Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers of English towards Grammar Teaching in the Turkish Context

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Abstract

Problem Statement: ESL/EFL grammar teaching has been a controversial issue due to the contextual differences. Therefore, there is a growing need to explore how English teachers perceive and practise grammar teaching in a variety of contexts. Research studies into this issue can provide them with context-sensitive perspectives.

Purpose of Study: This study aimed to investigate the perceptions and classroom practices of Turkish pre-service teachers of English employing a quantitative research design.

Methods: In this study, which employs a quantitative research design, the questionnaire adapted from a recently conducted study was distributed to 39 female and 5 male senior students at the Department of English Language Teaching at an English-medium state university in Turkey. They were all enrolled in the course Practice Teaching. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.

Findings and Results: The student-teachers favored benefiting from not only form-focused instruction and but also holistic, meaning-based approaches. They assumed an active role in the teaching process as informed decision-makers sensitized to cultural and individual variables in their contexts within which their perceptions were shaped. Instructional
challenges were the establishment of form-meaning mappings, informed use of authentic texts, contextualization, target language use, and skills integration.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Classroom experience has helped student-teachers internalize the need for a balanced approach to grammar. Practice teaching course hours should be increased to procedurize the skills of context-sensitive adjustments.

Keywords: perceptions towards grammar teaching, beliefs, pre-service teachers of English, context, explicit/implicit grammar instruction

Introduction

Grammar instruction still remains a popular field of investigation in empirical and practical terms in the field of second/foreign language (L2/FL) learning in the face of the ever-changing prevalence of different language teaching methodologies. Although the degree of attention and prominence attached to it has altered at different points in the history of L2 teaching, it has continued to play a pivotal role in moulding different orientations to L2 pedagogy. Regardless of its controversial status from certain perspectives of second language acquisition (SLA) and English Language Teaching (ELT), it is now widely acknowledged that some formal, conscious attention to form promotes language learning, as suggested by Burgess and Etherington (2002) and Borg and Burns (2008).

Accordingly, the notion of integration, i.e., the integration of focus on form and the focus on meaning, is, in fact, considered an important thread in the teaching of grammar in the Turkish context as well as it is elsewhere. The last three decades has witnessed the emergence of a variety of methodological frameworks (see Borg and Burns, 2008) for L2 practitioners to address the issue of grammar instruction from a broad perspective including linguistic, contextual and communicational dimensions (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2006).

With regard to the integration models for grammar teaching, Ellis (2006, p. 100) proposes three different options, which overlap with those of Doughty and Williams (1998) to a great extent. The first one is focus on forms, described as a structuralist, synthetic approach to language with an isolated focus on the language forms at the expense of the meanings to be conveyed (Burgess and Etherington, 2002). The second one is planned
focus on form, “where a focused task is required to elicit occasions for using a predetermined grammatical structure” (Ellis, 2006). It is considered to provide L2 learners with “cognitive processing support” through an overriding focus on meaning or communication as learners’ attention is drawn to a particular linguistic feature in a communicative situation (Burgess and Etherington, 2002, p. 434). The third one, incidental focus on form, can be defined as the “unplanned attention to form in the context of communicative work” (Borg and Burns, 2008, p. 457).

Despite the proliferation of pedagogical models for grammar instruction, the implementation of the methodological procedures in the classroom is yet to be investigated (Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2002). To illustrate, isolated (as opposed to integrated) grammar activities may have a beneficial impact on the interlanguage development of students sharing the same L1, whereas the integration of grammar may assist fluency and automaticity development (Ellis et al., 2002). In fact, both options are considered as beneficial by students and teachers (Spada and Lightbown, 2008). The choice for any option is not an exclusive either/or choice and depends on the context (Borg, 2001).

In his argument on the available pedagogical options for grammar instruction, Borg (2001) points out that teachers’ pedagogical choices are, to a great extent, context-sensitive in that they are not fixed, but subject to change in accordance with certain variables. These variables are the student profile, the students’ background, previous learning experiences and learning styles, the syllabus demands, time constraints, administrative concerns, the teachers’ pedagogical preferences, and the institutional culture. Additionally, he emphasizes that teachers tend to choose to operate within a continuum of pedagogical options (implicit-explicit, inductive-deductive, sentence level-text level, controlled-free, accuracy-fluency, discrete-integrated), rather than favour polarization.

In the same way, Swan (2005, p. 376) warns against the unconstructive polarization of meaning and form-based instruction in the face of “the recurrent pattern of damaging ideological swings in language theory and practice”. He states that “excessive reliance on one or other kind of approach can only lead teachers to unproductive extremes” suggesting that it is better to draw on all the available resources and techniques rather than limiting oneself to one type of activity. Likewise, Lightbrown (2000) cautions against bandwagonism, frequent paradigm shifts, and application of new methods to the classroom.
without any critical professional scrutiny or any reference to all the accumulated professional wisdom of teachers.

A recent comment from a seasoned practitioner and materials writer, Azar (2007), in relation to pedagogical choices at the disposal of the grammar teacher, resonates with both Borg (2001) and Swan (2005), asserting doing both options relatively close to the ends of the curriculum. Despite the multiplicity of methodological frameworks and pedagogical options to account for the relation between grammar teaching and communicative work, the field of SLA lacks consensus as to the degree and direction of the grammar to accomplish effective language learning (Borg & Burns, 2008).

There is a theoretical disagreement on which types of form-focused instruction are most effective in language learning (focus on forms, planned focus on form, and incidental focus on form). However, still one point agreed on is the need “to ensure that learners are able to connect grammatical forms to the meanings they realise in communication” (Ellis, 2006, p. 101). As Ellis (2006) pointed out, the salience of descriptive grammar is a target in grammar teaching, with an emphasis on the form and meaning relations and the treatment of the linguistic form along with the semantic and discoursal meaning. He validates use of a focus-on-forms approach “as long as it includes an opportunity for learners to practise behaviour in communicative tasks” (Ellis, 2006, p. 102).

