

ISSN (print): 2588-5731

Research Paper

On the Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Grammar Teaching Beliefs and Their Professional Development

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Received Date: 15/08/2023 Accepted Date: 17/06/2023

Pp: 93-106

Abstract

L2 research, during the last two decades, has almost abandoned studying the appropriacy of methodologies and techniques to focus more on the underlying derives for teachers' pedagogical decision makings inside the class. This study, in line with the recent trend, is designed and conducted to determine the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' grammar teaching beliefs and their professional development. In so doing, a Likert scale 24-item grammar belief questionnaire developed by Mohamed (2006) and a professional development questionnaire developed by Jadidi and Bagheri (2014) were administered to 177 Iranian EFL teachers. The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The results revealed that teachers are currently more inclined toward communicative based activities which focus on grammar instruction in their classroom. Finally, the results showed that Iranian EFL teachers are professionally self-regulated.

Keywords: Teachers' grammar beliefs, Teachers' professional development, Self-regulated teachers, Other-regulated teachers

Introduction

Professional development is defined as the processes and activities planned to develop teachers' knowledge, instructional practices, and students' learning achievements

(Richardson,1997). Traditional professional development has been known as distinct activities like workshops and college training courses (Little, 1993); but these activities are

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often thought of as ineffective since they do not reveal what individual teachers actually do in the classroom teaching (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teacher learning which is one of the significant concepts in teachers' professional development deserves more attention and exploration (Schulz, R. A. 1996).

Teacher learning was conceptualized as: a skill learning, a cognitive process, a personal construction, and a reflective practice; the first one viewed teacher learning as the growth and mastery of various kinds of skills or competencies which contribute to successful teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005). The second one regards teacher learning as a cognitive process which accounts for teachers' thoughts and beliefs and the way they have an impact on language teaching and learning; as a result, teacher development programs which take this perspective into account would assist and help teachers in discovering their language cognitions in relation to their classroom practices. Personal construction as another perspective of teacher learning is grounded in the constructivist educational philosophy which views learning as the reorganization and relearning of one's previous representations of knowledge; that is, new learning points are assimilated into the old system of existing knowledge through interpretations of their own experience (Sanchez, 2012). Therefore, this view accentuates teachers' nature and distinctiveness together with developmental activities which concentrate on self-awareness and individual interpretation. As regards reflective practice, teachers learn when they reflect on their own teaching experiences. This view of teacher learning which is based on teaching experience has received much attention in the literature of teacher development (Richards & Lockhart 1994). Reflection was defined as "the process of critical examination of

experiences, a process that can lead to a better understanding of one's practices and routines." (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 7). Pennington (1992) also highlighted the need for teacher reflection in language teaching and declared that it influences teachers' knowledge, abilities, and teacher beliefs; and consequently, affect learners and the way they view learning.

Teachers can improve their learning through various modes (Richards & Farrell, 2005); their own practices would assist them to achieve and accumulate new knowledge and which can contribute to an awareness of such issues as their students, schools, institutional programs, and teaching approaches and procedures. This may involve a kind of conscious and prearranged language learning strategies like self-monitoring, action research, and reflective journals; or indirectly as the consequence of what they experience in their daily lives. Teachers can also enhance their own learning through peer coaching, classroom observation, and action research. Moreover, many practicing teachers learn via teacher development programs such as university graduate programs and also workshops which are organized by the language institutes.

Evaluation of Teachers' Professional Development

For decades, instructors have worked based on the view that professional development is good by definition. However, there has little been done on the evaluation of L2 education programs and especially on the process of evaluation (Wilson, 2011; Capan, 2014). Good evaluations are the product of thoughtful planning, the ability to ask good questions, and a basic understanding about how to find valid answers. Good evaluations provide information that is sound, meaningful, and adequately dependable to use in making thoughtful and accountable

decisions about professional development processes and effects (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019).

Abelson (1979) declared that planning an evaluation program encompasses responding to some questions concerning the purpose of such issues as the evaluation, audience, evaluator, content, method, and timing; however, he indicated that we cannot find “One Best Way” (p. 274) of conducting an evaluation. Moreover, he mentioned that conducting an evaluation relies on some factors like the evaluation purposes, the nature of the individuals and program, time scale and resources.

