Teachers' perspectives on grammar teaching: Do they correspond with the current principles?

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Abstract

Grammar teaching has always been subject to considerable controversy. With the advent of the post-method era, different options, principles and conditions have been proposed to guide the process of teaching which has led to the recognition of teacher cognition. The present study aims at delving into teachers' perspectives on different aspects of grammar teaching. Furthermore, it examines whether they correspond to the current principles of grammar instruction. 109 teachers from different language institutes responded to a Likert-type questionnaire adapted from Burgess and Etherington (2002). Then, the classroom practices of 5 of them were observed for more insights into teachers' perspectives on the current principles of grammar teaching. The results indicated that teachers had a good knowledge of different aspects of grammar instruction. Further, they valued all the current principles, but only

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applied the awareness principle in their classes. Finally, in the light of the results, it was concluded that the realities of classrooms should determine the content of teacher education courses.

Keywords: teacher cognition, teachers' perspectives, teacher's practices, grammar teaching, principles of grammar teaching

1. Introduction

The debate over whether grammar should be the main focus of instruction was heated in the second half of the 20th century when explicit grammar teaching was considered necessary. But, with the advent of the communicative approach, it was maintained that students would subconsciously acquire grammatical items presented within meaning- focused activities which obviates the need for explicit instruction. However, reviewing current developments in research on grammar teaching, Nassaji and Fotos (2004) stated that recent studies have called the communicative view of grammar instruction into question and aroused a renewed interest in explicit grammar instruction.

At the same time, as Allwright (1991) argues, since the age of methods is now over, we, as teachers, are no longer confined to follow prescribed principles or methods. We have moved toward a 'post method condition' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) in which there are a set of principles, which are fixed, and a set of parameters, which vary with regards to differences in context (Widdowson, 2003). This movement has led to the recognition of teachers' autonomy and cognition. Widdowson's (1990) model of pragmatic mediation, Allwright's (1992) exploratory practice framework, Kumaravadivelu's (1994) macro-strategic framework, and Ellis' (2005) ten principles of instructed language learning account for this recognition. In the context of grammar teaching, we can refer to Ellis' (1998) four options for grammar teaching, Nassaji and Fotos's (2004) three conditions for grammar instruction, and Batstone and Ellis' (2009) three principles of grammar instruction, among others.

Although the availability and abundance of principles and options in the post-method era has led to an increase in the importance of teachers' cognition, it has resulted in teacher's confusion. Teachers may misinterpret some of the principles, or they may unduly ignore some and overemphasize others.

All these misinterpretations and misunderstandings will be part of teachers' perspectives toward grammar and grammar teaching. Since perspectives influence behavior, teachers with such perspectives toward grammar and grammar teaching may opt for activities which do not promote language learning. Thus, an understanding of teachers' perspectives is valuable as it can help us to find out whether they correspond to the current principles of grammar teaching. Therefore, the present study was conducted to examine the most prevalent perspectives among teachers in English language institutes toward different aspects of grammar teaching and to see whether their perspectives correspond with the current principles of grammar instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Principles of Grammar Teaching

Batstone and Ellis (2009) indentify three principles in the selection of specific instructional procedures. These three principles are informed by one general principle which states: "Effective grammar instruction must complement the processes of L2 acquisition" (p. 195).

The first is "the given-to-new principle" where "existing world knowledge is exploited as a resource for connecting known or 'given' meaning with new form-meaning mappings" (p. 194). This principle draws on the idea that the process of discovering new form/function connections involves the use of learners' schematic knowledge (what they already know about the world). This can be done in two ways. First, learners are taught how a known meaning is expressed using an unfamiliar form. For example, how the present progressive tense is used to express an action in progress. Second, learners are taught how a form with which they are already familiar for conveying a known meaning can also be used to signal another known meaning. For instance, how

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the present progressive tense which learners already use to signal an action in progress can be used to express planned future events.

Based on the second principle, "the awareness principle", the process of discovering new form/meaning mappings involves awareness. This principle is strongly supported by Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis which requires language instruction to direct learners' conscious attention to grammatical items that would not normally be noticed when learners are exposed to meaning-focused input. To increase students' awareness, techniques such as input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1993), consciousness raising tasks (Fotos, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991), and explanation of grammatical rules can be used.

The third is "the real-operating conditions principle" according to which "the process of acquiring form/meaning mappings is not complete until learners are able to practice them in a communicative context and through a primary focus on meaning rather than on form" (Batstone & Ellis, 2009, p. 194). This principle treats grammar as a tool for engaging learners in effective communication, while the first two principles treat it as an object to be studied and analyzed. To apply "the real-operating conditions principle", focused tasks can be used (Batstone & Ellis, 2009). Such tasks are designed to elicit the use of a particular linguistic feature while the primary focus is on meaning (Ellis, 2003). What teachers think about these principles forms parts of their cognition which, in turn, will influence their instructional decisions (Borg, 2003). Therefore, a short account of teacher cognition seems required.

