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## Teaching Grammar: Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

By Tahira Kalsoom & Dr. Prof. Mumtaz Akhtar  
*University of the Punjab Pakistan, Pakistan*

**Abstract** - Previous research has revealed that teachers' beliefs play an important role in identifying their professional behavior. Teachers' beliefs affect their teaching. The exploration of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, and their classroom practices is the main aim of this study. Teaching and learning in an English language classroom in the context of grammar is the center point of present study. 160 schools from the province of Punjab were selected for survey. Questionnaire is a best tool to explore teachers' beliefs and their practices. In country like Pakistan where English is being taught as a foreign language it was found that teachers emphasize grammar and widely used method of grammar teaching is deductive. Teaching is an individualized activity and problems faced by teachers while teaching grammar are not discussed collectively. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, independent t test analysis and ANOVA. Educational implications will also be discussed. It will also open great opportunity to researchers to do further research in this area of study.

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# Teaching Grammar: Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Tahira Kalsoom <sup>α</sup> & Dr. Prof. Mumtaz Akhtar <sup>σ</sup>

**Abstract** - Previous research has revealed that teachers' beliefs play an important role in identifying their professional behavior. Teachers' beliefs affect their teaching. The exploration of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, and their classroom practices is the main aim of this study. Teaching and learning in an English language classroom in the context of grammar is the center point of present study. 160 schools from the province of Punjab were selected for survey. Questionnaire is a best tool to explore teachers' beliefs and their practices. In country like Pakistan where English is being taught as a foreign language it was found that teachers emphasize grammar and widely used method of grammar teaching is deductive. Teaching is an individualized activity and problems faced by teachers while teaching grammar are not discussed collectively. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, independent t test analysis and ANOVA. Educational implications will also be discussed. It will also open great opportunity to researchers to do further research in this area of study.

## 1. Introduction

Teaching is process linked with cognition. Both teachers and students go through cognitive process while engaged in learning activity. Tillema, (2000) said that "Teaching is a cognitive activity and teachers' beliefs influence their decisions in the classroom." Borg (2003) said that 2<sup>nd</sup> language teaching and learning is a complex mental process. Borg (2003) also suggests that teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on compound, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs. To be sure, teachers' possession of a wide ranged complicated beliefs about didactic concerns including beliefs related to learners and learning. "These beliefs are said to form a structured set of principles and are derived from a teacher's prior experiences, school practices, and a teacher's individual personality" (Borg, 2003).

In Pakistan students learn English up to graduation but most of the students are unable to write or speak English in correct and proper way. What is the reason behind this? Is it difficult to learn or there is a fault in our approach and method of teaching? What are the beliefs that language teachers hold in mind

while teaching? Do their own learning experiences affect their teaching? What type of knowledge do they have regarding language learning and teaching? These are the questions that the researcher wants to address in this study. "A belief is always accepted as a fact whether it is held intentionally or is imbued with emotive commitment" (Borg, 2001, p.186), Beliefs play a pivotal role in guiding thinking process of teachers and their behavior. Education and experience has significant place in making and establishing beliefs in earlier life and during study period of a person's well-built beliefs about the process of learning and teaching are conventional and Institute of education in the United States published a report in which it is considered also that the teachers; thinking process is completed more deeply in the earlier years. The report stated It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think. Moreover, it will be necessary for any innovations in the context, practices, and technology of teaching to be mediated through the minds and motives of teachers." It is a known fact that It is difficult to monitor one's beliefs and thoughts but we can make interpretations from one's self reported beliefs— and these things have predictably been investigated by Thurstone, Guttman and Likert type scales and questionnaires.

### a) Statement of the Problem

Without any doubt teachers personal knowledge and prior beliefs come in practice when there is any deficiency in the provision of well established and well defined instructions and guidelines related to grammar teaching. The most important element in this self centered and self created knowledge teachers own belief regarding teaching and learning. Without any doubt it can be said that Teachers' decisions are influenced by their prior knowledge and beliefs system. What materials they choose to teach, what method and technique they select to teach is justified by their own held beliefs relevant to grammar teaching. At a certain stage these beliefs become personal knowledge or personal theory. Therefore present study will investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching and their classroom practices.

