

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Teaching Grammar

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Abstract

The aim of study was to explore the teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in terms of grammar teaching in Indonesian context. English language cannot be acquired by learner without teaching grammar to them directly. Additionally, rote, mechanical drills, and repetition are necessary support the students' language acquisition. The result of the study showed that teachers teaching beliefs fit with their teaching practices. It means that it matches between the statement and classroom practices. This will lead to positive impact on teaching and learning process. Their beliefs reflected on their classroom practices. Teachers felt comfort to explain the grammar lesson to students by using their native language if they have problems in learning English language. Using native language is one way that can be used by teacher to deliver grammar lesson.

Keywords: *teachers' belief, practices, teaching grammar*

Introduction

English is a compulsory subject that should be learnt by students from junior level until university levels. On the other hand, English teaching has experienced limited success. Sulistiyo (2015) states that teaching English in the Indonesian context has encountered some problems such as low teacher competence, low student motivation and low English competence among students.

Grammar teaching is one of the essential elements of language. It refers to the way in which words change themselves and join together to make sentences (Harmer, 1987). It also deals with grammatical points that intensify communication (Nunan, 1991 cited in Tsehay, 2017). In addition, Murniati and Riyandari (2016) reveal that teachers' belief influenced their method of teaching grammar. The study on the teachers' belief on teaching grammar is limited. It only focuses on the materials and teaching techniques. However, the studies on teachers' belief on grammar will help to increase the improvement of national standard of English education.

Teachers' beliefs play an important role in teaching learning process. Therefore, understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improve teaching practices and teacher education programs in general (Johnson, 1994 cited in Tsehay, 2017). Teachers' belief is one factor which could affect the process of learning grammar. So, it is a need to conduct a study on English teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in teaching grammar. This study addresses some teachers' beliefs from English teacher perspective in teaching grammar.

The present study aims to explore teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in terms of grammar teaching. The research questions are:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on teaching grammar?
2. What are teachers' stated practices of teaching grammar?

Review of Related Literature

2.1. Teachers' Beliefs

Teaching is a process that can be conceived in different methods. It is the actions and behaviors which teachers carry out in the classroom that influenced learners. It is necessary to examine the beliefs and thinking processes which underlie teachers' classroom actions in order to try to comprehend how teachers deal with these dimensions of teaching. It is based on the assumption that what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe, and that teacher knowledge and "teacher thinking" provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teacher's classroom actions (Richard and Lockhart, 2007).

Nespor (1987) argued that teachers' beliefs are the propositions that involve affective and evaluative components, which are organized in a way that can guide them to achieve the ideal situations. For example, the goal of teaching and learning will be reached when a teacher organizes her class effectively. So, teachers need to know the ideal situations that teachers would like to follow as well as their perspectives of teaching

learning processes. In addition, Pajares (1992) revealed that “beliefs may also become values, which house the evaluative, comparative, and judgment functions of beliefs and replace predisposition with an imperative to action”. Indeed, beliefs have noteworthy roles because it can help teachers learn new knowledge and interpret new phenomena.

Kagan as cited in Kennedy (1997) states that teachers' beliefs play an important role in influencing their teaching practice. These beliefs come from teachers' past experiences, knowledge, and environments. Kennedy (1997: 7) states, "One of the most difficult beliefs to be changed for teachers are those formed during childhood, which is while they themselves are students in school observing their teachers and envisioning the kind of teachers they themselves would be".

Furthermore, teachers' beliefs are closely related to teachers' perception on teaching, their experiences, and application in the classrooms (Grossman et al., 1989, p. 31 cited in Murtiningsih, 2014). This statement suggests that teachers should teach based on the beliefs they have about teaching and learning.

2.2. The source of teachers' beliefs

Teachers' belief systems are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching, and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it. These beliefs and values serve as the background to much of the teachers' decision making and action, and hence constitute what has been termed the "culture of teaching." (Richard and Lockhart, 2007).

According to Kindsvatter, Willen, and Ishler (1988) there are a number of different sources of teachers' beliefs, namely:

1. Experience of teachers as language learners. All teachers have been ever students. Teachers' beliefs on teaching are often a reflection of how they themselves were taught.
2. Teachers experience is the primary source of beliefs about teaching. A teacher may have found that some teaching strategies work well and some do not.
3. Established practice. The instructional styles and practices may be presented through a school, an institution, or a school district.
4. Personality factors. Some teachers connect their particular teaching pattern, arrangement, or activity with their personal fondness.
5. Educationally based or research-based principles. Teachers may apply their understanding of a learning principle in psychology, second language acquisition, or education in the classroom.
6. Principles derived from an approach or method. Teachers may believe in the effectiveness of a particular approach or method of teaching and consistently try to implement it in the classroom.

Research Methodology

The study was applied a qualitative research method. A survey method was primarily used to collect information. The participants were English teacher (lecturer) in both public and private college – IAKN Tarurung, UHN Medan, and UMI Medan. They are holding a degree in English language teaching with different years of teaching experiences. There were four English teachers (lecturers) as respondent. Carrying out a survey or administering a questionnaire to investigate the teaching and learning aspects (Richard and Lockhart, 2007). The present study used a questionnaire as research instrument. The questionnaire was adapted from Zucker (2007) which was consisting of demographic profile, teachers' belief, teacher practice and open-ended questionnaire. It was administered to English teachers to collect information about their belief and practice in teaching grammar.

Results and Discussion

1. Demographic Profile

The participants of this study are four English teachers (lecturers). They are from different colleges. Their teaching experiences are between 3 up to 10 years, only one English teacher who has experience more than 10 years. It means that their teaching experiences are various.