2.2 Teacher Cognition

The movement toward "the post-method condition" has led to the recognition of teacher cognition, defined as "the store of beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, theories, and attitudes about all aspects of their work which teachers hold and which have a powerful impact on teachers' classroom practices" (Borg, 1999a, p. 19). Borg (2003) points out that one of the main purposes of teacher cognition research has been to identify factors influencing teacher cognition. Borg (1997, cited in

Borg, 2003) identifies (1) prior language learning experience, (2) teacher education courses, (3) classroom practices, and (4) contextual factors to be involved in the development of teacher cognition.

The effect of prior language learning experience on teacher cognition was demonstrated in Numrich (1996). He analyzed diaries of 26 novice English as a second language teachers who had enrolled for an MA TESOL program in the USA. He found that teachers tended to promote and avoid specific instructional strategies based on their experiences with such strategies. For example, 27% of the teachers wrote in their diaries that they included a cultural component in their language teaching because, as a language learner, they had enjoyed the second language cultural component of their classes.

To test whether teachers' beliefs on language teaching and learning can be subject to change, Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000) interviewed 20 students attending a Post-Graduate Certificate of Education secondary course at the University of Reading. The analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews revealed that only one participant's beliefs remained unchanged. Then, based on their data, the researchers identified, defined and exemplified the following categories of belief development processes: Awareness/realization, consolidation/confirmation, elaboration/polishing, addition, reordering, relabeling, linking up, disagreement, reversal, and pseudo change.

To investigate the relationship between teachers' perception of their knowledge about grammar (KAG), which is a part of teacher cognition, and their classroom practices, Borg (2001) observed and interviewed, and then compared two experienced EFL teachers. He found a direct relationship between teacher's KAG and their practices in classroom. For instance, the teacher who was confident about his KAG tended to encourage impromptu questions and formulate rules on the spot, but the teacher who did not feel confident about his KAG never worked on grammar unless he was prepared.

In a study exploring the effects of contextual factors on teachers' practices, Crookes and Arakaki (1999) found that difficult working conditions (in that particular case 50 hours per week) influenced how the participants taught language. The reason for this change in teaching style was the limited time for teachers to teach based on their belief system. As an example, they quote one teacher commenting:

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Well, as a [graduate] student, you were in the position of thinking about certain recommendations, certain methods... in a position to think about it again and again, refining the most ideal way. But once when you come to teach, you don't really have time to think. You walk out of one classroom, then in five minutes you gotta start another one. All those good ideas flew out of the window right away. (p. 18)

3. Purpose of the Study

Form these four factors which are identified to influence teacher cognition, the present study focused on the relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practices. More specifically, it aimed to discover the most prevalent perspectives toward different aspects of grammar teaching and finding out whether teachers' perspectives are consistent with the current principles of grammar instruction. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the most prevalent perspectives toward grammar teaching among teachers in English language institutes?
2. Do English language institutes teachers' perspectives toward grammar teaching correspond to the current principles of grammar teaching?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

In this study, 300 questionnaires were distributed among different language institutes. Out of 127 teachers who completed the questionnaires, 18 were excluded from the data analysis because they did not answer all the questionnaire items. The responses of 109 (62 males and 47 females) were analyzed. All teachers were Iranian non-native speakers of English with different years of language teaching experience.

4.2 Instrumentation

In order to delve into teachers' perspectives on grammar teaching, the five-point Likert-type questionnaire developed by Burgess and Etherington (2002) was adapted. The original questionnaire consisted of three parts. In the process of adaptation, from the first part of the questionnaire item No. 11 was excluded, because it asked for information which has been adequately solicited by the other items. Three items targeting teachers' perspectives on current principles of grammar teaching were added to this part (items No. 20, 21, 22).

The second part which measured teachers' perception of difficulties involved in grammar teaching was subject to more adaptations. One of the changes included the omission of four items (items No. 11, 12, 15, 16) because they looked for information already elicited. Two items (items No. 8 and 9), which looked for the reasons (elements of culture and vocabulary) behind the difficulty of authentic texts, were merged into one, and then the element of grammar was added as another possible reason. This was to see how teachers rank grammar, vocabulary, and culture in terms of their relative contribution to the difficulty of authentic texts (item No. 15).

The third part of the original questionnaire was omitted because it looked for some information irrelevant to the purpose of the present study. For instance, it inquired about the EAP course the teacher was teaching or the number students in his class.

