

The Influence of Teaching Experience, School Location and Academic Background on Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching Grammar

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Abstract

The beliefs that teachers hold regarding teaching will have a strong impact on the kinds of decisions that they make in their classrooms. The type of materials, activities and instruction they will use in their lessons will be guided by these beliefs. At the same time, without having conviction in their beliefs about how students learn, it is difficult to imagine teachers being enthusiastic and effective in their teaching regardless of the approach they take. In teaching English grammar to second language learners, teachers often subscribe to their own set of personal beliefs that have been formed, most likely through their experience as well training. This applies as well to the teaching of grammar which has had various competing points of view in terms of how it should be taught. This paper examines teachers' beliefs using data collected from a survey administered to 345 English language teachers in secondary schools in two states in Malaysia. A self-developed instrument was used to investigate four different emphases in the teaching of grammar in the classroom – input, explicit L2 knowledge, student output and error correction – as proposed by Ellis (1998). The data was analysed according to how teaching experience, school location, and academic background can influence teachers' views towards the importance of each of these emphasis in teaching grammar. The results indicate a number of interesting points which can be of help especially in teacher training and professional development.

Keywords: teacher education, beliefs, grammar instruction

1. Introduction

There are many factors that can influence the decision making process of teachers who are teaching grammar in their English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. One key factor is the ESL teachers' beliefs which have developed throughout the years' of their teaching the English language in the classroom. Although ESL teachers are often scrutinized for their teaching approaches, more recently, researchers like Borg (1998) have noted that less attention was given to "second language (L2) teachers' perceptions of the role of grammar teaching in their work and to the manner in which instructional decisions regarding grammar teaching are informed by teachers' personal pedagogical systems" (p. 10). A cursory examination of past studies in Malaysia has also shown the lack of studies conducted regarding the beliefs that ESL teachers hold pertaining to the teaching of grammar. Burgess & Etherington (2002) note the apparent influence the teachers' individual context as one of the major determiners in their decision making and for the kind of teaching that will take place. At the same time, other factors such as teaching experience and pedagogical knowledge may also play a role in how the teachers teach in a classroom.

Researchers in ESL such as Ellis (1998, p. 57) and Pajares (1992, p. 307) have addressed the lack of research that explores the teachers' beliefs involving the process of decision-making in teaching grammar. Similarly, Mackenzie, Hemmings and Kay (2011) describe various studies that indicate that teaching experience can have varied effects on teacher effectiveness. In one of these studies, Chingos and Peterson (2011) actually indicate that after an initial peak in the effectiveness-experience relationship, there is actually the "possibility of negative returns to experience over the course of teachers' careers" (p. 460). This paper is therefore interested in the confluence of both teacher beliefs and variables such as teaching experience, school location and academic background as it assumes that they are intertwined and may affect teacher effectiveness. The goal of this study is to take a closer look into the relationship between beliefs and these three variables in the teaching of English grammar in the ESL classroom in Malaysia and discuss the implications of this relationship especially in terms of teacher professional development.

2. Teacher Beliefs and Grammar Teaching

Studies on the beliefs of ESL teachers in Malaysia in the teaching of grammar in their ESL classrooms have been few and far between. This is not surprising as Borg (2006) pointed out that there is a lack of explicit discussion in the literature on the study of beliefs in teaching among teachers. He considers such studies to be “different to the study of related psychological constructs such as knowledge, conceptions and attitudes.” As Richards (1998: 51-52) acknowledges, the teachers’ belief systems are “stable sources of reference which are built gradually over the years they are teaching and are related to the teaching dimensions such as the teachers’ theory of language, the nature of language teaching, the role of the teacher, effective teaching practices and teacher-student relations.” In short, it is likely that it is the teachers’ beliefs that will determine how enthusiastically they teach in the classroom as well as how effective they may be in teaching their students. The lack of studies in this particular area in the Malaysian education system, therefore, prevents educators and researchers alike from a useful source of reference.

In trying to understand the influence of teachers’ beliefs on teaching, it is important to identify factors that may shape teacher beliefs. Eisentein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) claim that when it comes to “articulating their rationales, teachers referred to various factors shaping their views, such as student wants, and syllabus expectations” (p. 255). Richards (1998) lists down two different types of knowledge that may influence teachers’ understanding and practice of teaching. The first concerns the curricular goals, lesson plans, instructional activities, materials, tasks, and teaching techniques. The other relates to teachers’ personal and subjective philosophies and their understanding of what constitute good teaching (Richards, 1998: 51). Moini (2009) notes that teachers’ social construct, which results from their personal experiences and influences from their work setting, play a role in the development of their beliefs.

