Beliefs versus Declared Practices of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers Regarding Teaching Grammar

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Abstract

This study investigated English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs, perceptions and declared practices of teaching grammar within a communicative language teaching (CLT) framework. Participants included 221 EFL teachers, who were teaching during the years 2013-2018 in different grades and schools throughout Israel. Participants were graduates of teacher training programs in colleges and universities and included Non-Native English Speaking Teachers (NNEST) and Native English Speaking Teachers (NEST).

An on-line, self-report survey designed specifically for this study contained three closed questions and two open-ended questions. One-way ANOVA statistics, and mean scores of all the responses were performed on the quantitative data.   Qualitative data were grouped, analyzed, and coded.

Results show a discrepancy between EFL teachers' perceptions and declared practices of teaching grammar in classrooms. Results further reveal significant differences between NEST and NNEST teachers, as well as differences between teachers who teach in different grades (elementary school, junior high school and high school). Moreover, 'vocabulary' and 'speaking' were ranked of highest importance (58% and 55%, respectively), whereas 'writing' and 'grammar' were considered least important (24%). These findings have valuable implications for teachers and teacher education regarding teaching grammar in context and using contextualized activities.

Keywords: EFL teachers' perceptions, teaching practices, grammar, NEST-NNEST, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teacher education

1. Introduction

The ultimate purpose of foreign language teaching is to develop learners' communicative competence, and to help learners use the language in meaningful, real-life contexts that support their ability to communicate (Fang, 2010; Fotos and Nassaji, 2011; Hymes, 1972). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes learning a language for communicating with others. It emphasizes student-centered learning and face-to-face activities such as giving and receiving directions, interviewing each other, which provide learners with the information they need to construct grammatical rules from authentic instances and examples of language use (Nunan, 1989). Grammar helps students discover the nature of language so they can say, read, and write intelligibly, and accurately produce an infinite number of sentences (Azar and Hagen, 2012; Shen, 2012; Wang, 2010).

Despite the common belief that CLT is organized exclusively according to categories of meaning or functions, it includes a strong grammar basis (Spada, 2007; Spada and Tomita, 2010; Thornbury, 1999). Since any language is systematically organized by its grammar, which is inseparably linked to meaning and context, it is difficult to make meanings clear without shaping grammatical structures (Frodesen and Holten, 2003).

A global challenge EFL teachers face with respect to teaching grammar is how to "bridge the gap between traditional teaching focused on grammar translation and receptive skills, and communicative teaching aimed at well-rounded communication skills" (Crain, 2012, p. 14). Research suggests that it is essential to consider not only what teachers believe about grammar teaching regarding the pedagogical approach they implement, but also the extent to which such beliefs are manifested in their classroom teaching activities (Canh and Barnard, 2009; Zhen and Murphy, 2007).

This study examines EFL teachers' perceptions and declared practices of teaching grammar in EFL classrooms. In view of recent research, which focuses on developing learners' communicative competence, the aim of this study is to examine (1) possible discrepancies between teachers' perceptions and their declared practices; (2) differences in

perceptions and declared practices between NESTs and NNESTs; and (3) differences in perceptions and declared practices between EFL teachers who teach in different grade levels. The outcomes of this study may provide useful implications for English teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) regarding the way grammar could be integrated in the curriculum.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 The Role of Grammar in Language Teaching

Teaching grammar has always been a central but challenging domain for language teachers; the connection between what teachers think about teaching grammar and how they actually teach grammar is an important issue (Nan, 2015; Richards and Renandya, 2002). Some researchers suggest that grammar is the representation of linguistic competence and it represents the main functions of language, such as sounds, words, pronunciation, sentences, dialects and meaning (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, 2003). "Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves, so it can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in language" (Crystal, 2006). The goal of teaching grammar is to promote understanding of language so that people convey the desired messages (Liamkina and Ryshina-Pankova, 2012).

