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English Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching English Grammar to Improve Students' Speaking Skill

https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v7i1.236

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A B S T R A C T

English teachers' beliefs had an important role in their decision-making about how grammar should be taught. Approaches to foreign grammar pedagogy were informed not only by the point of view of grammar, but also by beliefs about the importance of grammar, how it could be learned, and how it could be taught. The aims of teaching English grammar in this research were to know the factors that could influence English foreign language teachers' beliefs in English grammar teaching and their roles in the practice of teaching English grammar. A mixed-method that involved qualitative and quantitative methods in this research was used to describe any insight of English teachers in teaching English grammar. The data were collected based on a close-ended interview and a questionnaire administered to 27 English teachers in 3 junior high schools and 3 senior high schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The results showed that: (1) the reasons for the importance of grammar teaching in speaking skills, (2) the way how grammar should be taught in speaking skills, (3) the techniques to teach English grammar, (4) the challenges of teaching grammar in speaking skills, and (5) the procedures to teach English grammar. This research recommended English teachers to reflect on the professional and pedagogical contexts of English grammar teaching to improve the quality of English teachers' teaching behaviors.

Keywords: *English teachers' beliefs, English grammar teaching, speaking skill*

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been done on teaching grammar with the aim of using language in natural interactions with the competent speakers because grammar provides a set of rules for the structure of the language. Three areas of grammar teaching need to be considered: grammar as rules, grammar as form, and grammar as a resource (Murtisari et al., 2020). For many foreign language students, learning grammar often means learning the rules of grammar and having an erudite knowledge of grammar that helps us communicate (Daloglu, 2020). The students need to experience how grammar is related to what we want to say and how we expect others to interpret our language use and its purpose because grammatical competence is one of the communication skills (Olcu, 2022).

Foreign language students' acquisition of grammar knowledge is different from native speakers. The native language naturalizes the grammar of the same language while the foreign language student deliberately tries to master the features of that language which

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account for grammatical purposes. Therefore, a foreign language student is required to learn the grammar of the English language (Yusof et al., 2019). However, some of the students dislike the teaching of grammar and wherever the term 'grammar' is used because it is tedious and rarely taught enthusiastically in the classroom. The students are confused when they make grammatically correct sentences because the sentence structure is different from their own language. However, English grammar teaching in schools has posed some new problems (Kosar, 2022). The rules are taught one after another which makes the students have to memorize many terms and rule definitions, so language knowledge becomes the most boring lesson in the school because it is taught in detail (Fuangkarn & Rimkeeratikul, 2020).

Foreign language grammar is always seen as the process rather than the product since grammar is a source for creating meaning in a context-sensitive manner. Three interdependent aspects of grammatical features: (1) Formality, which concerns how a specific structure is constructed and how it fits in with other structures in a sentence (for example, morphology, syntax, and phonetic patterns), (2) Meaning, is related to semantic, such as lexical and grammatical meaning, as well as derived compound words, and (3) Usage, is related to the pragmatics or the meaning of grammatical structures in a particular context, whether it reflects social, linguistic, or situational issues (Richards, 2017). The teaching of foreign grammar must be considered the meaning and the message conveying the message of the language. Therefore, there is no list of grammatical structures that need to be taught and paid attention to meet the student's needs, as an error affects the achievement of communication goals and the student's feedback. Corrective feedback is needed because the teacher or the student chooses to focus on a particular function, for example, by asking how to express a particular meaning or asking about the meaning of a new grammatical structure that appears in a text (Lubis & Rahmawati, 2022).

An increasing number of studies suggests that teachers' grammar teaching is influenced by their own prior knowledge, experience, beliefs, and contexts, implying that classroom practices are not affected by handouts and prescribed guidelines (Milad et al., 2020; Lestari, 2018; Pema, 2020). The aim is to teach grammar as cognitive and teachers should focus on helping the students to develop clear knowledge (Badash et al., 2020). No matter how important grammar is considered in language learning, grammar is still one of the essentials to mastering a language. Grammar is considered to be an important constitutive element because grammatical structures convey meaning and express ideas (Maryanti, 2019; Janfeshan, 2017).

The way of English teachers to present grammar lessons can be affected by their beliefs about how grammar should be taught. Approaches to foreign grammar pedagogy are informed not only by the point of view of grammar, but also by beliefs about the importance of grammar, how it can be learned, and how it can be taught (Binnendyk, 2019). The question of whether teachers teach as they have been taught; in other words, how their learning experience affects their teaching experience has been a matter of interest in many areas of educational research (Deng & Lin, 2016).