### b) Objectives of the Study

The basic aim of this study was to examine Language teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to

**Authors <sup>α σ</sup>** : Institute of Education and Research Institute of Education and Research University of the Punjab Pakistan University of the Punjab Pakistan. E-mails : tahira.kalsoom@yahoo.com, drmumtazakhtar@hotmail.com

teaching grammar. Therefore, following objectives guided the aim of the study.

1. To examine the background factors that hinder or promote enforcement of beliefs about teaching and learning English grammar into teaching practices
2. To investigate teachers' instructive beliefs about teaching and learning English grammar.
3. To compare the beliefs of secondary school English language teachers who are categorized with respect to certain demographic variables such as gender, qualification, local, and experience.

#### c) *Research Questions*

A common conception is that research questions serve as a guide to the study. Therefore, it was thought that the following research questions would be very important to conduct a research because these questions guide the researcher to focus on objectives. Questions given below are formed to discover and examine the phenomenon researched.

1. Does any relationship exist between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices? (Pearson r)
2. Do male and female teachers possess the same beliefs regarding teaching and learning grammar? (t test)
3. Do the teachers of rural and urban areas possess the same beliefs regarding grammar? (t test)
4. Does any relationship exist between teachers' qualification and their beliefs regarding teaching and learning grammar? (ANOVA)

## II. Review of the Literature

While reviewing related literature, first we will talk about approaches of teaching grammar and then teachers' beliefs, factors influencing those beliefs, and the effect of the beliefs on classroom practices will be discussed. With the advancement of language teaching, the role of explicit grammar teaching in the development of learners' bilingual systems and target language proficiency has been continuously discussed in language learning research.

Batstone and Ellis (2009) say that Grammar is considered a most important element in the field of language teaching because without knowing grammar proficiency and accuracy in target language can't be gained.

Grammar is part of meaningful communication and now it is not being considered useless set of isolated rules (Ellis, 2006).

Dekeyser (1995) argues that grammar teaching is a difficult task and many complications occur while teaching and learning grammar. Bog (199) asserts that due to investigation of new methods of language teaching, grammar becomes a popular topic of study but failure of those methods and approaches considers the failure of grammar.

Teachers' beliefs play a pivotal role to establish importance or unimportance of any component of language. So the study of teachers' beliefs in the context of grammar teaching has gained popularity among researchers. Kagan (1992) believes that "teacher cognition is an amalgamation of teachers' assumptions about instruction, students, learning, and interactions in the classrooms."

In this chapter we will study different methods of grammar teaching, teachers' beliefs, factors effecting those beliefs and the influence of held beliefs in a language classroom in the light of past researches.

New trends in language suggest that overt knowledge of grammar is necessary. This kind of knowledge provides opportunity to the learners to examine the production of language and activates the fundamental process of understanding new elements of language input. The experts of 2<sup>nd</sup> language acquisition have opinion that two types of distinctions are required to be noticed.

1. Learners should have some type of input which has potential to convert in to input.
2. They have to understand existing gap between their mother tongue and target language.

In this way learners' implicit knowledge plays desired role to apply rules in daily life communication.

Ellis (2000) says, "The benefits of explicit grammar instruction have been reported in a number of research studies over the past two decades." Meta analysis on the studies conducted between the Three decades of 1980 and 2000 was done by two researchers Norris and Ortega and they found that explicit grammar teaching is more effective than implicit grammar.

Ellis in his study conducted in 2003 says, "To achieve the goal of communicative competence, grammar and communication need to be integrated. He recommends that form-focused instruction and meaningful communication should be combined through a task based communicative curriculum."

It is still a debatable question among linguists that instructions in a grammar class are necessary or not and studies are being conducted to answer such type of questions.