The importance of Teaching and Learning L2 Grammar

The grammar instruction has been a debated issue for a long time. Although the role of grammar teaching has changed considerably over time, some researchers think grammar has a very vital part in language teaching and learning. For the last 4 decades, many have been interested in teaching grammar which held a principal position in English language teaching (Azar, 2007). Azar further emphasized an important aspect of grammar teaching; that is, it assists learners to figure out the nature of a language because all languages consist of predictable patterns which make the speakers' language intelligible.

There is a key point here which must not be forgotten; meaning is of focal attention in language learning; that is, learners cannot apply the grammar rules when they do not recognize the meaning and function of the language components and elements. Most of the teachers agree with the point that it is not that easy to teach a language without knowledge of its structure and its functions (Hamer, 2001).

Celce-Murcia (1991) declared her idea of the importance of teaching grammar

concerning communicative purposes. It should be kept in mind that English teachers must understand the fact that linguistic accuracy is a very important part of communicative competence, because it makes it possible to achieve meaning, “while communicating in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner” (p. 280).

According to Ur (1996), teaching grammar is not the only way to give learners the ability to use language in real life contexts. She believed that the problem is not that teaching grammar must be done or not; but whether teaching grammar assists the learners to use the language or not. Every individual can learn or, in other words, acquire his or her native language without consciously learning grammar. However, teaching grammar in learning a second or foreign language is precious and even crucial if it is taught constantly. It is not a goal, but as a means to help learners prepare themselves to achieve language mastery. Based on a large number of studies done on grammar, some researchers believe that explicit grammatical rules can facilitate the process of learning grammar (Andrews, 2007). Hedge emphasized the importance of teaching grammar by saying; “It is this belief that has led to the reassertion of the value of grammar learning in the classroom” (p. 151).

On the other hand, some researchers believe that grammar teaching is a waste of time. The main important point is that they assume that grammar teaching is neither necessary nor sufficient for learning a language which is thought to result in its use. It is evident that there has been much discussion on teaching and learning grammar, so teachers and learners have still not realized the main cause of the problems; in other words, there is a problem regarding whether to teach grammar or not (Borg, 2018).

The role of teachers must not be forgotten in this field (Brumfit, 1996). Some

language teachers believe that if learners do not have any difficulty in syntactic structures, they will not encounter any problems in handling language use. The truth is that there are some situations in which learners know grammatical structures, yet they are unable to use the learned structures in real life contexts.

In short, the value of teaching grammar is still in doubt. One strand of research has been against teaching grammar and think of it as just a waste of time; researchers in this view have the interpretation that most of the language learners cannot apply the grammatical rules after years of spending time in grammar classes (Borg, 2006; Borg & Sanches, 2020). On the other hand, another strand of research has found that when grammar is well taught through any methods can be beneficial and learned by most learners (Borg, 2001).

Objectives of the Study

Borg (2015) declared that many factors including teaching and learning experiences, cognitive characteristics, and professional developments can have an impact on the way they form their beliefs and attitudes. So, this study aims to discover teachers' grammar beliefs ways of acquiring grammar, and methods of grammar instruction; to discover the ways Iranian English teachers deal with grammar in the class; besides, to find out to see if there is any correspondence between teachers' grammar beliefs and their professional development.

Research Questions

R.Q. In what ways professionally self-regulated and other regulated teachers differ in terms of their grammar beliefs?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research paradigm. Quantitative research is concerned with measuring numerical data is which of paramount importance. The main and the most outstanding feature of quantitative research is that it is capable of quantifying variables which can be generalizable.

Participants

This study used a convenient sampling through which 177 Iranian EFL teachers were selected to cooperate in this piece of research. The participants were selected from different language institutes such as Sepas, Iran Language Institutes, Marefat, Neyayesh, Bahar, Boostan, Mehr, and Mehre Sepas across Fars Province.

Instruments of the study

Professional development scale (PDS)

PDS was an eighteen-item teacher professional development questionnaire developed by Jadidi and Bagheri (2014) used in this study to explore teachers' attitudes about their professional development which consists of two components namely self-regulation and other-regulation. The validity of the questionnaires was established through a review by a group of university teachers together with some PhD candidates.

Teachers' grammar beliefs questionnaire (TGBQ)

A 24-item questionnaire, developed by Mohamed (2006), required teachers to respond to statements on a five-point Likert scale in the present study. The beliefs questionnaire used for the study was designed to fulfil two main objectives.