Furthermore, as (Onalan, 2018) points out, "the lack of attention to the cognitive biases in the work of teachers of grammar teaching represents a gap in the research agenda for foreign language teaching". It concerns the factors that influence the educational-decision making process of English teachers and what they take into account when making the decision. (Hu & Liu, 2021) define "active teachers are the reflective-decision makers who make instructional choices based on complex webs of knowledge, thoughts, beliefs, practice-oriented, and context-sensitive. The problem for improvement is that many English teachers, influenced by traditional teaching methods and other factors, tend to emphasis on the correct language use, give more grammar exercises, and do not reflect on the teaching and learning of language in communication function. On the other hand, the lack of clear guidelines for teaching grammar in the curriculum and especially in the problematic situations encountered by English teachers in their daily language teaching practice (Anagaw, 2019).

Researchers have previously investigated the effect of English teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching and learning. The first research done by Buwono & Purbani (2020) indicate that many English teachers also stick to the traditional techniques of grammar despite emphasizing their teaching grammar in meaningful contexts. The second research conducted by Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017) found that the students were found to have more favorable attitudes towards learning formal grammar than the teachers. More students agree that they can improve their communicative ability more quickly if they learn and practice grammar. It also found that the majority of students and teachers believe that it is broadly more important to practice a foreign language in simulated real-life situations than to analyze and practice grammar patterns.

The objectives of this research are twofold as follows. First, it hopes to uncover English teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and learning. Second, it helps foreign language students and English teachers reflect on their beliefs. Such reflection can bring these beliefs to reassess and re-evaluate different grammar teaching techniques that students are unaware of so that the students can become aware of foreign language patterns while learning English grammar. Furthermore, the selection of grammar instruction for this research is based on the evidence that the use of correct grammar usage is primarily responsible for the students' effective communication in the target language (Saengboon, 2017). In addition, teaching and learning grammar at a conscious level gives English foreign language students a strong sense of achievement that helps them stay motivated, engaged, and participate in classroom activities and thus facilitate the process of learning the target language (Dos Santos, 2019). Based on the background, the problems of this study are raised as follows: 1) What factors can influence English foreign language teachers` beliefs about teaching English grammar? 2) What do English foreign language teachers think about the role of practice in teaching grammar?

METHOD

A mixed-method that involved qualitative and quantitative methods in this research was used to describe any insight of English teachers in teaching English grammar. The purpose of a mixed-method was to focus on multiple perspectives that happened at a certain time by conversing the qualitative data with the quantitative data to describe the certain characteristics in the sample of research (Senturk & Kahraman, 2017). The sample in this research was 27 English teachers from 3 junior high schools and 3 senior high schools in North Sumatra, Indonesia. They were chosen based on at least two-year experience to teach English and they had expertise in English mastery at a school level.

A questionnaire was administered to 27 English teachers as the data collection technique to study their beliefs in teaching English grammar (Lee, 2019). Before the qualitative data in the questionnaire were made, the writers conducted a close-ended interview to know the area of concern in English grammar and the variety of teaching English grammar by using google form. English teachers filled the column Agree or Not Agree based on the statement that was given in the questionnaire and then the writers calculated the results of statements based on the frequency and the percentage that had already been chosen (Rismayanti et al., 2021). The questionnaire was distributed by the writers themselves by giving a link through the WhatsApp group and English teachers could click the link and fill in their choices based on the statements in the questionnaire (By & Khalil, 2017). Data analysis technique in this research was used between the two groups: The first group was the experienced English teachers with 5-10 years of teaching experience with a total of 16 participants and the second group was the experienced English teachers with 2-3 years of teaching experience with a total 11 participants to clarify the exact evidence between English teachers' beliefs in teaching English grammar. In the quantitative method, the frequencies and the percentages were calculated to see the result of each statement of English grammar teaching. In the qualitative method, English teacher responses to two research

questions were analyzed based on the open questions about the motivation in teaching English grammar (Mazlaveckiene, 2018). To explore the general beliefs of English teaching grammar, both the percentage and the analysis of open questions were combined to improve the practice of English grammar in the discussion of this research (Mayanondha & Soontornwipast, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The factors of English teachers' beliefs in teaching English grammar in the first problems were described through this table below:

Table 1 The Reasons for the Importance of Grammar Teaching in Speaking Skills

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
It made the students to be effective language users.	23	85%
The students could organize the words to clarify the text meaning.	22	81%
The students could be confident in their speaking performance.	19	70%
The students could understand what the speaker meant to say according to the time used and the appropriate situation.	26	96%
The students understood how to produce the correct grammar.	27	100%
The students need to be aware about knowledge of grammar to improve their target language.	18	66%
The students could improve their ability to communicate well by learning English grammar.	22	81%
Grammar was required by students for their future professions.	21	77%
The importance of grammar as a set of structures and rules in language.	16	59%
The students could produce language construction with different topics.	14	51%
The students could understand different meanings by learning grammar.	14	51%

The three dominant reasons for the importance of grammar teaching in speaking skills were to know how to produce the correct grammar (100%), to understand what the speaker meant to say according to the time used and the appropriate situation (96%) and to be an effective language user (85%). The emphasis on English grammar teaching had been used to fulfill a number of purposes, such as communication, knowledge acquisition, using English in social-cultural, professional development, and so on. English teachers also believed that speaking English through grammar could reflect on their language level, build self-confidence, provide a choice of different language styles, and avoid misinterpreting the message given. They also believed that awareness of English grammar was important in the process of learning a foreign language in terms of communication activities, authentic materials, and hands-on learning experiences on various topics.

Table 2 The Way How Grammar Should be Taught in Speaking Skills

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar could be taught by using drilling sentences, multiple choices, or sentence combinations to establish a grammatical pattern directly.	18	66%
Grammar could be taught through common structure exercises.	20	74%
Grammar could be taught based on the students' needs and their English proficiency.	14	51%
Grammar could be taught by using problem-solving or case studies to increase students' awareness.	18	66%
Grammar rules should be presented at the sentence level.	22	81%
Grammatical structures should be taught not only in sentences but also in the text to be effective.	19	70%
Teaching grammar could be incorporated with different skills.	11	40%
Grammar could be taught in communicative contexts and dialogues.	17	62%
Grammar could be taught by giving examples and then identifying the rules.	26	96%
Grammar could be taught in attractive topics and daily conversations.	23	85%
Grammar could be taught by practicing gradually and repetitively.	22	81%
Grammar could be taught by using direct explanation to ensure students' understanding.	18	66%

The three dominant reasons for the way how grammar should be taught in speaking skills were in the form of examples and identifying the rules (96%), attractive topics and daily conversations (85%), and using sentence-level and practicing gradually and repetitively (81%). English teachers believed that their practical and pedagogical knowledge influenced the way they taught English grammar. Their grammatical competence was developed through observation, linguistic variation, criteria awareness, rule verbalization, and fluency of terms and concepts. An English grammar test was given at the end of the lesson to see how much the students had progressed and what the students needed to improve in the next lesson.

Table 3 The Techniques to Teach English Grammar

Statement	Responses			
	1	2	3	4
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Grammar could be taught by context-structural exercises such as role-play or drama in speaking skills.	48%	23%	18%	11%
Grammar could be taught by using storytelling to relate the connection between sentences.	56%	11%	15%	18%
Grammar could be taught by using pictures to illustrate the topic in the text.	52%	23%	11%	14%
Grammar could be taught by using tables, figures, charts, or diagrams	48%	11%	15%	26%
Grammar could be taught by using music, songs, and poems to stimulate phonological and phonemic awareness.	45%	37%	11%	7%
Grammar could be taught by using games to recall grammar materials that had been learned in the previous lesson.	48%	26%	7%	18%
Grammar could be taught by using contextualized practice to give real communication based on students' interests.	63%	22%	4%	11%
Grammar could be taught by using form-focused practice to improve grammatical accuracy.	52%	22%	19%	7%
Grammar could be taught by interacting with native speakers to use variations of English grammar in real-world communication skills.	37%	30%	15%	18%
Grammar could be taught by using newspapers, articles, or magazines to organize words and the message in a meaningful way.	41%	33%	11%	15%