Grammar learning entails the establishment of form-meaning connections as a fundamental aspect of L2 acquisition (Ellis, et al. 2002; Ellis, 2006; VanPatten, Williams, and Rott, 2004). In the same vein, the goal of grammar teaching involves helping learners create new form-meaning mapping(s) and integrate them into the already existing repertoire of the form-meaning system (Batstone & Ellis, 2009, p. 194). In this respect, it should be kept in mind that just as one form may encode one meaning or multiple meanings, one meaning may be encoded by multiple forms (VanPatten, Williams, and Rott, 2004).

As for the contribution of practice to implicit grammatical knowledge, Ellis (2002) maintains that grammar teaching has a delayed effect and an indirect role in converting explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge through extensive communicative practice. Hedge (2000) argues that through engagement in frequent practice opportunities of a specific form, learners can notice the form relatively easily. Through extensive exposure, varied and intensive practice opportunities, learners can test their hypotheses and develop
familiarity with available forms and begin to discover the rules. Also, through practice, learners may enrich their explicit knowledge about language forms, gradually developing the ability to utilize the rule accurately and automatically in production. Underlining the contribution, in an indirect way, of explicit grammar rules to second language acquisition, Scheffler and Cinciata (2011, p. 22) conclude their study, stating that “language teachers should invest some classroom time in explicit grammar instruction”. Spada and Lightbown’s (2008) conclusion overlaps the findings of Scheffler and Cinciata (2011, p. 22), underlining the benefit of form-focused instruction for language features that may be hard to acquire without guidance. Walter (2012) summarizes what the “rigorously conducted meta-analyses of a wide range of studies have shown” succinctly: “within a generally communicative approach, explicit teaching of grammar rules leads to better learning and to unconscious knowledge, and this knowledge lasts over time” (p.4). She makes her point very clear, indicating that the explicit teaching of grammar is more effective than the implicit or not teaching at all, an argument for a preplanned focus on grammar. In Bax’ (2003) opinion, context matters considerably, which is in line with Walter’s (2012) distinction between ESL and low exposure or input-poor EFL settings, the latter constituting the majority of the English language learning contexts all over the world.

Considering a great range of options at L2/EFL teachers’ disposal in the grammar class, it is of utmost importance that the opinions and experiences of teachers themselves not be ignored. The available knowledge about how teachers transform their technical knowledge about the teaching of grammar is relatively scarce, a point stressed by Ellis (1998). With the emergence of the ‘Post-method condition’, it has become all the more evident that the choices the teachers make focusing their own ‘unique’ contexts have a crucial impact on the relevance of their teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Arıkan, 2006; Burgess and Etherington, 2002). It is interesting to note that in different teaching contexts, teachers’ instructional approaches may vary significantly. For instance, Burgess and Etherington (2002) revealed that teachers of English for academic purposes (EAP) in UK universities reported favourable attitudes towards formal instruction. They expressed their firm conviction on the validity of the role conscious knowledge of grammar plays in the development of the EAP students’ proficiency. They also highlighted students’ expectations to have explicit presentation of grammar points. The study also pointed out the
teachers’ inclination towards an integrated, focus-on-form approach to teaching grammar, involving a reactive focus. On the other hand, Saraç (as cited in Alptekin & Tatar, 2011), in his study on Turkish instructors’ attitudes towards grammar teaching, reported teachers’ dissatisfaction with an excessive focus on explicit grammar instruction, the interview data revealing participants’ deployment of pedagogical techniques geared towards “the activation of functional and contextual elements in teaching grammar” (e.g., discovery learning) (p. 337).

There is a good deal of evidence that teachers derive their personal theories from their own teaching experiences, their understandings of their own teaching contexts and their training courses (Borg and Burns, 2008). According to Ur (2012, p. 4) “the main source of professional learning is classroom experience. What can enrich it is appropriate conclusions drawn from the critical assessment of research, the supplemental value of which can not be replaced with discussion with colleagues, student feedback, handbooks, or practical journals, which are themselves enriching sources as well. However, she emphasizes that researchers possess relatively little amount of classroom teaching experience.

Teachers’ practices are reported to be affected by “their beliefs about learners’ affective involvement, (the learner profile), background knowledge, conceptions of language use and usage, and teacher role as guide and manager” (Burns, as cited in Baleghizadeh and Farschi, 2009, p. 31). As indicated by many studies, teachers engage in a complicated process of instructional decision making, shaped by a variety of interacting factors in and out of class (Bailey, 1996; Burns, 1996; Borg, 1999). Individual teachers’ decisions are the consequence of multifarious interacting sources of knowledge. Declarative knowledge about language (i.e., subject matter knowledge) is one of these; teachers also draw on “their own knowledge of the immediate classroom environment, the knowledge of instructional techniques, their knowledge of learners, and knowledge about teaching and learning derived from prior experience” (Borg, 2003, p. 105). Consequently, the beliefs and attitudes, i.e., teacher cognition, which affect teachers’ classroom decisions concerning how to teach grammar, are important areas of study (Andrews, 2003; Burgess and Etherington, 2002; Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers, 1997; Schulz, 1996, 2001). However, unlike a multitude of studies into the perceptions of instructors towards grammar
teaching in the ESL context, the number of studies in this regard in the Turkish EFL context is relatively scarce (See the above-mentioned study by Saraç, as cited in Alptekin and Tatar, 2011). Considering the lack of research studies related to grammar teaching in the Turkish context, this study aims to contribute to the relevant literature by exploring a group of Turkish pre-service EFL teachers’ perceptions concerning grammar instruction.

The study set out to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of the 4th year Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL in the course of grammar instruction during the practicum period?

2. What are the affective concerns of the 4th year Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL concerning grammar instruction?

3. What are the prior experiences of 4th year Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL as to grammar learning?

