Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 37 | Issue 2 Article 5

2012

Grammar Teaching Revisited: EFL Teachers between Grammar Abstinence and Formal Grammar Teaching

Ahmad Nazari
London Metropolitan University, a.nazari@londonmet.ac.uk

Negah Allahyar
Universiti Sains Malaysia, negah.al@gmail.com

Recommended Citation
Nazari, Ahmad and Allahyar, Negah (2012) "Grammar Teaching Revisited: EFL Teachers between Grammar Abstinence and Formal Grammar Teaching," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 37: Iss. 2, Article 5.
Available at: http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss2/5

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss2/5

Grammar Teaching Revisited: EFL Teachers between Grammar Abstinence and Formal Grammar Teaching

Dr Ahmad Nazari
London Metropolitan University, UK
Negah Allahyar
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract: The study of English language teachers' cognitions and its relationship to teachers' classroom practices have recently been the focus of language teaching and teacher education (Borg, 2006 & 2010). However, rarely have the studies delved into teachers' knowledge about grammar (reviewed by Borg, 2001) or investigated the relationships between teachers' knowledge about grammar and teachers' actions (Borg, 2003; Sanchez, 2010). Moreover, these studies have been mostly conducted by English native speaker researchers who do not necessarily have the same cultural or linguistic background of the participants in the studies (Andrew, 2001 cited in Sanchez, 2010, p. 45). Also, they are largely confined to English native speaker teachers and few have addressed non-native speaker teachers in countries where English is a foreign language (Sanchez, 2010, p. 45). In response to these gaps in the area of second language teaching, this study investigates four English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' views about grammar teaching to give an aggregate picture of the way they teach grammar. The research database consists of audio-recordings of these teachers' lessons and interviews in which they explain why they adopt a deductive or an inductive approach, how they teach grammar and how they respond to students' errors. Implications for non-native EFL teacher education are also discussed.

Introduction

There are at least three groups of language researchers as far as their views on teaching grammar are concerned. As Rodrigllez and Avent (2002) maintain, those who support Krashens' input hypothesis, known as "anti-grammarians", doubt the role grammar instruction plays in language learning; this group supports "comprehensible input" by arguing that this type of input would enormously help the learner improve both their fluency and accuracy (Rodriguez and Avent, 2002; Stern, 1983; Yim, 1998). The second group, "pro-grammarians", claim that formal instruction plays an important role and it should not be abandoned because direct grammar instruction helps significantly with accuracy and speeds second language (L2) learning (Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers, 1997). The third group claim that factors such as age, cognition and maturation of learners should be taken into consideration while teaching grammar (Celce-Murcia, 1991 & 2001).

A review of the literature reflects the variety of positions which researchers have taken on the issue of grammar, but little evidence exists on the actual processes of grammar instruction and instances of grammar presentation in EFL contexts. This study is an empirical endeavour to expand our understanding of EFL teachers' attitudes towards grammar teaching.

Data were collected from different classroom settings in order to find out how teachers present grammar lessons and how these lessons relate to their personal views on grammar and grammar teaching. This study, therefore, explores the following questions:

1. What are the current practices of the EFL teachers in Iran with regard to teaching grammar?
2. What attitudes do the teachers have to grammar teaching?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between the teachers' knowledge about grammar (KAG) and the use of a deductive/inductive approach[1]?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between the teachers' error correction and their application of a deductive/inductive approach?

Literature Review

The trend of ELT in Iran has reached a special status within the last 25 years. Along the fast spread of English as an international language, there has been an increasing interest among Iranians in quest of English as a means of intercultural communication. Limitations and constraints of public schools and universities in embracing students' ever-increasing aspiration to learn English communicatively have caused enterprise of English learning and teaching to grow rapidly and in fact have more than tripled the number of private institutions over the past decade. It is perhaps not surprising that in recent years, the pedagogical work of these institutions has come under intense scrutiny by language policy-makers, academic departments and funding bodies. English language institutions have brought exceptional growing focus on English language communication and the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been prescribed to Iranian EFL teachers (Razmjoo and Riazi, 2006). However, Parvaresh (2008) claims that the results of CLT classes have been far from being satisfactory and maintains that "learners eagerly register for those classes and attentively participate in them, but the improvement in their communicative ability does not seem to be satisfactory and the number of adult EFL learners who drop out after one or two terms is too high to turn a blind eye to" (Parvaresh, 2008, p. 154). One of the reasons, among others, for this might be the teaching approach adopted by language teachers (Ramirez and Stromquist, 1979).