Through his extensive review of studies on beliefs, Borg (2003) insists that the studies on practicing teachers “provide further support for the belief that prior learning experience shapes teachers’ cognitions and instructional decisions” (p. 88). Other previous studies have also shown that teachers’ prior knowledge as learners with their previous ESL teachers plays an important role in shaping their current teaching beliefs regarding the teaching of grammar. In the same vein, Nespor (1987) found that the teachers may be influenced by a “crucial experience or some particularly influential teacher produces a richly-detailed episodic memory which later serves the student as an inspiration and a template for his or her own teaching practices” (p. 320). Experience as learners has also been identified by Abdullah and Majid (2013) as one of the potential sources of beliefs, besides perceptions towards the students, institutional environment and practice and personal views on current practice in their study on Malaysian ESL teachers (p. 821). The results of these studies are echoed by Ezzi’s statement on the complexity of the beliefs that teachers possess that “are likely to be derived from their prior experience of teaching English” (2012, p. 170).

The importance of beliefs in a teacher’s practice in the classroom cannot be ignored. Shavelson and Stern (1981) indicate that teachers’ action in the class is governed by their beliefs. According to Moini (2009), the teachers’ belief system consists of “the information, attitudes, values, theories, and assumptions about teaching, learning, learners, and other aspects of teaching” (p. 143). The teachers’ beliefs on the teaching of grammar help them to “form part of the process of understanding how to conceptualize their work” (Richards, Gallo and Renandya, 2001, p. 42). These show the vitality of the role of ESL teachers’ beliefs’ in the process of making decisions involving the contents of the lesson, the depth of the lesson, the methodology used and other aspects of language teaching in their ESL grammar classroom.

The teachers’ effectiveness at delivering the grammar lessons to their ESL classrooms can clearly be affected by their beliefs regarding the teaching of grammar. Richards mentioned that one of the two types of knowledge that can play an influential role in how effective the teacher will be in the classroom, is teachers’ personal view of teaching (Richards, 1998, p. 51). Their beliefs are not formed loosely and do not just influence one aspect of the grammar teaching but also act as a filter to their instructional judgements and decision making in class and subsequently provide a “systematic justification process with which to plan, assess, judge, decide, accept, deny or act (Ezzi, 2012, p. 172). However, although Ezzi (2012) found that while the teachers’ beliefs may have a very significant relationship to the suggested strategies of teaching grammar, when it comes to the actual teaching, the beliefs are not actually reflected in their classroom practices. This is the reason why it is crucial to conduct more studies in this area as it will provide valuable information that may be used to sensitize teachers to their own beliefs in order to improve classroom pedagogy as well as to inform teacher trainers and administrators on how best to ensure that effective grammar teaching is constantly provided in the classroom.

3. Methodology

This study is a descriptive study using quantitative methods with data collected through a survey questionnaire. Although qualitative data were also collected through a structured focus group interview, this paper will only report on the quantitative portion of the study. The survey questionnaires of the survey were distributed by mail over a period of time to in-service ESL teachers in two states in peninsular Malaysia.

Specifically, this study which examines the influence of teaching experience, school location and teachers' academic background on their beliefs in the teaching of grammar. In each of the three variables of teaching experience, school location and academic background, the study will examine differences in their beliefs between the groups in the variable as well as differences in their beliefs according to each group in the variable. For example, in terms of teaching experience, differences among four groups of teachers with varying years of teaching experience towards the importance placed on four different grammar teaching emphases will be examined. This question will be examined using a One-way ANOVA. Secondly, the differences in the importance placed towards the four grammar teaching emphases by each teaching experience group will be investigated. This question will be examined through repeated measures ANOVA and pair wise comparisons.

3.1 Sample and Population

Two states in peninsular Malaysia were randomly selected in the study and the survey questionnaire was sent to all 261 public secondary schools in the states. ESL teachers from these two states were chosen as the sample for this study because it would allow the information construed from the study to be generalized to the whole of peninsular Malaysia. Five questionnaires were sent to each of the 261 schools, however, only 345 ESL teachers responded.