4. What are the challenges of the 4th year Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL in teaching grammar?

**Method**

**Participants and Settings**

Fourty-five Turkish pre-service teachers of English with an age range of 20 to 25, with the mean being 2.02, participated in the study. All the participants (39 females and 5 males) were senior students at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) at an English-medium state university in Turkey. They were all enrolled in the course *Practice Teaching* then, which was offered to the fourth-year students at the department in the spring semester of the academic year 2010-2011, when the study was carried out. As part of the course requirements, the participants were assigned a mentor teacher in pairs or groups at the practice teaching schools, where they were involved in the instructional activities 6 hours a week. Apart from the field work, they were also supposed to attend the contact hours at the university, which served as academic sharing or discussion sessions related to different aspects of EFL teaching or interactive input sessions. In these, the instructor discussed the recent trends in ELT with the whole class or imparted information on certain problematic aspects of teaching English, particularly those that posed difficulties for trainee teachers in the course of instruction. All the practice teaching schools were state schools based in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Some of the participants were allocated to primary
and secondary schools whereas others were sent to high schools. They were all pre-service teachers of EFL, with little or no experience in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) apart from the practicum experience in the fall semester. The course Practice Teaching entailed classroom observations, three teaching tasks of 40-/50-minute classes, and one assessed teaching session at the designated practice teaching schools. All the teaching tasks were evaluated jointly by the mentor teacher and the course instructor (also the researcher). All the participants took the course School Experience, in the fall semester prior to their engagement in the study. As to the assessment of the teaching tasks in this course, all the teaching tasks were evaluated jointly, just as in the course Practice Teaching. All the student performances in teaching tasks in the course, including the assessed teaching sessions, were video-taped.

**Research Design**

This descriptive study adopts a quantitative research design to provide an account of the perceptions of the Turkish pre-service teachers of EFL concerning grammar instruction, their affective concerns related to grammar teaching, the challenges faced in the instructional process, and their prior grammar learning experiences. The data were collected over a period of 14 weeks. Data sources include a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale.

For the data collection purposes, a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert-scale (strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, not sure/undecided = 3, agree = 4, strongly agree = 5), consisting of 54 items in Turkish, was used to collect the quantitative data in the study. Besides, four open-ended items were added to the questionnaire, which constitute the qualitative data in the study, together with the semi-structured interviews with randomly-selected participants. The quantitative items in the questionnaire were analyzed in four main subscales.

Regarding the item breakdown in the questionnaire, items 1, 2, 3, 6, 14, 29, and 44 investigated the pre-service teachers’ affective concerns related to teaching grammar, while items 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 39, 40, 41, 42, 50, 47, 48, and 49 explored their perceptions of teaching grammar. The challenges of the pre-service teachers in teaching grammar were investigated via items 23, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34,
The internal consistency reliability figure (the Cronbach Alpha coefficient) for the questionnaire was calculated to be .71. This might be considered justifiable given that the questionnaire consisted of items exploring many different areas (Dörnyei, 2007). The questionnaire was designed in Turkish, based on an adaptation of the survey developed by Burgess and Etherington (2002) to avoid misunderstandings on the part of the pre-service teachers due to the grammar terminology and to obtain more reliable data. The researcher obtained expert opinion on the questionnaire items from a group of colleagues at the university before doing a pilot study on a small scale. After the pilot study, the items which were reported to be confusing or misleading were modified before it was administered to the pre-service teachers in the study. As regards the analysis of the quantitative data in the study, the close-ended items on the questionnaire, the SPSS 18 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics (i.e., the means, standard deviations and the percentages).

**Results**

In this section the results of the quantitative data analysis are displayed. The descriptive statistics for the EFL pre-service teachers’ perceptions concerning grammar instruction are provided in the Appendix. The results of the quantitative analysis is reported in four parts. These are the pre-service teachers’ affective concerns related to teaching grammar, their perceptions of teaching grammar, their challenges in teaching grammar, and their prior grammar learning experiences.

**Pre-service Teachers’ Affective Concerns Related to Teaching Grammar**

As regards the pre-service teachers’ affective concerns about teaching grammar, it can be deduced from the responses that they considered grammar teaching a somewhat anxiety-inducing process. In fact, almost one half of them (40%) reported that teaching grammar in the classroom caused disquiet for them (item 1, 2.96), while the other half indicated it did not cause any anxiety on their part. A little over 60% of the pre-service teachers reported having a fear of making mistakes (item 2, 3.42). In relation to responding to unpredictable questions from students while teaching grammar (item 3), nearly half of them (46.7% - 3.27) pointed out their insecurity as the majority (62.2%) did not consider
themselves an authority figure in grammar instruction (item 44, 3.42). This finding is not considered surprising as the majority of the participants in the study did not have any or had little classroom experience, particularly in the field of grammar teaching. This renders it hard for them to translate their declarative knowledge into the procedural one in the classroom context. In relation to the pre-service teachers’ confidence in handling students’ unexpected grammar questions in class, the pre-service teachers might be having a hard time expressing the complicated structural aspects of the English language in detail. They were offered the courses that aim to enhance their proficiency level (e.g., grammar courses), only in their freshman year for two semesters, which may account for the participants’ relative lack of confidence in their own linguistic competence.

The number of those who liked or enjoyed teaching grammar was not many, that is 13 participants constituting almost less than one-third (28.8%) of the sample (item 29, 2.82), which was another reflection of their affective concerns. Likewise, nearly half of the participants (46.7%) reported grammar teaching to be boring (item 6, 3.07). On the other hand, half of the participants (51.1%) asserted that they did not have difficulty teaching grammar, as opposed to a little over one third of the sample (35.6%) who found it hard (item 14, 2.91). It seemed that the pre-service teachers in the study held different opinions about grammar teaching. The majority were in consensus on the point that the idea of teaching grammar instilled anxiety, insecurity and lack of confidence while the minority described grammar teaching as an enjoyable process. Although they associated grammar teaching with negative feelings, there were some who found it an exciting and enjoyable experience.

