



## TEACHER KNOWLEDGE ON GRAMMAR TEACHING: A CASE STUDY\*

### DİLBİLGİSİ ÖĞRETİMİYLE İLGİLİ ÖĞRETMEN BİLGİSİ: BİR DURUM ÇALIŞMASI

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to explore teachers' knowledge and belief on how to teach grammar to Turkish learners of English as a foreign language. It is designed as a case study. Its data and findings are limited to the selected setting which is the Department of Basic English at Hacettepe University, Turkey. The research process was composed of two stages. Within the data collected during the first cycle of research, the most reoccurring theme was identified as 'grammar instruction' among the other themes on teacher knowledge. Therefore, in the second cycle of data collection, the scope of research was to elucidate the reasons of structure-based instruction and to gain teachers' perceptions of the 'ideal' grammar teaching methodology for the students learning English in the above mentioned institution. The findings indicate that Turkish practitioners prefer functional teaching methods including student-centered and contextual teaching approaches.

**Keywords:** teacher knowledge, grammar, teaching, Turkey.

**ÖZET:** Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizce'yi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin dilbilgisini nasıl öğrenmeleri gerektiğine dair öğretmenlerin bilgisini ve inançlarını açığa çıkarmaktır. Araştırma bir vaka çalışması olarak düzenlenmiştir. İlgili veri ve bulgular, Türkiye'de bulunan Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksek Okulu ile sınırlıdır. Araştırma süreci iki kısımdan oluşmaktadır. İlk veri toplama çalışmalarında, öğretmen bilgisine dair temalar arasında en çok tekrar edilenin 'dilbilgisi öğretimi' olduğu saptanmıştır. Dolayısıyla, ikinci veri toplama sürecinde kapsam, yapı odaklı dilbilgisi öğretiminin nedenlerini belirlemek ve yukarıda belirtilen kurumda İngilizce öğrenen öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarına ilişkin en 'uygun' dilbilgisi öğretimine dair öğretmen görüşlerini toplamak olarak belirlenmiştir. Bulgular göstermektedir ki, Türk öğretmenler işlevsel öğretim yöntemleri ile öğrenci merkezli ve bağlamsal yaklaşımları tercih etmektedirler.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** öğretmen bilgisi, dilbilgisi, öğretim, Türkiye.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher knowledge has gained great importance in the field of English language teaching. The merging of different aspects on teacher cognition created a substantial body of research, especially on practitioners' knowledge regarding grammar teaching. A number of valuable studies have been conducted in this area (Schultz, 1996, 2001; Andrews, 1999; Ellis, 2006; Borg, 1998a, b; 1999a, b, 2001; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Arıkan, 2002). All these studies elucidate what practitioners know, think, believe and apply while integrating grammar instruction into their own teaching practices and contexts. Although all these enquiries into teacher cognition provide great contribution to grammar teaching in the foreign language context, not enough research has been conducted to gather data on what Turkish teachers hold in relation to pedagogical knowledge on grammar teaching.

On teachers' knowledge and perspectives of grammar instruction, Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) conducted a study. Sixty university teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in New York and Puerto Rico answered questionnaires and eight of these teachers took part in informal interviews. The results indicate that even though the majority of teachers preferred direct grammar instruction, there is a preponderance of the Puerto Rico teachers preferring explicit grammar instruction when compared to the New York teachers. This difference in teacher preference was

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explained through Puerto Rican education system which is more traditional. The study provides important findings on how teacher cognition differs in different teaching contexts.

In another study, Ellis (2006) collected data from 31 practicing teachers of ESL to adults in Australian language centers. The aim was to explore the relation between teachers' language learning background and their professional knowledge and beliefs. The data derived from interviews and oral language biographies. Instead of looking for evidence of teacher knowledge via in-class observation, Ellis focused on how teachers constructed and described their professional knowledge and beliefs. Findings indicate the relation between one's learning experience and her/his approach to teaching the language. The categories for teacher experience and knowledge were as follows:

- Experience of learning an L2 post-childhood
  - Insights into learning and communication strategies
  - Learning strategies
  - Communication strategies
- Experience of the medium of instruction not being L1
- Experience of using an L2
- Experience of linguistic aspects of migration
- Code-switching
- Bilingual identity (pp. 10-20).

