

# EFL Teachers' Beliefs about Grammar Teaching and Classroom Implementation: Focus on Ankesha Senior Secondary and Preparatory School Teachers in Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** This study's primary goal was to find out what EFL teachers thought about the high school's implementation of grammar instruction and its teaching strategies. It is believed that an educator's educational beliefs affect the assessments and results of schooling. Questionnaires, in-class observations, and focus groups with the chosen high school teachers were used to gather data for the study. The chosen high school has 22 English language instructors. As a result, the researcher used the data from all 22 teachers in his analysis. The researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative techniques to evaluate and interpret the data. The questionnaire's results showed that teachers generally thought that communicative language education and inductive grammar instruction helped students' language skills to be improved. Their professed views were quite different from their actual teaching practices, however. The beliefs of the teachers were not reflected in the real classroom. These conflicts run counter to the claims made by some academics in the literature on the important influence that teachers' ideas have on the way that education is carried out. Since then, it has been proposed that there may be an impact on students' educational outcomes from these discrepancies between instructors' views and actions, and these gaps have typically been linked to students' declining of English language ability. Lastly, to lessen the detrimental effects on the efficacy of teaching English, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, teacher educators, and other pertinent and concerned bodies should harmonize teacher beliefs and teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Grammar Teaching Beliefs, CLT.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the EFL teachers' grammar beliefs and teaching practices. According to Johnson (1994) cited in Thomas & Farrell (2005:1, 2) teachers are active decision makers in the classroom and have primary responsibility for what is happening. It seems that certain issues regarding their beliefs need to be examined. Educational research on teachers' beliefs shares three basic assumptions: (1) teacher beliefs influence perceptions and judgments, (2) teacher beliefs play a role in how information about the classroom is translated into classroom practice, and (3) teachers' beliefs are important to convey to understand and improve teaching practices and teacher training programs. Similarly, Richards (1998) cited in Degefe, D., (2017) argued that one of the decisive factors for a language teacher is his/her beliefs. That is, the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning will be developed over time and bring into the classroom.

On the other hand, many ESL professionals, such as Krashen, Terrell (1983), Celce-Murcia, M. (1988:1) and Hassan, N. (2013:15) have new assumptions that learning a second/foreign language is very similar to

mastering a first language. Their point of view is that providing "comprehensive input" and what foreign or second language teachers can or should do to facilitate acquisition. They believe that grammar lessons do not facilitate second language acquisition activities. Similarly, ( Degefe, D., (2017), Ur, P. (1996:78), favored implicit grammatical education and opposed the structural view in the sense that teaching learners how to construct grammatical sentences does not enable them to produce real discourse. This means that the learner composes a block of speech as a single sentence, striving to convey meaning in a real-world context. Additionally, Hunt, J.R., (2015), states that unconsciously learned grammatical rules helps learners form a myriad of sentences. As to Richards (1985) noted in Celce-Murcia, M. (1988:1, 2) is generally assumed that communicative classrooms provide better access to learning a second or foreign language than structure-based (formal) lessons. They argue that structure-based education alone is insufficient to promote communicative activity.

Other pros still share both because it's already in placing structural and communicative views together. Ur, P. (2011) stated to both implicit and explicit (eclectic approach). Knowing grammar is important because you can't be effective unless you know how to combine words into acceptable sentences or sentence structures. He found it helpful to teach grammar systematically based on the syllabus provided. Although teachers may need to emphasize the form of specific language items, grammar lessons should be conducted in meaningful contexts that require the teacher to integrate grammatical form, meaning, and use (Atkins, Hairom and Null, 1995).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

There is a general consensus in education that teaching is a cognitive activity and that teachers' beliefs greatly influence their teaching practice in the classroom (Farrell, 2005). Some scholars like Borg (2001) and Johnson (1994) also emphasize the definite effects of teachers' beliefs about their classroom practices. William and Burden as cited in Abiy (2002) state that teachers' actions are more influenced by their beliefs rather than their knowledge. According to these and other researchers, teachers' beliefs are more important methodologies that teachers are trained to implement in their classrooms.

With regard to teaching grammar today, applied linguists and methodologists around the world hold different beliefs. Controversy over the importance of grammatical education is widespread, especially with the advent of communicative approach. Some scholars, such as Krashen and Terrel (1983) and Probhu (1987) are against grammatical education. This was once thought to be very important, but these scholars and their followers believe that conscious knowledge of grammatical rules is irrelevant to foreigners' learning of a language. Krashen (1995:83) argues: "Conscious knowledge of rules is not responsible for our fluency and does not trigger speech." You underestimate the value of teaching. Allen and Campbell (1972:42) state, "The important point is that the study of grammar is neither necessary nor sufficient to learn a language."