**Pre-service teachers’ perceptions of teaching grammar.** The participants’ responses to the items regarding their perceptions of teaching grammar revealed that their methodological preferences were diverse but complementary to one another. As to the pre-service teachers’ instructional options for grammar teaching, the majority of the participants (item 4) indicated their preferences towards inductive teaching over deductive teaching. Most of them (34 pre-service teachers – 75.6%) definitely did not prefer deductive teaching (item 4, 2.04). However, over one-third (35%) of the sample indicated that the students at practice teaching schools mainly preferred to be taught grammar deductively. In fact the two-fifths of all the participants expressed mixed feelings about the students’
preferences (item 9). For over one-third (16 – 35.6%) of the sample, not many students asked them to give rules and shift to exercises (item 7, 3.18). It can be said that the students’ preferences might have reflected those of the mentor teachers.

It can be said that preservice teachers’ preferences might have reflected those of their mentor teachers’ method of delivery in grammar as they were accustomed to learning grammar by the same teachers in a certain manner. When they were asked if the mentor teacher asked for an explicit presentation of the rules of the grammar topic (item 5), the pre-service teachers ‘ responses varied in line with their mentor teachers’ preferences. Nearly one half (42.2%) revealed that their mentor teachers were disposed to deductive teaching whereas the other half (46.7%) were in favour of the inductive. It appears that the mentor teachers opted for different instructional choices (i.e., inductive, deductive or both) when it comes to teaching grammar. As to the pre-service teachers’ preferences, the majority (80%) reported applying discovery learning techniques, which guides students to discover the rules themselves (item 8, 4.02). However, they were not in full agreement on whether teaching grammar without a provision of grammar rules, by using discovery learning techniques exclusively, might make students feel insecure about what they learnt, with 40% of agreement as opposed to another 40% who disagreed and one-fifth expressing their uncertainty about the issue (item 25, 3.09). Over one-third of the participants were of the opinion that indirect grammar teaching might lead the students to be unsure or even dissapointed about their grammar knowledge (item 26, 3.09). The rate of those who thought students preferred sentence-based examples was a little below half of the sample (44.4%) while the rate of the undecided was the same as well (item 9, 3.38). On the other hand, with respect to their language choice in teaching grammar (item 10), a consensus was observed among the pre-service teachers that English should be the medium of instruction in grammar teaching (80%).

Nearly one-half of the pre-service teachers in the study (42.2%) stated that their mentor teachers also thought in the same lines concerning the language choice in grammar instruction whereas a little above one-fourth (26.7 %) indicated that their mentors insisted on their making grammar explanations in Turkish (Item 11: 2.82). It was interesting to note that one-third of the participants were undecided about their mentor teachers’ ideas in this respect. Some pre-service teachers revealed that the mentor teachers asked them to offer
students Turkish explanations when they were doing a grammar point which has a complicated form-meaning relationships such as conditional sentences. The trainees showed that their mentor teachers advised them to use Turkish to facilitate student learning when they were dealing with topics that students might find challenging. As to the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the students’ preferences concerning the language choice, the former claimed that nearly 65% of the students were in favour of Turkish explanations (item 19, 3.76). This does not seem surprising, considering the students’ educational background and previous language learning experiences.

As to their preferred style of presentation, more than 90% of the pre-service teachers indicated their tendency to present new grammar topics in context (item 13, 4.40), and the integration of grammar activities into other skills (item 13, 4.40). It is not that most of their students want to discover the relation between structure and meaning by themselves, actually the opposite, they apparently need their help (item 15, 2.71). As for their preferences to integrate communicative activities into grammar instruction, those preservice teachers preferring to integrate pair-work or group-work and other communicative activities into grammar classes constituted nearly one-fourth of the participants (26.7%), as opposed to 40% doing the opposite (item 16, 3.69). It was interesting to point out that one-third of the participants were undecided on this issue. Although these results seemed contradictory with the pre-service teachers’ tendency towards inductive teaching at first sight, it could be understandable, taking into consideration that they felt a pressing need to organize their teaching in accordance with the external factors such as time limitation and syllabus demands. Also, although there was no obligation, the pre-service teachers felt obliged to follow their mentor teachers’ method of teaching even though it was not always in line with their own. Some trainees even reported having several clashes with their mentor teachers due to the latter’s adherence to the inductive teaching techniques. Nevertheless, they indicated some reluctance to introduce new grammar points their own way, mostly in an inductive fashion, as they were not very familiar with the learner profile and the students might have difficulty learning the grammar points through a method which they might not be used to.

Unlike their reservations about the integration of communicative activities in grammar lessons, 60% of the pre-service teachers reported that their students found pair or
group work activities helpful while those disagreeing were nearly 20% and the undecided a little over 20% (item 48, 3.33). In the interviews, the pre-service teachers pointed out that students saw the integration of communicative activities into grammar lessons a novelty which they enjoyed a lot. As the students were used to receiving grammar instruction in a deductive manner in the mainstream Turkish education system, they viewed such activities as interesting and a break from the routine.

As to the grammar revision techniques, an overwhelming majority of the pre-service teachers (95.6%) reported that they preferred to consolidate, reinforce the grammar points through worksheets (item 17, 4.40). More than ninety percent of the sample (93.3%) agree that the worksheet use is a beneficial pedagogical practice in terms of providing students with practice opportunities (item 40, 4.35). As to their perceptions of the students’ benefits of the worksheet use, there is almost a consensus (88.9%) on reported students’ favourable views in this respect (item 49, 4.22).

Concerning the participants’ perceptions of the use of meta-language (item 27, 3.09), more than half of the participants (55.6%) reported unfavourable views while less than one-third (28.9%) supported its use (item 18, 3.44). The number of those undecided on this issue was noticeable. As for their views on what students might think on the same issue, those who had reservations about the benefits of metalanguage use (44%) outnumbered those who agreed on its usefulness (28.8%) and those who found it unhelpful (28.8%).