Hence the administered questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part had 22 questions and dealt with approaches to the teaching of grammar. The second part included 15 questions targeting teachers' perception of difficulties involved in grammar teaching. Furthermore, using an open-ended question, teachers were asked to provide any comments about their grammar teaching.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were given to a number of language teachers teaching in Qom, Tehran, and Rasht institutes. Then, with the permission of five of those teachers (all from Qom language institutes), who had answered the questionnaire, their actual behaviors in the classroom were observed

twice when teaching grammar to see whether these teachers apply the principles of grammar instruction. Teachers who were selected to be observed were asked to write their names on their questionnaires. Each class was videotaped for further reference. The camera only shot the teacher, without including students in the frame, so as not to discourage camera-shy students from classroom participation.

All observed classes were at the intermediate level in which *World English 2* − a four skills general English boo k− was taught.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS. Items of the questionnaire were divided into 12 categories. 11 of them were adopted from Burgess and Etherington (2002) and the last one (Principles of grammar teaching) was added by the researchers in line with the purposes of this study. Before calculating the mean score of each category the values of some items (Items No. 1.1b, 1.4, 1.2, 1.12, 1.15, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.11, 2.13, and 2.14) had to be reversed because they carried an opposite weight to the purpose for which each specific category was included. Finally, the answers given to item 2.15 were divided into six possible types and the frequency of each one was calculated (Table 2).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Results for Teachers' Perspectives on Grammar Teaching

The results for teachers' perspectives on various aspects of grammar instruction will be presented in two ways. First, the mean and standard deviation of each category and second the percentage of participants who have marked different options will be presented. Table 1 presents a descriptive statistics for participants' perspectives on grammar teaching in descending order. In what follows, the results of each category are presented and discussed.

5.1.1 The Role of Practice

As Table 1 shows, 'the role of practice' has gained the most amount of support ($\overline{X}$ = 4.07, SD=0.56) from teachers. Four items (1.5, 1.7, 1.11, and 1.13) were included in the questionnaire to discover teachers' perspectives on the practice role. Statements 1.5 (Students can improve their grammatical accuracy through frequent practice of structures) and 1.11 (Productive practice of structures is necessary part of the learning process) focused on structure practice. These item results revealed that structure practice is of high importance to learners in improving their grammatical accuracy. 87% of the replies indicated agreement with item 1.5 and 83% showed agreement with item 1.11.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for participants' perspectives on grammar teaching (N=109)

Teachers' Perspectives	Mean	Std. Deviation
the role of practice	4.0	.56
principles of grammar teaching	3.7	.58
Problem-solving activities	3.6	.57
comparison and contrast of struct	3.5	.94
explicit grammar teaching	3.5	.72
the role of grammar	3.4	.56
proceduralization of declarativ knowledge	3.2	1.20
consciousness in grammar learn	3.2	.84
the use of grammatical terminolo	3.1	.80
error correction	3.1	.64
importance of instruction	2.7	.45
presentation of grammar throug authentic, complete texts	2.7	.63

Responses to the other two items, 1.7 (Practice of structures must always be within a full, communicative context) and 1.13 (Participating

in real-life tasks with language is the best way for students to develop their grammatical knowledge), shed light on teachers' perspectives on the practice of structures in a communicative context. On the whole, 67% of the teachers agreed with item 1.7 and 87% indicated agreement with item 1.13 which demonstrates that these teachers appreciate the value of real-life and communicative practices. As the results for 'the role of practice' show, teachers value both structure and communicative practices. One possible interpretation is that teachers are aware of the importance of both kinds of practices in grammar instruction and know that the total acceptance of one to the rejection of the other is counterproductive. Also, when completing the questionnaire, teachers may have had learners from different levels in their mind. As one of the participants wrote:

> *In early stages of learning English, using grammar drills and exercises such as slot substitution are useful. Students can internalize structures by writing down or simply copying the grammatically correct sentences. Using different structures in a communicative situation or in a context is useful for intermediate learners who know the basic structures.*

Therefore, it may be concluded that teachers appreciate the use of structure practices for the beginners and communicative practices for more advanced students; i.e., they consider students' level a determining factor in the choice of the kind of practice to be used**.**

5.1.2 Principles of Grammar Teaching

"Principles of grammar teaching" also gained a strong support from teachers ($\overline{X}$ = 3.77, SD= 0.58). 63% had the idea that students' world knowledge should be exploited in the process of helping students find new form/meaning mappings (statement 2.20: Students' existing world knowledge should be exploited as a resource for connecting known meaning with new form-meaning mappings). 63% stated that awareness is necessary in discovering form/meaning mapping (statement 2.21: Students should be aware of the process of discovering new mappings between form and meaning). This finding was consistent with those of

item 1.6 in which teachers considered a conscious knowledge of grammar useful for improving their students' language and those of item 1.16 in which they considered comparison and contrast of structure to be helpful for grammar learning. A large number (80%) of the teachers agreed with item 1.22 (Student should practice the new form-meaning mappings in a communicative context) showing that they considered the practice of newly learnt form/meaning mappings in a communicative context necessary in the learning process. Considering the results for these items, it can be argued that the teachers are aware of all the current principles of grammar instruction.

