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An Analysis of Teacher Beliefs and Practices in Grammar Teaching: A Case Study of EFL High School Teachers

Mutyara Sabita*, Nia Pujiawati, Fauzi Miftakh

FKIP, Universitas Singaperbangsa, Karawang, 41361, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching. Using a qualitative case study design, the researcher conducted interviews and observations to collect data. The data analysis method was adopted from Miles and Huberman (1994). The findings revealed a strong alignment between teachers' stated beliefs about grammar and their actual teaching practices. This consistency suggests that teachers effectively translated their beliefs into actions during lessons. Such alignment is expected to contribute positively to the overall teaching and learning process, as it ensures that the instructional methods are in harmony with the teachers' perspectives on grammar. The study highlights the importance of understanding teachers' beliefs as a key factor in improving grammar instruction.

1. Introduction

In the course of learning and teaching, beliefs are crucial to achieving goals in English language teaching. Borg (2001) argues that beliefs significantly influence various aspects of teaching and life. During the teaching process, English teachers need beliefs as guiding principles to support them in their teaching endeavors. Teacher beliefs significantly influence the teaching and learning process. According to Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017) beliefs help teachers shape lesson plans, make curricular decisions and determine the content to be taught in the classroom. These beliefs act as a compass, guiding teachers in their curricular choices. Recognizing the profound influence that beliefs have on teaching underscores the importance of recognizing and understanding the role of teacher beliefs in shaping education.

The beliefs held by teachers regarding foreign language teaching strategies and methods significantly shape their approach to classroom management, curriculum planning, and student expectations. These beliefs inform perceptions, instructional

* Corresponding author.

E-mail: 2010631060104@student.unsika.ac.id

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goals, and course design, creating a framework for teaching style and student assessment. Pajares (1992) describes beliefs as individual judgments formed through an understanding of human speech, intentions, and actions, which include evaluations about oneself, others, and the world. Khader (2012) adds that beliefs are derived from observation or logical reasoning, while Peacock (2001) considers them to be psychologically held perceptions, assumptions, or theories held as true.

Teaching grammar is essential to language learning as it provides the framework needed to construct sentences effectively. Pontarolo (2013) states that the analysis and study of grammar have been deeply rooted since the time of the ancient Greeks. He notes that the Greeks defined grammar as "the rules governing the production of texts." Halliday & Matthiessen (2016) define grammar as a fundamental component of language, describing it as a system of word structure and organization. In addition, Phipps & Borg (2009) stated that teachers' beliefs significantly influence their pedagogical decisions. Research on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching is limited, mainly focusing on teaching materials and techniques. However, exploring teachers' beliefs about grammar can contribute to improving the overall quality of English education.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017) states that teachers' beliefs shape their teaching behavior and impact student development, directing their decision-making and interactions with students. Teachers' beliefs are a factor that can influence the process of learning grammar. Therefore, it is essential to conduct research on English teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in teaching grammar. This research is in line with research by (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016) and (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022) also explored teacher's beliefs in teaching grammar. study explores various teachers' beliefs from the perspective of English teachers regarding grammar teaching.

2. Methodology

The researcher adopts a qualitative approach in this study, aiming to examine the phenomenon from a specific perspective. According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research serves to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. The qualitative method was chosen because a case study was deemed suitable for achieving the study's objectives. By employing a case study design, the researcher hopes to obtain clear and valid answers to the research questions. McIntosh & Morse (2015) explain that semi-structured interviews are intended to elicit subjective responses from individuals regarding particular situations or phenomena they have experienced. The aim of this research is to reveal teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction and their classroom practices. This study was conducted in a senior high school in Bekasi during the 2023/2024 academic year. The chosen school is accredited with an A grade and is well-equipped with the necessary facilities.

The study involved two experienced English teachers who were expected to enhance the validity of the research through their expertise and teaching practices.

The data was collected from two primary sources: interviews and observations. The interviews aimed to gather insights into the teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar, while the observations aimed to validate the alignment between the teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. The interview questions were based on aspects of teacher beliefs and teaching practices from Reynolds (as cited in (Ispri, 2015) and Newby (2006). The observation checklist was developed using AlAbri et al. (2022) study, which utilized Farrell et al. (2005) framework. Data analysis was conducted using Miles & Huberman, (1994) data analysis model.

3. Results and Discussion

Results

1.) The Teacher's Beliefs About Grammar Teaching

a. Beliefs in The Aspects of Learning Process

The first question in the aspect of learning process is about teachers' personal beliefs about the importance and role of grammar in English teaching. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: "Grammar in any language must be important, grammar is the basis of a language as a means of communication."