Data collection procedures

The data for the study were collected from 177 EFL teachers in English language institutes in Fars province, Iran. 80% of the two questionnaires, teachers'

grammar beliefs and teachers' professional development, were distributed among Iranian EFL teachers at institutes where they taught. The researcher sent the rest of the questionnaires (20%) through an email because they taught at different institute across Fars province.

Data analysis Procedure

Concerning both teachers' grammar beliefs and teachers' professional development questionnaires' reliability coefficient which is the scale used to measure reliability of the questionnaires was calculated using Cronbach alpha. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 the descriptive statistics for the 2 components of professional development

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
self	177	1.50	4.67	3.2137	.54325
Other	177	1.78	4.11	2.8493	.50004
Valid N	177				

To answer research question, two groups each consists of 20 teachers who were self-regulated and other regulated were selected in this study. In order to compare and contrast self-regulated and other-regulated teachers concerning their grammar beliefs questionnaire, descriptive statistics were obtained using SPSS. The results are as follow: concerning the first component (TA), self-regulated teachers mainly were in agreement with items 21, 4, 14, 22, and 16 and disagreed with items 11, 23, 7, and 9. In contrast, other-regulated teachers were in agreement with item 23, 7, 4, and 9 and were not in agreement with items 11, 21, 14, 22, and 16. 80% of the self-regulated teachers

The professional development questionnaire had two components namely self-regulated and other-regulated. Forty teachers were selected to put into self-regulated and other-regulated groups based on their answers to the two components of the professional development questionnaire. The means for two components, self-regulation and other-regulation, are 3.2137 and 2.8493 respectively which shows that Iranian EFL teachers inclined to use self-regulation in their professional development and they are more dependent on their own experiences and abilities rather than other external factors.

generally agreed with item 21 which states that students will learn grammar better if understand grammatical terminology, on the other hand, other-regulated teachers disagreed with this item; this implies that self-regulated teachers rely more on their own abilities. Regarding item 23, 60 % of the self-regulated teachers were in agreement with the point that the main role of the teacher is to explain the grammar point. In contrast, 70% of the other-regulated teachers disagreed with this item, so this may be due to the fact that self-regulated teachers depend more on their own experience as a learner; however, other regulated teachers did not approve this because such external factors as

workshops and institutional regulations limit the use of teachers' grammar explanation. An important feature about this component is that self-regulated and other regulated teachers generally were in agreement with items 4 and 9 which state that grammar should be taught intensively. 14 out of 20 self-regulated teachers agreed with items 4 and 14 which emphasized the inclusion of

grammar in teaching syllabus and in all lessons whereas 65% of other-regulated teachers were not in agreement with these items. As regard to item 16, about 70% of the first group agreed with teaching grammar to beginners than to advanced students while 65% of the second group disagreed with this item.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Regulated Teachers, Component 1, Teaching Approach (T A).

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
11	It is essential that students are familiar with the correct grammatical terminology	20 100%	4 20%	9 45%	2 10%	3 15%	2 10%
21	Students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology.	20 100%	1 5%	3 15%	0 0%	7 35%	9 45%
23	The main role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the grammar point.	20 100%	1 5%	3 15%	4 20%	8 40%	4 20%
7	Grammar should be the main component of any teaching syllabus.	20 100%	3 15%	4 20%	1 5%	7 35%	5 25%
4	Grammar can be successfully taught without extensive grammatical terminology.	20 100%	2 10%	1 5%	3 15%	6 30%	8 40%
9	It is best to teach grammar intensively rather than extensively.	20 100%	6 30%	12 60%	0 0%	2 10%	0 %
14	It is important to focus on grammar in all lessons.	20 100%	3 15%	3 15%	0 0%	8 40%	6 30%
22	Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how the structure works.	20 100%	2 10%	4 20%	0 0%	10 50%	4 20%
16	It is more important to teach grammar to beginners than to advanced learners.	20 100%	1 5%	5 25%	0 0%	11 55%	3 15%