Though teachers' attitudes and cognitions have an important role in underpinning teachers' teaching approaches, little qualitative research is available on that area (Borg, 1998) in the context of Iran especially at EFL private institutions where their EFL teachers and learners have been neglected as participants of the study (Talebinezhad and Sadeghi, 2005). Moreover, how EFL teachers' error correction is influenced by their teaching approaches and how the latter is affected by their KAG are research areas which have not been explored adequately. Borg (1999), looking at the use of L2 grammar terminology in relation to teachers' practices and cognitions, maintains that further research in various contexts is required to gain a broader understanding of teachers' cognitions and practices in using L2 grammar terminology (Borg, 1999, p. 122). He also contends that "insight into individual teachers' use of terminology in a range of instructional situations ... can inform our understanding of the specific contextual factors that impinge on this facet of L2 teaching" (Borg, 1999, p. 123). In a similar vein, Pahissa and Tragant (2009) point out that "for NNS (non-native speaker) teachers, lack of confidence in KAL (Knowledge About Language) and more generally in their language proficiency may be a central issue, but one which has

[1] A deductive approach to language teaching underlines explaining the grammar item to learners and then training them in applying it, whereas an inductive approach fosters practicing the syntactic structure in context and then asking learners to infer the grammar rule from practical examples. While the former is said to be more teacher-centered, the latter is considered to be more learner-centered.

received little attention from researchers according to Borg (2003, 2005) and Pawlak (2007)" (Pahissa and Tragant, 2009, p. 48). They also highlight that the situation of NNS teachers who share a common language with their students and who work in a non-English speaking country needs to be researched (Pahissa and Tragant, 2009, p. 56). The above encouraged us to carry out the present research with NNS EFL teachers in a non-English speaking context with the aim of answering the questions mentioned on page two.

Due to the lack of qualitative research on teachers' actual practice of grammar and teachers' cognition in EFL contexts, especially in Iran, this literature review has looked mostly at English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms to see how the previous research findings have contributed to this issue.

In 1996, Numerichs' analysis of 26 diaries of novice ESL teachers showed that they felt frustrated about some issues of teaching and many of them avoided teaching grammar because their knowledge of grammar was weak or they felt unable to explain the rules (Numrich, 1996). Borg (1999) illustrated the new perspective on L2 grammar teaching and argued how teachers' decisions regarding grammar were related to their conflicting cognitions about language, learning, grammar teaching and students. "For example one teacher believed it was important for students to learn grammar yet he taught it rarely because of his self perception-he was insecure in his knowledge about grammar and was afraid he would be caught out by students' questions" (Borg, 1999, p. 26). Johnston and Goettsch (2000) explored aspects of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of learners of four experienced ESL teachers in explaining grammar and other aspects of language. Observation and interviews showed that these categories of knowledge are intertwined in complex ways, though knowledge of English was vital. Concerning the type of grammar explanation, the explanation of grammar rules was not rejected by any of the teachers and their opinions on the degree of metalanguage use depended on the different level of courses. Borg (2001) also examined the relationship between teachers' self perceptions of knowledge of grammar and their classroom practice. To this end, he observed and interviewed two experienced English language teachers (Eric and Dave). The study showed how teachers' knowledge about grammar (KAG) had an influence on their teaching grammar and teachers' lack of confidence made their behaviour change. For example, Eric, who had built up good confidence in KAG, in those case of uncertainty about grammar parried the students' questions and deferred them to the next session, or provided his students with a direct answer himself rather than bouncing back those questions to them and getting feedback from them. Dave's lack of confidence in his KAG led him to minimise grammar teaching and evade spontaneous grammar discussions.

More recently, Pahissa and Tragant (2009) investigated the metatalk and cognition underlying the behaviour of three experienced English non-native teachers (Emma, Joel and Miquel) teaching in Spain. All the three teachers expressed that their grammar teaching practice had been largely influenced by their own experience of learning English. Emma acknowledged that she used explicit grammar teaching, translation and terminology in CLT classes, though in teacher training courses she had been advised to avoid grammar and translation. She believed that such tools (grammar teaching, translation and use of grammar terminology) helped her as an English learner. Unlike Emma, Joel minimized grammar and did not use terminology. Joel's approach to grammar was affected by his teachers at school and university. Similar to Emma, Joel stressed using translation because he as a learner had found it a useful strategy. Miquel and Emma adopted a similar approach to metatalk since both favored the above mentioned tools. However, while Miquel said that he preferred to be more communicative oriented and use less grammar in his lessons, he found it difficult. Miquel's lack of confidence in vocabulary and in the command of the foreign language made him teach grammar more than he actually wanted to (Pahissa and Tragant, 2009, p. 57).

Method of the Study

The goal of the study was to identify "naturally" occurring processes of grammar teaching without intervening in the sources of data or controlling teachers' behaviour. "The form of qualitative research, alternatively known as naturalistic … takes a holistic perspective. An interpretive qualitative study utilizes interviews, observation, and other forms of data collection within the time frame to understand the actors' meanings for social actions (an emic perspective)" (Davis, 1995, p. 432). Because verification of theories or approving of hypotheses was not our concern, so naturalistic design was the best framework within which we could explore the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007).

The reasons for gathering the data in the classes of X language institution in X part of Tehran, the capital of Iran, were as follows. First, observations and interviews were common practice for both teachers and students, as the institution held teacher-training programs. The trainees of these programs were required to observe different classes and interview different teachers of the X language institution as part of the teacher-training program. Second, familiarity with the system of the site gave us a better understanding of the context and data. Third, the teachers of that institution expressed their willingness and interest to participate in the study. As was mentioned earlier, they were easily accessible and there was no time constraint. They were experienced teachers who had taught English in different contexts and language institutions in Iran. That language institution was fairly easy for us to get to (it was accessible to us) (Ellen, 1984). As Ellen writes, ''The accessibility of community informants to an accepted fieldworker can be a great time saver and advantage'' (1984, p. 241). The language institution was hospitable to our inquiry since the teachers of that institution were known to us. Needless to say, choosing the field and participants is concerned, among other things, with its accessibility, hospitality and the opportunity it provides to the researcher to learn. Too little can be learnt from less hospitable and less accessible sites and participants (Stake, 1995 & 2000). As Stake puts it, the researcher can lean "toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn…. That may mean taking the one most accessible, the one we can spend the most time with" (2000, p. 446).