5.1.3 Problem-Solving Activities

The teachers placed high estimates on the value of problem-solving activities ($\overline{X}$ =3.65, SD=0.57). These inductive activities require learners to discover form/function mappings for themselves. For example, in one type of problem-solving activity, i.e., consciousness-raising activities learners are provided with a set of data and asked to work out a rule.

73% of the participants considered problem-solving activities motivating for their students (statement 2.2: My students are motivated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar) with only 10% disagreeing with the usefulness of these activities for enhancing students' motivation. 61% indicated that their students prefer to find form/function mappings for themselves (statement 2.5: My students prefer to match meanings to structures for themselves) which is a further proof for the importance these teachers attach to such activities, because discovering form/function mappings is one of the characteristics of problem-solving activities. 59% of negative responses to statement 2.14 (My students are frustrated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar) indicated that these approaches do not discourage their students, again supporting problem-solving techniques. These teachers' support for the use of problem-solving activates in grammar teaching is in line with the support such activities have gained from the research in the field. Studies (e.g. Fotos, 1992, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991) have shown that consciousness raising tasks are more

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useful than traditional deductive techniques for grammar teaching because they not only result in more proficiency gains, but also engage learners in an improved negotiated interaction.

5.1.4 Comparison and Contrast of Structures

Comparison and contrast of structures was also regarded as a useful technique in grammar instruction ($\overline{X}$ =3.57, SD=0.94). 63% of replies were 'agree' or 'strongly agree'; on the other hand, a small number of teachers (14%) indicated disagreement in their answer to the statement 1.16 (Comparison and contrast of individual structures is helpful for students learning grammar) which shows that teachers consider this technique helpful in grammar learning. This approval of comparison and contrast of structures can have both positive and negative implications. Positively, it is indicative of the fact that teachers know their students should be aware of the process of learning a grammatical item because this technique increases students' awareness. This is positive because the second of the current principles of grammar instruction, supported by Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, asks for awareness in such process. Negatively, it is indicative of this group of teachers' preference for focus-on-formS approaches to grammar instruction, an approach which the current trends of grammar teaching are getting away from (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Because focus-on-formS techniques deal with each structure separately and not within a context with a primary focus on meaning, whereas, based on the third principle of grammar teaching, using grammatical items in a primarily meaning-focused activity is a necessary part of the grammar learning process. Whether these teachers' appreciation of comparison and contrast of structures was positive or negative could be determined through subsequent interviews and/or observations. Negatively, teachers may only adhere to such comparisons and contrasts without providing opportunities for learners to use grammatical items in meaning-focused activities. But, positively, they may provide follow-up meaning-focused opportunities for their students. However, subsequent observations proved that these teachers did not provide any meaning-focused activities for their students to practice the newly learnt items.

5.1.5 Explicit Grammar Teaching

Three items were included in the questionnaire to investigate how teachers think about explicit grammar teaching. On the whole, teachers showed their understanding of the value of explicit teaching ($\overline{X}$ =3.57, SD=0.72). Replies to statement 1.19 (Explicit discussion of grammar rules is helpful for students), for which 61% of the teachers marked 'agree' or 'strongly agree', demonstrated these teachers' belief in the usefulness of explicit instruction for students.

71% of the participants marked 'agree' or 'strongly agree' for item 2.3 (My students expect teachers to present grammar points explicitly) which shows these teachers' awareness of their students' expectations. The fact that students expect their teachers to teach grammar explicitly is also noted in the literature (e.g. Borg, 1999b, 1999c; Moghaddam Hosseinpour, 2006; Phipps & Borg, 2009). Students' expectations are said to influence teachers' instructional decisions to the extent that teachers may make decisions which are contrary to their belief system. For example, in Phipps and Borg's (2009) study, although a teacher did not consider sentence-level practice useful for the students, he used sentence level gap-fills because his students expected him to do so. These teachers' awareness of their students' expectations and approval of explicit grammar teaching is further supported by the 66% of 'agree' responses to statement 2.9 (A lack of explicit grammar teaching leaves my students feeling insecure).