Grammar and vocabulary are inseparable areas of language teaching (Hunston and Francis, 2000). Rӧmer and Schulze (2009) discuss the inseparability of lexis and grammar, showing the close connection between patterns and meanings or functions. In other words, knowing a word means recognizing not only its definition, but also its grammar (part of speech, stress, affixation, etc.), and knowing grammar requires not only identifying rules but also deep understanding of how such rules look when producing language. Selivan (2018) suggests that teachers should 'get rid' of the dichotomy between grammar and vocabulary and focus on both at the same time to communicate and create meaning, so the "boundary between what we have traditionally called 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' is somewhat blurred" (p. 3).

2.2 Teaching Grammar within a CLT Framework

The fundamental goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence in L2 through communication and interaction with others (Brown, 2000; Canale and Swain, 1980). CLT emphasizes student-centered learning and face-to-face activities that focus on what people *can do* with language (CEFR, 2018). Freeman (1989) claimed that in language learning, mastery of forms would be insignificant without equal mastery of the meanings they convey. Similarly, recent research [27] argues that grammatical forms and grammatical meanings are equally important in language teaching when focusing on productive language (Azar, 2012; Ellis, 2006).

According to Dickens and Woods (1988), "communicative grammar consists of content and construct: content refers to what is being presented to students […], and construct addresses how the content is being presented" (p.123). Communicative grammar is a resource that enables us to get things done, make choices, and articulate our feelings and attitudes (Nunan, 1991, 2007). Other scholars in the field of language teaching suggest different ways of using grammar communicatively. Saricoban and Metin (2000) suggest techniques to promote student-student and student-teacher communication, such as expressing ideas, providing authentic materials, offering rich content, and inducing meaning and form for relevant situations. These techniques include carefully designed activities using pictures, games, role-plays, songs, storytelling, problem-solving activities, etc. CLT highlights the importance of meaning, contextualization and the notion that accuracy should be judged in context and not as an abstract (Brown, 2000).

2.3 Dilemmas in Teaching Grammar

English grammar is often perceived by learners and teachers as difficult and complex. Thus, many EFL teachers wonder how to address possible lack of engagement and interest in dealing with grammatical intricacies of a foreign language on the part of the learners, and how to improve learners' ability to use grammar rules effectively in spoken and written communication (Liamkina and Ryshina-Pankova, 2012). Teaching grammar cannot be a 'one size fits all' experience, and teachers have to make constant and conscious choices regarding how to present language rules to their students. The most predominant dilemma many EFL teacher face is whether to focus more on producing accurate forms or on appropriate use (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004); that is, should structure be emphasized over communication and fluency? Along similar lines, an additional dilemma is whether to teach grammar as an isolated unit, at the sentence-based level, or as part of additional content with greater communicative intents (Nan, 2015; Zhen and Murphy, 2007).

Another question EFL teachers raise relates to the process of learning grammar and the teaching order of different topics in grammar. That is, should teachers simulate natural processes of L1 acquisition as much as possible (Ellis,

2006; Ellis, 2012), or should they change the order of topics they teach according to curriculum demands or abide to other constraints such as the textbooks?

2.4 Teaching Grammar in the EFL Israeli Context

As English has become a global lingua franca in many contexts in the world, accurate language use is especially necessary for many EFL learners who need English for economic empowerment and business (De Wet, 2002). Similar to many counties worldwide, English is instrumental in Israel; it is evident in the linguistic landscape and present on street signs, media, advertisements and many local services. English is the first foreign language studied throughout the school system and in all sectors of society. Since English is both the means of instruction and the subject of instruction (Brosh, 1996), EFL teachers are required to possess a high level of proficiency in all four-language skills, have full mastery of content, and total command of teaching methods and content dissemination (Carmel and Badash, 2019).

Most English teachers are Israeli born, non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), who have learned English as a foreign language in school. Although time and resources are devoted to developing EFL teachers' language and communication skills in teacher training curriculum, many graduates of colleges and high education institutions lack confidence in their knowledge of grammar, which may negatively influence their teaching (Borg, 2001). This situation raises some questions about Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) and Non Native English Speaking Teachers (NNESTs) regarding teaching grammar in the Israeli EFL classrooms. Some NNESTs often use their native language for grammar explanations (Dickson, 1996) or try to compare grammar rules in the two languages. This leads to confusion as not all rules have equivalent forms in the target language or because some rules 'work' differently in L1 and L2. As for NESTs, since many received limited linguistic training at school, in their English speaking countries, and presumably 'picked the grammar up' in unsystematic ways (Cajkler and Hislam, 2002), they may follow a similar pattern as teachers and avoid teaching grammar rules explicitly.