Teacher B: "Grammar is one of the important components of the English language that should not be overlooked at all."

Teacher A pointed out that grammar forms the foundation of language, which serves as a means of communication. Meanwhile, Teacher B emphasizes that grammar is an essential element of learning English that should not be overlooked.

The second question in the aspect of learning and learner is about teachers' beliefs about teaching grammar changes through their experience and training. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: "In my early years of teaching grammar I did a lot of trial and error because I used to teach like my teacher used to teach in the 70s but through experience then I realized that I shouldn't teach like that, then I changed my teaching style"

Teacher B: "Overall in teaching English, especially in teaching grammar from year to year I always improve, I improve, so that students are also more enthusiastic in learning"

Teachers' beliefs towards grammar teaching develop as their experience and training increase. They realize the importance of adapting and refreshing teaching methods to suit the needs of today's students, so that learning becomes more effective and interesting.

b. Beliefs in The Aspects of Teacher's Instructional Roles

The first question in the aspect of teacher's instructional roles is about teacher's personal beliefs about how to teach grammar in the classroom. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

***Teacher A:** "In teaching English, especially grammar, the most basic thing is that students must be accustomed to using their common sense to think critically rather than memorizing grammar."*

***Teacher B:** "In delivering grammar material, teachers should deliver the material in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend by students."*

Teacher A emphasized the importance of students using their intuition and critical thinking when learning grammar. On the other hand, Teacher B suggests that when teaching grammar, the material should be presented in a way that is easy for students to understand.

The second question in the aspect of teacher's instructional roles is about teacher's personal beliefs about grammar teaching influence their lesson plans and classroom activities. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

***Teacher A:** "If we just fill the students with formulas and so on they will memorize but the next day they will immediately forget again, but if we start by encouraging them to use common sense then they will understand by themselves."*

***Teacher B:** "In teaching grammar material, I start from the basics and then move on to the next level of grammar which is more difficult."*

Teacher A, focuses on encouraging students to use their common sense to understand grammar on a deeper level, rather than just memorizing rules. On the other hand, Teacher B believes in building a solid foundation in grammar before introducing more challenging concepts.

The third question in the aspect of teacher's instructional roles is about teacher's personal beliefs about grammar teaching influence their use and selection of resources and teaching materials to be taught. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: “The selection of resources and materials should be scrutinized to suit the level or difficulty of the students.”

Teacher B: “The provision of grammar material can be adjusted with the provision of other materials that have a relationship between one another. For example, narrative and recount texts tell about past events. Then it can be equalized with the provision of simple past tense material.”

Teacher A emphasized the importance of carefully selecting resources that match students' abilities. Teacher B further emphasizes the importance of integrating grammar teaching with related subjects to create a cohesive learning experience.

c. Beliefs in The Aspects of Student’s Activities

The first question in the aspect of student’s activities is about the example of activities or technique that the teacher used in teaching grammar in the classroom. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: “For example, when I teach tenses, I will encourage students to find the sixteen tenses by themselves, I also tell them how to find the sixteen tenses through the five basic tenses by combining the five basic tenses, so I often encourage students to do self-inventing although sometimes I have to take more control. Sometimes students can be trusted to discover on their own.”

Teacher B: “For technique, I will look at the material to be taught first and then I can connect it to the grammar.”

Teacher A focuses on fostering independence among students, encouraging them to explore and understand grammar through self-discovery, with guided support when necessary. This approach fosters critical thinking and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. On the other hand, Teacher B emphasizes a more structured approach, matching grammar instruction directly to the content being taught, ensuring that grammar is learned in context.

The second question in the aspect of student’s activities is about how teacher’s grammar instruction is engaging and relevant to the student’s needs. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: “Seeing the condition of the students now if the learning is less interesting then they do not want to learn, now we are supported by many supporting facilities

such as the internet that can access movies. It can help to attract students to learn.”

Teacher B: *“For most students, learning grammar is interesting as can be seen from the results of the practice questions and tests of the students who usually reach 85% of the minimum score. I make sure by giving them the basics so that they can understand the material.”*

Teacher A highlighted the use of modern resources such as the internet and multimedia to make learning more interesting and relevant to students. Teacher B focused on ensuring that the instruction provided was grounded in solid fundamentals, which proved to result in high scores in the grammar test among most students.