Most of the qualitative comments were related to 'explicit grammar teaching'. They ranged from a total denial of explicit grammar teaching to some middle-ground ideas favoring both explicit and implicit instruction, to a complete endorsement of explicit instruction. For example, denying the utility of grammar teaching, a teacher wrote:

Stop teaching and learning grammar. Just get it through conversation.

Another participant, not adopting an extreme position, considered age to be a determining factor and noted:

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> *Age is a determining factor in choosing the appropriate approach in teaching grammar. As an illustration, I would rather teach grammar explicitly to adults and not to children.*

On the other hand, in support of explicit teaching, one of the teachers wrote:

> *We might prove theoretically that implicit teaching leads to deep learning; however, lack of exposure and opportunities for language use make it hard to put grammar learning on the shoulders of students, because we can't deny grammar as the chain which keeps words connected…*

5.1.6 The Role of Grammar in Language

These teachers did not strongly appreciate the role of grammar in language ($\overline{X}$ =3.40, SD=0.56). Although 66% expressed agreement or strong agreement with item 1.1a (the role of grammar in language is as a framework for the rest of the language, a basic system to build everything else on), considering grammar a basic framework for other language elements, 52% of teachers agreed with statement 1.1b (the role of grammar in language is something which is added on to language proficiency), viewing grammar as an element which can later be added on to language proficiency. In other words, they viewed grammar as a refinement of more basic language knowledge. These opposing views were also reflected in teachers' comments. For example, in support of the role of grammar, one of the participants wrote:

> *Grammar should be the first and initial part of language learning to contribute to other skills, since lack of this knowledge makes a lot of problems not only for the students but also for the teachers.*

On the other hand, opposing the role of grammar, another teacher noted:

> *In my opinion vocabulary is more important than grammar. Teachers must start with teaching words.*

Responses to item 1.1c (the role of grammar in language is an equal pillar in supporting language proficiency_ other pillars could be knowledge about pronunciation, appropriacy or culture etc.) indicated that 77% of the teachers considered grammar to be important; however, they did not consider it more important than other language elements such as vocabulary, appropriacy, culture and pronunciations. Taken together, it can be argued that, for these teachers, grammatical accuracy is not an integral part of language proficiency and communication; consequently, they might feel comfortable with a syllabus which delays grammar teaching until later in the learning process.

5.1.7 Proceduralization of Declarative Knowledge

The inclusion of this category in the present study was to delve into teacher's perspectives on the possible problems in the process of transferring declarative knowledge (knowledge about language) into procedural knowledge (actual use of that knowledge in communication). The mean score of 3.24 (SD=1.20) for this category with 55% of agreement with statement 2.1 (My students find it difficult to transfer their grammatical knowledge into communicative language use) demonstrates that these teachers believe there exist some problems in the proceduralization of declarative knowledge.

These results are not surprising because many students, in English language institutes, are able to verbalize and explain the rules without being able to use them in real communication. This is the reason for which Batstone and Ellis (2009) have proposed "the real-operating conditions principle" and argued that the process of learning a grammatical item is not complete until learners are able to use the item in a primarily meaning-focused activity. It seems that, to solve this problem, teachers had better, in line with the specifications of "the real-operating conditions principle", include more integrated and communicative activities in their lessons.

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5.1.8 Consciousness in the Learning of Grammar

The mean score of 3.20 (SD=0.84) for this category indicates that the importance of conscious knowledge is not well recognized by the participants. Such lack of recognition will be corroborated if we look into the three items included in this category.

Statement 1.4 (Students' use of language does not involve conscious knowledge of the grammatical system and how it works) probed into teachers' perspectives on the role of conscious knowledge in learners' language use. Although 45% of teachers disagreed with this item, a fairy large number of participants (38%) agreed; this does not produce a firm evidence for the recognition of the role of consciousness in language use.

The second item of this theme (item 1.6: Students need a conscious knowledge of grammar in order to improve their language) focused on teachers' perspectives on the role of conscious knowledge in the improvement of students' grammatical accuracy; 60% agreement with the item revealed that these teachers considered conscious knowledge important for such improvement. From the responses given to items 1.4 and 1.6, it can be interpreted that teachers believe when improving accuracy and learning grammar, students need to be conscious of the rules, but when they are to put such rules into practice, there is no need for a conscious knowledge.

Statement 1.9 (Students need to be consciously aware of a structure form and function before they can use it proficiently) asked about the necessity of being aware of form/function matches. However, for this item no conclusive results was produced (47% agreed and 46% disagreed).