The 345 participants in this study consist of 70 male ESL teachers and 275 female ESL teachers. A total of 161 of these participants have training in teaching English as second language (TESL) at their first degree level while the majority of the remaining respondents were trained in another discipline at the first degree level and attended special training to teach English. A slight majority of 184 participants were teaching in schools that are located in urban area schools.

As teaching experience was an important variable in this study, teachers who responded were divided into varying groups according to this variable. Four groups were therefore formed based on the teachers' years of experience: Group 1 consisted of teachers with 7 or fewer years of experience, Group 2; 8 to 18 years of experience, Group 3; 9 to 29 years of experience, and Group 4; 30 and more years of experience. This decision was made based on the distribution of the number of years of experience of the participants in the study. This division into four groups based on their experience resulted in 59 participants in experience group 1, 109 participants for experience group 2, 124 participants for experience group 3 and 53 participants for experience group 4.

In terms of school location, teachers were categorized according to whether they were teaching in urban or rural schools. This categorization was based on the Malaysian Ministry of Education categorization for location of schools. The teachers in the study came from 184 urban schools and 161 rural schools. Teachers in the study were also categorized according to their academic background, i.e. whether or not they were trained in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) for their first degree. There were 161 and 184 TESL and non-TESL teachers respectively who were involved in the study.

3.2 Instrumentation

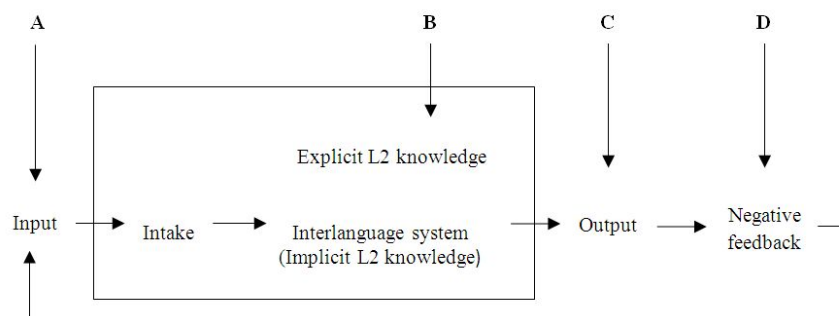


Figure 1. A Computational Model of L2 Acquisition (Ellis, 1998, p. 43)

This study used a survey instrument that was developed to identify teacher beliefs and practice in relation to established theories in grammar instruction. The survey was constructed based on a model of second language acquisition proposed by Ellis (1998) that highlights four major emphases in the process of learning grammar. Each emphasis relates roughly to common beliefs on how grammar should be taught. The first emphasis, input, stresses on the materials and the modification of input used in teaching grammar in the classroom. The second, explicit knowledge of the second language grammar rules, involves teachers in providing explicit instruction about grammar rules; the third, output, focuses on production practice; and the final stage, negative feedback, highlights the role of error correction. The model can be seen in Figure 1 with the four emphases identified by the letters A, B, C, and D respectively.

The four different emphases can generally be elicited from research done in the field of grammar instruction as well as theories of language learning that have emerged throughout the years. The importance of input, for example, is emphasized by Krashen (1982) who proposed that input must be made comprehensible but at a level slightly above the student's present ability in order to encourage acquisition. The importance of providing authentic language input has been a mainstay in language learning theory although theorists have differed in terms of the nature of the input required, from Krashen's comprehensible input to modified input intended to spur student noticing of grammatical structures and to total language immersion programmes. While the question of language input is often associated with an implicit approach to the teaching of grammar, the explicit L2 knowledge emphasis describes a more traditional approach to language teaching where grammar should be presented more explicitly. Currently much-maligned because of its teacher centred approach, this emphasis cannot be ignored as it is a straightforward approach that many teachers resort to particular classroom situations. The third emphasis, output, relates to the importance that some theorists give to student language production. Language learning theories such as Swain's Output Hypothesis and Long's Interaction Hypothesis support such an emphasis placed on output. Similarly, the importance placed in allowing students to negotiate meaning is further evidence of how output or student production of the language is considered by many to be critical in language acquisition. Finally, providing negative feedback, or providing students with information about their performance especially in terms of corrections to errors, is a traditional teacher approach and any study on the different beliefs teachers may have towards teaching grammar cannot ignore this emphasis. There is considerable literature on the use of feedback or error treatment in language learning (see e.g. Chaudron, 1988; Oliver, 2003). In addition to these four emphases, present-day research also look into combinations of two or more of these emphases (e.g. Lilliati & Arshad, 2014) and although such combinations may provide better solutions than a single emphasis, this paper focuses only on each individual emphasis and how well it is subscribed to by the teachers in the study.

