues. Rafidiyah, Kailani, and Nugroho, (2018) conducted a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. They found that teaching is done more communicatively and uses task-based learning and authentic materials. Hence, students are always active. Muhamad and Kiely, (2018) have provided some insights into the practice of teaching grammatical forms in actual

communicative classrooms, yet the implementation of both instructions should carefully be considered.

As regards attempt to find which method is better than the other, the practical implication would depend on the teachers. They should have sufficient knowledge (Baker, 2014) on both methods so that the implementation of the methods can be optimized. The teachers are highly expected to know the purpose of the methods in which their understanding could create their awareness of what fits for their students. Likewise, their cognition about them should be clear. The term 'cognition' refers to beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and values (Borg, 2015). Consequently, seeking teachers' beliefs towards teaching grammar will be precisely essential to enrich its literature especially in the Indonesian context.

Teachers' beliefs might influence the teachers' goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the school they work in. In line with that, Richards and Lockhart (1994) found that teachers' beliefs may be based on their training, their teaching experience, or may go back to their own experience as language learners'. Besides, many studies on teacher beliefs in the realm of grammar teaching have mainly focused on English as a second language (ESL) context (see Farrell and Bennis, 2013; Mohamed, 2006; Nurusus et al, 2015). Some found that the teachers are characterized by explicit attention to grammar and vocabulary and it is consistent with their reported beliefs about the importance of grammar. On the other hand, some found that there are clear divergences between stated beliefs and observed practices in the area of error correction for all teachers (Farrell and Lim, 2005; Ng and Farrell, 2003). Yet, research about teachers' reflections towards issues in grammar teaching such as the use of grammatical terminology, authentic text, and students' preference in learning grammar in the area of foreign language teaching is not mushrooming.

Therefore, this current study aimed at portraying teachers' insights of teaching and learning grammar in the Indonesian context. Once the beliefs from the teachers are being explored, the actualizing which methods work best will optimistically occur. Asking reflective questions through questionnaires and conducting in-depth interviews could gather sufficient data so that a holistic portrait for a better framework of its need's analysis especially in the Indonesia context would be attained. To address the issue, the research question of this study

was: How do EFL teachers perceive grammar in their teaching? A further recommendation would also be administered to prospective English teachers who want to teach English especially in the area of grammar teaching.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate teaching and language learning beliefs in regards to grammar held by pre-service EFL teachers at a public university in Indonesia. To cope with the purposes of the research, this research applied descriptive qualitative design. A descriptive qualitative study was deployed due to the consideration that this study was concerned with teachers' beliefs and reflections. Moreover, a descriptive study is chosen since it "attempts to present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The initial phase of the study started by delivering the questionnaire to all of the participants aimed to get the notions about teaching and language learning beliefs of these pre-service teachers. In the latter phase of data collection, four pre-service teachers completed the questionnaire were purposively selected and interviewed to discover more information about their understanding of grammar teaching.

The participants were 30 teachers teaching English at some senior high schools in Bandung. Four were interviewed aiming to get an in-depth understanding of their beliefs. The first obtained data were collected through a questionnaire in which the use of the instrument in the study was adopted from Burgess and Etherington (2002). The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements focusing on educational issues such as 1) explicit grammar teaching (statements 3,4,5 and 13), the transfer of declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge (1,17 and 18), the use of grammatical terminology (14 and 19), error correction (15 and 16), problem-solving activities (2,20), and the use of authentic texts for grammar teaching and learning (6,7,8,9,10,11,12). Teachers were asked to respond to each statement on four responses: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Using a four-point scale facilitated a straightforward descriptive analysis of positive and negative responses. The result of the questionnaire was tabulated by using percentages. The questionnaire was administered through *WhatsApp* application and the participant would get the link of Google form. The participants were asked to choose the answer that fits to their

beliefs. After that, they submitted the questionnaire and the researcher continued to choose some participants to have an interview.

Besides, the interview involved several questions regarding how the teachers perceive grammar teaching. These questions were used to gain the participants' beliefs about the issue being asked. There are five questions with some themes covered. The first theme was the issue of teaching grammar. The second was about the use of media in teaching and the third was about the relationship between communicative language teachings with grammar. Overall, there were three steps to analyze the data from the interview. In step 1, after conducting the interview, the researcher converted the data from oral language to written language. The interview transcripts were read many times to look for the statements representing the ideas related to the research question. The second step was coding the data. The codes were used as categories to organize the data based on the research question. Step 3 was interpreting and concluding the data into the finding as a detailed report.