A number of theoretical suggestions have come forward to integrate this type of instruction in 2<sup>nd</sup> language curriculum. Deductive and inductive approaches of grammar teaching are distinctively different from each other. In deductive approach teacher explains grammatical rules explicitly and then learners use these rules practically in isolated sentences. While in inductive approach learners are indulged with real life conversation and examples are given in a context and then they discover rules and patterns and formulate target rules and required structures by themselves. This

is the reason that inductive approach is called rule discovery, in contrast deductive approach is rule driven.

Richards & Rodgers (2001) says, "Since the 18th century, people in the West commonly studied Latin or classical Greek as a foreign language in schools." While Chastain (1988) says, "The Classical Method was developed for understanding these classical languages. Because this method began in the German Kingdom of Prussia during the late 18th century, it is also called the Prussian Method."

Ellis (2001) said that the purpose of Teaching of grammar is only knowledge of grammar structures but it does not create ability to use structures of grammar correctly. Some grammarians like Nassaji & Fotos (2004) say that grammar instruction can prove to be harmful for language learning.

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### III. Research Methodology

Quantitative method of research was applied in the present study. The study used survey method primarily to collect information from a bigger sample. A questionnaire-based survey was used to easily obtain information from a large number of participants in order to understand the beliefs of teachers in the context being studied.

#### a) Population

All English language teachers teaching at secondary level in the province of Punjab were the population of this study

#### b) Sample and Sampling technique

Multi stage sampling technique was used for this study. There are 36 districts in the province of Punjab. 8 districts were selected conveniently. At the second stage, keeping in view the demographic variables stratified sampling technique was adopted. In each district 20 schools were selected. 10 were urban and ten from rural area. Further stratum was made on the basis of gender. So 5 girls schools from urban area and 5 from rural areas were selected. Same selection criterion was applied for boys' schools. All English language teachers teaching in selected schools were included in the sample. So it could be said that at the last stage of sampling census technique was adopted to ensure validity, reliability and generalizability of the results.

#### c) Instrument of the study

Questionnaire is a multipurpose tool of research, through which we can collect data in both paradigms, quantitative and qualitative. Open ended questions can be included in questionnaire; on the other hand likert type scale is also a common form of questionnaires.

The beliefs questionnaire used for the study was adopted. It was first used by Muhammad(2006) After taking permission from the author of the instrument slight adaptations were made in instrument.

Part A revealed demographic information about participants. Four open ended statements were included in Part B of the questionnaire. After analyzing common responses given by the participants, statements were coded and analyzed statistically. Part C had four sections with different nature and purpose. Section 1 and 2 consisted a table with six types of activities to check their frequency and effectiveness. To test occurring frequency of activities the statements were rated as Never 1, Rarely 2, Occasionally 3, Frequently 4 and to test effectiveness of activities same statements were rated as not at all effective 1, fairly effective 2, effective 3 and very effective 4. Section 3 of part C asked about change in teaching over time and the sources responsible for that change. Section 4 of part C asked about the most important factor while making decision regarding what to teach and how to teach.

There were 35 statements included in part D of the questionnaire. Every respondent was assigned the same code on the teachers' belief questionnaire (TBQ).

The 35 statements which reflected some of the key issues in the field were categorized according to the following:

- Teaching Approach in a grammar class
- Argument against teaching grammar
- Feedback and error-correction
- Importance of grammar
- Role of the learner

#### d) Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

To ensure content validity the instrument was reviewed by the panel of four experts. All the experts were experienced ELT teachers and researchers. The criterion to establish and assure content validity was simplicity, usability and validity of questionnaire. The panel of experts reported that the content of instrument was clear, useful and valid for the situation under study. The questionnaire was pilot tested in 40 schools, on 225 teachers. Teachers were asked to report if they faced any difficulty or ambiguity while filling the questionnaire. But no difficulty and ambiguity was reported so it could be said that questionnaire had content validity.