An additional reason teaching grammar can be a challenge for many EFL teachers in Israel relates to the issues of testing and assessment. For the last fifteen years, schoolchildren's achievements in reading and writing in English are regularly tested in the 5th and the 8th grades, using a national assessment tool called the *Meitzav* (Ministry of Education, 2016b). The Meitzav, being a high-stakes test, has a strong impact on teachers and on their teaching methods as they are often expected to carry out testing orders of "teaching for the test" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 104) and change their pedagogical strategies accordingly. This situation could demotivate teachers to use communicative methods to teach grammar and encourage the use of traditional grammar exercises.

Along similar lines, the textbooks used in EFL classrooms may strongly influence the grammar teaching and learning process. For many EFL teachers, textbooks seem to be the main teaching resource and many teachers claim that they depend on textbooks because "these provide content and activities that shape what happens in the classroom" (Byrd, 2001, p. 415). Moreover, many EFL teachers claim textbooks are an attractive teaching tool because they include pictures and graphic materials that may be more efficient than the teacher's descriptions (Gonz áez, 2006). Despite these claims and the varied communicative activities textbooks offer, many teachers still use textbooks mainly for completing traditional 'fill in' exercises. As a result, explaining grammar rules often becomes a technical and oversimplified procedure, which is not compatible with the CLT approach to teaching grammar.

In line with CLT, whereby emphasis is placed on promoting communication (Saricoban and Metin, 2000), the Chief English Inspectorate in the Ministry of Education has recently launched new English programs to promote spoken English from the pre-foundation level (grades 2) (Ministry of Education, 2016). The objective of this new initiative is to raise the level of speaking and oral proficiency among Israeli students. One of its outcomes pertains to the need to teach grammar communicatively by engaging the learners in expressing ideas correctly using rich, relevant vocabulary while focusing on integrating meaning and form for relevant situations. Fotos and Nassaji (2011) state that the ultimate purpose of foreign-language teaching is to develop learners' communicative competence, and to help learners use the language in meaningful, real-life contexts that support their ability to communicate. Similarly, according to Larsen-Freeman (2001), the communicative approach to teaching a foreign language has changed the way grammar is viewed as a resource to be used in conveying meaning and therefore, indicates that grammar should not be taught as an end in itself, but always with reference to meaning, social functions, and discourse. It is, therefore, essential to consider not only what teachers believe about teaching grammar for communication, but also the extent to which such beliefs are manifested in the classroom (Farrell and Lim, 2005; Zhen and Murphy, 2007).

2.5 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify teachers' perceptions and their declared practices of teaching grammar and

examine possible discrepancies between those perceptions and practices. In particular, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions about teaching grammar, and is there a difference between these perceptions and their declared classroom practices?

2. Which aspects of language do EFL teachers rank as most important?

3. Is there a difference in perceptions and declared practices between NESTs and NNESTs?

4. Is there a difference in perceptions and declared practices between EFL teachers who teach in different grade levels?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study included 221 EFL teachers who were teaching during the years 2013-2018 in various schools throughout Israel. Table 1 shows participants' characteristics and teaching data: gender, NESTs or NNESTs, seniority, and grade of teaching. Participants were graduates of teacher training programs in various colleges and universities, they gave their consent to participate in the study and their anonymity was secured.

Table 1. Subjects' characteristics and teaching data

Gender		NEST/NNEST		Num. of years teaching			Grade of teaching*			
M	F	Yes	No	1-3	4-8	+9	ES	JHS	HS	mixed
6	215	41	180	35	65	121	88	30	47	56
2.7%	97.3%	18.5%	81.5%	15.8%	29.3%	55%	39.8%	13.6%	21.3%	25.3%

* ES = elementary school, JHS = junior high school; HS = high school

3.2 Research Design and Instruments

An online survey was constructed for the purpose of the study by the researchers and distributed online to 488 English teachers countrywide, via Google Docs. The survey was based on a review of empirical literature pertaining to grammar teaching practices and EFL teachers' perception about the role of grammar in language teaching (Barnard and Scampton, 2008; Farrell and Lim, 2005). This method of data collection enabled us (the researchers) to get information from a large cohort of teachers and receive both quantitative (closed items) and qualitative (open questions) data. Open questions related to examples, teachers' personal opinions and descriptions regarding the procedures and methods they were using in the classroom, while the closed questions elicited their beliefs/perceptions.