The survey instrument consisted of both subjective items and 5 point Likert type items. For the purpose of this paper, however, only the 28 Likert scale items were analysed as they were the most relevant. The Likert scale items treated the four main emphases mentioned in Figure 1 as four separate categories. The items were developed according to these categories and also adapted from various studies on the teaching of grammar (Ezzi, 2012; Baleghizadeh & Farshchi, 2009; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Peacock, 2001) with each of the four emphases represented by 7 items. Aggregate scores for the seven items for each emphasis were used to measure the respondents' view of the importance of each emphasis with higher values indicating higher importance. As each item had a Likert scale value of between 1 to 5, the minimum and maximum total scores for the 7 items for each emphases were 7 and 35 respectively. The questionnaire went through several stages of filtering including a thorough discussion of items according to the four emphases and a pilot study to ensure respondents' comprehensibility of the instrument.

The data collected from the pilot study were analyzed for reliability using Cronbach-Alpha and the items with low reliability were excluded or modified in order to better reflect the category they were placed in. The modified version of the draft then went through another assessment by the researchers which resulted in some minor changes to the items and the final reduced number of the items to 28 items from an original 34 items. The standardized Cronbach Alpha values for the items on input, explicit knowledge, output and feedback after all the modifications were made were 0.68, 0.62, 0.66 and 0.79 respectively. Although relatively low, the values can be considered as minimally acceptable and were probably due to the few items used for each category as well as the affective nature of the variable (Ary, Jacobs, Razavied, & Sorensen, 2006). A One-Way ANOVA was used to analyse the difference between responses to the four emphases in grammar teaching described earlier in Figure 1 according to the three variables of teaching experience, school location and teachers' academic background. Additionally, repeated measures ANOVA was also performed to examine the differences in the importance placed on these four emphases within each group of the variables.

4. Results

The results of the analyses are presented in the following subsections according to the three variables in the study: teaching experience, school location and academic background.

4.1 Teaching Experience

Differences attributed to teaching experience were examined based on four experience groups. The descriptive statistics of the responses of the teachers in the four experience groups towards the four grammar teaching emphases are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean scores for Beliefs on four grammar teaching emphases according to experience groups

Years of Experience	Input		Explicit knowledge		Output		Feedback	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Below 7 (n=54)	27.21	3.80	24.98	3.36	26.89	2.75	27.86	3.67
8 to 18	26.06	3.17	26.45	9.22	26.58	2.66	28.17	3.52
19 to 29	26.07	2.97	24.91	3.26	26.55	2.67	28.64	3.72
30 and above (n=48)	27.12	4.29	25.38	2.87	26.47	2.87	28.84	3.73
Overall	26.42	3.43	25.78	8.00	26.60	2.70	28.38	3.65

In the one way ANOVA, the study found that there is no significant difference in the teachers' beliefs according to their years of experience. More specifically, there was no difference between the four groups in terms of their beliefs regarding input ($F=2.55, p>.05$), explicit knowledge ($F=1.56, p>.05$), output ($F=0.27, p>.05$) and feedback ($F=0.981, p>.05$). Despite not having any significant difference between the four experience groups, it should be noted that the mean plots indicate a strong pattern in the beliefs of the teachers regarding the four types of belief categories according to years of teaching experience. This is especially true in their beliefs regarding feedback and output. The mean plots for these two beliefs are presented in Figures 2 and 3 below.

