

**TEACHERS' PRACTICES AND BELIEFS OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN
SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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*I dedicate this piece of work to my loving and supporting husband, Mohd Nazrul bin Arsad, my beloved children, Nurheda Natasya, Nur Nasrin Aqmar, Nur Alia Balqis, Iskandar Warid and Iskandar Khalid and my family members and my friends...
for their love, motivation and support.*

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ABSTRACT

The study attempts to investigate the teachers' practices and beliefs of grammar instruction in second language classroom. The researcher has developed a conceptual framework which addresses on the four main concepts which are the factors influencing teachers' beliefs, teachers' practices, direct-indirect method and explicit-implicit approach. A mixed method design which includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in this descriptive study. The purpose of this study was to explore and investigate teachers' practices and beliefs of grammar instruction as well as to study the relationship between teachers' actual practices and beliefs on grammar instruction. The samples consisted of 19 English teachers from Kolej Profesional MARA at Indera Mahkota who were teaching diploma students. Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in order to find out what their beliefs and they were observed to see what their actual practices towards grammar instruction in second language classroom. Interview sessions were also carried out to study what the relationship between the actual practices and teachers' beliefs. In summary, the findings indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between teachers' belief and their practices on grammar instruction in second language classroom.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menganalisis kepercayaan dan amali guru-guru terhadap pengajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas. Empat konsep utama iaitu faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kepercayaan guru-guru, amali guru-guru, kaedah langsung dan tidak langsung serta pendekatan luaran dan dalaman. Kaedaha dwi campuran iaitu kajian kualitatif dan kuantitatif digunapakai dalam kajian deskriptif ini. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk melihat dan menganalisa kepercayaan dan amali guru-guru begitu juga hubungan dia ntara amali sebenar dengan kepercayaan guru-guru. Sampel kajian adalah terdiri dalam kalangan 19 orang guru bahasa Inggeris di Kolej Profesional MARA Indera Mahkota yang mengajar para pelajar diploma. Soalan kajiselidik juga diedarkan kepada para guru-guru yang terlibat untuk melihat kepercayaan mereka dan pencerapan juga dilakukan untuk melihat amali sebenar guru-guru terhadap pengajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas. Sesi bualbicara juga dibuat bagi mengkaji hubungan antara kepercayaan dan amali sebenar guru-guru. Secara keseluruhannya, dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan ada hubungan penting antara kepercayaan dan amali para guru terhadap pengajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Throughout time, the controversy towards grammar instruction in second language teaching and learning never end. Second language teachers and researchers are still discussing and arguing about the role of grammar and grammar instruction. Based on a structural syllabus such as ‘grammar translation’ and ‘audiolingualism’ grammar holds the primary focus but the advent of communicative language teaching and natural methods has radically changed this situation. Teaching grammar becomes unhelpful and might be detrimental. In communicative methodology it is believed that teaching grammar does not correlate with acquiring grammar.

However, many recent researches have demonstrated the importance of formal instruction in order to attain high level of accuracy. This has led to resurgence of grammar instruction, and its role in second language acquisition has become the focus of many researches. As such, presented by Mitchell (2000) in the communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches which minimize the importance of form-focused instruction and explicit error are believed to be inadequate. Which means, although fluency is the focus of communicative approach, one cannot be fluent without some level of accuracy. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that grammatical awareness and error correction for certain grammatical structures may actually enhance second language acquisition.

Since then, debates among the researchers are continuing over the role of explicit versus implicit language learning. When learners are exposed to language input there is a question on whether the learning occurs through conscious manipulation of information or primarily through unconscious processes. Krashen (1981) demonstrated the distinction between conscious learning and unconscious acquisition of language. It is claimed that language should be acquired through natural exposure and not learned through formal instruction.

However, there are many researchers have made reconsideration on the role of grammar in second language learning. A large body of research pointing to the inadequacies of teaching approaches where the focus is primarily on meaning-focused communication and grammar is not addressed. Extensive research on learning outcomes in French immersion programs by Swain (1989) and her colleagues showed that, despite substantial long-term exposure to meaningful input, the learners did not achieve accuracy in certain grammatical forms. This research suggested that some type of focus on grammatical forms was necessary if learners were to develop high levels of accuracy in the target language.