The three dominant reasons for the techniques to teach English grammar were by using contextualized practice to give real communication based on students' interests (63%), by using storytelling to relate the connection between sentences (56%), by using pictures to illustrate the topic in the text, and by using form-focused practice to improve grammatical accuracy (52%). English teachers often tried to draw the students' attention to a structure that they could identify and understand. The students were given tasks with the structures, which focused on understanding, interpreting meaning, and perception rather than making correct statements. A series of practice activities that English teachers usually did in the three main activities: (1) Building the students' awareness: First, English teachers introduced structures to the students. Then, the students had the opportunity to study a type of speech and performed a task to focus their attention on its form and meaning. For example, the students were given an excerpt from the newspaper article and asked to underline all the examples of future tense that they could find, (2) Meaningful exercise: English teacher gave a situation and direction and the students must respond to them within the limitation and a number of the limited choice of cues. For example: To practice the forms of present continuous tense, the students were asked to choose someone and compose a correct statement according to the following model, (3) Free sentence composition: In this activity,

English teacher provided a picture or situational cue and the students were encouraged to compose their own responses using the structure. For example, the students were asked to describe a picture that showed several people doing different things using the appropriate tense.

Table 4. The Challenges to Teach Grammar in Speaking Skills

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
The students had insufficient vocabulary when applying the grammar context.	18	66%
The grammar textbooks did not suitable for the student's interests and needs.	22	81%
Grammar did not teach through texts.	23	85%
Grammar was taught separately from other language skills.	15	55%
The grammar activities in the textbooks were too abstract.	20	74%
The grammar topics were based on memorization techniques.	15	55%
The students should apply the words that they could not hear in their daily life.	13	48%
The inadequate support for online courses to teach English grammar.	16	59%
The students could not find the relationship between form and function in the hidden meaning in the text without a clear explanation from the teacher.	14	51%
Teachers have difficulty recommending appropriate tasks based on actual materials.	13	48%

The three dominant reasons for the challenges to teach grammar in speaking skills were grammar did not teach through texts (85%), the grammar textbooks did not suitable for the student's interests and needs (81%), and the grammar activities in the textbooks were too abstract (74%). English teachers believed that the challenges could arise when English teachers did not use appropriate resources properly when teaching grammar and that could be a problem if they did not know how to collect and use resources and materials, and made them appropriate to the students' needs and levels. English teachers found that teaching grammar was difficult if it involved explaining rules to the students while bridging the gap between the theoretical understanding of grammar and the actual use of grammar. Furthermore, English teachers sometimes expected the students to have mastered grammar as they had been learning in previous lessons. As a result, teaching grammar could sometimes be frustrating by having to teach the same thing for so many years due to the repetition of grammar rules.

The results of this research were correlated with the result of English teachers' interviews about the procedures to teach English grammar. Some English teachers should re-teach some grammar concepts and terms to prioritize the students' needs based on the test in English textbooks. The teachers had to correct the students' misunderstandings and inaccuracies when they were practicing English grammar. Some of the students asked their friends to work in pairs and checked their answers in grammar exercises (Murniati & Riyandari, 2016). The results of English foreign language teachers' perceptions about the role of practice in teaching grammar in the second problem which were linked to the theory of English grammar use were described as follows: Teacher 1 said: "*When the students were constructing a sentence, they should learn the part of speech such as verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and so on. It was better to present this material clearly by learning English grammar.*" Teacher 2 emphasized the situation: "*By learning English grammar, the students learned to internalize language structures and applied examples of language usage and exposed themselves to nuanced meanings of words.*" English teachers consciously drew the students' prior experiences of phonics through games and activities because grammar must be learned much earlier if it was to be used in daily life (Johansen, 2019). Teacher 3 gave an opinion: "*When I taught junior high school students, I thought it was most effective to present the grammar implicitly. It was easier to put them in a specific situation, or by giving them an illustration. Thus, I will begin to build their*