Regarding the variations in pre-service teachers’ preferences of the grammar teaching approaches, more than 70% agreed on the view that approaches used in grammar teaching should present differences depending on the level acquired in the target language by the student (item 39, 3.80). Quite a large number of pre-service teachers were in total agreement that students should be equipped with grammar knowledge to function efficiently in communicative contexts in the target language (item 40, 3.53). However, the level of agreement (item 50, 2.20) was observed to decrease to nearly 50% as far as the necessity of a theoretical, rule-based background in grammar for effective communication is concerned.

With respect to the need for the explicit presentation of the rules followed by exercises found a negative response from more than half of our sample, the rate of those
agreeing constituting almost one-fourth (item 4, 2.71). The responses to this item was quite congruent with the responses (those) to item 8, which is concerned with the pre-service teachers’ attitudes towards inductive teaching, indicating a general tendency towards inductive teaching. More than ninety percent of the preservice teachers stated that the teacher should play the role of a guide (item 42, 4.00). Little over 70% of our sample stated that students see them as a figure of authority in teaching grammar (item 43, 3.60). It was a view shared by not all but still more than two thirds of the preservice teachers, who thought likewise, whereas those who were not of the same opinion constituted one-third (item 44, 3.42). Speaking of disagreement, the grammar teaching styles of more than two-thirds of our sample did not overlap with those of their mentor teachers (item 45, 2.16). According to more than 90% of our sample, incidental teaching (teaching grammar in indirect ways) should also have its place in order to develop their students’ language skills (item 46, 4.11).

As regards perceptions about grammar instruction, more than half of the pre-service teachers (57%) did not believe that grammar must be an aim in language teaching (item 20, 2.64). On the contrary, an overwhelming majority (nearly 90%) reported that according to their observations, their mentor teachers consider grammar teaching as an aim (item 21, 4.02). With respect to the importance of form-meaning relationships in teaching grammar, 80% of our sample considered it important to explain the connection between form and meaning (item 22, 3.93) with only four percent disagreeing.

Concerning their perceptions of the employment of authentic texts in grammar instruction, over one-third of the participants (40%) reported that they opted for authentic texts for grammar instruction while nearly one-fifth indicated that authentic texts were not their preference in grammar teaching (item 24, 3.80). Despite the students’ favourable attitudes towards the authentic text use, as reported by the participants, about one half of the latter were not sure about its benefits (item 33, 2.62).

**Pre-service teachers’ prior grammar learning experiences**

As far as the participants’ prior grammar learning experiences are concerned, more than 90% of the sample pointed out that their English teachers often preferred a rule-based (deductive) teaching (item 51, 4.22). Slightly over 70% considered the English grammar courses taken prior to the university to be beneficial, the rates of the undecided and the disagreeing more or less equally sharing the rest of the percentage (item 52, 3.77). As to the
views on level of satisfaction with their current grammar teaching method, a little over three-fourths of the sample were of the opinion that the method they employed was a beneficial one (item 53, 3.82), with only four of them dissatisfied.

**Pre-service Teachers’ Challenges Concerning Grammar Teaching**

As the participants’ responses to the questionnaire items indicate, the most challenging aspects of grammar teaching for pre-service teachers were finding understandable examples closely aligned with the students’ level of proficiency, the use of authentic materials, the activity design based on authentic materials, and error correction practices. However, some difficulties were more challenging while others less so. As regards finding examples suitable to the students’ level of proficiency, it was only almost two-thirds of the participants (57.7%) who did not consider it challenging to find examples that their students could understand whereas less than one-fifth expressed the difficulty they had in this respect (item 23, 2.60). Regarding the authentic material use, the majority of the participants pointed out their preference for the integration of authentic texts into grammar lessons. However, they expressed their reservations in using them in grammar instruction due to the complicated syntactic features, the cultural elements pertinent to the target culture, and the vocabulary load they contain. According to almost half of them (48.9%), their students had difficulty with authentic texts since these texts contained several grammatical structures whereas one-third (33.3%) disagreed on that (item 28, 3.22). The rate of those who agreed on the cultural elements as a source of their difficulty with authentic texts was almost the same as the rate of those who disagreed, with the former almost five percent more than the latter who constituted 37.7% (item 30, 3.07). Those stating that the heavy lexical load of the authentic texts challenged students to a great extent formed over half of the participants (53.3%) despite one-third who did not consider the lexis a big obstacle for students (item 31, 3.24). In fact, the majority of the pre-service teachers were of the opinion that vocabulary load posed a greater challenge for students than the cultural elements interwoven into the authentic texts. More than 50% of the pre-service teachers’ displayed some uncertainty as regards students’ need for the teacher guidance in understanding, analyzing and internalizing the form-meaning relations when authentic texts are used in grammar teaching (item 32, 3.51). However, in their opinion
(42.2%), their students saw the use of authentic texts as a useful pedagogical practice. As to the creative activity design based on authentic materials, the majority of the participants considered it difficult to use authentic texts in producing activities which suit the levels of their students. More than 60% indicated that they found it hard to create tasks and activities in line with the student proficiency level while nearly 20% did not mention any difficulties as such (item 31, 2.49).

With respect to the difficulties with error correction practices, more than 80% of the participants reported that they did not have difficulty dealing with error correction in a written communicative text. In contrast, over 60% stated having a hard time providing corrective feedback or errors in an oral communicative context (item 36, 2.53). The trainee teachers in the study described providing corrective feedback for students as a challenging experience for them.