Despite the controversy, the two common approaches that have been practised by many English language teachers in the teaching of grammar are explicit which is also known as deductive approach, and implicit or inductive approach (Syed Jalal, 2009). The necessity to teach grammar is no longer the focus as the linguists

and language researchers are now giving attention to the explicit-implicit dimension of grammar teaching and learning which is also termed as grammar instruction (Syed Jalal, 2009). Although there are many other terms for approaches that have been used to describe how grammar is taught in the language classrooms, many empirical studies have investigated which method is better for grammar teaching either based on explicit or implicit approaches (Scott, 1989).

However, the language teachers are still undecided whether to practice an explicit or implicit grammar instruction in the communicative English classrooms. It is because the debates on whether grammar should be taught explicitly where the grammar rules are explained deductively by the teachers or implicitly taught where the students are supposed to learn the rules through communicative activities inductively, or both, are still on-going among the linguists and language researchers (Siti Rohani Md. Zain, 2007). According to Brumfit (1980), in order for students to communicate effectively as stipulated in the aim of the English language program, they need to attain both fluency in the language and grammatical accuracy “for maximally effective communication will lead back to work on accuracy”. In other words, without much confidence in grammar, students are limited in what they can write especially in Malaysia context.

English language teachers possess beliefs about various aspects of Teaching English as Second Language. Some of these beliefs refer to the best practices for vocabulary, reading, writing, or speaking (Horwitz, 1988). However, this study focused on the beliefs and practices teachers have about the grammar instruction in second language classroom. Furthermore, allowing teachers to explore their personal beliefs will help them to become more aware of their instructional practices and also why they select certain approaches to language learning. Hence, the exploration of teachers’ beliefs and practices of grammar instruction is useful in an effort to improve second language teaching and learning.

1.1 Background of Study

Grammar can be defined in many different ways, grammar can be regarded as “the essence of language” (McClure, 2006:2). Therefore, grammar plays a critical role in any language teaching and learning. However, the introduction of new methodologies based on various language learning theories, grammar is no longer the focus of the language classroom (Siti Rohani, 2007). Such a challenge influenced not only the content and the curriculum in language teaching, but also the implication for teaching grammar where it has moved from being the core component in language learning mode (Sanganithy, 2008). This has led to a continuous debate among language educators and linguists regarding the nature and type of grammar instruction, which affected the understanding of how second languages should be taught or learned (Siti Rohani, 2007)

In investigating the aspect of beliefs for the language teachers, their beliefs influence their consciousness, teaching attitude, teaching methods and teaching policies (Altan, 2006). In other words, the study of teacher beliefs, as Richards, Gallo, and Renandya (2001) have pointed out, “forms part of the process of understanding how teachers conceptualize their work”. On the other hand, Richards and Lockhart (1996) stated that “teachers’ belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it”. These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers’ decision making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the “culture of teaching”. Teachers’ beliefs also strongly influence their teaching behaviour and finally, the development of the learners. As stated by Pajares (1992), teachers’ beliefs had a greater impact on the planning of their lessons, decision making and general classroom practices compared to their knowledge about the subject.

In exploring the classroom practices among English teachers in second language classroom, these English language teachers need to adopt ‘appropriate’ and

effective methods and strategies to teach grammar in the language classrooms in order to enhance second language acquisition among second language learners. How should the teachers teach grammar? But those simple questions somehow demand far more complicated answers than what many of these teachers realize. English language teachers are therefore entrusted with a task of helping students to acquire grammatical competency as well as communicative competency and proficiency.

It is the purpose of this study to investigate the teachers' practices and beliefs in grammar teaching and learning. What English teachers say and actually do in teaching grammar, and what form of grammar instruction that is favoured by the English teachers so that the aims and objectives of the English Language subject will be realized. This effort is perceived as important and critical so that any mismatch between the teachers' practices and their own beliefs on the aforementioned aspects can be corrected or perhaps minimized, in ensuring the success of English Language program, and the teaching and learning of grammar in particular.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The present dilemma on how to teach grammar must be addressed promptly. Menyuk (1995). McCavitt, Rude and Vallow (2002) stated that the question now may be not whether grammar should or should not be taught, but how it should be taught. In relating this statement to the present scenario, the question: "Do all our English teachers hold the same notion regarding how grammar should be taught in class?" has to be answered. Which approach the English teacher implement in the second language classroom? Therefore, it is the need to determine whether grammar should be taught explicitly or implicitly in order to meet the aim of learning English language in second language classroom.