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Other-Regulated Teachers, Component 1, Teaching Approach (TA)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
11	It is essential that students are familiar with the correct grammatical terminology	20 100%	1 20%	5 45%	3 10%	7 15%	4 10%
21	Students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology.	20 100%	7 35 %	6 30%	3 15%	0 0%	4 20%
23	The main role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the grammar point.	20 100%	8 40%	6 30%	1 5%	3 15%	2 10%
7	Grammar should be the main component of any teaching syllabus.	20 100%	1 5%	5 25%	1 5%	7 35%	6 30%
4	Grammar can be successfully taught without extensive grammatical terminology.	20 100%	7 35%	5 25%	3 15%	2 10%	3 15%
9	It is best to teach grammar intensively rather than extensively.	20 100%	0 0%	7 35%	0 0%	8 40%	5 25%
14	It is important to focus on grammar in all lessons.	20 100%	9 45%	4 20%	0 0%	3 15%	4 20%
22	Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how the structure works.	20 100%	8 40%	7 35%	0 0%	5 25%	0 0%
16	It is more important to teach grammar to beginners than to advanced learners.	20 100%	8 40%	3 15%	3 15%	3 15%	3 15%

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Regulated, Component 2, Arguments Against Grammar Teaching (AAGT)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
1	A learner can acquire a second or foreign language without grammar instruction.	20 100%	8 40%	7 35%	1 5%	1 5%	3 15%

5	Grammar is best acquired unconsciously through meaningful communication.	20	2	12	3	2	1
		100%	10%	60%	15%	10%	5%
6	Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate	20	1	12	4	0	3
		100%	5%	60%	20%	0%	15%

Table 17. Descriptive Statistics for Other-Regulated Teachers, Component 2, Arguments Against Grammar Teaching (AAGT)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
1	A learner can acquire a second or foreign language without grammar instruction.	20	2	3	1	9	5
		100%	10%	15%	5%	45%	25%
5	Grammar is best acquired unconsciously through meaningful communication.	20	3	2	0	3	12
		100%	15%	10%	%	15%	60%
6	Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate	20	3	3	0	8	6
		100%	15%	15%	0%	40%	30%

As regard to component 2 which deals with Arguments Against Grammar Teaching (AAGT), the majority of the self-regulated teachers disagreed with all the items; that is, 75% of the self-regulated teachers were not in agreement with item 1 which states that a learner can acquire a foreign language without grammar instruction; on the other

hand, 70% of the other-regulated teachers agreed with this item. About 70% of the self-regulated teachers did not approve items 5 and 6. In contrast, the teachers in the second group were in agreement with these two items.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Regulated Teaches, Component 3, Feedback and Error Correction (FEC)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
12	It is important for students to be given the right answers after an exercise/test.	20	1	1	1	8	9
		100%	5%	5%	5%	40%	45%
13	It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work.	20	2	3	2	6	7
		100%	10%	15%	10%	30%	35%
15	It is important to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work	20	3	4	1	8	4
		100%	15%	20%	0%	40%	20%

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Other-Regulated Teaches, Component 3, Feedback and Error Correction (FEC)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
12	It is important for students to be given the right answers after an exercise/test.	20 100%	1 5%	1 5%	1 5%	8 40%	9 45%
13	It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work.	20 100%	8 40%	7 35%	1 10%	4 20%	0 0%
15	It is important to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work	20 100%	7 35%	0 0%	0 0%	9 45%	4 20%

Eighty-five percent agreement can be observed among the self-regulated teachers and other-regulated teachers concerning item 12. As regard to item 13 which states the importance of correcting errors in students' oral work; there was a sixty-five consensus among self-regulated teachers; on

the other hand, 75% of the other-regulated teachers disagreed with this item. The two groups of self and other regulated teachers were generally in agreement with item 15 (about 60%), it is important to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Regulated Teachers, Component 4, Importance of Grammar (IG).

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
8	If learners receive grammar instruction, they are more likely to be able to correct errors.	20 100%	2 10%	2 10%	1 5%	7 35%	8 40%
17	Regular practice ensures that grammar is quickly and successfully acquired.	20 100%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%	14 70%	4 20%
2	Attention to grammar ensures that students become aware of how the language works	20 100%	3 15%	1 5%	1 5%	7 35%	8 40%

3	Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.	20	3	4	00	6	7
		100%	15%	20%	00	30%	35%
24	Teaching grammar enable students to produce more complex sentences	20	2	2	3	8	5
		100%	10%	10%	15%	40%	25%

All of the self and other regulated teachers were mainly in consensuses with the component of importance of

grammar; that is, both groups agreed with items 17, 2, 8, 3, and 24.