The survey was piloted among a cohort of 15 EFL teachers with varied seniority level, working in different school sectors and geographical regions. Responses were reviewed by the researchers, the survey was corrected and adjusted in wake of the comments. 221 EFL teachers responded to the final survey during January 2019, yielding a 45% response rate.

The survey contained three closed questions and two open-ended questions.   The first closed question collected teachers' characteristics and teaching data (See Table 1). Additionally, participants were asked to rank their opinion regarding five aspects of language (reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and speaking) according to importance from (1) = least important to (5) = most important.

The second closed question related to teachers' perceptions regarding teaching grammar and included 11 items (Alpha's Cronbach 0.79), for example *"Teaching meaning is more important than teaching grammar"*; *"Pupils learn grammar better if it is presented in context (text, song, etc.)."* The third closed question was about teachers' declared classroom practices and methodologies and included 13 items (Alpha's Cronbach 0.65 with the exclusion of one item), for example *"I find the use of authentic material to teach grammar too time-consuming"*; "*I give grammar rules a lot of attention*". All questions were presented on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) = strongly disagree to (5) =strongly agree. A higher mean indicated a more communicative approach to teaching grammar.

The two open-ended questions were:

"In your opinion, what is the best way to teach grammar? Give two examples."

"Add any relevant factors regarding your views on grammar teaching."

3.3 Data Analysis

With the quantitative data, we performed descriptive statistics, (mean scores and standard deviation (SD) on all items of the survey. T-tests, one-way ANOVA, and a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA were performed to compare between teachers' perceptions and their declared practices, to find out which linguistic aspect is considered the most important in language, and to discover the impact of each independent variable (NEST and NNEST and grade of teaching) on the participants' perceptions and declared practices (See 'Results').

The qualitative part of the survey included two open-ended questions, allowing participants opportunity to share their opinions regarding how they view grammar instruction in a CLT framework, and share personal insights and examples. Each researcher analyzed the qualitative data independently, looking at key words and phrases, which were determined beforehand (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). The data was coded categorized according to emerging themes (Holliday, 2010).

3.4 The Rationale for the Research Method

As former EFL teachers and current teacher educators, we have collected anecdotal evidence of EFL teachers who find it difficult to explain grammar rules to the students or know very little grammar themselves. Additionally, teachers' lack of grammatical knowledge seems to affect the instructional decisions some of them make when teaching English in their classes and has been a cause for concern among professionals and teacher educators. Thus, the goal of the method employed in this study presents the initial stage in examining this anecdotal evidence and focuses on teachers' perceptions and declared practices. Examining teachers' perceptions in comparison with their declared practices will address possible knowledge gaps in the field and will set the basis for further research using classroom observations, teachers' assessment and/or interviews.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results from Closed Questions

In this section, we present the results of the quantitative data according to the research questions. First, results will relate to teachers' perceptions and declared practices in general. Declared practices refer to the ways teachers teach grammar in the classroom and their views on grammar as a means of communication. Next, we present results pertaining to teachers' ranking of perceived importance of different aspects of language. Finally, we present the two independent variables of NEST-NNEST and grade of teaching.

4.1.1 Teachers' Beliefs and Declared Practices

Table 2 presents the results for the first research question: what are EFL teachers' perceptions about teaching grammar, and is there a difference between these perceptions and their declared classroom practices?

Table 2. Comparison between teachers' perceptions and declared practices (N=221)

	Mean	SD
Teachers' perceptions	3.56	0.62
Teachers' declared practices	3.32	0.51

Table 2 shows the mean of teachers' perceptions about teaching grammar (M=3.56) and the mean of teachers' declared practices (M=3.32). A higher mean indicates that the teacher employed a more communicative approach to teaching grammar. Although both means are in the higher 'safe middle' zone (average 3-4), it is apparent that teachers' perceptions lean towards a more communicative approach (M=3.56) compared with their declared practices (M=3.32) which lean towards a less communicative approach to teaching grammar. In other words, results show a discrepancy between what teachers think about teaching grammar and what they declare they do in the field (t(220)=6.28, p<0.001).