2. Teaching Beliefs about the way grammar should be taught

Based on the questionnaire answer, most of respondents disagreed that English language can be acquired without teaching grammar directly. They also believe that formal teaching learning process is needed by learner in acquiring English language. Additionally, respondents also believe that drills and repetition are necessary support the students' language acquisition. This technique will help students to acquire the English language. Most of teacher felt comfort to explain the grammar lesson to students by

using their native language if they have problems in learning English language. Using native language is one way that can be used by teacher to deliver grammar lesson. Teachers believe that students' first language will interference to the students errors. The teachers believe that student will not pick up errors from each other when they work in group.

Furthermore, it can be inferred from the respondents' opinion that teaching grammar to English language learners is a must. Additionally, respondents of this study stated that grammar served as the foundation for communication as stated by one of the respondents. They believe that English grammar teaching should focus on the function of English language.

These ideas are supported by respondents' comments in open-ended questionnaire as follows:

1. In teaching English grammar, the teacher should focus on the function of the English language because the students will enjoy the learning if they know the function of the language itself. Mostly, the English language is difficult to acquire because the teachers do not give the understanding that the English language as the communication tools. They just focus on the structure and pattern. (Teacher 1)
2. Both of the structure of English and its function are necessary to be put in the syllabus. Beside students know the rules of the English, they have to know the functions of this language as the foreign language. By these ability to know both of the rules and its function, students will be more directed. It helps them to be easy to know the foreign language. (Teacher 2)
3. I believe that the syllabus better be designed to focus on the function of the English Language itself, while in its practice, teaching the grammar is actually undeniable. To make sure that the students are able to speak the target language is the main point of my personal teaching goal. But in order to achieve that goal, grammar explanations and drills are also necessary. (Teacher 3)
4. It shouldn't merely be focused on the structure or grammar, but sometimes it is useful if we contextualize to the learners' need. (Teacher 4)

The opinion above shows that the respondents are willing to put English grammar and its function in syllabus. The students will know the rules of language and how to use the target language.

3. Practices in teaching grammar

Most of teacher needed more than one hour to plan for an important grammar concept and to prepare teaching tools. They stated that curriculum guide or national standards and students need are two important factors that determine in teaching practice in the classroom. The others are syllabus, collaboration with other teachers, research article and workshops or professional development. Aspects of grammar teaching that are very important in their classroom are assessing speaking skill, writing in the target language, and explaining grammatical rules. Another aspects are reading, performing conversations, doing exercises on grammatical points, using songs to practice grammar points, conjugating verbs on charts, listening to audio tapes, modifying own speech in the target language, doing projects, and repetition drills.

The teachers' comment in open-ended questionnaire as follows:

1. No, I don't because sometimes the classroom situation encourage me to make the various teaching method and teaching strategy. (Teacher 1)
2. So far, even it is not 100 % fits between teaching grammar and teaching beliefs, but 80 % it has. It is because in the syllabus, the rules of the grammar are explained in the class for every meeting with the students and it follows the teaching beliefs that teaching grammar should be by explaining the structures or the language and its function to be learnt. (Teacher 2)
3. Yes. I myself design the syllabus that I use for my teaching. (Teacher 3)
4. No, I don't think so, reversely, following the syllabus of which all the activities are settled as manipulation (means orderly structured) can arise a disturbance such as awkward-like. (Teacher 4)

The respondents emphasize that they follow the syllabus which fit with their teaching beliefs and they design syllabus of their teaching guidance for every meeting in classroom. But, sometimes the classroom situation encourages them to apply various teaching method and teaching strategy.

Teachers' response on teaching beliefs fit with their teaching practices as follows:

1. Yes, I am. Because as we know that every human being has the Language Acquisition Device. They can acquire the language naturally by hearing, reading and speaking. They can correct each other how to speak correctly. (Teacher 1)
2. Yes it is. I believe that teaching grammar should explain the structure and the functions of the language itself. Thus in my teaching practices, I teach my students by explaining it in the class then give the example for my explanantion. It will help my students to know the structure of the language, English as a foreign language. As English is as foreign language, there will be the differences of the language in source language to target language. By explaining the structure and ots functions, students will be able to out thier position according to the language they learn. Thus, it helps them to know English grammar easily. (Teacher 2)

3. Yes. I teach what I believe would work on my students. (Teacher 3)
4. Certainly yes, since my teaching condition is always designed based on my self esteem in delivering what I want to teach for my students. (Teacher 4)

The teachers responded that their teaching beliefs fit with their teaching practices. Hoque (2016) states that language teachers' beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning play a significant role in their classroom practices, and in their professional development. Beliefs provide basis to the actions. Teachers' beliefs impact the performance of teachers. It is maintained that good beliefs results in the form of good practices. Normally, it is assumed that teachers do practice in the classroom what they think and believe. As Harste and Burke (2007 cited in Hoque, 2016) assume that teachers make decisions about classroom instruction in light of their theoretical beliefs they hold about teaching and learning. Teachers' beliefs influence their teaching goals, teaching methods, procedures, use of materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the schools they work in.

Conclusion

The respondents reflected similar belief towards grammar teaching. They believe that English language cannot be acquired by learner without teaching grammar to them directly. Additionally, rote, mechanical drills, and repetition are necessary support the students' language acquisition. Teachers felt comfort to explain the grammar lesson to students by using their native language if they have problems in learning English language. Using native language is one way that can be used by teacher to deliver grammar lesson. The respondents were possessing same stated practices of teaching grammar. The data from questionnaire showed that teachers' teaching beliefs fit with their teaching practices. It means that it matches between the statement and classroom practices. This will lead to positive impact on English instructional process. Their beliefs reflected on their classroom practices.

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