The study findings indicated that different language learning experiences paved the way for these practitioners to have diverse applications in teaching. When the experiences of the monolingual teacher were compared with other late or early bilingual teachers, it was seen that monolingual teacher falls short in understanding her/his students experiencing code-switching, intensive language instruction or migration. Ellis is precautionous in her identifications and states that "good teaching" is dependent on far more than the teacher's L2 learning experience" (p. 17). However, as a second statement, a bilingual teacher's experiential resources for professional decisions are claimed to be far greater than monolingual practitioners.

Borg (1999b) conducted a study with five teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Malta to reveal teachers' own theories of grammar teaching. In-class observations and interviews were conducted and the practitioners were encouraged to comment on their ways of instruction, which led to the emergence of teaching theories out of real applications. Eric, one of the practitioners who took part in the study, listed six items that justify the explicit and formal instruction; and these are as follows:

- Students expect grammar work. Formal instruction addresses these expectations, and eases the concerns students would develop in the absence of such work.
- Grammar work based on the errors students make during fluency activities validates such activities in the students' eyes, and encourages initially reluctant students to accept these activities more enthusiastically.
- Students like to be made aware of their errors. Grammar teaching creates this awareness, which also improves students' ability to monitor and self-correct their use of language.
- Grammar work allows for variation in lesson pace and, within the context of high-energy, interactive learning, provides students with some quiet, reflective time.
- An awareness of patterns in English grammar facilitates students' understanding of the way the language works.
- Making students aware of parallels and contrasts between English grammar and that of their first language often allows them to understand the grammar under study more rapidly. It also makes students aware of the source of foreign language errors caused by first language interference.

- Grammar practice consolidates students' understanding of grammar and provides the teacher with diagnostic information about their needs (p. 159).

On the other hand, another participating teacher, Tina, stated that learning by discovery was much more effective. Her thoughts and beliefs derived from her experiences as a learner, and also from her professional training. She also felt that students expected some explicit/formal instruction. So, to her, not all the grammatical structures were suitable for discovery learning.

Schulz (2001) proposed a very detailed study of student and teacher perceptions on the role of grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Both American and Colombian students and teachers were included in the study respectively, and the results were correlated with one another. The means of data collection was a questionnaire, which had been administered to 607 Colombian foreign language students and 122 of their teachers, as well as to 824 American FL students and 92 teachers. Teachers' perceptions were compared with students' preferences and ideas concerning the role of explicit grammar instruction and corrective feedback in FL learning. It was claimed that there was a significant positive correlation between the teachers' and students' beliefs that explicit grammar study and corrective feedback played a crucial role in learning a foreign language. Especially the Colombian students' and their teachers' data indicated that they are more favorably inclined to conscious grammar instruction and error correction.

Given a general review of studies conducted in different countries on teacher knowledge and grammar instruction, this study aims to explore Turkish practitioners' cognition on how to teach grammar to Turkish learners of English as a foreign language. The findings may be of value to especially novice and pre-service teachers who are planning to work as English teachers in Turkey.

## 2. METHOD

In this study, the selected research methodology is a case study, since the research focus can be defined as "particularistic" in relation to the setting and scope (Merriam, 1998). The study setting was the Department of Basic English at Hacettepe University, Turkey. Eleven Turkish teachers who teach the same level of learners participated in the study. The preferred means of data collection were semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire and a post-conference carried out towards the end of the academic year. The analysis of data collection from seven teachers indicated that teachers' discourse was loaded with grammar teaching. Therefore, in the second cycle of data collection, four teachers were asked to share their knowledge on the underlying reasons of prioritizing grammar instruction, and then on the ideal grammar teaching in relation to their students' needs.