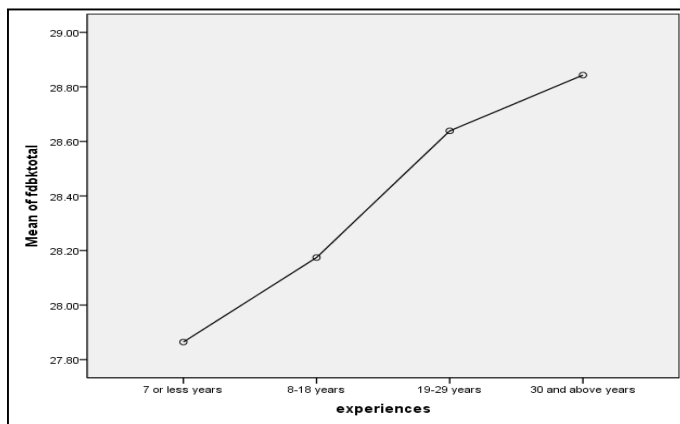


Figure 2. Feedback Mean Plot according to years of experience

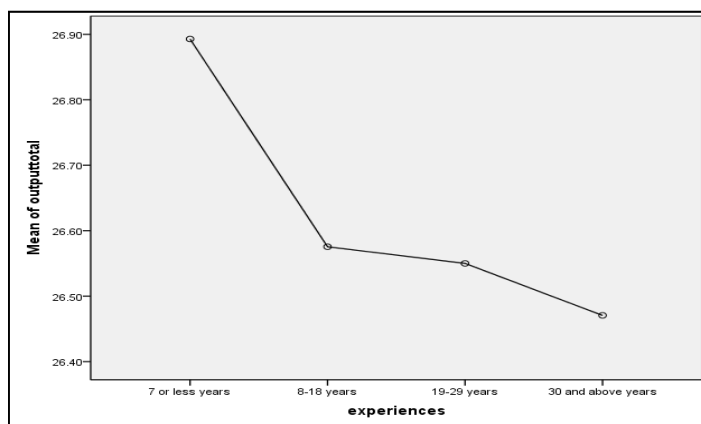


Figure 3. Output Mean Plot according to years of experience

As can be seen in Figure 2, belief in the importance of providing feedback increases with experience. Teachers who have 30 or more years of experience express greater belief that feedback should be provided in teaching grammar. Figure 3, on the other hand, shows that teachers with fewer years of experience consider students' output practice important but this decreases as teaching experience increases. Taken concurrently, these two observations are interesting in how they may be able to explain the influence of teaching experience on the teaching of grammar.

The repeated measures ANOVA yielded significant differences for two of the four groups of teachers, i.e. teachers with seven or fewer years of experience as well as for those with 30 or more years of experience. The F values for the teachers with seven years or fewer experience (group 1) and teachers with more than 30 or more years of experience in terms of comparison of scores for the four teaching emphases were 13.97 and 13.74 respectively, which were both statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Pair wise comparisons of means for the two experience groups were therefore examined and are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Pairwise comparison of four grammar teaching emphases for teachers with less than seven years teaching experience

Years of Experience	Pair wise comparison	Mean Difference
Below 7 years	Feedback x Explicit Knowledge	2.83*
	Feedback x Output	1.18
	Feedback x Input	0.48
	Explicit Knowledge x Output	-1.65*
	Explicit Knowledge x Input	-2.35*
	Output x Input	-0.70

* significant at .05 level

Based on the data in Table 2, the less experienced teachers felt that explicit L2 knowledge of grammatical rules was the least important of the four beliefs. The repeated measures ANOVA showed that explicit knowledge of L2 grammatical rules was considered significantly less important ($p < .05$) to feedback, output as well as input with pairwise comparisons of 2.83, -1.65 and -2.35 respectively.

Table 3. Pairwise comparison of grammar teaching emphases for teachers with thirty or more years of teaching experience

Years of Experience	Pair wise comparison	Mean Difference
30 Years and above	Feedback x Explicit Knowledge	3.27*
	Feedback x Output	2.31*
	Feedback x Input	1.63
	Explicit Knowledge x Output	-0.96
	Explicit Knowledge x Input	-1.65*
	Output x Input	-0.69

* significant at .05 level

In terms of the more experienced group, their beliefs towards the importance of feedback was significantly higher than towards students' explicit knowledge and language output as is seen in Table 3. Pairwise comparisons reveal the mean difference between the two to be 3.27 and 2.31 respectively with $p < .05$. Additionally, it should also be noted that the pairwise comparisons indicated that there is a significant difference between beliefs towards input and explicit knowledge with a mean difference of 1.65, $p < .05$.