In addition, data were triangulated from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. It meant that they were two types of data in this research. It would provide rich data and also enable cross-checking similarities and differences across methods and data sources.

FINDING

This study discovered several issues concerning teachers' beliefs in teaching and learning grammar. The first finding showed that more than half of the respondents stated that grammar should be taught clearly such as telling the students about the rule of the grammar lesson being taught. The second finding revealed that the students faced the difficulty of using the knowledge they have attained into communicative language use. The third finding showed the teachers believed that their students prefer to learn from the materials that were familiar in their context instead of learning about international issues that they have never heard.

The following section would display the data obtained from both the questionnaire and interview. The discussion would be presented distinctly.

Explicit Grammar Teaching

Table 1

Items		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
3.	My students expect teachers to present grammar points explicitly.	3.3	10	50	36.7
4.	My students prefer to learn grammar from one sentence examples.	10	23,3	60	6.7
5.	My students prefer to find matches between meaning and structure for themselves.	3.3	26.7	60	10
13	A lack of explicit grammar teaching leaves my students feeling insecure.	-	16.7	63.3	20

* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

Table 1 showed the teachers' understanding of the students' expectations of grammar teaching and the sensitivity the teachers possess on how grammar teaching should be taught. More than 50% of the teachers' responses stated that their students learn grammar by knowing the rules first. By understanding the practice, they will be able to construct one sentence and then they produce some sentences based on the standards given by the teachers. 63.3% or equal with 19 teachers of 30 teachers say that the absence of teaching grammar explicitly will make students feel confused, and no one strongly disagreed with the lack of explicit grammar teaching.

Similar themes occurred in the second data collection in which the excerpt of the interview as in the following: Nala (a pseudonym) says

"We as a teacher are asked to implement student-centered in the classroom. Then I tried to apply it in grammar teaching. Grammar is being taught in context within the genre of the text such as teaching past tense in narrative and present tense in descriptive text. However, I found my students prefer to be taught separately. So, I spare the remaining time to teach them Grammar.

Similar ideas were expressed by Tika (a pseudonym):

"When the curriculum expects the teachers to lead discovery-learning, I personally feel that my students do not learn much of grammar. When I tested them with some grammar questions such as past tense after teaching narrative, they were confused because I think they did not have enough time to learn grammar. So, I prefer to teach grammar explicitly."

Meanwhile, Jefri (a pseudonym) mentioned that his students do not like him to

teach grammar. The excerpt is as followed:

"I have tried to teaching grammar in context, and I found most of my students like it. I combined the teaching of grammar with reading activities such as what genre-base told us. So, I assumed that they preferred to have grammar in context because it does not bore them. The stories in reading and perhaps the ways I deliver them are attractive. Once I taught grammar separately, I saw some boring faces from them so I followed what the students want such as teaching grammar exclusively".

Joni (a pseudonym), also shares similar ideas as he said:

"What I need to do is to make my students love English. Reading is one of the ways to reach it. So, I always try to make an easy-to-understand reading story of the genre that is taught. I actually teach them grammar after reading by giving them questions focuses on making sentences such as, "what happened to the man? Then if they say "the man kills the woman". Then I corrected them by explaining that "kill should be killed". Then I tell them about the past tense. This way is proper for me".

Declarative into Procedural Knowledge

Table 2

Item		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
1	My students find it difficult to transfer their grammatical knowledge into communicative language use.	-	3.3	88.7	10
17	My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a totally communicative writing activity.	-	33.3	60	6.7
18	My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a totally communicative speaking activity.	-	16.7	76.7	6.7

* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

From table 2, we could see that several teachers agreed with the issue of communicative language use where the students got difficulties in coping with this current issue. In the statement about students' problems in transferring their grammatical knowledge into communication language use, almost all of the teachers, 28 teachers of 30, agreed with that issue. 60% also show a positive response in statement 17. Up to 76.7% of the respondents also agree with the point of students' difficulties in improving their accuracy within a communicative speaking activity. Meanwhile, there is no one shows negative responses to those

three statements.

Joni response's in regard to the connection between grammar knowledge with communication was as the following excerpt:

“To make students express their thought is so challenging, and to make them say it by using English seems very difficult task. In my class, I don't have time to focus on speaking because we are mandated with a lot of materials. The students also did not have enough time to speak. So answering the question orally was the only way to know their speaking. Most of them cannot deliver their speaking with the right grammar needed”.

Similar to Joni responses, Nala says:

“Even though grammar has been delivered explicitly, I don't feel my student speaking ability significantly improves much. They are several aspect such as hesitation to speak, being ashamed to be laughed by their friends and other aspects that I don't know what. Maybe students should be given a speaking class to practice their self-confidence.”