### 2.1. Research Questions

- Why and when do the teachers prioritize grammar instruction while teaching in a general English class?
- What are the teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding the ideal way to teach the English language grammar in relation to their students' needs?

### 2.2. Participants

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was employed while choosing the participants for both the first and second cycle of research. Seven teachers participated in the first data collection cycle. In the table given below, the first group of teachers' background information is provided with the pseudonyms chosen for them.

**Table 1: Participants' Background: First Group**

Name	Age	Experience	Education
Ayşe	30	8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A.-English Culture and Literature</li> <li>• M.A.-ELT</li> <li>• PhD-Curriculum and Planning (on-going)</li> </ul>
Kaan	34	11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A.-ELT</li> <li>• M.A.-ELT</li> <li>• PhD.-ELT (on-going)</li> </ul>
Sevil	31	9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A.- ELT</li> <li>• M.A.- Curriculum and Planning</li> <li>• PhD.- Curriculum and Planning (on-going)</li> </ul>
Nursen	36	13 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A.- American Culture and Literature</li> </ul>
Irma	31	9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A.- British Culture and Literature</li> <li>• M.A. ELT</li> </ul>
Burcu	38	15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A. American Culture and Literature</li> </ul>
Gül	33	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B.A. British Culture and Literature</li> <li>• M.A. ELT</li> <li>• PhD.- ELT (on-going)</li> </ul>

For the second set of interviews, four teachers were selected. Among these four teachers chosen for in-depth study, only one teacher, Sevil, was from the first group. The rest of the second group teachers were different practitioners working for the same institution and with the same level of language learners. For the purpose of this study, the pseudonyms employed for these four practitioners were 'Suzan,' 'Himmet,' 'Aydan' and 'Sevil.' The data on the participants' background are as follows:

**Table 2: Participants' Background: Second Group**

	Suzan	Himmet	Aydan	Sevil
B.A.	ELT, Hacettepe University	American Culture and Literature, Ankara University	Translation and Interpretation, Hacettepe University	ELT, Middle East Technical University
M.A.				Educational Sciences, METU
PhD				Educational Sciences, Hacettepe University (on-going)
Years of Experience	10	15	17	9
Administrative Duties Years	Testing Unit 2001 –	-	Testing Unit 1994-1998 Academic Coordinator 2000-2002	Academic Coordinator 1999-2001 Teacher Trainer 2003-2006
Certificates	DipELT, Teacher Training, Testing	-	Testing	Trainer Development in ELT Certificate

### 2.3. Data Collection

The initial circle of research with the first group of teachers provided a large collection of teacher knowledge gathered through interviews. The most repeated theme among these data was identified as ‘grammar instruction.’ Therefore, with this preliminary research, the collected data served as “the source of a real research” and narrowed down the research scope to ‘teacher knowledge on grammar teaching’ only (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to explore the underlying reasons of grammar-based instruction, the second set of data collection procedure was implemented to achieve an in-depth inquiry. The data collection procedure included interviewing four experienced teachers and gathering their knowledge on grammar teaching. The interviews began with the “ideal question” which provided both opinion and information in case study research (Merriam, 1998). The actual question was “What is the ideal way to teach grammar?” Each interview was completed through three sessions each of which lasted for 45 to 50 minutes at minimum. The findings of ‘ideal question’ provided data on the teachers’ thoughts which were mainly about the students’ needs. Later, the ‘ideal question’ was followed with other questions to identify the participating teachers’ ideas on why teachers tend to prioritize grammar instruction more than the teaching of language skills.