Questioner was pilot tested using a sample of 225 teachers from 40 schools.. Cranach's alpha for belief questionnaire was found 0.812.

Table 3.3 : Mean, Standard Deviation and Reliability Coefficient for TBQ

Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation	Alpha Cronbach Reliability
225	12.20	13.834	.812

#### e) Data Collection

The data were collected from 160 schools from 8 districts from the Punjab province of Pakistan. All English language teachers teaching at secondary level in randomly selected schools from these district were the participants of the study. The data gathered through questionnaire provided answers to the research questions of the study.

#### f) Data Analysis

After data entry, data were cleaned and made ready for analysis. The possible responses on each statement of the TBQ were assigned credence as: "Strongly agree" 5, "Agree" 4, "Neutral" 3, "Disagree" 2 and "Strongly disagree" 1. For data analysis through computer, data was re-coded and entered in SPSS 16.0 grid sheet.

### IV. Results

#### a) Demographic Characteristics

This section deals with demographic information about respondents related to their gender, locale, district, age, teaching experience, academic and Professional qualifications

Analysis by gender made clear that the highest number is of female respondents, the percentage is 51.8% as a whole. Distribution of male and female respondents shows that the percentage of all male respondents was 48.2%, Out of 732 respondents 108(14.8%) had age less than 30 years while 120(16.4%) were between 31 to 35years, 122 (16.7%) were between 36 to 40 year, 192(26.2%) were between

41 to 45year and 190(26.0%) were above 45 and less than 60. It was also evident by the table that larger number of respondents was in the age group of 41-55 (26.2%) while least number of respondents was in age group of >30(14.8%).

It was apparent that out of 570respondents (77.9%) possessed M.A degree, 153 (20.9%) respondents were B.A, 6(.6%) respondents were Ph.D.3 (.4%) participants' qualification was only Intermediate. i.e 12 year qualification.

The distribution of respondents according to their professional qualification shows that bigger number 287(39.2%) of respondents' professional qualification was B.Ed., 175(23.9%) were possessing M.Ed. while 270(36.9%) respondents didn't not have any professional qualification.

The categorization of respondents regarding their teaching experiences shows that 94(12.8%) respondents had 1 to 5 year experience, while 106 (14.55) had 5to 10 year experience 106(14.55) respondent, 149(20.4%) respondents were with 10 to 15 years experience while the greater number of respondents was in the category of 15 years or above 383(52.3%) respondents. 324(44.3%) out of 732 participants were rural and 408(55.7%) were from urban areas.

#### b) Inferential Statistics

This section consists of inferential statistics applied in the analysis of data including t-test, one way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 4.1: t-test applied on Total of teachers beliefs questionnaire by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Effect size
Male	353	123.25	12.858	730	-.166 <sup>*</sup>	0.8680	0.011
Female	379	123.09	14.069				

<sup>\*</sup>  
 $p > 0.05$

t test was conducted to compare mean scores on total of teachers' beliefs questionnaire. By applying t test on the mean scores of male and female respondents it was found that t value (-.166) with df

(730) was not significant at  $p < 0.05$ , and the difference in means is also negligible due to small (0.011) effect size. This means that male and female teachers are not different in their beliefs regarding grammar teaching.



Table 4.2 : t-test applied on total of teachers' beliefs questionnaire by locale

locale	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Effect size
Rural	324	123.09	13.341	730	-.143 <sup>*</sup>	0.886	-0.010
Urban	408	123.23	13.623				

<sup>\*</sup>  
 $p > 0.05$

The table 4.16 given above presents the results of t test for rural and urban respondents on total of teachers' belief questionnaire it was found that t value (-.143) with *df* (730) was not significant at  $p < 0.05$ , and

the difference in means is negligible due to small (0.010) effect size.

Telling thereby that difference in locale has no effect on teachers beliefs regarding grammar.