However, there is resurgence in the world of emphasis and desire for grammar lessons, meaning that grammar is making a comeback these days. Krashen and his supporters face strong opposition in the field of second language acquisition research. On the Revival of Grammar Lessons, Williams (1994:2) Question: "Where was the grammar? Where did it go? Why is it back now?" Also, most English teachers have paid special attention to grammar. "Language teachers have worked with grammatical terms and categories taken for granted and the basis of language" (Stern, 1983:131). For these teachers, an English lesson means a grammar lesson. Moreover, Nuan (1989) considers grammar to be an integral part of the communicative use of language. Additionally, the important role of grammar in teaching students is emphasized. It plays an important role in conveying messages."

Although there are pros and cons to teaching grammar, most students around the world study grammar to learn a second or foreign language. Woods (1995:36) states: "Despite the influence of communicative approaches on recent methodologies, the majority of second and foreign language learners around the world believe that the principles of construction and expression are grammatical. In sum, Harmer, (1987) Williams (ibid.), Woods (ibid.), and others argue that teaching English is teaching "grammar for grammar's sake." Although I disagree with the conclusion that grammar education is essential and necessary, it must be limited.

Nowadays, as explained above, there are various beliefs on the importance of grammar education across the world. Some scholars believe that teaching grammar is very important in foreign and second language teaching, but others are against teaching this subject. On these controversies McKay (1987: xi) said: Ethiopia is part of the world and shares the teaching of English, so it is hard to say that such controversial views and beliefs are not reflected.

According to Thompson (1996) there is also much debate about grammar teaching approaches. Discussion revolves around the preference for deductive or inductive grammar teaching. Lewis (1996) and Harmer (1987), for example, argue in favor of the inductive approach, and they say that inductive practices engender better learning. They believe that the additional challenge of discovering the rules themselves motivates learners and that understanding English grammar is very important for students. Lewis (1996:165) states that his research on student preferences shows that the majority of students prefer a deductive approach.

Williams (1994) on the other hand notes that many English teachers maintain a traditional deductive approach. Edwards and Mercer (1987) also support this approach and reject the overuse of discovery learning (the inductive approach).

The other claim lies between the two disputes. Atkins, Hailom and Nuru (1995) and Eisenstein cited in Tudor (1996), argue that both deductive and inductive representations are useful in teaching grammar. Tudor (1996:212) also stated: Although there has been much controversy and research over his 30-plus years about the role of formal grammar education, Ellis (1996) argues that there are no fixed guidelines for the methodology of grammar education. It also seems to be true that high school English teachers do not have a clear idea of how and to what extent grammar should be taught.

As mentioned earlier, there are two main controversies to teach grammar. These are:

- ❖ Whether or not grammar lessons are important to improve students' language proficiency.
- ❖ A deductive approach to grammar education is more important than inductive approach or vice versa, or both approaches have same importance.

With so much controversy and uncertainty about grammar teaching, it is important to clarify what beliefs high school English teachers hold about these issues, as teachers' beliefs have a powerful impact on teaching practice in the classrooms.

Teachers' educational beliefs are thought to influence the process of teaching and learning, but no research has been conducted in our university on the role of grammar and grammatical teaching approaches, and teachers' beliefs in the classroom.

The main purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the beliefs of high school English teachers about the role of grammar education in improving students' language proficiency and the types of approaches they use to teach this subject. We also attempt to show whether classroom lies reported by teachers are consistent with actual classroom practice or not. Finally, an attempt is made to demonstrate which approach is used in Ethiopian high school English language classrooms.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate high school English teachers' views on grammar teaching and their actual teaching practices. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What do high school English teachers think about teaching grammar to improve students' language skills?
- What approach do teachers believe as more effective in teaching grammar? Deductive or inductive approach?
- What method/approach do these teachers typically use to teach English?

#### **4. Research Design**

The case study of the beliefs of school teachers and their actual instructional practices in grammar teaching attempted to answer the research questions asked in objective part. Therefore the researcher used the case study design method to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of complex issues in its real life context of teaching grammar.

#### **5. Research Site**

The researcher selected the research site based on subjects' consent. That is, the participants' cooperation or consent will help the researcher in order to get the necessary data. This can be achieved through rapport already established. Muijis (2004:40) explains, "Probably the most sampling method is convenience sampling. This occurs where researchers have easy access to particular sites, such as teachers, they have worked with before or pupils in their own schools..." Shortly, schools where a researcher can get the subjects' easy consent are considered to be appropriate for the study.