Cohen et al. (2007) state that careful sampling is important as it increases the validity in research. Researchers are asked to take into account sample size in relation to the teacher's time, access to teachers, teaching schedules and the feasibility of conducting research within a live setting such as a school (Cohen et al., 2007). Cases must be chosen in a way that we can learn "the most" (Marriam, 1988, p. 48) or the maximum of information can be drawn from what is under the study with regard to the available time period for the study (Tellis, 1997). Therefore, purposive sampling was used to identify "information-rich" cases that can then be studied in depth (Patton, 2000). In acknowledging this, four English teachers holding a Bachelor or Master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language were purposively selected as the participants of this study. They had been teaching English for over three years and not only had been teaching English at the language institution where the data were collected but also at other institutions.

Students of this institution took a placement test and sat an interview to be placed at the appropriate level when they registered or had passed the previous level with the minimum of 75 out of 100. These levels included Beginners, Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Advanced. The students were adults ranging from 18 to 30 years old. They attended the classes three days a week, which amounted approximately one month and a half.

The textbooks which were used in the language institution for teaching EFL learners were the six books entitled *Spectrum: A Communicative Course in English* (1994) as well as various story books as complementary materials. The content of these books can be described as a six-level course in English that intends to teach readers to communicate in real-life situations. The language presented provides input for practice. The books include opportunities for personal expression and activities that stimulate communication. The

language teaching method stipulated by the language institution was CLT while teaching the four language skills.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, we dealt with two sets of data. We observed and recorded four classes using an audio-tape device. A total of three weeks of observations were carried out, totalling about 801 minutes. Those parts of the teachers' classes consisting of grammar explanations, grammar teaching and error correction were transcribed. Another set of data came from four pre and post-observation interviews with the teachers, which were audio-taped and transcribed subsequently. The pre-observation interviews were designed to obtain factual information, i.e. information about the teachers' backgrounds, qualifications and experience. Drawing on the key events (those incidents which raised questions about the teachers' ways of or views about grammar teaching and KAG), the post-observation interviews were designed to make explicit the teachers' personal theories and their rationale behind their action by having their comments on the key instructional events in their lessons and explaining why they decided to use particular techniques or strategies (see Borg, 1998 & 1999). In fact, the data gathered through post-observation interviews were used to triangulate the data observed. In other words, triangulation, which is one of the procedures to ensure the credibility of the qualitative research and to validate data (Cohen et al., 2007), was adopted. The relevant parts of the observation and interview tapes were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is the process of "encoding qualitative information" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). "Theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observation and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (ibid). Once transcribed, it was possible to establish general themes from the teachers' lessons and interviews and the coding process commenced. Coding is a process of discovering, naming and categorizing phenomena by organizing it based on its dimensions and properties (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The labels which were used in the process of coding, later, entered into a code list for the purpose of grouping similar labels. Each group was then given a generic name, which was indeed an emerging theme. A key episode from each teacher's lesson is presented below with reference to their comments on it.

Case 1/Mina

The class was an advanced level for non-native speakers of English. There were 15 students in the class, 4 males and 11 females. The lesson aims were as follows: Mina was supposed to teach passive voice, active voice and the infinitive of purpose. One of the features of Mina's work was prompting students to talk by personalizing conversational activities and helping them use the language meaningfully regardless of grammar. The observation revealed that she did not teach grammar as such. Mina prioritized fluency over accuracy and grammar instruction. Actually, as she stated in a post-observation interview, she regarded grammar as a block to communication that would distract students from the main goal, fluency. In her opinion, grammar did not guarantee communication because there was a gap between the "applied" rules and "learned" ones. She also labelled grammar as "boring," "exhausting" and appropriate only for "self-study". According to Mina, "exposure" was the best way to learn grammar.

The observation prompted us to ask what the real motive behind her neglect of grammar was. During the observation, few words of grammar terminology and no words of grammar explanation were seen. Mina avoided grammar terminology and refused to answer students' grammar questions. She instructed her students to refer to the examples she gave

them to figure out the rules. Mina taught active and passive voices by presenting some examples of active sentences that she herself changed into passive ones, asking her students to analyze the examples and draw rules from them. Episode 1 below provides an example of her grammar treatment:
(T stands for the teacher; S stands for the student)
T: Look at the example and try to draw rules. I' m sure that you can.
S: Excuse me! Is it passive or active?
S: This is passive.
T: Terms aren't important though. I don't know what passive or active is. I don't want to teach grammar.

Here are Mina's comments on episode 1:
I don't know what is present perfect and past even in Farsi… I don't know the grammar labels, present perfect and simple present. I can't teach grammar through terms, because I have learned it by my feeling. [She probably meant inductively]. I hate grammar… it is boring and exhaust my students' patience. We ourselves don't like grammar, do we?