The Use of Grammatical Terminology

The knowledge and the use of grammatical terminology are considered necessary in the EFL classroom. Teaching and learning grammar explicitly often involves teachers and learners in formulating the rules of grammar and syntactic analysis of phrases and sentences. Based on the data given, there are 2 statements in the questionnaire that is indicating this issue:

Table 3

Item		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
14	My students find grammatical terminology useful.	-	13.3	80	6.7
19	My students find it difficult to use grammatical terminology.	-	23.3	73.7	3.3

* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

Based on teachers' responses above, it shows positive reactions on both statements on the use of grammatical terminology. 80% gives a positive reaction to the usefulness of grammatical terminology. In a similar vein, 73.7% agree and this finding is related to the conclusions of statement number 14 in which several teachers are showing similar experiences within the issue. Therefore, the findings showed that grammar terminology is suggested to be said to the students.

Jefri's notions about the issue are as followed:

As I said previously that I teach grammar in context. For example, I would deliver a simple past tense when I teach narrative. I tell them the story first then we have what I called students' time. I offer them some questions about the story then they discuss the answers. Then, we will have such kind of discussion. After that, I tell them what irregular and regular verbs are, what element should be put to make a sentence such as Subject and Verb. Before that I would tell them what nominal and verbal sentences are, what adjectives are, and so on. By doing that, I believe they could think that there are some aspects that English differs from their native language.

Nala added by saying

I think students who learn a language should know the rules of the languages where I meant "the rule" here is the grammar. So they need to know the grammar term to ease them to create a sentence. For instance, I would tell them what the subject is, what a verb is, and the complement.

Error Correction

Table 4

Item		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
15	Teachers find it difficult to correct student errors of grammar within a written communicative context	6.7	60	30	3.3
16	Teachers find it difficult to correct student errors of grammar within a spoken communicative context.	6.7	46.7	40	6.7

* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

The first statement, 60% of the teachers or equal with 18 teachers disagreed with the delivered issue. Two teachers showed disagreement with this issue. On the other hand, 30% or nine teachers felt that correcting students' grammar in written was considered to be complicated. In the second statement, two teachers strongly agreed with the report. Yet a similar number of teachers disagreed with it. It was surprising that 46.7% of the teachers showed negative responses through the issue. They felt that correcting students' grammar while they were speaking was not complicated. However, 40% of the respondents agreed with the problems.

Problem Solving Techniques

Table 5

Item		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
2	My students are motivated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar	3.3	33.3	56.7	6.7
20	My students are frustrated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar.	6.7	40	46.7	6.7

* Value based on 4-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

From the data above, teachers in this study considered that problem-solving techniques motivated students to learn grammar. It showed that 56.7% of the respondents gave positive responses to this particular issue. On the other hand, 46.7% said that this technique brought students into frustration. Thus, the finding indicates that teachers' perception of this was optimistic. They assumed that problem-solving activities are motivating for their students in learning grammar.

The Use of Authentic Texts

Table 6

Item		Frequency %			
		1	2	3	4
6	My students find it difficult to handle grammar presented within authentic texts	3.3	13.3	70	13.3
7	My students find authentic texts difficult because of the wide variety of structures which appear.	-	16.7	63.3	20
8	My students find authentic texts difficult because they are too culture bound.	3.3	23.3	63.3	10
9	My students find authentic texts difficult because of the vocabulary used.	-	13.3	66.7	20
10	My students cannot find form-function matches in authentic texts without explicit direction from teachers	-	16.7	60	23.3
11	Teachers find the use of authentic material too time-consuming.	3.3	46.7	43.3	6.7
12	Teachers find it difficult to produce tasks of a suitable level from authentic texts	-	46.7	46.7	6.7

* Value based on 4-points Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Agree 4=Strongly agree

Based on the data above, mostly the teachers gave positive responses to the issues. There were five statements that they agreed with and two statements were considered to be equal among both the negative and positive sides. In statement number 12, there was the same percentage of agreement and disagreement (46.7%). It showed that 14 teachers felt difficulty in making tasks from an appropriate level when they were asked to use authentic texts.

Conversely, 14 teachers did not think that producing tasks from authentic texts was difficult. Surprisingly, two teachers showed their positive responses to this issue. In statement 11, it showed a negative response. Teachers did not think that using authentic texts consumes too much time. It can be seen from the data that 46.7% said that authentic texts were not time-consuming. However, 13 teachers or 43.3% agreed that using authentic texts took much time.