### 2.4. Analysis

In this case study, the interpretational analysis involved a systematic set of procedures to code and classify qualitative data to emerge themes and patterns. The stages of interpretational analysis suggested by Gall et. al. (2005) were applied all through the data collection and analysis process. The stages were as follows:

1. Preparing a database containing all the data.
  2. Numbering each line of text sequentially and then dividing the text into meaningful segments.
  3. Developing meaningful categories to code the data.
  4. Coding each segment by any and all categories that apply to it.
  5. Generating constructs that emerge from the categories.
- (p. 315)

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed first. Each statement was coded and segmented. The codes were collected around themes to come up with constructs. Later, all the categories were matched with the content of research questions in order to ground the procedure on the scope of research.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Teachers’ Knowledge on Students’ Needs

The teachers who contributed to this study have all emphasized their students’ language needs while speaking in relation to the question on ‘the ideal way to teach English grammar’ in their own context. The explanations indicate the participating teachers’ invaluable knowledge accumulated through experience and observation in their institution.

Suzan prefers teaching grammar in context, and creating spontaneous scenarios is her teaching technique for grammar. She believes that without context, language presentation is kept isolated and irrelevant sentences are “up in the air.” She does not believe in rule-based or “formulaic” language presentation. She advises her students to “understand the reason behind the usages,” so they do not need to memorize them. She mentions subjunctives as an example for the importance of understanding the underlying meaning behind their use.

To her, grammar teaching is not the sole aim any more. Lexical approach, inductive teaching and contextualization reflect recent developments in English language teaching, and all these methods accelerate language learning. She also indicates the necessity of authentic materials to be used:

If grammar instruction is necessary, it must be contextualized then. And the method must be inductive. The context can be created in a reading or listening text. But the language point must be embedded in it as a real thing, relevant with the level and must be authentic.

Suzan lists the developmental sequence of grammar teaching she adopts. She believes that grammar teaching starts with providing students a real purpose, and then learners deduce meaning from the context. Finally, the practice part comes in phases, starting from controlled to free and she adds “practice makes perfect.”

While talking around grammar instructions and students’ needs, Himmet expresses his thoughts about learning languages and says “learning a language does not resemble to learning other skills.” To him, the feature that differentiates language learning is the requisite of “experiencing it.” At this point, he highlights the responsibilities of a language teacher, which to enable the students to ‘live’ the language situation. Despite the fact that language classrooms have an artificial language learning environment, the teacher has to turn it to a real-life-like environment appropriate for experiencing the language situation. He says that he has taught ‘giving directions’ on that day. In order to teach that function, he uses the plan of the faculty building. Since there are not many places to go to in the building, as a follow up activity, students work on how to give directions on campus. This application is Himmet’s exemplification on how he relates the teaching point to a real purpose from real life.

While talking about grammar teaching, Aydan relates her teaching approach to students’ needs. As the first need, she states the necessity of contextualization. To Aydan, students feel stuck when they encounter a new language structure in isolated sentences. To turn learning into an effective process, she suggests allowing learners to discover and deduce the rule on their own with the help of contextual clues. This method is thought to be efficient as the students are not aware that they are learning a grammatical structure. “Students learn within the natural context without being aware of it.” Aydan believes that with natural context, learners both construct and discover meaning on their own. She finds this method much more efficient in terms of “permanent results” in students’ language productions.

To Sevil, the ‘ideal’ equates with ‘student-centered’ approach; “the approach should be in accordance with students’ expectations and their learning styles.” Within this ‘student-centered’ approach, she explains how she starts determining her teaching goals. At first, “students’ general aim and needs in learning grammar should be identified,” she says. When she considers her own students, she comments: “these students will not be linguists. So, while learning grammar, the teaching concern should be where and how they will use it”, reflecting a real-life and needs-based approach.

While talking about how teachers can teach grammar best, Sevil states that teaching in accordance with students’ learning styles produces much more effective results. She combines language teaching with learning styles by means of a ‘discovery learning method’. “I prefer discovery learning and think it is the ideal way to teach,” says Sevil. While talking about discovery learning, she suggests a definition based on her teaching experience: “Teachers provide different language input to allow the learners find out the grammatical usage on their own.”