The relationship between her knowledge about grammar (KAG) and her actions is interesting here. Her comments above seem to suggest that she does not have a good command of grammar and grammar labels and probably that is why she avoided further discussion with her students by saying, "Terms aren't important though". Mina's decision to disregard students' grammar questions could be due to her insufficient KAG for the task of teaching grammar. Actually, she regarded grammar and teaching it as a useless activity: "Why should we teach grammar? There is no use in it" she said. She spent time on the listening and speaking skills. This explains why a taped dialogue took up 70 minutes of the class time. From the interview data we collected, Mina justified her teaching approach by using terms such as "input", "exposure" and "CLT".

To teach the infinitive of purpose, Mina carried out substitution drills. She seemed to assume that her students would draw rules from the drills. Unfortunately her students were unable to grasp the grammar, as the lesson ended with the students' whining and complaining. Error correction rarely occurred in the session. The observations showed that the students repeated errors and the teacher did not attempt to correct them. By putting the emphasis on "fluency", Mina, as she said, regarded "accuracy" as a matter of language development which would take care of itself. In sum, the teacher avoided answering grammar questions, encouraged her students to draw the rules from drills or a couple of examples, and suggested they study grammar on their own.

Case 2/Samareh

The class was an advanced level for non-native speakers of English. It consisted of 17 students, 8 males and 9 females. The lesson aims were as follows: The teacher was supposed to teach passive voice, active voice, gerunds and infinitives. Contrary to Mina's class, a different picture was found in Samareh's class. In this class, the grammar teaching method observed was to explain grammar points followed by some exercises. Grammar instruction and the use of grammar labels were central.

Actually, some contrasts between Mina and other teachers emerged regarding the teachers' treatment of grammar. For example, Samareh defined grammar "as a body of language through which we can talk about it." She was one of the teachers who emphasized grammar instruction for "effective communication." Grammar was not an end for Samareh, rather it was a vehicle through which people could achieve communication, as she said. In her opinion, grammar was as important as fluency and teaching grammar could not be avoided because "grammar makes speaking and writing more systematic" and "as a set of principles provides one of the means by which we can evaluate students." She believed

substitution drills were a good technique for teaching grammar. Although Samareh said an inductive approach to grammar was the best way to present grammar, a different reality was observed in her class.
Episode 2 below illustrates Samarehs' work:
T: Look at the grey box, the grammar frame. Look at the gerund. After these expressions, you should have gerunds.
S: What does 'gerund' mean?
T: It is a noun, a verb plus 'ing' <she went up to the board and wrote v+ ing =cook + ing then she read the grammar box>
T: I have trouble cooking.
T: I enjoy travelling. <She read out other examples from the grammar box>
T: Look at the second part, preposition plus gerund <she read out examples>. We can't use infinitives after prepositions; a gerund is kind of noun.

Although Samareh stressed that the presentation of grammar should be "functional and meaningful" [the primary focus should be on meaning rather than form], the observation of her class suggested that, in contrast to what she said, grammar terminology was heavily used and to ensure that students understood grammar, translation was adopted as well. In fact, priority was given to grammar over communication and all underway activities were directed by grammar. Explaining her real practice of grammar, she stated, "Most of the time, I try to teach grammar meaningfully but in the students' speaking I see wrong structures… so consequently I have to teach the grammar rules mechanically."

In presenting passive and active sentences, she gave examples of the target language structure. Though she said she taught grammar inductively, she worked out grammar using grammar terms and formulas as well as the first language (L1). Samareh softened her remarks later by saying, "It is very difficult to teach grammar inductively, so in advanced levels, there is no need to bother. Besides, it is time consuming…Terminology is a kind of tool to teach grammar and it is part of grammar presentation in our materials. " She continued, "Using terminology helps us to compare the first and second language to learn the latter easier. If you know the function of gerunds in the first language, you will definitely understand its function in the second language better. I think in advanced levels, we can easily apply deductive teaching of grammar and even ask students to translate some sentences into Farsi. Plus, knowing terms and having a good knowledge of grammar gives more credibility to you in the students' eyes, because at this level, I mean advanced level, students are more engaged with language and care about the details of grammar."

The observation demonstrated that Samareh focused on accuracy. Her feedback on students' speech was limited to grammar rules that the students had learned in that particular session. We also noted her habit of being selective in correcting her students' errors. In writing, terminology was used to correct the students' errors. Justifying the neglect of some of her students' errors and not being consistent in error correction, she stated: "I'm very careful not to correct Babaks' trivial errors. He, one of my best students, is very sensitive to his errors. As soon as I correct him, he shows a reaction; he smacks his palm against his forehead."

Case 3/Mahnaz

The class was a basic level for non-native speakers of English. There were 20 students in this class, 7 males and 13 females. The lesson aim was teaching the simple past tense. Explicit elaboration of grammar was a recurrent feature of Mahnaz's class. Although she defined language as "what people say not what they should say", she said that EFL students should be familiar with all the basic elements of grammar to use the language "correctly." In her view, inductive ways of teaching are appropriate for beginners and teaching grammar

terminology is appropriate for advanced levels. She said, "If they are beginners, they should learn inductively by using different examples in sentences and at the end, the teacher should say the rule to the learners, but in advanced levels teachers should introduce different names of tenses since the students should know them."