5.1.9 The Use of Grammatical Terminology

The teachers did not strongly support the use of grammatical terminology ($\overline{X}$ =3.19, SD=0.80). More than half of the participants (52%) stated that their students consider grammatical terminology helpful (statement 2.10: My students find grammatical terminology

useful). Since the use of grammatical terminology is one of the characteristics of explicit grammar teaching, it can be argued that these results are consistent with students' preference for explicit instruction (see section 5.1.5).

Teachers' stated agreements and disagreements with item 2.13 (My students find it difficult to use grammatical terminology) were almost equal. 41% believed that the use of terminology presents their students with problems. Likewise, one of the participants wrote:

> *Misunderstanding grammatical terminologies is [one of the] problems my students mostly face.*

It should be noted that the results for item 2.10 and 2.13 are not necessarily contradictory since teachers may be aware of the possible difficulties students face in the use of grammatical terminology, and at the same time do not deny its utility for students.

5.1.10 Correction of Errors

The mean score of 3.12 (SD=0.64) for this category shows that teachers do not support correction of errors. This lack of support is also evident when we look at the responses given to the items of this category. 56% of the responses indicating agreement with statement 1.15 (Teachers should only correct students' errors of form which interfere with communication) show that these teachers do not think correction of errors will help students learn grammar, and errors should only be corrected when communication problems make it necessary.

Although 48% of teachers responded negatively to statement 2.8 (My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a communicative speaking activity), a relatively large number of teachers (42%) showed agreement indicating that they do not believe that error correction can improve students' grammatical accuracy in a communicative speaking activity. Likewise, 47% of positive and 39% of negative replies to 2.11 (My students find it difficult to improve the accuracy of their grammatical language within a communicative writing activity) indicate that these teachers consider error correction ineffective in improving accuracy within a

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communicative writing activity. Therefore, based on the results of items 2.8 and 2.11, it can be argued that these teachers did not value error correction in both spoken and written communicative activities differently.

However, the responses to item 1.7 (Form-focused correction helps students to improve their grammatical performance) were indicative of teachers' appreciation for error correction. 68% of the participants marked 'agree' or 'strongly agree' for this item suggesting that they think form-focused error correction is helpful for the improvement of grammatical accuracy.

Based on the results for the items of this theme, it can be argued that these teachers do not appreciate the value of error correction when their students are engaged in a communicative activity (items 2.8 and 2.11). This might be because teachers find it difficult for their students to shift their attention from a focus on meaning to a focus on form. However, they valued form-focused error correction for the improvement of accuracy (item 1.7).

5.1.11 The Importance of Instruction

These teachers did not appreciate the importance of instruction ($\overline{X}$=2.79, SD=0.45). Responses to item 1.2 (Students can learn grammar through exposure to language) suggest that these teachers believed in the sufficiency of mere exposure to language as a means for grammar learning; 81% of replies indicated agreement with this statement. However, 66% of positive replies to item 1.3 (Formal instruction helps learners to produce grammatically correct language) revealed that teachers believe formal instruction can promote grammatical accuracy. Based on the results of items 1.2 and 1.3, it can be concluded that although these teachers consider exposure to input sufficient for grammar learning, they believe that instruction can help with gaining grammatical accuracy. As Burges and Etherington (2002) argue, results for items 1.2 and 1.3 are not necessarily contradictory since these teachers can "believe in the possibility of learning grammar through input alone, but feel that learning is helped by instruction" (p. 442).

The results for items 1.18 and 1.12 did not support the importance of instruction. Only 27% of teachers considered a focus on individual structures as the best way of grammar teaching (item 1.18: Grammar is best taught through a focus on individual structures). 23% of disagreements with item 1.12 also support this finding (Grammar is best taught through work which focuses on message). However, statement 2.12 (My students cannot find form-function matches in authentic texts without explicit direction from teachers), which focused on the necessity of explicit instruction in the process of discovering form/function mappings, did not yield any conclusive results (35% agreed and 38% disagreed).

Statements 1.8 and 1.10 were to delve into teachers' perspective on the utility of teaching grammar in a separate part of the class. Although the results for item 1.8 (Separate treatment of grammar produces language knowledge which students can use in natural communication) did not show any orientations, (39% agreed and 37% disagreed), 52% of the teachers disagreed with item 1.10 (The separation of work with a grammar focus from the rest of the language syllabus is useful for students.) which is an evidence against the separation of grammar work. Taking the replies to items 1.8, 1.10, and 1.18 into consideration, one possible interpretation is that these teachers appreciate the usefulness of instruction only when an item requiring instruction rises during other activities.

5.1.12 Presentation of Grammar through Authentic, Complete Texts

Presentation of grammar through authentic, complete texts did not gain support ($\overline{X}$=2.73, SD=0.63) from these teachers. This category focused on the vehicle for grammar presentation. Items 1.14 and 2.4 targeted the utility of using complete texts for presenting grammar. Items 2.6, 2.7, and 2.15 were to investigate teachers' perspectives on the usefulness of presenting grammar through authentic texts which are not produced for the purpose of language teaching.