4.2 School Location

In terms of school location, differences between teachers teaching in urban and in rural schools were examined. The means for the four grammar teaching emphases according to the two locations are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean scores for Beliefs on four grammar teaching emphases according to school location

School Location	Input		Explicit knowledge		Output		Feedback	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Urban	26.48	3.31	26.06	7.32	26.41	2.80	28.57	3.75
Rural	26.35	3.57	24.83	3.38	26.82	2.58	28.18	3.54

In the one way between groups ANOVA, the study found that there is no significant difference in the teachers' beliefs according to the location of their school. More specifically, there was no difference between the four groups in terms of their beliefs regarding input ($F=0.114$, $p>.05$), explicit knowledge ($F=3.734$, $p>.05$), output ($F=1.895$, $p>.05$) and feedback ($F=0.980$, $p>.05$).

The repeated measures ANOVA, however, yielded a statistically significant effect for beliefs for the urban school location with Wilks' Lambda = .732, $F(3, 165) = 20.18$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons showed significant values between Feedback and all the other three grammar teaching emphases. The mean scores on Feedback at 28.57 was significantly higher than scores on Explicit knowledge (26.23), Output (26.41) and Input (26.57).

Similarly, a significant value was also obtained for rural schools (Wilks' Lambda = .546, $F(3, 146) = 40.45$, $p < .05$). The pairwise comparisons of the four grammar teaching emphases for the teachers in rural schools revealed that significant differences existed in all pairwise comparisons except between Output and Input. The means for each of the four teaching emphases were highest for Feedback (28.23) and lowest for Explicit knowledge (24.93), while both Output (26.83) and Input (26.48) were generally mid way between these values.

4.3 Academic Background

With respect to the academic background variable in this study, the mean and standard deviation values are presented in Table 5. The two levels of academic background were whether the teachers were trained in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or whether they were not.

Table 5. Mean scores for Beliefs on four grammar teaching emphases according to academic background

Academic Background	Input		Explicit knowledge		Output		Feedback	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
TESL	26.33	3.06	24.96	3.11	26.86	2.64	27.92	3.64
Non TESL	26.50	3.73	25.94	7.44	26.39	2.75	28.80	3.62

In the one-way between groups ANOVA, there was a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level for the two academic background groups in terms of their response towards the importance of feedback with $F(1, 336) = 4.96$. There were no statistically significant difference in mean scores on the other three teaching emphases.

The repeated measures ANOVA for the TESL group returned a significant value (Wilks' Lambda = .601, $F(3, 143) = 31.62$, $p < .05$). Significant differences were observed in all pairwise comparisons except between Output and Input. The means for each of the four teaching emphases were Feedback (27.95), Explicit knowledge (25.20), Output (26.90) and Input (26.54).

Similarly, the repeated measures ANOVA for the non-TESL group also yielded a significant value with Wilks' Lambda = .660, $F(3, 168) = 26.79$, $p < .05$). In the pairwise comparisons, Feedback at 28.80 was found to have a statistically significant difference with all the three other emphases of explicit knowledge, output and input which had mean values of 25.98, 26.36 and 26.52 respectively. All other comparisons were not statistically significant.

5. Discussion

This study has shown some interesting results in terms of teachers' beliefs towards the teaching of grammar based on their teaching experience, school location and academic background. Opinion towards teacher feedback and explicit knowledge in teaching grammar were the two most interesting of the four emphases when viewed with respect to the three variables of teaching experience, school location and academic background. At all levels of the three variables, feedback was viewed as the most important and, similarly, in all but one was explicit knowledge the least important. There was also a significant difference in view regarding the importance of feedback between teachers who had an academic background in TESL and teachers who did not, with the former considering it less important. It is difficult to venture an explanation for these observations. Feedback, however, may be considered the least controversial and most straightforward of the four emphases with most teachers probably willing to accept it as their professional responsibility to their students in the classroom. Teachers with a TESL background may have their belief towards the importance of feedback somewhat tempered by their exposure to theoretical rationales dealing with the other three emphases. Non TESL trained teachers, on the other hand, may focus more on feedback as they consider it as important from a common sense point of view.