The observation of Mahnaz' class indicated that her class was highly terminology based with few examples. By using the grammar terminology, she seemed to see no need for further practice. Her approach to grammar was writing some examples of simple past on the board and analyzing them through formulas. In terms of inductive teaching, the teacher did not give the students the opportunity to derive the rules on their own and reach their own conclusions. In fact, grammar activities did not require active participation of her students. The teacher spent the class time on teaching grammar by resorting to terminology. The observation indicated a lack of use of inductive teaching techniques. In fact, there appeared to be a contrast between the teacher's cognition and her practice in terms of grammar instruction because in beginners' classes, terminology was heavily used. Episode 3 below illustrates Mahnaz's work:

T: <The teacher went to the board, wrote the following examples on the board and then started reading them out while underlining them >

1. He heard the telephone five minutes ago.
2. I worked at this company from 1996 to 2000.
3. I played tennis yesterday.
3. My brother left Tehran last night.
4. This morning my brother and I went to the supermarket.
5. Maryam bought her sister a doll last week.
6. We stopped here three days ago.

T: Ok, look at these examples, worked, played and stopped all have an 'ed'. This is called simple past tense. We use this tense to describe actions in the past. These actions started and finished in the past. Look, the sentences have an adverb of time, yesterday, last night, last week and three days ago. Worked, played and stopped are regular verbs. < The teacher wrote on the board (Simple past tense: simple or base form + '-ed' or '-d': work + 'ed' = worked). Then she re-underlined the irregular verbs saying that they were irregular and that the students had to memorize them.>

As for error correction, she explained her instructional strategy as follows: In reading, "choral repetition" is useful and in speaking, only the big mistakes should be corrected. Most of the errors will be "automatically" corrected. In her words, "learners will learn to correct forms automatically over time". Mahnaz's reason for ignoring some of the students' errors was, as she said in her interview, due to a sense of frustration developed in her professional life. In other words, students' repeated grammar errors were the main source of her frustration at correcting them. She said, "There is no use of correcting errors."

Case 4/ Sanaz

The class was a basic level for non-native speakers of English. There were 20 students in this class, 10 males and 10 females. The lesson aim was teaching Modals (can, could and may). In her interview, Sanaz said she was impressed by her English teacher, who taught her grammar using substitution drills. Sanaz adopted this technique occasionally in her classes. In Sanaz's estimate, "Teaching too much grammar may intimidate students; so only a trifle of the time should be allocated to grammar." The observation contradicted the teachers' reported belief in grammar. Throughout much of the extract shown below (Episode 4), it is clear that Sanaz's verbal behavior seems to allow the students to focus more on grammar:

Episode 4:

T: In this unit we are going to talk about 'can'. I can study English. I can jump. What is the meaning of 'can'? It means ability (the teacher says the meaning of 'can' in L1). We use 'can' for ability. Look at the grammar box. I can dance. I can sing. I can write. Look at 'write'. What is the role of 'write'? It is the main verb. 'Can' is an auxiliary. It comes before a main verb. Now if we want to change it into negative, we use 'not'.

Sanaz explained her method, saying:

"When I'm to teach grammar, I use a diagram and examples. I give an example but if I can, I never write the rule in this way: subject +have or has+ pp." While she said that she had gained her knowledge of grammar "through practice not knowing the rules" and emphasized presenting grammar through examples and diagrams, it was interesting to see why her words did not match her behaviour. In support of what she did in the class, Sanaz said that teaching grammar by using examples was more difficult than explaining it by using terminology. In correcting errors, she fell back on terminology to correct errors made by her students:

T: 'Slowly' is an adverb and we use adverbs at the end of sentences to explain? <Inflecting her voice, she herself answers 'verb'> What is the adjective of 'slowly'?

S: 'Slow'.

T: We use 'ly' at the end of adjectives to change them into adverbs.

The way Sanaz corrected grammatical errors led her to explain and use metalinguistic knowledge. She did not allow peer correction in her class. Her rationale for such behavior consisted of the following: "In the first session, I tell my students not to correct others; I myself will correct your mistakes… sometimes the students just wait for their teachers' failure and mistake." She continued, "I want to appear as a source of knowledge in my class and I don't want my students to doubt me. If I do not correct my students, they'll think I'm not knowledgeable."

Discussion

Teachers' knowledge and teaching grammar

While some teachers tended to avoid teaching grammar and even answering students' grammar questions, some put a great emphasis on grammar. The former, who applied inductive approaches, confessed that teaching grammar was difficult for them. However, the latter, who applied deductive approaches, seemed more comfortable with and confident about utilizing traditional ways to teach and explain grammar. To ensure students' understanding of grammar, the latter group reverted to terminologies, explained syntactic structures explicitly, used substitution drills occasionally, and did not abandon L1 in their classes. In fact, these teachers gave a wider coverage of grammar. In other words, the teachers who displayed a wider knowledge of grammar were those who adopted deductive approaches.