In discussing the issue, it is also equally important to determine whether there is incongruence between the teachers' actual practice and beliefs regarding grammar instruction as these will affect second language teaching and learning. There is a study about the relationship between teachers' practices and belief which are, at the same time, not always reflected in what teachers' do in the classroom (Dobson and Dobson, 1983; Pearson, 1985; Tabachnik and Zeichner, 1986) It is also evident that language teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning have a powerful effect on teachers' pedagogical decisions (Johnson, 1994). Teachers' beliefs also act as a filter through which teachers interpret new information and experience (Pajares, 1992). Since then it is believed that the relationship between teachers' practices and beliefs is important for successful language learning, it is essential for teachers to survey their beliefs toward pedagogical practice of grammar instruction are indeed congruent. Therefore teachers are able to provide learners with more meaningful teaching and learning English classroom atmosphere where language transfer is maximized. The effectiveness of instruction play an important role to make sure the learners are engage in teaching and learning which also can attract learners to take part in all the activities in the classroom.

Furthermore this study is also conducted to investigate the relationship between the teachers' practices and beliefs in MARA Professional College second language classroom. In addition, the study is hoped to explore the teachers' beliefs and the practices in grammar teaching. There is a need to understand the underlying beliefs of English teachers about the importance of grammar in learning English and about grammar teaching, and to know their instructional classroom practice. As understanding teacher beliefs may improve their teaching practices and help in suggesting effective implications for implementation of teachers' professional development. Besides the findings of this study can help alleviate any mismatches between teachers' practices and beliefs that may result for a better classroom practice on grammar instruction in the future. Hence this study is hoped to throw a light on the present scenario in relation to grammar teaching and learning that can possibly happen in many second language classrooms throughout the country.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

The study attempts to investigate the teachers' practices and beliefs of grammar instruction in second language classroom. The researcher has developed a conceptual framework which addresses on the four main concepts which are the factors influencing teachers' beliefs, teachers' practices, direct-indirect method and explicit-implicit approach. The conceptual framework of the study can be seen in Figure 1.1

1.3.1 Concept of Teachers' Beliefs of Grammar Instruction

According to Johnson (1994) educational research on teachers' belief share three basic assumptions: (1) Teachers' beliefs influence perception and judgment. (2) Teachers' beliefs play a role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practices. (3) Understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and teacher education programs. In the area of language teaching, teacher beliefs have been examined to see how personal beliefs and knowledge of the pedagogical systems of teaching have informed the instructional practices and decisions of teachers of English as a second language (Borg, 2003).

1.3.2 Concept of Teachers' Practices of Grammar Instruction

As noted by Shavelson and Stern (1981) what teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve to act as a filter through which instructional judgements and decisions are made. Borg (1998) believed that there has been a growing realization of a need to understand, and

account for, the underlying belief systems of language teachers and the impact these have on their classroom practices. Therefore it is essential to identify whether the classroom practice is congruent to teachers' beliefs in second language classroom.

1.3.3 Concept of Direct-Indirect Method

According to Freeman (1991) the direct method is use spoken language in situations with no native language translation. Whereby, Indirect method is to have students translate from target language texts to native language and grammar is taught inductively. Therefore it is necessary to demonstrate the teachers' beliefs and practices of grammar instruction in relation to both approaches.

1.3.4 Concept of Explicit-implicit approach

As stated by Van Pattern (1996) explicit instruction refers to planned and organized teaching designed to inform learners of how the second language work and implicit instructions involves explanation and practices of the grammar rules. Likewise, as added by Thornbury (1999) teaching grammar deductively means the teachers present the rules and ask the students to apply the rules when they understand the rules given. In this research it will explore the approaches implemented by teachers in grammar lesson.