In relation to their perceptions of the students’ difficulty with self-correction practices in a communicative activity, while the pre-service teachers stating the presence of student difficulty constituted 40%, the number of the undecided were almost the same (35.6%) causing the mean to be 3.13 for item 37. Pre-service teachers’ opinions were divided regarding the students’ responses to the application of problem-solving techniques in grammar instruction (item 38, 2.66). The rate of disagreement is the same as that of agreement (fourty percent) in item 38, which investigated the students’ level of satisfaction with the application of problem-solving techniques in grammar instruction (2.66). The pre-service teachers’ responses to this item echoes those to item 15, which was concerned with the teachers’ perceptions of the students’ willingness to discover the form and meaning relations in learning grammar.

As can be seen from the quantitative analysis results, the highest mean in the questionnaire belongs to a balance of approaches/methods/techniques. Most of the participants favored a balanced approach towards grammar teaching, welcoming both the discovery-based learning and a rule-based learning style (item 53, 4.27). On the other hand, the means within the 3.00 – 3.50 range underlined the variability across the unique contexts of classroom of each preservice teacher. Those equal to or over 4 demonstrated common points, which can be more easily generalised.
Discussion

The discussion in this paper will focus on the findings from the three main perspectives as regards EFL grammar instruction in the Turkish context. The first perspective is concerned with the Turkish pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the EFL grammar instruction with an emphasis on the affective concerns. The second perspective is related to the impact of their prior grammar learning experiences on their instructional decisions on teaching grammar. The final one is in connection with the challenges of the pre-service teachers in the course of grammar instruction.

In relation to the first issue, the study contributes to the existing research in the field of ELT (English Language Teaching). The findings from the literature suggest that teachers of adolescents and adults in the EFL/ESL context tend to display a favourable disposition towards some form of explicit grammar work (Schulz, 1996; Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Borg & Burns, 2008, Baleghizadeh & Farschi, 2009; Burgess & Etherington, 2002). However, this is not to imply a tendency towards the direct instruction of grammar due to the number of many pre-service teachers who advocated a balanced treatment of inductive and deductive approaches (Andrews, 2003). Despite their strong preferences towards inductive, implicit, problem-solving activities, the teachers in the study also expressed their acknowledgement of the positive impact of grammar practice on developing communicative ability, particularly on the development of learners’ fluency, as pointed out in Schulz (2001). In a nutshell, the approach to grammar instruction adopted by the participants of this study was an eclectic one. The inductive presentation of new grammar structures in a meaningful context initially to encourage learners to discover the rules is followed by a focus on form, usually accompanied by some explicit form-related explanations in L2 or sometimes in L1, with contextualized, communicative practice of the target structure. Such an eclectic approach is supported by Richards and Rodgers (2001), emphasizing the context-dependent nature of language instruction in the post-method era observed that “choice of teaching method cannot therefore be determined in isolation from other planning and implementation practices” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 244-245). The trainees indicated that skills-integrated work and contextualization are the sine qua non of grammar instruction in the EFL classroom. They were found to be extremely positive about the value of the integration of grammar and skills work, as indicated in Borg and
Burns (2008). It is interesting to note that in this study, the pre-service teachers, despite being novice with practically no teaching experience, displayed a high level of awareness towards the adoption of a holistic approach to grammar instruction, embracing both implicit and explicit teaching approaches, which reinforces some previous studies (e.g., Baleghizadeh and Farschi, 2009; Burgess and Etherington, 2002), but contradicting others such as Schulz (1996; 2001). All the same, for the interpretation of the findings of this study it is important to bear in mind that the sample in this study consisted of exclusively pre-service teachers at university whereas EAP teachers, experienced, or inexperienced, constituted the sample in the previous studies mentioned above.

The participants in the study did not seem to think highly of the metalanguage use in grammar instruction. In fact, the majority of the participants expressed their reservations about this issue, which is voiced in some studies such Garrett (1986). The participants’ concerns in this respect can be justifiable to a certain extent, considering its traditional link with formal grammar instruction and and the negative connotation attached to its use in CLT-oriented L2 classrooms with the advent, rise and spread of communicative language teaching (Elder and Manwaring, 2004). However, in accordance with the findings of some recent studies which suggest that metalanguage may influence L2 proficiency indirectly through its relationship with metalinguistic knowledge (Ellis, 2005; Hu, 2011), the place of metalanguage in the L2 classrooms should be reconsidered. As a matter of fact, instead of discarding it as an extra cognitive burden for learners, teachers should recognize advantages for the L2 learners. In communicative classrooms, it is quite common “to have an explicit discussion of the structural and functional features of highly complex structure” (Hu, 2011: 181).

They should raise learners’ awareness of the target structures or provide opportunities for them “to conform to or modify the rules they internalized as a result of their own hypothesis formation and testing the efficient delimitation of the contexts to which the generalization applies” (Hu, 2011, p. 181). The study revealed that the pre-service teachers had reservations concerning the employment of the learners’ first language (L1) and saw them as an impediment to learning in that it may block the provision of comprehensible input in the L2. They displayed a lack of awareness on how to use L1 to maximize L2 learning. Use of L1 in EFL settings can be regarded as an integral part of “a
particular, practical, and possible pedagogy”, with a particular emphasis on the local setting to develop solutions to local problems (Kumaravadivelu, as cited in Copland and Neokleous, 2011, p. 280). Copland and Neokleous (2011) find the actual practice to be likewise despite a lip service paid to the contrary opinion, which are inculcated by non-local sources.

In fact, a questionnaire and interview study of teachers of English at a university in Turkey revealed that their position is a practical and pragmatic one that favors L1 use despite popular assumptions to the contrary (Kayaoğlu, 2012). It can be suggested that teacher education programs should clarify to the teacher candidates the identification of the L1 role. This involves how to assist learners to develop an appropriate L2 conceptualization, how to exploit L1 in L2 classrooms beneficially, the different functions for L1 use in the L2 classroom and the rationales for using L1 for functions (Mojica-Diaz and Sanchez-Lopez, 2010).