In the meantime, five statements were answered positively. Students experience difficulties in learning grammar when it is presented and practiced in authentic texts. They experienced more difficulties from finding form-matches (statement 10: 60%), vocabularies (statement 9: 66.7%), culture boundary (statement 8: 63.3%), variety of structure (statement 7: 63.3%), and handling from presentation within authentic texts (statement 6: 70%). This finding indicates that teachers need to simplify authentic texts before distributing or teaching them in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

As the finding has been shown, several aspects illustrate how teachers perceive grammar teaching in the EFL context. Their insights have been explored and the result varies among the participants. Fundamental issues such as: which grammar methods work best in Indonesian students; the challenging faced by teachers in coping with the newest curriculum; and the use of authentic materials seem undeniably worthy to be discussed.

The implementation of both explicit and implicit grammar teaching is connected with the changing of the curriculum in which its changes are aimed at increasing internationalization and new linguistic competencies and these initiatives require teachers to engage with grammar teaching in alternative ways (Robertson et al, 2018). In the finding, we confirmed that some teachers found the new curriculum does not match with their teaching instructions. They used to be taught by a traditional method where the teachers delivered and explained the

grammar explicitly; hence the participants believe that grammar should be exclusively taught. Some of the participants' grammar teaching styles are influenced by their previous experiences as learners. This is in line with Borg (2015) who found teachers frequently report the impact of their prior language learning experiences on their current views.

In a similar vein, Richard and Lockhart (1994) maintained that all teachers were once students, and their beliefs about teaching are often a reflection of how they were taught. They possessed their beliefs that derive from their own experience as language learners. A lot of teachers know that they were learners and how they were taught helped them to form their beliefs about teaching. Saputra et al (2020) in their qualitative investigation revealed that their participants' beliefs were shaped not only from teaching experiences but also from their students' preference in learning.

Teachers' insight was not only formed from their experiences. In the finding where the teacher says that his preference in teaching grammar was not because he was being taught with traditional grammar teaching. Yet, his decision merely because his students love to learn grammar explicitly and the teachers changed the way they perceived grammar because of their students. This finding is similar to Lengkanawati (2016) who found most of the teachers strongly agreed that learners are making choices about how they learned (93.8%) and what activities they do (85.4%), and involving them in deciding what to learn (81.3%). Yet, this finding is in contrast with Abdi and Asadi (2015) some teachers prefer a particular method because it corresponds to their character. They have a personal preference for a specific teaching pattern, arrangement, or activity because it matches their personality.

Concerning the use of authentic materials, this study found most of the participants showed a negative attitude towards the grammar used in the native English text and the unknown culture told in the reading text. This finding corresponds with what Nurliana (2019) discovered by stating "*The teacher stated that she needed a model of supplementary English materials based on local content. It would be interesting for students since they were encouraged to learn the materials related to their environment.*"

As well, if the teachers modify the level of grammar used in the text, the students would be eager to learn even though the culture in the text is strange to

them. Thus, teachers should become creative in modifying the text. This is in line with Saputra, (2019) who found that the participants tried to combine the existing materials with other materials taken from the other resources and they believed that suitable materials should be easy to follow. Besides, Macalister and Nation (2010) agreed that the learning materials need to be presented to learners in a form that will help to learn and it should involve the use of suitable teaching techniques and procedures.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After being asked with several reflective questions, the researcher could draw the teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching. The implementation of both explicit and implicit grammar teaching is connected with the changing of the curriculum. The teachers are required to cope with the changes. However, most of the teachers in the study still stick with the former explicit grammar teaching. This consideration to keep using explicit grammar teaching differs among teachers and these are several aspects. First, they found when the teachers implemented implicit grammar teaching, they faced problems in measuring the students' capability in grammar. Second, the teachers found that their students prefer to be taught by deductive grammar such as telling them the terminology of grammar being shown on that day. Third, the teachers believed that in teaching grammar, students needed to be taught in a context such as reading. The use of materials should have been modified to the level of students where it merely said that the authentic materials need to be eased.

The researcher suggests that EFL teachers become reflective practitioners. Reflections can be done in several ways such as recording their teaching, asking another teacher to observe their teaching, writing a journal about the problems that occurred in the classroom and discussing with other teachers. Thus, teachers' pedagogical practices can be improved when the teachers reflect on their teaching regularly. Then, they may figure out whether or not their practices are in line with their beliefs.

In conclusion, teachers should do reflections of their works to shed more light on the methods, activities, and lessons delivered in the class. The further recommendation might provide to the researchers who want to investigate more on the beliefs of EFL teachers and their problems in regards to implementing their

views and reflective practice can be the means to measure the gap among the theories and practice.

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