The third question in the aspect of student’s activities is about how the teacher’s teaching practice is effective for all students, regardless of their learning style or level of knowledge? This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: *“I start from the simplest level of grammar to ensure that my learning is effective for all students with different intelligences, learning styles, and behaviors.”*

Teacher B: *“I believe the lessons I provide are effective for the students, because they can use their grammar knowledge in daily conversation.”*

Teacher A adopts a strategy that meets the needs of different students by starting from the most basic level of grammar, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in learning. Meanwhile, Teacher B demonstrates the success of an educational approach that combines theory with real-world relevance.

d. Beliefs in The Aspects of Objective Setting

The question in the aspect of objective setting is about the teacher’s goals to guide classroom grammar teaching practices. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: *“Every practice has a goal, in this case it should be the students themselves who set their goals. Because if it comes from their desire, the practice can proceed and the target can be achieved correctly because it is in accordance with their desire.”*

Teacher B: *“Before presenting the material, I will usually make an illustration where students can infer that they will learn something new in the future.”*

Teacher A emphasizes the importance of students setting their own learning goals, believing that motivation is strongest when it comes from

personal desire, leading to more effective practice and goal achievement. Teacher B, on the other hand, focuses on building anticipation and interest through illustrative introductions to new material, aiming to engage students' curiosity and readiness to learn.

e. Beliefs in The Aspects of Rule Formation

The question in the aspect of rule formation is about How the teacher's help students learn grammar rules in the classroom. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: "In my day the teacher was the only source of knowledge, whereas now I have changed my function to become an agent who conveys knowledge. All the learning I provide is on the internet so here I am just leading the students in the learning process."

Teacher B: "In order for students to understand, I slowly illustrate and tell them what we will learn today."

From the interview responses we can conclude that to help students learn grammar rules, teachers use two main approaches:

Teacher A becomes a guide, directing students to learn through available resources, especially online. This means the teacher helps students find and understand grammar rules using the internet, making learning more active and independent. Teacher B takes a step-by-step approach, slowly introducing grammar rules to ensure students understand the concepts clearly from the start. This approach helps break down complex grammar rules into simpler, easy-to-understand parts, making it easier for students to follow and apply.

f. Beliefs in The Aspects of Methodology

The question in the aspect of rule formation is about the teacher's method in teaching grammar. This can be seen from the following answers of the two teachers:

Teacher A: "My way of teaching is mostly shaped by teaching experience and observation because observation precipitates teaching itself."

Teacher B: "The way I teach grammar is more into the traditional method, focusing more on rules, formulas, and structures."

Teacher A watches closely to see what works best in class and adapts their teaching style to fit the students' needs. On the other side, Teacher B sticks to a more traditional way of teaching grammar, focusing a lot on rules, formulas, and the structure of the language. This method is more about sticking to the basics and ensuring students have a strong foundation in grammar rules and structures.

2.) The Teacher's Practice of Teaching Grammar in Class.

a.) Teacher A

Teacher A, who has approximately 30 years of teaching experience, teaches 3 different classes, namely E-4, F-BL, and F-4.

1.) First Observation

The initial observation took place in classroom E-4, where Teacher A began the session by revisiting previously covered material on tenses. As the class commenced, the students warmly greeted the teacher, who then checked on their well-being and recorded their attendance. Teacher A then delved straight into the day's lesson, starting with a review of the five basic tenses. With those covered, the focus shifted to an explanation of an additional eleven tenses, deepening the students' understanding.

Following this overview, Teacher A prompted the students to explore the formulas for various tenses, specifically challenging them to recall the formula for the past future perfect continuous tense. The students were encouraged to discover these formulas on their own, using examples they had previously encountered as a guide. Once a student provided a correct formula, Teacher A immediately used a computer connected to a projector to verify and confirm its accuracy.

Throughout this interactive session, Teacher A was quick to offer corrections and clarifications, ensuring students grasped the content. A light-hearted joke was occasionally shared, keeping the learning atmosphere engaging and lively. As the lesson drew to a conclusion, Teacher A made a point to invite any remaining questions, ensuring each student felt heard and supported. This approach highlighted a commitment to fostering a thorough understanding and a supportive learning environment.

2.) Second Observation

During the second observation in the bilingual class F-BL, the initiation of the lesson followed the standard procedure where students greeted the teacher, who in turn, checked on the students' wellbeing and attendance. In this session, only three students were present due to the absence of six others who had other commitments, leading to a more intimate class setting.