4.1.2 Ranking Aspects of Language

Table 3 presents the findings of the second research question: Which aspects of language do EFL teachers rank as most important? Only 79 participants (36%) answered this question as instructed by ranking the five aspects from

least important (1) to most important (5), using each number only once. 142 participants (64%) repeated identical numbers in their ranking, so their responses were excluded from this analysis.

Table 3. Ranking aspects of language

Aspect in language teaching	% of teachers who think this aspect is the most important in language teaching
writing	24%
grammar	24%
reading	37%
vocabulary	58%
speaking	55%

Table 3 shows the percentage of teachers who think a specific aspect is the most important aspect in language teaching; namely, ranked the aspect as 4 or 5. The percentages do not add up to 100% as each aspect is analyzed separately. A higher percentage meant that more participants considered that specific aspect as very important. For example, 58% ranked vocabulary as a very important aspect in language teaching and only 24% considered writing and grammar as very important aspects of language teaching.

A one-way repeated-measures ANOVA showed a main effect for language aspect ($F(4,312)=7.8$, $p<0.001$). A post hoc Bonferroni test revealed a significant difference between the importance teachers assign to vocabulary and speaking in contrast to writing and grammar. In sum, vocabulary and speaking were seen as most important aspects of language (58% and 55%, respectively) whereas writing and grammar were considered least important aspects of language (24%). The aspect of reading yielded insignificant results with respect to the other aspects (37%).

4.1.3 NEST and NNEST

Table 4 presents results relating to the third research question: is there a difference in perceptions on teaching grammar and declared practices between NEST and NNEST[1]?

Table 4. Comparison between NEST and NNEST

		N	Mean	SD
Teachers' perceptions on teaching grammar	NEST	40	3.7	0.51
	NNEST	181	3.53	0.64
Teachers' declared practices	NEST	40	3.5	0.51
	NNEST	181	3.28	0.5

We can see in table 4 a significant difference to the advantage of NEST regarding their declared teaching practices ($t(219)=2.42$, $p<0.05$). NEST teachers declare they teach grammar more communicatively when compared with NNEST teachers (M=3.5 and M=3.28 respectively). No significant differences were found between NEST and NNEST in perceptions of teaching grammar.

4.1.4 Grade of Teaching

Table 5 presents results to the fourth research question: is there a difference in perceptions between EFL teachers who teach in different grades? Since there were 56 participants who teach in more than one group (e.g. teaching in both elementary and junior schools), they were excluded from this analysis. Therefore, the analysis in Table 5 includes 165 participants.

Table 5. Comparison between grade levels

	Grade	N	Mean	SD
Teachers' perceptions on teaching grammar	ES	88	3.47	0.64
	JHS	30	3.6	0.61
	HS	47	3.66	0.61
Teachers' declared practices	ES	88	3.18	0.53
	JHS	30	3.31	0.4
	HS	47	3.50	0.5

* ES = elementary school, JHS = junior high school; HS = high school

A One-Way ANOVA was performed in order to check whether grade of teaching influences the participants' perceptions and declared practices. Traced by a post-hoc Bonferroni test, a significant difference was found between high-school teachers (M=3.5) and elementary school teachers (M=3.18) with respect to teachers' declared practices $(F(2,162)=5.88, p<0.01)$. That is, high-school teachers reported using more communicative activities when teaching grammar.

Since the factor of NEST and grade of teaching seem to be crucial in our analysis, we examined whether most NESTs teach in high school; yet, this assumption could not be drawn from our data. The 40 NESTs in this study teach in various grades, but only 11 of them (27%) teach in HS. Thus, there are not enough NESTs who teach in HS in this research. Interestingly, no significant difference was found when comparing novice teachers (1-3 years) to less novice (4-8 years) or veteran ones (9+ years) with regard to any of the survey questions. In the present study, the independent variable of years of teaching does not play a role regarding teachers' perceptions or their declared practices.