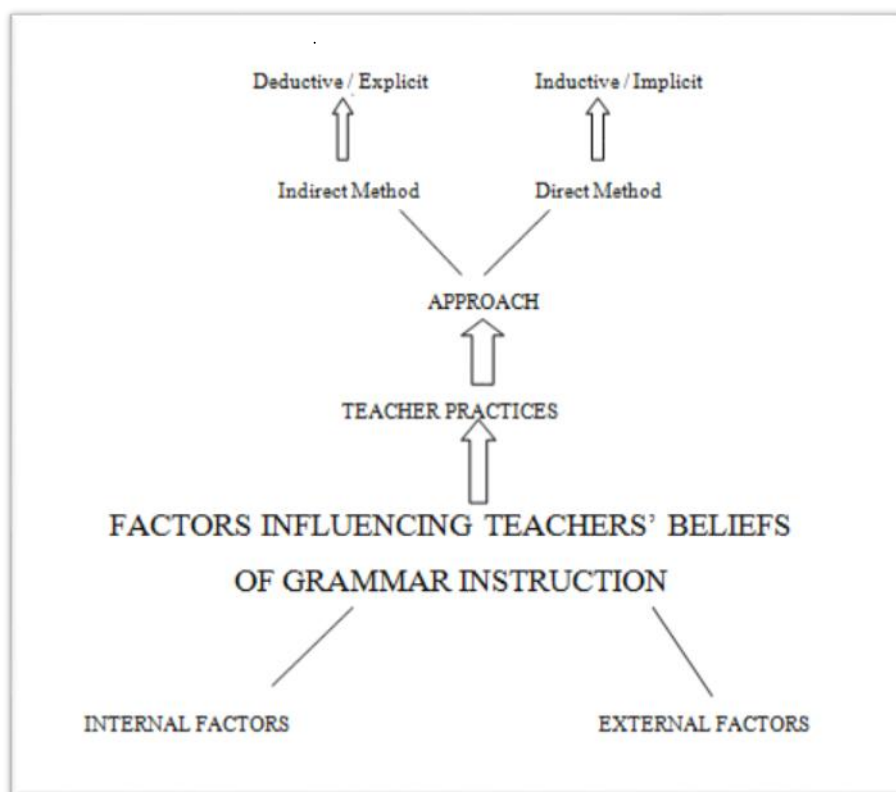


Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.4 Research Objectives

The main aim of this study was to investigate teachers' practices and beliefs of grammar instruction in the second language classroom. Hence, the study was to be carried out based on the following objectives.

1. To explore teachers' practices of grammar instruction in the second language classroom.
2. To investigate the factors that influence teachers' beliefs on teachers' grammar instruction.
3. To study the relationship between teachers' actual practices and beliefs on grammar instruction.

1.5 Research Questions

This present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What grammar instruction do teachers implement in the second language classroom?
2. What are the factors that influence teachers' beliefs on grammar instruction?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' actual practices and beliefs on grammar instruction?

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined according to the context of this study. The terms are as followed:

1.6.1 Grammar Instruction

“Grammar instruction” refers to grammar teaching and learning and this is based on Abdu Moh'd Al-Mekhlaf and Ramani's (2009: 43) definition that “instruction has two components – teaching and learning. The former refers to what the teacher does; the latter refers to what the students do”. Thus, in the context of this study “Grammar Instruction” means the method and approaches use by the teachers in teaching grammar lesson.

1.6.2 Direct Method

As mention by Brown (2006), that one could learn a second language by imitating the way children learn their first language; that is, directly and without explanations of grammatical points and using only the target language. Therefore, grammar was taught inductively. The objectives were speaking and listening comprehension, not translation; for this reason, vocabulary was introduced in context and through demonstrations and pictures; and an emphasis was placed on correct usage and pronunciation. Students learned to write by taking dictation in the target language. The direct method is based on the idea that people can learn a L2 easier if it were taught without any use of the L1. This way is supposed to simulate the way in which a child learns a L1 because, when a child acquires a L1, he or she has no prior language to refer back to. In this method, the learner was to communicate in the FL in realistic conditions. The definition is adapted from literature to suit the present study.