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Other-Regulated Teachers, Component 4, Importance of Grammar (IG)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
8	If learners receive grammar instruction, they are more likely to be able to correct errors.	20	1	2	1	10	6
		100%	5%	10%	5%	50%	30%
17	Regular practice ensures that grammar is quickly and successfully acquired.	20	3	5	0	10	2
		100%	15%	25%	0%	50%	10%
2	Attention to grammar ensures that students become aware of how the language works	20	3	5	1	3	8
		100%	15%	25%	5%	15%	40%
3	Explicit knowledge of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of language.	20	5	5	00	3	7
		100%	25%	25%	00	15%	35%
24	Teaching grammar enables students to produce more complex sentences	20	0	4	1	10	5
		100%	0%	20%	5%	50%	25%

Seventy percent of the self-regulated teachers were in agreement with item 10 which states that it is better for students to figure out for themselves why their answer was wrong. In contrast, 75% of the other-regulated teachers were not in consensuses with this item; because self-regulated teachers may depend on their own abilities and experiences, however, the second group may believe in the other factors such per coaching and observers' comments and suggestions to cope with such issue. The next one is item 18 which more than 80% of both self-regulated and other-regulated teachers disagreed with.

70% of the teachers in the first group were in agreement with item 19, on the other hand, 75% of the teachers in the second group were not in consensus with this item because other-regulated teachers may believe that they can help their students to be error free by relying on some external factors such as asking their co-workers for help, peer coaching, and feedback from their observers. Self-regulated teachers disagreed with item 20 the use of inductive approach in their classroom, however, 85% of the other-regulated teachers believed in an inductive approach to teaching grammar: this may be due to the fact that

other regulated-teachers have the inclination toward attending workshops, conferences, and TTCs to be updated in following teaching approach.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Self-Regulated Teachers, Component 5, Role of the Learner in Learning Grammar (RLLG).

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
10	It is better for students to figure out for themselves why their answer was wrong.	20 100%	1 5%	2 10%	3 15%	7 35%	7 35%
18	Students generally do not learn the grammatical structures they are taught.	20 100%	10 50%	8 40%	0 0%	1 5%	1 5%
19	Students rarely become error-free because English grammar is very complex.	20 100%	3 15%	2 10%	1 5%	7 35%	7 35%
20	Students should be given the opportunity to work out rules from examples.	20 100%	9 45%	5 25%	2 10%	3 15%	1 5%

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Other-Regulated Teaches, Component 5, Role of the Learner in Learning Grammar (RLLG)

No.	Description	N	SD	D	Ne	SA	A
10	It is better for students to figure out for themselves why their answer was wrong.	20 100%	8 40%	7 35%	0 0%	2 10%	3 15%
18	Students generally do not learn the grammatical structures they are taught.	20 100%	7 35%	9 45%	0 %	2 10%	2 10%
19	Students rarely become error-free because English grammar is very complex.	20 100%	6 30%	9 45%	1 5%	4 20%	0 0%
20	Students should be given the opportunity to work out rules from examples.	20 100%	1 5%	2 10%	0 0%	8 40%	9 45%

Conclusion

The fact that 80% of the self-regulated teachers are mainly in agreement with item 21 which states that students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology. So, this implies that self-regulated teachers rely more on their own abilities and on their own reflections on issues and challenges they faced in the class; on the other hand, other-regulated teachers disagreed with this item which implies that they may depend on some external factors such as attending workshops and conferences which can change their beliefs toward new approaches in teaching grammar. Self-regulated teachers believed in teachers' grammar explanation in the class (60%) whereas other-regulated teachers did not believe in such an issue (70%); it can be

justified that self-regulated teachers depend more on their own experience as a learner and their own experience in the class; however, other regulated teachers did not approve this because such external factors as workshops and institutional regulations limit the use of teachers' grammar explanation. An important feature about this component is that self-regulated and other regulated teachers generally were in agreement with items 4 and 9 which states that grammar should be taught intensively. As regard to item 16, about 70% of the first group agreed with teaching grammar to beginners than to advanced students while 65% of the second group disagreed with this item; it can be explained that self-regulated teachers were taught grammar when they were beginner learners and they may teach beginner levels

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