4.2 Qualitative Results from Open-Ended Questions

4.2.1 Teachers' Beliefs vs. Declared Practices

According to participants in this study, there is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions about teaching grammar and their declared practices. On the one hand, teachers think that grammar has to be taught communicatively, as one teacher (F) wrote: *"I think grammar needn't be a specific part of the lesson. Sure, you have to know it to use the language correctly but it should be part of the reading and speaking and not as drills."* Similarly, another teacher (F) noted the value of teaching grammar in context, *"Grammar should be taught in context, having students come up with the rule on their own…after reading a text or watching a short educational scene or hearing a song etc. […] let the kids infer the tense from the meaning of the text. Teacher and kids form the rule together."*

On the other hand, when we examined teachers' declared practices, the focal point sometimes shifted from context-centered teaching to explicit instruction of grammar rules, as several teachers said that they: *"teach grammar without any songs or stories. Present each feature in an isolated manner and allow pupils to practice it using a wide spectrum of exercise."* Another teacher (F) wrote, *"I think that the best way to teach grammar is to explain how the pattern works, then how its components are formed in it and only then use examples and practices. Also, I make it as simple as possible to explain my point, so the students will easily understand."* some teachers referred to explicit teaching, for example*: "EFL teachers should teach grammar explicitly. They [the students] understand it better when they are taught the forms specifically."* Participants' written comments also show some teachers prefer teaching the rules first but move to more communicative activities that include the new grammar topic later, for example *"after I taught the rules for the Past Simple and Past Progressive, I asked the students to write about an experience from the past and to include both structures in their writing."*

4.2.2 Ranking Aspects of Language

According to the participants' views, the two most important aspects of language teaching are 'speaking' and 'vocabulary' while grammar, reading and writing are deemed less important. Some teachers emphasized the importance of using speaking activities in the classroom*,* as in the following two examples*: "apply authentic situations which use the grammar naturally in speaking, as in interviews and roleplays, for example, you are a police detective interviewing a witness to a crime…Get all the details you can like what's your name? Where do you live? Etc.",* *"The most important thing is to teach our pupils to speak and to learn how express their feelings and*

thoughts." Teachers in this study also expressed their concern about lack of speaking practice, saying that *"Speaking is an important factor when learning a language because I teach grammar, writing and listening but I am not sure if my students will be able to speak correctly when they need to: when they go broad or speak to non-Hebrew speakers."*

4.2.3 NESTs and NNESTs

Results show that NESTs believe that authentic exposure to the target language helps students 'pick up' grammar intuitively. For example, *"Students will learn grammar best if they are given opportunities to use /hear/read English. This way they will learn it naturally, as native speakers do."* Another NEST teacher wrote, *"Students who have more exposure to English (through hobbies, playing video games, and visiting relatives) often require less explicit grammar instruction than purely EFL students."* Having said that, there were also NNEST teachers who supported teaching grammar through CLT, as illustrated in the following examples: "*grammar should be taught naturally through exposing students to as much spoken language as possible*."; "*grammar should be taught through games and activities that are based on everyday situations.*"

4.2.4 Grade of Teaching

Some of the high school (HS) teachers in this study believe that context and use of songs and stories are important when teaching grammar as the following two quotes demonstrate: "*I think students should understand grammar […] but not to drill and test it. It should be done within context, i.e., pointing out grammatical structures in stories, songs and conversations;* "context helps *students come up with the rule on their own*." Another point of view of HS teachers emphasized the importance of teaching grammar using communicative approaches before presenting a rule: "*first creating a conversation; then eliciting examples from the students; last, presenting grammar rules*."