One of the reasons for the way the teachers treat grammar could be attributed to their own knowledge of grammar. Woods (1996) (cited in Johnston and Goettsch, 2000), for example, from the study of eight ESL teachers in Canada, suggested that "teachers' beliefs, assumptions, knowledge (BAK) underlines whatever teachers say and do." Similarly, a considerable number of studies pointed out the role of teachers' knowledge in making decisions in class (See, for example, Johnston and Goettsch, 2000; Mitchell, 1994; Numerich, 1996: Shulman, 19873; Borg, 2001). Mitchell et al. (1994) suggested from a study of foreign language teachers that "teachers' regular avoidance of technical vocabulary… seemed linked to the lack of knowledge and insecurity in using grammatical or discourse terminology" (Borg, 1999, p. 118). Other studies by Schulman (1989) and Borg (2001) confirmed that teachers' knowledge about grammar (KAG) influenced teachers' teaching grammar.

Although the teachers who applied deductive approaches said that certain factors should also be taken into consideration while teaching, there seem to be barriers working

against these variables as far as the teachers' sense of self-image is concerned. For example, Samareh stated, "In presenting terminology, there should be correspondence between the first language acquisition and second language learning in that grammar terms should be used while teaching adults." Despite the fact that she believed that teenagers were not interested in grammar labels and terminologies, she still carried on teaching them grammar terms. She stated that "Teens aren't interested in terminology but I use it." Samareh's comments prompted us to ask: Why do you insist on grammar labels though you know that it is problematic with regard to their age? She replied that she wanted to be the sole authority and source of knowledge in her classes. This suggests that making an impression seemed to be of a greater importance than clear teaching. It seems that the teachers employed technical terms to give the impression to the students that their classes were of high quality. Similar results were reported by Sanchez (2010). Both teachers interviewed by Sanchez, Emma and Sophia, maintained that they decided to include grammar in their teaching because they believed grammar instruction gave their teaching face validity in their students' eyes. To preserve their reputation or show they had a good command of grammar, the teachers of the current study who applied deductive approaches did not even let the students correct each other's mistakes (e.g. see Sanaz on peer correction on page 13). In sum, in addition to KAG, the teacher's self-image also seems to be one of the factors that affect their decision on whether to adopt a deductive or an inductive approach and how to correct students' errors.

Our observations of and interviews with the teachers indicated that there was also another issue causing EFL teachers to treat grammar in a certain way. The issue is being aware of only a limited version of CLT. This is discussed in the following section.

Teachers and CLT

Though all language teachers called themselves CLT teachers and the school and curriculum stipulated that teachers must apply CLT to their classes, the observations revealed that they, particularly those who applied deductive approaches, were not implementing the CLT principles as such. While there was an expectation of game like activities, information gap, role play, meaningful tasks, pair and group work, the teachers taught grammar in a way that did not appear to be consistent with the CLT techniques and procedures. As the data revealed, the classes had the features of traditional classes. The lessons were teacher-fronted with few communicative activities. Hui (1997) argues that many teachers do not distinguish real communicative activities from false ones, mistaking linguistic activities with some artificial classroom situations for communicative tasks. Despite the fact that the interviewed teachers agreed on inductive grammar teaching, the data indicated that most of them were quite attached to deductive ways of teaching in practice. According to Hui (1997), teachers are still proponents of the deductive ways of teaching, though they claim they are practicing CLT. In a similar vein, Nazari (2007) points out that although we should not rule out the impact of institutional constraints (for example, limited class time, big class size, prescribed syllabus and exam washback) on EFL teachers' teaching activities, some EFL teachers apply a narrow view of communicative competence and Communicative Language Teaching to their classes, because they have a general indistinct view of the broad and narrow versions of communicative competence (Nazari, 2007, pp. 202-210). Likewise, Mowlaei and Rahimi (2010) reported that the observation of EFL teachers who preached CLT showed that the observed classes were run as if they were not based on CLT principles and that the classes had both the features of the Grammar-Translation and CLT approach. They argue that these teachers followed the method by which they had been taught during their school years or the method they observed during their practical teaching classes module. Mowlaei and Rahimi believe this shows that being merely familiar with the concepts of CLT does not guarantee its successful implementation in the classroom (2010, p. 1527).

Teachers and error correction

One of the interesting points emerging from the analysis of the data was that more error corrections were seen in deductive than inductive classes. It also emerged that the teachers who applied deductive approaches corrected their students intermittently. Regarding students' errors and error correction, Mahnaz, Mina and Samareh said that teachers should not correct students' language mistakes. Numerich's (1996) study revealed that many teachers chose not to correct their students' errors, but by the end of the semester, these teachers recognized the importance of error correction and were aware that students wanted feedback on their errors. One of the likely reasons that the teachers overlook their students' errors could be their own knowledge of grammar, grammar teaching, and/or error correction procedures. We found no fixed pattern in the teachers' efforts to correct students' errors. Sometimes they seemed to overlook an error made by one student and then corrected the same mistake when another student made it. Formal grammar instruction requires teachers to have had professional training in language teaching. Samareh referred to the lack of proper training teachers receive and said, "Our knowledge of grammar is limited and it is very difficult to run advanced classes because we are expected not to leave out any details." In fact, without adequate teacher education, teachers cannot effectively learn how to put into practice what they theoretically learn. Borg (2001) noted that training teachers gives them the opportunity to assess their KAG and identify their weaknesses. In addition, training teachers in the various approaches to error correction and feedback would allow them to choose those approaches that match their objectives and contexts. It is also worth noting that sometimes error correction, as a frustrating task, discourages teachers from correcting some errors. Mahnaz and Sanaz unequivocally expressed their frustration at correcting students.