1.6.3 Indirect Method

Indirect method also known as ‘Grammar Translation Method’ whereby according to Brown (1994), the method focuses on translating grammatical forms, memorizing vocabulary, learning rules, and studying conjugations. Most of the teaching is done through explanation in the learners’ first language. The definition is adapted from literature to suit the present study

1.6.3 Explicit Approach

Explicit approach is a more traditional way of teaching and learning grammar where according to Adair-Hauck, Donato and Cumo-Johansen (2000:148), “an explicit method of grammar instruction involves direct teacher explanations of rules followed by related manipulative exercises illustrating these rules”. This is to help students internalize or aware about the rules that are learned. In the context of this study “Explicit” or deductive is the kind of approach in grammar teaching and learning which draws learners’ attention to linguistic forms and functions.

1.6.3 Implicit Approach

Inductive approach according to Shaffer (1985:395) which is also known as implicit grammar teaching, “students” attention is focused on grammatical structures used in context so that students can consciously perceive the underlying patterns involved”. Whereby, in the context of this study “Implicit” or inductive approach is practiced, in which the teachers let the learners discover grammar rule while working through exercise or task.

1.6.3 Beliefs

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 behaviour” M. Borg, (2005: 2). The term teacher beliefs also refers to the rational underlying what teachers do; they are explanation for the action; they are why behind the what;

“they are conceptual systems which are functional or useful in explaining some domain of activity” (Nespor, 1987:326). Ertmer (2005) describes beliefs as theories that “over time, become deeply personal that become entrenched well within a teachers’ cognitive processes .

1.6.4 Classroom Practices

The term classroom practice is used here to refer to the actual teaching periods at the schools” (Borg, 2003;86). In this study classroom practice refers to what teachers do in MARA Professional College second language classroom. The definition is adapted from literature to suit the present study

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study aims to investigate and compare the beliefs and practices of grammar teaching by the English language teachers at Indera Mahkota Professional College (KPMIM) in Pahang. The study also seeks to discover the factors influence teachers’ beliefs about grammar instruction.

The focus of the study is on how the teachers taught grammar lessons at college level. The method and approach (“Direct versus Indirect” method and “Explicit Versus Implicit” approach) practice by the teachers in teaching grammar will be explored. More specifically, to see the relationship between teachers’ belief and their actual practices in second language grammar instruction. It is to examine

whether teachers' beliefs are reflected their classroom practices and the reason behind that.

For the purpose of this research, the discussion will revolve round direct-indirect and explicit-implicit dimension of grammar teaching. In addition, the study is to identify how the beliefs correspond to the observed classroom practices. Also, any other determining factors that may have influenced these approaches to grammar teaching in KPMIM is investigated. The questionnaires will be conducted to 28 English teachers and only four teachers will be the participant for classroom observations and interviews.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Information about the study helps the teacher to have a clear picture whether they have implemented the best approach in their grammar classroom. In addition it is useful to know the teachers' beliefs which affected their pedagogical practice for successful English language teaching and learning. Ignoring the relationship between teachers' practice and beliefs of grammar instruction may cause negative impact in second language learning. Therefore, the present study would add to the existing body of knowledge pertinent to grammar teaching and learning in College level. This study also aids the teachers' practices regarding grammar instruction in their classroom so that the students are able to achieve the objectives for learning the language.

1.9 Limitation

Since the study will be done in college, there is limited number of English language teachers which are only 28 teachers who will be the respondents for the primary data. Also, the participants for the classroom observations will be selected from the English teachers who are teaching semester 1 DIA, DCN and DDC only since they are teaching the same grammar lesson. Furthermore only four teachers will be selected for classroom observations and interviews due to the time constraint.

In accessing teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching grammar lesson, the discussion of this research will centre round the direct versus indirect, and implicit versus explicit approaches of grammar instruction. Even, there are numerous approaches that have been developed to cater for a better grammar teaching and learning. This is due to time constraint, while the area of grammar teaching approaches is too wide to cover in this study.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduces background of the study with the issues regarding the role of grammar and how best to teach grammar in the language classrooms as the debates on grammar among the language researchers, the linguists as well as the educators or practitioners have been going on longer than necessary without any sign of cessation. In MARA Professional College, the unclear directives on how grammar should be taught have left the teachers at their own disposal as how they should approach grammar in the classrooms. This chapter also continues by presenting statement of the problem and the purpose of conducting the study.

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