Results also showed opposing views in the declared practices of ES teachers. Some ES teachers prefer to *"Teach grammar without any songs or stories"* as one ES teacher (M) wrote *"I use a formula so there is a clear structure".* While other ES teachers support creative methods to teach grammar as this example demonstrates*: "teaching grammar in a creative way such as games is much more effective, also teaching grammar in context, so students won't just learn the rules by heart, but know how to use those rules when creating a sentence.*" Another example showing a communicative perspective is "*to relate to pupils' everyday life, for example: when teaching present simple ask the pupils to write their weekly schedule.*"

In conclusion, four main issues regarding teachers' perceptions and declared classroom practices of teaching grammar emerged from the survey questions. Findings show a significant gap between EFL teachers' perceptions and declared practices and point at differences between NESTs and Israeli born NNESTs. Findings further indicate that teachers' ranking the importance of aspects of language is not always aligned with their declared practices; although many teachers think speaking is the most important aspect of language in the EFL classroom, their declared practices often challenge those perceptions. Finally, the results reveal a significant difference between teachers who teach in different grades regarding the implementation of communicative tasks; HS teachers' declared classroom practices showed a more communicative approach to teaching grammar compared to teachers in JHS and ES.

5. Discussion

The role of grammar in CLT is gaining importance due to the growing need of EFL learners to use English for communication and interaction in the global world. The findings in this study point at discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices. In the discussion, we will attempt to unpack some of these findings and suggest possible interpretations teachers and teacher educators can reflect on.

5.1 Teaching Grammar Communicatively - Easier Said than Done

The results of this study suggest that teachers hold a set of belief systems that is not reflected in their declared classroom practices regarding teaching grammar. Teachers think it is important to teach grammar for communication, but their declared practices lean toward a more traditional view which focuses on frontal teaching, explicit explanations of rules, textbook drills and little contextualization. We believe there may be several possible reasons for this discrepancy.

One reason may relate to participants' former experience and assumptions as learners and/or teachers of grammar in a foreign language. Research on teachers' past experiences and attitudes to grammar shows that these experiences affect their instruction far more than what they learned in the training program (Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Richards, Gallo, and Renandya, 2001; Zheng, 2009). In addition, it is possible that traditional teaching methods such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method that were widely used for decades affect today's

EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching grammar. Furthermore, in a recent study conducted in Bangladesh among teachers and students, secondary students reported they enjoyed traditional practices. 86% stated that they liked learning grammar rules in English classes and 69% believed that learning English means learning grammar rules (Perez-Gore, McCormick, Burton, and Siddique, 2014). Thus, prior knowledge, personal learning experience, and beliefs of pre-service teachers are important components of their teaching practices and need to be considered within the framework of teacher education and training program.

A second possible reason for the discrepancy between what teachers think about teaching grammar and their declared practices relates to the frequency of testing and assessment in the Israeli school system. Preparing for school exams or national tests often leads to working with prescriptive textbooks, which often result it teaching in a rule-based manner, which is not aligned with the CLT approach, but focuses more on teaching students test strategies through drilling. Consequently, accuracy can be 'overrated' (Gorsuch, 2002; Shohamy, 2006) and 'over practiced' and communication skills can be negatively affected.

Finally, the discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and their declared practices may stem from lack of preparedness in CLT methodology during their teacher-training program (Gamal and Debra, 2001). English teachers need more guidance and tools to help them move away from traditional practices that promote rote learning and help them focus on developing communicative language teaching methods.

5.2 NESTs and NNESTs

The topic of NESTs and NNESTs has long been of interest among both academics and practitioners in the field of English language teaching and learning (Inbar-Lourie and Gagne, 2016). Research in the field has shown that EFL teachers who are NESTs and are fluent English speakers enjoy an extensive experience as "language users" while EFL English teachers who are NNEST of English, are often considered "language learners" and rely more on teaching accuracy (Widdowson, 1996). Furthermore, NESTs 'feel' the natural flow of the language and its nuances, which may increase their confidence to try communicative activities. Walkinshaw and Hoang (2014) examined students' perceptions about NESTs and NNESTs in Vietnam and Japan and found that NESTs were valued as models for authentic, natural pronunciation, yet their ability to explain grammatical features was not viewed as a forte. In turn, for NNESTs, the fact that English is not their native language may make them feel vulnerable and not adequately prepared to deal effectively with any spontaneous situation that could come up in the classroom.