For statement 1.14 (Students learn grammar more successfully if it is presented within a text), there appeared a strong approval (81% of agreement) showing that teachers believed in the utility of presenting

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grammar through complete texts. However, 75% of the teachers stated that their students prefer one sentence examples, rather than complete texts (statement 2.4: My students prefer to learn grammar from one sentence examples). The replies to these two items point to mismatches between teachers and students' beliefs. The contrast between what teachers and students think has also been referred to by Spratt (1999). Furthermore, since presenting grammar through one-sentence examples is one of the characteristics of explicit grammar teaching, the results of item 2.4 can be said to be consistent with those of item 2.3 which indicated that students expected their teachers to present grammar explicitly.

For item 2.6 (My students find it difficult to handle grammar presented within authentic texts) no clear trend was found, 43% of the teachers agreed and 45% disagreed. But, for statement 2.7 (My students find authentic texts difficult because of their wide variety of structures) just more than half (51%) of the teachers indicated that they found these texts difficult for their students.

In order to see what these teachers think about the nature of the difficulty of authentic texts, an item was included in the questionnaire which asked teachers to rank grammar, vocabulary, and culture in order of their contribution to this difficulty. The results appear in Table 2. Only 26% stated that grammar contributes more than vocabulary and culture to the difficulty of authentic texts. 43% considered vocabulary and 31% considered culture to be the most important factor influencing a text difficulty for students. Therefore, it can be argued that teachers regard authentic texts inappropriate for grammar presentation and consider vocabulary, and not grammar, as the main cause of this difficulty.

5.2. Results for the Convergence of Teachers' Perspectives and Current Principles of Grammar Teaching

For a discussion of the second research question, the performance of five teachers (Because of confidentiality issues, pseudonyms are used) was observed and compared with their own perspectives on current principles of grammar teaching.

Table 2: Results for Item 2.15

Responses Types	N	Freque	Percentag
Grammar, Vocabula Culture	10	19	17.43
Grammar, Culture Vocabulary	10	9	8.25
Vocabulary, Gramm Culture	10	38	34.86
Vocabulary, Cultu Grammar	10	9	8.25
Culture, Gramma Vocabulary	10	15	13.76
Culture, Vocabula Grammar	10	19	17.43

5.2.1 Hamid

Hamid marked 'agree' for all principles ($\overline{X}$=4) which shows that he appreciated the value of all the current principles of grammar teaching.

His teaching practice almost corresponded with his stated perspectives except for the given-to-new principle. In line with the given-to-new principle, in both of his classes, he used some examples to activate the background knowledge for which he was going to present a new form (e.g. have + past participle); first, he established the world knowledge, and then linked the targeted form to it so as to facilitate the process of learning. During the practice time, he insisted that students use examples from their real life which can be considered as another use of students' world knowledge.

The observance of the awareness principle by the teacher was the most noticeable. In both observations, the teacher focused on individual structures, compared and contrasted them, and explained and verbalized the grammatical rules and their functions. These were all to make student aware of the process of discovering form/function mappings. But the real-operating conditions principle was ignored. Although the teacher asked his students to talk with a partner about activities which

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they had done repeatedly in the past, this pair-work did not have a primary focus on meaning, because students were told to use the present perfect tense. Taken together, this teacher's stated perspectives and practices were consistent in terms of the first and the second principle, but not the third one.

5.2.2. Ali

Ali marked 'agree' for the first and second principles and 'undecided' for the third one, producing a mean score of 3.67 for 'principles of grammar teaching'. Only in one of his classes, he tried to exploit students' existing world knowledge. Before explicitly explaining the function of question tags, he focused his students' attention on the question tags in the conversation section which was taught in the last session. However, in the second class there were not any attempts to use students' world knowledge for the purpose of grammar teaching.

This teacher's practices clearly reflected his stated perspectives regarding the awareness principle. In both observations, he not only verbalized, explained, and exemplified the rules orally in great detail, but also distributed handouts in which further information and examples were provided. He also used comparison and contrast of structures as a technique to teach grammar. Furthermore, when working on the exercises in the book, he asked the students to explain the reason for their given answers. All of these, in addition to his noticeable use of grammatical terminology were aimed at raising students' awareness in the process of discovering form/function mappings.

For the last principle, although he marked 'undecided', the conspicuous absence of communicative activities in both observations indicated a rejection of such activities in his actual practices; this reveals a divergence between teachers' perspectives and practices. Therefore, for this teacher, the consistency between perspectives and practices was remarkable for the second principle, minimal for the first, and absent for the last.