The study revealed a finding which might be considered unusual for the pre-service EFL teachers. The majority of the participants in the study displayed favourable attitudes towards the employment of authentic materials in the presentation of grammar, which they described as a challenging practice. There was dissonance between their favourable attitudes in this respect and their classroom practice, which also echoes Baleghizadeh and Farshchi’s (2009) study with the state school teachers. Although the participants generally stated that they were positive about the inclusion of authentic materials in grammar classes, they reported having difficulty dealing with the structural, lexical and cultural load in such texts. The pre-service teachers might be reminded to try the adapted materials for “a streamlined focus in class” when the use of authentic materials produced confusion for students or “digression” from the main teaching points. They should be indicated that both types of materials are “mutually supportive within a curriculum”; the use of one does not prevent the use of the other (Azar, 2007, p. 10).

The study disclosed the complicated mechanism underlying the teachers’ instructional decisions. All the institutional, pedagogical, and individual (teachers’ beliefs and their knowledge of instructional techniques, their knowledge of learners and knowledge about teaching and learning- derived from prior experience) factors might sometimes be in conflict with one another and might not be congruent with the classroom practices (Borg,
To illustrate, the majority of the teachers in the study reported their confusion about the nature of their role as a grammar teacher; a guide or an authority? Owing to the pre-service teacher education program they were involved in and their previous ELT methodology courses, the pre-service teachers mainly associated their role with that of a guide/facilitator. However, in the practice teaching school that they attended, they saw they were expected to play the role of a grammar authority, which they were unwilling to assume. Therefore, it seems necessary to ask the trainee teachers to articulate and reflect on their beliefs about teaching and their rationales behind their classroom practices. This way, they can gain valuable insights into their particular pedagogical options in grammar instruction, and the different kinds of roles they would like to assume as a prospective grammar teacher when teaching different levels and audience and to evaluate the effectiveness of their grammar lessons. In order to highlight the relationships between teacher cognition and practice in grammar teaching, one technique that can be feasible is “describing actual classroom practices and ground the analyses of teacher cognition in these practices” (Borg, 2003, p. 105).

The study also depicted the challenges the pre-service teachers faced in the establishment and the reinforcement of the form-meaning relationships in ESL/EFL instruction. One recommendation to alleviate this difficulty might be the deployment of concept checking questions, those which aim to check learners’ understanding of form and meaning in a given context (Scrivener, 2011). Another might be to use a constructivist approach to help learners develop concept formation through L1 as the source of difficulty for adults with form-meaning connections is said to arise from mainly “the first language (L1) semantic and conceptual system (Mojica-Diaz and Sanchez-Lopez, 2010). With a view to improving the quality of grammar instruction in the EFL, the teacher educators need to raise pre-service teachers’ awareness on the following four issues underlying the grammatical explanations of four experienced ESL teachers and work with them on an individual basis if necessary. Shulman (as cited in Borg, 2003) reports issues as improving their “content knowledge (knowledge of the subject matter), pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of the effective representation of subject matter to learners) and knowledge of learners”. As regards the above-mentioned elements, the participants in this study expressed their difficulty with the content knowledge and the knowledge of learners.
They reported that they had gaps in their own (declarative) knowledge about grammar. They indicated that as grammar is offered to only the freshman students at the department, they reported having forgotten some structural features, the form and meaning maps, exceptions to the rules and small nuances by the time they started doing their practicum. To illustrate what might serve as a refresher as well as a confidence booster for the pre-service teachers, some suggestions can be made. For instance, it might be beneficial to offer a contextual grammar course with a strong conceptual basis. Another contribution might be through incorporating “a discovery process that allows the learner to be actively involved in the process by forming and testing hypotheses concerning the function and meaning of grammatical structures in a given context” with the use of authentic texts in a constructivist framework.

As Mojica-Diaz and Sanchez-Lopez (2010) offer, a few suggestions can be made so as to alleviate the pre-service teachers’ difficulty with giving responses to students’ questions and giving oral corrective feedback in class. Raising their metalinguistic awareness focusing on increasing “language teachers’ explicit knowledge about grammar through teacher education” is one thing. Raising “their pedagogical skills to use this knowledge to enhance learning” in the teacher development programs at university is another (Borg, 2003, p. 101-102). In order to render their oral error correction practices more effective, the pre-service teachers might be encouraged to incorporate the self-correction and peer-correction techniques into their grammar instruction (Azar, 2007).

The quality of the grammar instruction in the EFL context can be enhanced by raising the awareness level of EFL pre-service teachers towards their own belief systems within a reflective framework. This can be accomplished in several ways. Pre-service teachers might be presented effective and ineffective grammar teaching samples through the videorecordings of real classrooms and then they might be asked to reflect on the appropriacy of the teaching methods and techniques for the learner profile in these contexts along with the strengths and the weaknesses of the instructors in the videos. In addition, in order to see the interrelationship between their beliefs about teaching and their actual classroom practices, the pre-service teachers can be encouraged to videotape their own performances in teaching tasks. They can also be encouraged to prepare self-reflection papers on these videotapes and then critically analyze the aspects that went well during the
teaching performance and those that need improving. They can also be encouraged to do peer evaluation to provide feedback on each other’s performances.

A further implication of this study is concerned with the new roles for today’s grammar teachers and students in the grammar class. It is crucial that the role of the grammar teachers should change drastically. The instructor’s role was supposed to be regarded as an input provider, an authority offering explanations /descriptions and one giving corrective feedback on the learners’ hypotheses in the past. However, today it is essential to adopt multiple roles as a grammar instructor: ranging from an input provider and one offering explanations, clarifying concepts, and doing comprehension checks to a facilitator of information and the guide of the student (Corder, 1988). Similarly, students in grammar classes should adopt a more active role in the learning process, analyzing the data provided by the grammar instructor and developing hypotheses based upon that data (Mojica-Diaz and Sanchez-Lopez, 2011). These roles necessitate the implementation of “genre-based approaches” and “constructivist classrooms” (Mojica-Diaz and Sanchez-Lopez, 2011: 473). On a more general platform, today’s grammar teachers are expected to be informed decision makers, making judicious choices about their method, strategy, and technique use taking into consideration the local needs, the availability of equipment and the contextual factors (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; and Arikan, 2006).