The teachers who adopted deductive approaches always had recourse to teacher correction and did not give the learner any opportunity of self-correction or peer correction. As was discussed earlier, it may be in the interests of maintaining their authority and self-image that some teachers overcorrect students' grammar errors. Another reason for having recourse to teacher correction might be a lack of enough class time. It is known that teachers' workloads are heavy and they are also expected to cover a great deal of materials in a short time. To save time and energy, some teachers revert to direct teacher correction without trying self and peer correction procedures. The other reason for tackling students' errors unilaterally by the teacher could be the lack of enough time to involve the students in learning and teaching procedures. As far as error correction is concerned, the analysis of the data indicated that the students were institutionalised as 'an object with ears rather than a subject with voices' (Cummins, 2000). Loosening the institutional constraints such as teachers' workloads and class time could help teachers to involve their students in learning and teaching activities. Benjamin Franklin aptly points out the significance of involvement of learners in educational activities: "Tell me and I'll forget; teach me and I'll remember; involve me and I'll learn." This is what is called 'learning by doing' or 'experiential learning' (gaining knowledge and skills from experience). Merely observing and hearing what other people do and say will not lead to learning in its full and real sense.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, it would be fair to say that teachers' practical and pedagogical knowledge has an influence on the way they teach grammar. The analysis illustrated that this knowledge influenced their teaching styles and drifted them towards certain grammar teaching procedures with which they were probably comfortable. The teachers who seemed

to have more KAG usually gave a wider coverage of grammar and grammar teaching activities. The data also revealed that for the teachers making a good impression was of a greater importance than delivering more efficient teaching. To this end, some teachers often employed technical terms to give the students the appearance that their classes were of high quality. Some teachers who claimed to apply Communicative Language Teaching appeared to have a limited vision of CLT techniques and procedures.

Some teachers tended to avoid teaching grammar due to the fact that their knowledge of grammar was limited. Others put a great emphasis on grammar to ensure students' understanding of grammar. The latter reverted to terminologies, used substitution drills and did not abandon L1 in their classes. Limited knowledge of grammar on the part of the teacher and uncertainty about errors seemed to be among the factors that resulted in overlooking the students' grammar errors.

In addition to the above factors involved in exerting constraints on teachers, we appreciate that long working hours and the impact of exams could also have an effect on the teachers' teaching approaches. These constraints have been discussed by Ostovar Namaghi (2006). Interviewing five experienced EFL Iranian teachers, Ostovar Namaghi elaborates on the constraints which steer the teachers' work and, in brief, classifies these into three categories: "The 'mandated national curriculum' controls input. The 'mandated national testing scheme' controls output. The circle of control is tightened by 'make the grade pressure'" (Ostovar Namaghi, 2006, p. 90).

Despite certain challenges and barriers to the implementation of CLT in EFL settings, there is a rationale for adopting this method, particularly when it comes to improving learners' communicative competence, which addresses what EFL learners need for higher education or career opportunities. Given that in EFL contexts rarely do most EFL learners have a chance to become exposed to English out of the classroom, these learners are much in need of what communicative practices in the classroom offer them. To meet such needs, decreasing teachers' workloads to give them more time to prepare and implement authentic and communicative activities and to enhance their awareness of language and teaching it could be helpful.

The results of this study are valuable for EFL institutions and policy makers to reflect on the situation and improve their curricula and teacher training programs. EFL teacher educators are likely to become aware of the concerns of EFL teachers and the sources of their frustration. For instance, teacher training programs can include in their modules units on various types of corrective feedback and different approaches to error correction. In the light of the findings, EFL teacher educators are also expected to familiarize EFL teachers with the concept of CLT more fully to guarantee its successful implementation. It is more likely that these efforts would avail if EFL teacher educators dedicate more space on EFL programs to developing language-related knowledge (language awareness) and content-related knowledge (e.g. knowledge of CLT) of teachers. Moreover, EFL teacher educators can provide prospective teachers with the practical knowledge of other EFL teachers during the initial teacher education programs. Hiebert et al. (2002) call for access to the knowledge of other EFL teachers. According to these teacher educationists, "most teachers who continually develop knowledge about their own practice have seldom accumulated and shared their knowledge. As much as they might benefit from the knowledge of their colleagues … most teachers have not accessed what others know and must start over, creating this knowledge anew" (Hiebert et al., 2002, p. 11).

EFL teacher educators can also use the data of the current study to design data-based tasks to foster reflection among prospective teachers. Borg (1998) recommends that teacher education programs take advantage of teachers' real practices and the rationale behind such practices to "provide an ideal platform for the kind of other-oriented inquiry which facilitates self-reflection" (Borg, 1998, p. 273). One advantage of designing data-based tasks could be

their sensitivity to the context of EFL teaching where the practical concerns of the teaching situation are different from those of teaching English in a second language context.

The authentic data provided here based on observations of real classes also reinforce "the links between research and teacher development, creating in teachers an awareness of the contribution which research in their own classrooms can make to their professional growth" (Borg, 1998, p. 281). These types of studies can bridge the gap that exists between theory, research and practice.