5.2.3 Saeed

Saeed indicated his strong agreement ($\overline{X}$ =5) with all the principles. But, similar to Ali, he showed adherence to the first principle in only one of his classes. Before engaging in a discussion of the uses of 'MUST' and 'SHOULD', he played a sound track to make students understand the differences between the functions for which those form are used; in this way, he attempted to establish the required world knowledge. But in the second class he did not use any techniques to exploit students' world knowledge.

This teacher adhered to the awareness principle in his classes. Verbalization, explanation, and exemplification of the rules, focusing on individual structures, and using grammatical terminology, which are all techniques for increasing students' awareness, support this claim. But, for the real-operating conditions principle a high tension was observed; Saeed did not include even a single meaning-focused activity in his classes which shows a lack of adherence to the third principle. Thus, for the third teacher it can be said that his perspectives and practices were congruent regarding the second principle, minimally congruent for the first, and incongruent for the last.

5.2.4 Hossein

Hossein agreed with all the three principles ($\overline{X}$ =4) and valued them highly. But, in practice, he did not follow his own belief system. He did not exploit his students' existing world knowledge to teach grammar and only in one of his classes he included a pair-work which was not meaning-focused. This behavior reveals no adherence to the first and last principles in actual practice. However, in line with his appreciation of the awareness principle, he tried to make students aware of the process of grammar leaning using techniques such as verbalization, explanation, and exemplification of the rules, and focusing on individual structures. Therefore, it can be said that the fourth teacher's perspectives and practices were only consistent with respect to the second principle.

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5.2.5 Reza

Reza marked 'agree' for the first principle and 'strongly agree' for the second and third, gaining the mean of 4.67. Contrary to what he had stated, he did not exploit his students' world knowledge as a resource in grammar teaching. For the second principle, a close correspondence between perspectives and practices was observed; he focused on individual structures, explained the grammatical functions in his students' L1, and verbalized and exemplified the corresponding rules. Finally, contrary to what he stated, there were no attempts to make students practice new form/function mappings in a communicative context with a primary focus on meaning. Although, in both classes, he engaged his students in pair-works, those activities had a primary focus on form, thus they did not satisfy the real-operating conditions principle. Therefore, similar to Hossein, Reza's perspectives and practices converged for the awareness principle.

6. Conclusion

In this study, teachers' practices did not reflect what they had stated about current principles of grammar instruction except for the awareness principle; the existence of contrast between teachers' stated perspectives and practices is also reported in the literature (e.g. Borg, 1998, 1999c; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001).

As Golombek and Johnson (2004) state, recognition of such contrasts by teacher educators is a driving force in teachers' professional development. Therefore, the findings of this study can have implications for language teacher educators, who based on their own presuppositions about what happens in classrooms, leave a series of principles and options for teachers to follow. Teacher educators had better base their practice on classroom realities and devote time to issues which require attention. For example, if their students were found to hold unsound perspectives concerning some aspects of instruction, they can educate their students on the currently accepted principles. Or if any departures from accepted perspectives were noticed, they can make teachers aware of the divergence and guide them toward a better

adoption of options, hence a better classroom practice. This practice, which "has the potential to be more meaningful and long-lasting" (Phipps & Borg, 2009, p.398), is improved because through basing the content of teacher training courses on the realities of classrooms teacher educators can explain to their students when, how, and why to opt for appropriate options.

Therefore, based on the results of the present study, in teacher training courses, more time should be devoted to inform teachers of the advantages of using students' existing world knowledge in grammar teaching and making them practice new form/function mappings in a communicative context with a primary focus on meaning. Different options should also be presented to teachers on how, when, and why to apply such principles.

Teachers can also use the findings of this study to become aware of their own perspectives and practices. This way they can reflect better on their teaching (Borg, 1998) and think of better ways to realize what they think. There also may be some perspectives which are less theoretically and practically justified; therefore, teachers can modify their perspectives in order not to let them influence their instructional decisions negatively.

Since teacher cognition is a newly born area of research, with most studies emerging in the second half of the 1990s (Borg, 2003), there are numerous opportunities for further research. Although in this study questionnaires and classroom observations were used as data collection procedures, it seems that further interviews with teachers could help understand the underlying reasons for their perspectives and practices.

This study investigated the correspondence between teachers' perspectives and practices in English language institutes with respect to different aspects of grammar teaching. Similar studies can be done focusing on university professors, state high-school teachers, and ESP or EAP teachers. Studies can also target the teaching of other language components such as vocabulary, culture, and pronunciation. The teaching of language skills such as writing and reading can also be the purpose of such studies.

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