The focus of this lesson was on conditional sentences, a continuation from a previous lesson. To bring the concept closer to the students, Teacher A employed an innovative approach. They asked the students to identify examples of conditional sentences but did this through the medium of song lyrics to make the learning engaging. With only three students, Teacher A tailored the lesson by using lyric excerpts from three different songs exerting a personal touch. These examples were "*Jikalau telah datang waktu yang dinanti, Ku pasti bahagiakan dirimu seorang*" from "Jikalau" by Naif, "*Andai dipisah laut dan pantai, tak akan goyah gelora cinta*" from "Cinta Kita" by Inka Christie and Nike Ardilla, and

"Andai ku tahu kapan tiba ajalku ku akan memohon tuhan tolong panjangkan umurku" from "Andai Ku Tahu" by Ungu.

Students were tasked with translating these lyrics, after which Teacher A explained how each set of lyrics exemplified different types of conditional sentences. The lyrics from "Jikalau" illustrated the first type, known as Future Possible. "Cinta Kita" presented an example of the second type, or Present Unreal, and "Andai Ku Tahu" represented the third type, Past Unreal conditions. Beyond these, Teacher A also introduced two other types of conditional sentences: the Zero Conditional for factual scenarios and the Mixed Conditional for complex hypothetical situations.

Throughout the lesson, Teacher A fostered a comfortable and interactive learning environment by incorporating humor, similar to previous lessons. This approach not only made students feel at ease but also encouraged open communication. Quick to correct misunderstandings and clarify doubts, Teacher A ensured that the lesson was understood well. In conclusion, the teacher solicited any questions from the students to confirm their grasp of the material, maintaining a supportive and informative atmosphere.

3.) Third Observation

In the third observation held in class F-4, Teacher A introduced the lesson on Comparative and Superlative sentences. The session began with an engaging activity where the teacher asked the students to list items they would prioritize purchasing if they had substantial financial resources. Following this, two students were selected to input their priority lists on a computer directly linked to a projector in the classroom as the example for the other student's.

This acted as a bridge to introduce the grammatical concepts of comparative and superlative forms. For example, the phrase "big house" translated into "bigger house" for the comparative form and "biggest house" for the superlative form. Overall, this educational approach was consistent with the teaching models used in the previous lessons. By connecting the theoretical material with practical and relatable scenarios, Teacher A effectively helped students grasp complex grammatical concepts in a simple and engaging manner. Utilizing technology like projectors added a visual element that enhanced student interaction and understanding.

b.) Teacher B

Teacher B, who has approximately 21 years of teaching experience, teaches 3 different classes, namely E-3, E-2, and E-1.

1.) First Observation

In Class E-3, Teacher B followed a well-defined protocol from the moment she entered the classroom, starting with a warm greeting and meticulously checking the students' attendance and condition to ensure they were prepared for the lesson.

The focus of this lesson was on the active and passive forms of the Simple Present, Present Continuous, and Simple Past tenses. Teacher B employed a deductive teaching methodology, beginning with a clear outline of the grammatical formulas related to each tense. Advising students to listen attentively without taking notes initially, she allowed them to fully absorb the concepts. Examples such as "Laurent writes two letters" becoming "Two letters are written by Laurent" for the Simple Present, "Laurent is writing two letters" becoming "Two letters are being written by Laurent" for the Present Continuous, and "Laurent wrote two letters" becoming "Two letters were written by Laurent" for the Simple Past were used to illustrate the rules. Teacher B engaged the students by prompting them to create their own sentences and guided them in transforming these sentences into passive forms, fostering a collaborative learning environment that reinforced the grammatical rules through practical application. The engagement in Class E-3 was high, with Teacher B monitoring students' understanding and addressing their questions immediately, ensuring they never felt lost.

2.) Second Observation

In Class E-1, the lesson continued focusing on active and passive forms across various tenses. Teacher B maintained her deductive approach, starting with direct explanations of grammatical rules followed by practical examples. Again, she actively involved the students by having them participate in sentence transformations, such as "Father washes a car" becoming "A car is washed by Father" for the Simple Present, "Father is washing a car" becoming "A car is being washed by Father" for the Present Continuous, and "Father washed a car" becoming "A car was washed by Father" for the Simple Past. The consistent methodology and structured approach kept the students responsive and highly engaged, demonstrating the success of her teaching methods.