Further studies can investigate the likely roles of the experience, qualification and gender of EFL teachers in shaping their views and their teaching practices as far as teaching grammar is concerned. Also, an exploration of the teachers' training in and understanding of the principles of CLT could contribute to our knowledge of why they teach in a particular way and why they apply / do not apply CLT to their classes.

References

Andrews, S. (2001). The language awareness of the L2 teacher: Its impact upon pedagogical practice. *Language Awareness*, 10, 75-90.

Borg, S. (1998). Data-based teacher development. *ELT Journal,* 52(4), 273-281.

Borg, S. (1999). The use of grammatical terminology in the second language classroom: A qualitative study of teachers' practices and cognition. *Applied linguistics*, 20, 95-126.

Borg, S. (2001). Self perception and practice in teaching grammar. *ELT journal*, 55, 21-29.

Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching,* 36(2), 81-109.

Borg, S. (2010). Contemporary themes in language teacher education. *Foreign Languages in China,* 7(4), 84-89.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). Transforming qualitative information: *Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Celce-Murcia, M. (1991). Grammar pedagogy in second and foreign Language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 459-480.

Celce_Murcia, M. (Ed.) (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (3rd ed.). Bostan, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education* (6th ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

Davis, K. (1995). Qualitative theory and methods in applied linguistics research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(3), 427-53.

Eisenstein_ Ebsworth, M. and Schweers, C. (1997). What researchers say and practitioners do: Perspectives on conscious grammar instruction in ESL classroom. *Applied language learning*, 8, 237-260.

Ellen, R. F. (ed.) (1984) *Ethnographic Research*. London: Academic Press.

Ellis, R. (1998). Teaching and research: Options in grammar teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 39-60.

Hiebert, J., Gallimore, R. and Stigler, J. W. (2002). A knowledge base for the teaching profession: What would it look like and how can we get one? *Educational Researcher*, 31, 3-15.

Hui, L. (1997). New bottles, old wine: Communicative language teaching in China., 37, 4, 38. *Forum*, 37(4), 38-41. Retrieved from Retrieved May 28, 2002, from//http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol35/no4/p38.htm .

Johnston, B. and Goettsch, K. (2000). Insearch of the knowledge base of language teaching: Explanations by experienced teachers. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 56(4). Retrieved

from Retrieved March, 5, 2002, from http://www.utpjournals.com/product/cmlr/564/564-Gatbonton.
Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: a qualitative approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
Mitchell, R. (1994). 'Foreign language teachers and the teaching of grammar' in Bygate M., A. Tonkyn and E. Williams (Eds.) *Grammar for the language teacher*, pp. 215-23. London: Prentice Hall.
Mowlaie, B. and Rahimi, A. (2010) The effect of teachers' attitude about communicative language teaching on their practice: Do they practice what they preach? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 9,* 1524-1528.
Nazari, A. (2007) EFL teachers' perception of the concept of communicative competence. *ELT Journal*. 61(3), 202-210.
Numrich, C. (1996). On becoming a language teacher: Insight from diary studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 131-35.
Ostovar Namaghi, S. A. (2006) Forces steering language teachers' work in public high schools in Iran. *The Reading Matrix,* 6(2), 90-105.
Pahissa, I. and Tragant, E. (2009). Grammar and the non-native secondary school teacher in Catalonia. *Language Awareness,* 18(1), 47-60.
Parvaresh, V. (2008). Metaphorical conceptualization of an adult EFL learner: Where old concepts are impregnable. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language),* 2(2), 154-161.
Patton, M. Q. (2000). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Method*. London: Sage Publications Inc. Retrieved 3 April 2010 from http://books.google.com.my/books?id=FjBw2oi8El4C&pg=PA265&dq=strategy+that+simultaneously+combines+document.
Ramirez A. G. and Stromquist N. P. (1979) ESL methodology and student language learning in bilingual elementary schools. *TESOL Quarterly*, 13:2, 145-158.
Razmjoo, S. A. and Riazi, A. M. (2006). Is Communicative Language Teaching Practical in the Expanding Circle? *Journal of Language and Learning,* 4(2), 144-171.
Rodriguez, L. and Avent, P. (2002). What Happens When direct grammar is used to Develop Oral Proficiency in a Spanish Immersion Classroom. Retrieved from http://gse.gmu.edu/research/lmtip/arp/vol1Word/L.Rodriguez.doc.
Sanchez, H. S. (2010). *An investigation into the relationships among experience, teacher cognition, context, and classroom practice in EFL grammar teaching in Argentina.* Unpublished PhD thesis: The University of Warwick.
Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: foundation of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1-22.
Stake, R. E. (2000) 'Case studies' in Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.) pp. 435-454. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
Stern, H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Talebinezhad, M. R. and Sadeghi, A. (2005). Non-academic L2 users: A neglected research pool in ELT in Iran. *Linguistik online*, 24(4). Retrieved March 18, 2008, from http://www.linguistikonline.de/27_07/talebinezhadaliakbari.html.
Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The Qualitative Report,* 32(2).Retrieved 14 May 2010 from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html .
Woods, D. (1996). *Teacher cognition in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Yim, Y. K. (1998). *The role of grammar instruction in an ESL program* (p. 17). Los Angeles, CA: Languages and Linguistics (ERIC Document Reproduction in Service No. ED432137.