The study revealed that the pre-service teachers seemed to have adopted a holistic perspective towards teaching grammar, embracing both explicit and implicit grammar instruction, which might be considered a good start for their future professional development.

Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge that the study was carried out with a relatively small group of EFL pre-service teachers at the tertiary level in the Turkish context, composed of mostly female participants. A further limitation is the gender of the participants. The participants were mostly female. The final limitation is the duration of the study, which lasted about 3 months in the 2010-2011 spring semester. The small sample size, the restricted number of observed classroom practices, the gender factor, and the short duration of the study do not permit the findings to be generalizable beyond the local context. Taking into consideration these limitations, this research study has provided a number of valuable
insights. These are particularly in relation to the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of EFL grammar teaching, their challenges in EFL grammar teaching, their affective concerns about grammar teaching, and their prior grammar learning experiences in a specific tertiary setting in Turkey. It illuminated the motives underlying the pre-service teachers’ cognitions concerning EFL grammar instruction and their affective concerns in relation to their classroom practices, along with the revelation of a variety of interacting factors intervening the teachers’ complicated process of instructional decision-making. Of importance too is the way the pre-service teachers described and justified their chosen approach to teach grammar (i.e., the integrated focus on form approach to teaching grammar). It is also noteworthy to observe the effort the pre-service teachers make to integrate grammar with other language skills in a contextualized manner.

This study is significant in that the findings are somewhat different from some other studies conducted in the Turkish context regarding the Turkish instructors’ attitudes towards grammar teaching (e.g., Saraç, as cited in Alptekin and Tatar, 2011). Saraç (as cited in Alptekin and Tatar, 2011) indicates a growing dissatisfaction among teachers in relation to an explicit focus on explicit grammar instruction and the teachers’ employment of pedagogical techniques for the activation of functional and contextual elements. Unlike Saraç (as cited in Alptekin and Tatar, 2011), the present study revealed the pre-service teachers’ tendency towards an integrated focus-on-form approach to teaching grammar, embracing both explicit and implicit teaching in a situated context-sensitive manner, in line with Burgess and Etherington (2002). The findings can be said to shed light into pre-service teachers’ perceptions and challenges concerning grammar teaching and the relationship between their perceptions and their actual classroom practices in other similar EFL contexts. The results might be used to draw some guideliness and develop new frameworks to enhance the quality of EFL grammar instruction in Turkey and abroad.

It is also remarkable to notice a relatively high level of awareness among the pre-service teachers in the study concerning a variety of grammar teaching approaches. The variety included the implementation of a holistic approach to grammar teaching, both explicit/implicit instruction with a focus-on-forms and meaning-focused, focus-on-form approaches. The holistic complementary perspective adopted allows flexibility in line with the contextual factors, which might be regarded as the reflection of a sound ELT
methodology knowledge they possessed. This case study can act as a catalyst to help other teachers to reflect on and examine their own perceptions about grammar teaching. As Ur (2012) emphasizes, since classroom context is the main source for learning to be a professional teacher, the participating students are likely to finetune their generalizations prior to recruitment as they appreciate the value of context-sensitiveness. It can be said that the pre-service teachers in the study gained a lot of insights into teaching grammar thanks to the mentor teachers assigned to them at practice teaching schools, probably more than that provided by their instructors at the university, although the former had certain conflicts with the latter in terms of the way they approached grammar teaching, and the latter sometimes interfered with the way the former taught grammar.

Grammar teaching is treated as a component of an elt methodology course entitled teaching language skills offered to juniors (third-year). They are introduced to a variety of grammar teaching methods and techniques, however they are not provided with sufficient opportunities to practice this declarative knowledge in different contexts with variety of learner profiles. Whenever they are given opportunities to proceduralize their declarative knowledge, they can only do so through a few microteaching practices predominantly performed in groups due to time restrictions. The study contributes to the existing literature on the field of grammar instruction by depicting the profile of a sample of prospective EFL/ESL grammar teacher in the post-method era - one who is an informed, active, thinking decision maker engaged in reflective and exploratory practice situated in context. And we would like to end with what Cook and Seidlhofer (1995: 9) have to say relevant to our study: “as with the competing theories of language, so with theories of language teaching and learning: we do not have to express allegiance to one or other. Language teaching, if it is to promote language learning, must go in all of these directions.”
References


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İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Türkiye Bağlamında Dilbilgisi Öğretimiyile ilgili Algıları

Öz


Çalışmanın Amacı: Bu çalışma Türk İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının farklı bağlamlarda dilbilgisi öğretimine dair algıları ve sınıf-içi uygulamalarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Yöntem: Nicel bir araştırma deseni kullanılan bu çalışmada, yakın zamanda yürütülen bir çalışmada adaptasyonu yapılan bir anket öğretmen adaylarının İngilizce dilbilgisi öğretimine dair algıları ve sınıf-içi uygulamalarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Veri analizinde SPSS 18 kullanılmıştır.


Sonuçlar ve Öneriler: Sınıf-içi deneyimleri öğretmen adaylarının dilbilgisinde biçim ve anlam ağırlıklı yaklaşımlar arasındaki dengeyi içselleştirirlerinde yardımcı olmuştur. Üniversitelerde öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi için ayrılan zaman adayların bağlama duyarlı ayarlamaları yapma becerilerini otomatik hale getirmeleri için artırılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: dilbilgisi öğretimiyile ilgili algılar, inançlar, İngilizce öğretmen adayları, bağlama, doğrudan/dolaylı dilbilgisi öğretimi
## Appendix

### Table 1

The results of the quantitative analysis

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