Therefore, the research site of this study was Ankesha Senior Secondary and Preparatory School, in Ankesha Woreda, Awi Zone, Ethiopia.

#### **6. Population**

The first step in developing any sample design is to clearly define the set of universe or population to be studied. In Ankesha senior secondary and preparatory school, there are 22 English language teachers. Therefore, the population of the study was all 22 English language teachers of the selected school.

#### **7. Data Collection Instruments**

Multiple sources of information are needed because no single source of information can be relied upon to provide an adequate perspective (Patton, 1990). Therefore, to achieve the objective of this case study research, three different data collection sources were used: questionnaires, observations and group discussions. These tools, which would otherwise be incomplete, are used appropriately to gather relevant information for the research being investigated.

#### **Methods of Data Analysis**

After identifying a research question and gathering relevant information through three different instruments, researchers classified the data for interpretation. Qualitative method was used to analyze and interpret data from focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaires, and classroom observations. Quantitative methods, including simple statistical data analysis (percentages and means), were also used to interpret data from the Likert closed-scale questionnaire (Kumar, 1999:223). In the closed part of the questionnaire, a 5-point Likert scale of "Strongly agree/ strongly disagree" was used. The items in this part were divided into three tables and the overall means of tables 1 and 3 were calculated and similar items were analyzed and interpreted together. In addition, we used the mean of each item and the percentage of the options in the analysis to identify teachers' beliefs and their influence on each of the items.

Based on Peacock's (1999) suggestions, the five-item Likert scale was divided into three by combining "strongly agree and agree" into one scale and "strongly disagree and disagree" into one scale. This was done to simplify reporting. Also, numerical data and means expressed as percentages are rounded to the nearest integer for interpretation.

On the other hand, the data obtained from the group discussions were recorded to facilitate repeated listening. And a careful effort was made to sort out commonalities and key points from the comments and comments of subjects in focus group discussions and open-ended questionnaires. Once the common baselines were determined, most of the views of the subjects were interpreted, and some of them were described as spoken or written. Then, the qualitative data is sorted and analyzed with the quantitative data to arrive at relatively accurate conclusions.

## 8. Findings

Coinciding with the first objective of research paper, teachers have positive thinking about teaching grammar to improve students' language skills. It seems alright to suggest that high school English language teachers have positive beliefs about grammar teaching, and their beliefs converge with their instructional judgments or with their actual classroom practices. It could also be reasonable to deduce that the teachers have been influenced very little by those theories of second language acquisition that downgrade the role of explicit, form-focused instruction in the learning of a foreign language.

Concerning to the second objective of the research, targeted teachers believed that both deductive and inductive grammar teaching methods are effective and should be practiced. However, the results of classroom observations and group discussions indicate that teachers attach great importance to the deductive method and they were not familiar with the inductive method to teach grammar inductively. In other words, there was no consistent agreement between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices about grammar teaching methods. This was in contrast to the literature which states that the beliefs of the instructor and reflects the nature of the instruction. Based on the results obtained on grammar teaching methods, it also seems to be concluded that traditional language teaching methods/ approaches were prevalent in selected secondary schools.

About objective 3, the finding revealed that the teachers' beliefs about the preference for traditional methods or CLT approaches were indicated. Besides indicating their beliefs on the basis of the results in the questionnaire, an attempt was also made to reveal whether or not the teachers' beliefs about the teaching methods were reflected in their real classroom activities. Hence, the notes made during classroom observation were used in the analysis to cross-check the match or the mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their classroom activities. Moreover, the data gathered from the focus group discussions were treated together with the results of the questionnaire to reason out the mismatch between their beliefs about the principles of language teaching methods and their actual classroom practices.

## 9. Conclusions

The major objective of this study was to find out what beliefs high school English language teachers have about grammar instruction and the types of foreign language teaching methods. The study also aimed at revealing facts about whether or not the teachers' beliefs converge with their real classroom activities.

The results indicated that high school English language teachers have positive beliefs about the development of communicative classroom environments that blend several principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) such as employing free communicative activities, focusing on fluency, using authentic materials, etc. In spite of this, a wide disparity between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom activities was observed. In other words, the teachers accept the principles of CLT at the level of beliefs, but they fail to apply them in practice.

It was also indicated that the teachers have favorable beliefs about the inductive grammar teaching approach. Nonetheless, their classroom practices significantly deviated from their beliefs, i.e. the teachers were observed teaching grammar deductively, not inductively. Employing the deductive approach of grammar instruction is one of the basic features of traditional language teaching approaches. This result could, therefore, suggest that traditional language teaching approaches/ methods are prevalent in the selected school.

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