Academic background is not the only variable that seems influential in forming a teacher's beliefs towards teaching grammar. In terms years of teaching experience, it is interesting to note that novice teachers clearly

show a specific set of beliefs towards the teaching of grammar compared to the other more experienced teachers. The teachers from Group 1 (teachers with fewer than 7 years of teaching experience), for example, do not seem to believe that it is as important to provide feedback to the students compared to the other kinds of emphases in teaching grammar. This may be caused by their training that focused more on communication, which may consequently lead them to believe that by giving feedback to students all the time, it will disrupt the students' natural flow of communication. It may also be the case that younger teachers keep more strictly to their teaching plan, as pointed out by Mackey, Polio and McDonough (2004) who found that less experienced teachers "may be less likely to deviate from their planned lessons to exploit spontaneous learning opportunities" (p. 307). Hence, there is less interactivity and response by these teachers as doing so requires them to deviate from their plans. Another reason for this observation, however, might be because the teachers from Group 1 do not have enough knowledge or confidence to give grammar related feedback, therefore they de-emphasize the importance of feedback in the teaching of grammar in their classroom.

The results from the mean plot regarding student output (Figure 3) also characterizes the teaching approach adopted by less experienced teachers with respect to providing feedback to students. Teachers from Group 1 provide less feedback but allow for more student production or output. As teachers gain more experience, this trend reverses and more feedback is provided and less student output seem to take place in the classroom. At the same time, these more experienced teachers express greater belief in the role of input in language learning as the results show that the more experienced teachers scored significantly higher on the importance of input than on explicit knowledge. Taking all these results together, it may be possible to argue that the more experienced teachers focus on corrective feedback in a classroom situation that emphasizes student learning through exposure to meaningful language input. While all these observations are cross-sectional, it will be interesting to focus on the less experienced teachers in a longitudinal study and examine whether this pattern will continue in the years to come as they gain more experience.

A second interesting result of this study with respect to teaching experience is how teachers from Group 1 believe that explicit L2 knowledge is the least important of the four emphases in teaching grammar. This result may cause concern for many stakeholders as it can indicate that the more recently graduated teachers do not have enough content knowledge to handle the teaching of grammar. These teachers therefore, focus on student production, preparation of input materials and to a lesser extent, feedback instead of explicit L2 grammatical knowledge. However, this situation may also be due to teacher training that emphasizes communication over grammatical knowledge instead of the recently graduated teachers' own lack of abilities.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that teachers' beliefs towards teaching grammar can be influenced by their teaching experience, academic background, and to a lesser extent, the location of their school. Of these four teaching emphases examined, teachers seem to consider providing feedback as the most important and student explicit knowledge of the grammar as the least important. The years of teaching experience can have an influence on a teacher's beliefs regarding the teaching of grammar. Although comparison between the experience groups was not statistically significant, a pattern did arise where teachers with more experience relying a lot more on feedback compared to the novice teachers. In contrast, most novice teachers express a greater propensity towards student production compared to the more experienced teachers. Similarly, the repeated measures ANOVA that examined within group differences with respect to the four emphases confirm the importance placed on feedback by the experienced group, although language input is also considered an important emphasis as well. These observations are generally similar when viewed from the perspective of academic background and school location.

The relatively less enthusiastic view towards the importance of explicit knowledge can perhaps be attributed to the more controversial value of this emphases with many teachers perhaps more concerned with their students' communicative ability rather than explicit grammatical knowledge. An alternative explanation, however, could be put forward, which is that the teachers avoid this teaching emphasis as they are not capable and knowledgeable enough to deal so directly with grammar rules.

The reasons for the observations in this study cannot be conclusively determined from the data obtained in this study and therefore, qualitative and longitudinal type studies are proposed in order to obtain such data. Nevertheless, teacher educators and other stakeholders in education must pay greater attention to continuous professional development and training in order to ensure that teachers continue to hold correct and appropriate beliefs in the teaching of grammar and consequently teach grammar in their classes accordingly. This suggestion is not different from that of Ezzi (2012) who feels that teachers should be "regularly provided with feedback on

their teaching behavior” to improve the quality of their teaching (p. 180). The findings of this study has helped to confirm the importance of teacher beliefs in the teaching of grammar and which teaching emphasis is given the most and least importance by the teachers. Further study can help confirm the role teaching experience, academic background and school location play in helping to develop these beliefs towards the teaching of grammar.

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