Table 4.3 : t-test applied on subscale "teaching Approach" by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Effect size
Female	379	31.92	4.243	730	-.949 <sup>*</sup>	0.342	-0.034
Male	353	32.24	4.897				

<sup>\*</sup>  
 $p > 0.05$

It can be observed from the statistical figures given in table 4.18 that by applying t test on the mean scores of male and female respondents it was found that mean (31.92, 32. 24) and t value (-.949) with *df*

(730) was not significant at  $p < 0.05$  and the difference in means was negligible due to small (-0.034) effect size. It means that teaching approaches of male and female teachers were not different.

Table 4.5 : One way ANOVA on teachers' beliefs questionnaire among groups based on academic qualification

	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Between groups	7	309.063	103.021		
Within Groups	724	132713.932	182.299	.656	.638
Total	731	133022.995			

$p < 0.01$

Table indicates that F value (.656) for all respondents on teacher's belief questionnaire was not significant at  $p < 0.01$ . It is apparent from the table above that respondents with different academic groups were not significantly different as indicated by teachers' belief questionnaire.

## V. Discussion and Interpretation

The exploration of present study regarding question no. 1 revealed teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and the way grammar should be taught in a language class. Majority of the participants said grammar was a set of rules governing the structure. Burgess and Etherington (2002) said that grammar is an unavoidable component of a language. If we want to teach language to our students to express

themselves in any social setting then grammar will be "an indispensable element of language teaching. The results revealed a positive significant relationship between instructors' beliefs about language teaching and their real practices in classrooms (Mellati, Fatemi & Motallubzadeh, 2013).

On the question how grammar should be taught a number of researches have been conducted. Teaching grammar is debatable issue among language experts and teachers. Borg and Burns, (2008). Researchers widely take interest on the topic of grammar teaching. Beliefs are mental constructs which help us to learn and guide in certain situations (Borg, 1999). With Special reference to teachers' beliefs, Borg (1999) particularly says, that it is a special understanding regarding their role as teacher. Decisions

regarding teaching and learning, use of language and way of teaching are greatly influenced by the beliefs that teachers hold and practice. So it could be concluded that teachers' teaching approach would be influenced by their insights, old beliefs, and knowledge about language. Students show a discrepancy in their views for grammar teaching and what type of grammar and how much grammar should be taught is another controversy among respondents (Ganjabi, 2011). Question number two and three deal with demographic variable related to gender and locale. Do male and female teachers possess the same beliefs regarding teaching and learning grammar was one of the important question of this study and the results with the study conducted by Bernat and Lloyd (2007) about gender and both the studies found that gender play no significant role in the development of beliefs and classroom practices. The results of present study agreed Mohammed and Aljohani(2012) also reached on the same conclusion and said Gender has no importance and significance in the beliefs construction and plays no role in this regard. Another finding of their study was that meaning and form should be taught in context and simultaneously. The impact of above mentioned variables on teachers' beliefs was not confirmed positively by Moini (2009) and Lackhart (2008). they concluded that gender plays no major role. In contrast Alijanian (2012) found that female teachers had different beliefs about grammar and its teaching.

A doctoral study done by Brown (2006) exposed that teachers' beliefs in respect of error correction were not significant irrespective of demographical variables such as gender and these results confirm the findings of present research. The impact of above mentioned variables on teachers' beliefs was confirmed positively by Moini (2009) and Lackhart (2008). Their studies unveiled that with different levels of qualification teachers' beliefs vary considerably.

## VI. Conclusions

The findings of the study rendered the following conclusions:

1. The male and female respondents reflected similar beliefs towards grammar and grammar teaching for the entire sample.
2. The rural and urban area respondents showed similar beliefs towards grammar and grammar teaching for the entire sample.
3. It is evident from the findings that rural and urban students had similar attitude towards all sub scales of Teachers' belief questionnaire.
4. Teachers with various levels of academic qualification were not different significantly and same was the case with professional qualification that teachers were possessing same beliefs on teachers belief questionnaire

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