3.) Third Observation

In Class E-2, the focus remained on active and passive sentence structures across the mentioned tenses. Teacher B adhered to her established deductive approach, beginning with grammatical rule explanations and moving through practical examples with the class. Sentences such as "I eat an apple" becoming "An apple is eaten by me" for the Simple Present, "I am eating an apple" becoming "An apple is being eaten by me" for the Present Continuous, and "I ate an apple" becoming "An apple was eaten by me" for the Simple Past exemplified the lesson content. The emphasis on student participation continued, with Teacher B encouraging students to independently and collectively transform sentences, providing multiple opportunities to practice and apply the grammatical rules. The learning environment remained positive and productive, with Teacher B's consistent methodology reinforcing the students' comprehension and offering immediate feedback to ensure they felt supported and confident in their learning journey.

Discussion

1.) Teacher's Beliefs About Grammar Teaching

The two English teachers have different beliefs about grammar teaching, as highlighted in their interviews. These beliefs shape their methodology, instructional strategies and overall approach to teaching grammar, in line with Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017), theory that teachers' beliefs influence students' behavior and development. Both Teacher A and Teacher B value the importance of grammar, in line with Alghanmi & Shukri (2016), findings highlighting the importance of grammar teaching. Teacher A viewed grammar as essential for effective communication and articulating thoughts clearly, while Teacher B emphasized its role in language competence and proficiency. The evolution of their instructional beliefs, influenced by experience and training, reflects Farrell (1999), observation that past experiences shape teachers' beliefs. This evolution underscores the need to develop instructional approaches that better engage and motivate students.

After examining their instructional roles, it is evident that personal beliefs about grammar teaching significantly influence their educational strategies. Teacher A emphasized critical thinking and comprehension over memorization, fostering a deeper understanding of grammar concepts and aligning with Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017), assertion that beliefs shape curricular planning and decisions. Teacher B adopts a foundation-first approach, presenting grammar topics clearly to build a strong foundation before moving on. This approach integrates grammar with related subjects, thus creating a cohesive educational experience.

Teacher A and Teacher B's beliefs strongly influence their teaching methods and approaches. Teacher A encourages independence through self-discovery and critical thinking, using modern resources to make learning interesting and relevant, while Teacher B adopts a structured approach, grounding grammar teaching in fundamental concepts for basic understanding. Both aim to create an effective and inclusive learning environment tailored to diverse needs and learning styles, emphasizing flexibility and innovation. According to Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017), beliefs guide teachers in adopting strategies to overcome challenges, shaping the learning environment, motivation and language skills. Despite their differences, both teachers share the same goal of fostering an effective and inclusive learning environment.

2.) Teachers' Grammar Teaching Practices In The Classroom.

Teacher A uses a student-centered inductive approach, acting as a facilitator rather than a traditional authoritative figure. This method involves guiding students to discover grammar rules on their own, with the belief that self-set goals can increase intrinsic motivation and make learning more meaningful. This is in line with Thornbury (1999), who states that starting with examples and leading to rules will improve understanding. Teacher A also uses internet resources to help students navigate and understand grammar independently.

In contrast, Teacher B uses a traditional deductive approach, starting with explicit grammar rules and followed by examples. This teacher-centered strategy involves clear explanations and detailed illustrations to help students build a strong grammar foundation. According to Thornbury (1999), presenting rules first and then examples helps students understand and apply grammar more effectively. Teacher B believes that using illustrative examples can establish context, make learning objectives clearer, and prepare students for new material.

Through observation, the researcher saw that the teachers' beliefs were in line with their teaching methods. Teacher A's inductive approach fosters an exploratory and student-centered environment, while teacher B's deductive method provides clear and direct guidance. This study found that teachers' beliefs about grammar consistently matched their teaching practices, supporting the research of Raikhapoor (2020) and Tarigan & Stevani (2022), but not in line with the findings of Alghanmi & Shukri (2016) and Chali et al., (2020), who noted inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices.

4. Conclusion

Teacher A's and Teacher B's beliefs significantly shaped their grammar teaching methods and aligned with classroom practices. Teacher A values grammar for clear communication and encourages critical thinking and independence. Emphasizing clear communication and critical thinking encourages students to be independent and utilize modern resources and methods to enhance understanding and critical analysis. Teacher B, on the other hand, emphasizes a structured approach to ensure basic understanding and linguistic competence. Their teaching focuses on building a strong grammar foundation, ensuring comprehensive understanding. Both teachers' experiences and training have influenced this belief. Despite their different methods, they share the same goal: creating an inclusive and effective learning environment tailored to diverse needs and learning styles.

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