The results of this study support these claims, indicating that NESTs teach grammar more communicatively and tackle the challenges regarding teaching grammar differently compared to NNESTs. Thus, if, in fact, NEST use more CLT methods to teach grammar due to their confidence as native speakers and spontaneous use of communicative language in class, teacher education and development programs should provide NNEST with extensive opportunities to practice and improve their oral proficiency and communication skills. The more proficient the teachers, the more likely they will use communicative teaching methods to teach grammar.

5.3 Promoting Speaking and Communication

Results show that teachers think it is very important to practice speaking activities with students to promote communication and grammar production. Speaking activities include active teacher-student and student-student conversations, which can provoke spontaneous unpredicted responses from students. This result is aligned with research, which indicates that it is mainly though speaking across all age levels that students express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance (Kayi, 2006). EFL teachers should, therefore, create opportunities for students to speak in the lessons. At the same time, and at risk of favoring fluency over accuracy, teachers need to be tolerant of common errors such as misuse of subject-verb agreement, omission of articles, incorrect word order and more.

Findings in this study show that CLT increases among teachers in JHS and HS. Indeed, it is generally expected that JH and HS students know more vocabulary and grammar and can use it more effectively in oral interactions. It is likely that JHS and HS teachers rely on students' previous knowledge and speaking abilities and feel it is easier to conduct theme lessons that revolve around speaking, and thus teach grammar more communicatively. In view of this finding, we suggest that teaching grammar will not be central in elementary school. Alternatively, focus should be placed on vocabulary and speech chunks using confidence-building methods and practices.

6. Practical Implications

Implications from this study can be drawn for teachers and teacher education. Activities that contribute to proficiency development for NNESTs should be embedded in teacher preparation, re-certification and professional development programs. EFL teachers' preparation should concentrate on communicative activities and rule discovery processes

which focus on performance-based learning such as Project-Based Learning (PBL), role-playing, information gap activities, WH-questions and answers (Fullan, 2001). Moreover, teacher education curriculum should focus on authentic, communicative activities using technology and media (for example digital games and music clips) which inherently include social interaction and require students' active involvement in the learning process.

In the same vein, teacher preparation should include discussions with students about CLT methods that may help them reflect and analyze the methods' advantages and effectiveness (Brown 2009, Shrestha 2013). Such teaching processes support production, interaction and mediation, allowing students to discover how the rules function in realistic situations and express their ideas in speaking and writing. Accordingly, students in the classroom could be exposed to grammatical structures in the context of meaningful communication or speaking activities that guide them to use the language effectively (Larsen-Freeman, 2014a). Employing a more dynamic and holistic approach to teaching grammar and connecting the outside world into the classroom by using communicative activities and presenting authentic situations and materials could provide opportunities for developing and increasing students' communicative awareness (Whong, 2013).

Furthermore, professionals in the field of ELT should work together to reach an alignment between textbooks and how grammar topics are presented and practiced in class. Activities that focus on accuracy and activities that focus on fluency would be graded and well balanced.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated EFL teachers' beliefs and declared practices of teaching grammar pointing at discrepancies between beliefs and practices. Results show that NESTs teach grammar more communicatively and use more CLT methods to promote students' communicative competence and interaction skills. The findings also show that teachers believe it is mainly though speaking across all age levels that students express themselves. Finally, our findings suggest that CLT increases among teachers in JHS and HS.

It is necessary to point out that this study does not include descriptions of actual teaching practices of the participants or classroom observations; hence, the conclusions are based on teachers' reported practices. Due to severe demands on receiving ethical consent for classroom observations, this study focused on teachers' declared practices for data collection. Teachers in this study stated and described their methods of teaching in the classroom and provided numerous authentic examples from the field to support their claims. The examples and explanations were clearly specified in the qualitative part of this study

Furthermore, the data were collected from a cohort of English language teachers. Collecting additional data from linguists, students and English language researchers could provide more insights regarding what this research was set to examine. Finally, the current study is based on teachers' perceptions and declared practices of teaching grammar - factors such as teachers' preparedness, self-efficacy and confidence are not included in the analyses. Such factors pertaining to teachers' personality and character could shed additional light on EFL teachers' dilemmas and pedagogical choices.

Endnote:

[1] The number of NEST teachers (40) in this study is smaller than the number of NNEST teachers (181). This comparison, however, is valuable and has implications. See part 5.

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