understanding through the situations and illustrations given." English teachers beliefs' of grammatical rules were mainly to simplify pedagogical purposes, so it must be reflected accurately what the students understood about the grammar of the target language. Teacher 4 criticized the situation: "*Grammar was the most important thing in teaching English since it could guide the students to speak English properly by understanding the meaning of sentences. But first of all, we should understand the rules of grammar correctly.*" Outside the grammar lessons, English teachers also took opportunities spontaneously to focus on points of grammar in reading comprehension while the students identified their grammar errors and made improvements. English teachers encouraged their students to notice grammar in other subject lessons such as History, Biology, or Literature (Afzali & Izadpanah, 2021). Teacher 5 said: "*I did not explain grammar rules directly to my students. I want the students to see grammatical structure in reading passages. After practicing the grammar structures, I lead the students to use grammar in their speaking activities so we could understand if the students had really understood the structures and they were using it for communication purposes.*" Teacher 6 stated: "*We could interest students to develop grammar consciousness, emphasize grammar in an appropriate situation, and formulate the sentence structure to create similar patterns in new contexts.*" English grammar teaching in this research became explicit to increase English teachers' awareness of opportunities in bringing the students' attention to English and literacy lessons (Nurutdinova et al., 2021). Teacher 7 said: "*The student must be able to put grammar into its place appropriately according to context and purpose. Therefore, we should create opportunities for the students to articulate grammatical knowledge through exploratory conversation activities. As they produce language, they noticed its forms and functions, tested their own hypotheses about language use and effects, and received feedback on the extent to which their grammatical choices were related to their language goals.*" Teacher 8 explained: "*I believed that it was absolutely necessary to teach grammar explicit grammar clearly. The aim was for the students to unconsciously accept grammatical knowledge unconsciously through tacit exposure to language rather than through conscious learning through explicit instruction. For example, if a specific context was established as a starting point to introduce the concept of reported speech to students, they could be directed to identify the contextual considerations that could influence their structural and lexical choices in the reported speech situation.*" English grammar teaching also equipped the students with the ability to self-editing their grammar so they could be responsible for their own learning by discovering the rules of English grammar (Pawlak, 2021). Teacher 9 stated: "*Grammatical rule procedures were sometimes unrelated to conveying meaning in the context. For example, the conversion of passive sentences into active sentences by changing punctuation and word order.*" English teachers generally presented grammar in the context and impacted the students' language production and confidence in speaking skills (Philippines & Tan, 2020). Teacher 10 revealed: "*First of all, I implemented activities that have a hidden grammar focus. Then I focused on the rule of grammar. I did communication activities and after completing these activities, we focused on grammar correction. This way, the students had an opportunity to reflect on the rules of grammar and gain a better understanding of these rules.*" Teacher 11 suggested: "*I checked if the students had learned grammar features through the exercises we did in class. The practice could show us whether we should learn more about grammar or strengthen weaknesses that need to be clarified.*"

This research contributed to the understanding of English teachers' classroom practice context and English grammar teaching knowledge as a foreign language. It examined the relationship between what English teachers actually did and what they said they knew about teaching and learning English grammar. The results revealed that English teachers had different levels of understanding of English grammar teaching and they gave different reasons for their teaching practice. In addition, some English teachers had conflicting knowledge about the teaching of English grammar, while other English teachers seemed to be aware of the contradiction between their knowledge and practice. In this regard, the results of the interviews showed that most English teachers relied on their past experiences as language learners, teachers, and even students to make pedagogical decisions in teaching English grammar. Most English teachers reported that they mostly focused on

fluency during speaking activities and corrected students' grammatical mistakes after completing the task. It was clearly seen that English teachers' beliefs were influenced by personal and contextual factors to a considerable extent.

CONCLUSION

According to the finding and discussion of this research, this research showed the actual practices of English teachers in teaching English grammar to harmonize the beliefs of the teachers and demands of language tasks. English teachers' attitudes towards grammar were generally positive and they were in favor of teaching grammar that grammar was implicitly integrated with English skills. English teachers` knowledge of grammar could be measured using test-like instruments; English teachers` beliefs could be gained through questionnaires and interviews, and English teachers' perceptions could be tested in a more sophisticated way through an analysis of actual classroom practice and discussions with other English teachers about grammar practice. English teachers used a variety of internet and other published sources, and peer discussions were important and reliable sources of information. English teachers used a variety of approaches, from decontextualized 'introduction to grammar' to language studies combined with literary reading and applied grammar with extended writing. Contextual grammar study was more likely to occur when English teachers were confident in their grammar knowledge and feel able to spend time in the classroom talking with the students about texts and language. Moreover, all English teachers must ensure that they and their students had covered the curriculum's required grammar content. This research could offer English teachers in Indonesia an opportunity to reflect on their beliefs in grammar teaching. English teachers were needed to see how strong their beliefs were so they could understand the logic behind what they were actually doing in the classroom. Since English teachers had some reasons for what they did in their teaching, it seemed likely that their beliefs gave an essential role in shaping their actions and behaviors in language classroom activities. Furthermore, this research was contributed to English teachers who needed to be aware of grammar teaching since what English teachers thought might even had more influence than the training they received and these beliefs could have a great impact on how the students felt about learning grammar in a specific way. The suggestions based on this research was English teachers should reflect on the professional and pedagogical context of English grammar teaching to provide appropriate feedback on the quality of English teachers' teaching behaviors.

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