In order to begin a lesson, she prefers starting with a situation given in a book. Nevertheless, if there is no situation-specific example provided in the coursebook, she creates one herself. Later, she integrates the context with coursebook content and continues. In order to explain the reason behind this approach, she says “usually, I start with the function of target grammar structure. I take into consideration how my students can learn best.” Her ideas on contextualization of grammar presentation and functional language teaching are in congruence with her belief in student-centered language teaching. Sevil emphasizes: “I take discovery learning as the basis and try to combine it with students’ learning styles.”

### 3.2. Prioritizing Grammar Teaching: Reasons

None of the participants believe that explicit grammar instruction is needed for better language teaching. Besides, they all claim that explicit and deductive grammar instruction should not be applied as these are not beneficial to attain the teaching goals. Suzan believes that grammar teaching is not necessary, unless students aim to take a structured exam that is heavily based on knowledge of grammar and grammatical accuracy. She notes that “to teach English for general and other purposes, direct grammar instruction is not necessary.”

Suzan appreciates reduced grammar teaching instruction and emphasizes that grammar rules provide language teachers with ‘power’; without which, she states, there is “nothing concrete left to language teachers to tell their students that language is this and that!” She also states that there might be some misconceptions such as, ‘Without grammar, there is no need for a language teacher in class.’

Himmet thinks that direct grammar instruction is the reason why Turkish students are able to understand but not speak English. He claims that 90% of all English teachers teach English through explicit instruction. In addition to this statement, he adds an underlying reason of this pervasive attitude among teachers: “Grammar teaching is easier for us.” He states that teachers provide answers to coursebook exercises using the answer-key and consider themselves ready for the semester. Aydan indicates the same point with her statements. She states that “traditional way is easier for us.” She supports this idea with another claim that new methodology in ELT prioritizes speaking skill but “we are as a society used to keeping quiet and listening.” To her, Turkish students prefer not to speak or participate in classroom activities and teachers, instead of finding ways to motivate students, choose the easier way and do not do much to enable active participation of learners.

Aydan states that, nowadays, deductive teaching methods are supposed to be replaced with contextual grammar instruction. Nevertheless, it is hard to break old habits. In her own words: “Our traditional teaching was presenting the grammatical rule by writing it on the board, and then writing their meanings with example sentences.” She appreciates recent methods of grammar teaching but remarks that, in general, teachers’ attitudes towards a new methodology are not always positive since they are so “focused on grammar teaching only.” “We do not know where to stop,” she states. In her view, teachers cannot determine the extend to which grammatical rules should be taught. Therefore, teachers choose to list down all the grammatical features related with the structure taught.

Suzan underlines another reason for prioritizing grammar: testing concerns. Teaching and testing departments are different and teachers do not have a say in the decisions taken by the testing office. So, it is all teachers’ duty to teach everything that might be asked by the testing office in the exams. Teachers with this pressure prioritize grammar teaching and prefer direct grammar instruction. She adds: “We tell the students that ‘you are responsible with the subjects covered in the book.’ When students are tested in the exam, I should have taught them all the language points and I have to feel safe about it.”

## 4. DISCUSSION

The participants shared their invaluable knowledge and beliefs on how to teach grammar best by answering questions on ‘the ideal way to teach grammar.’ They had a very critical view of the prioritization of grammar instruction and its structural implementation while teaching English. Their descriptions on ‘the ideal’ revealed prioritizing students’ needs instead of prioritizing the structural accuracy. Table 3 below summarizes their suggestions on how to teach grammar best:

**Table 3: The Ideal Way to Teach Grammar: Students' Needs**

While learning grammar, students need...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student-centered teaching (Sevil).</li> <li>• to learn in line with their own learning styles (Sevil).</li> <li>• a situation and context (Sevil, Aydan, Himmet).</li> <li>• to see when and where to use the language point (Suzan, Sevil).</li> <li>• real-life-like language teaching activities (Himmet).</li> <li>• to start learning the function of that grammar structure (Sevil).</li> <li>• to experience the language (Himmet).</li> <li>• to construct and discover meaning on their own (Aydan, Sevil).</li> <li>• to deduce the rule from context (Sevil, Aydan, Suzan, Himmet).</li> <li>• pair-work and role-play to start talking and be productive (Suzan).</li> <li>• to be fluent rather than being accurate (Sevil).</li> <li>• to use the structure in controlled practice activities first (Sevil).</li> <li>• the practice stage, after deducing the rule (Suzan).</li> <li>• to practice; practice makes perfect (Suzan).</li> <li>• to improve the speaking skill most (Aydan, Himmet, Suzan, Sevil)</li> <li>• the speaking activities in the book; teachers should not skip them (Suzan).</li> <li>• direct grammar instruction for structured exams only or if students are going to be linguists (Suzan, Sevil).</li> <li>• <u>do not need</u> direct grammar instruction to learn general English (Himmet, Suzan, Sevil, Aydan).</li> </ul>

During the data collection procedure, the participants provided their own reasons for English language instruction being predominantly grammar-oriented. Their views were derived from personal observations, knowledge and beliefs. After the data collection procedure, participants' statements were analyzed and condensed into itemized findings. Table 4 below summarizes the identified reasons why teachers prioritize grammar teaching at the aforementioned institution:

**Table 4: Reasons to Prioritize Grammar**

Teachers prioritize grammar teaching...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if they are afraid of losing control and power in class.</li> <li>• since they are required to teach not less than the coursebook content because of testing reasons.</li> <li>• teachers take the advantage of grammar instruction because traditional is easier.</li> <li>• as it is hard to break old habits.</li> <li>• when teachers do not know where to stop while teaching grammatical rules and teach them all.</li> <li>• when teachers think that students cannot learn.</li> </ul>

The data collected from teachers indicate that practitioners do not approve of using explicit grammar instruction while teaching English to speakers of Turkish at tertiary level. Their beliefs and knowledge reflect that they are in favor of teaching EFL through a student-centered approach. While paying attention to learners' needs, they apply strategies which are in line with discovery learning, contextual and functional language teaching methods. Table 5 below illustrates the data on participants' beliefs and teaching strategies, and also the related language teaching methods.



**Table 5: Teaching Theories and Teachers' Beliefs**

Discovery learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• choosing among different input to find out and connect findings, and learn at the end (Sevil).</li> <li>• learners are not supposed to memorize lists of verbs. If the underlying rational is learnt, it is easy to decide how to construct sentences (Suzan).</li> <li>• constructing and discovering the meaning on one's own (Aydan).</li> </ul>
Contextual grammar teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• starting with a situation given in the coursebook. If there is not a section like this, then create one. Later, integrate it to the book and continue (Sevil).</li> <li>• students discover and deduce the structure from context on their own. Learning becomes much more effective, then (Aydan).</li> <li>• teaching should be from whole to specific. The context can be created in a reading or listening text. The language point must be embedded in the text; relevant with students' level and must be authentic (Suzan).</li> <li>• come up with a scenario. Context is very important; the teaching point should not be kept in an irrelevant sentence that is up in the air (Suzan).</li> <li>• starting with a situation. There is warm-up stage. Later, a reading or listening text comes. After that, grammar point was deduced by the learner (Himmet).</li> </ul>
Functional teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the approach should not be 'today, we will learn present simple tense'. Instead, we should start with 'how do we introduce ourselves' or 'what do we tell about ourselves while introducing us to others', for example (Sevil).</li> <li>• starting with the function of the grammar structure. Taking into consideration how the students can learn best. The most ideal way is to create the situation and context (Sevil).</li> <li>• making students live the language situation. Although the classroom has an artificial atmosphere, the teacher should turn the situation into a real-life-like one as much as possible (Himmet).</li> <li>• learning a language is not similar with learning other skills. If one wants to learn a language, s/he needs to experience it (Himmet).</li> </ul>
Learner-centered teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• approach should be in line with students' expectations and their learning styles (Sevil).</li> <li>• if students will not be linguists in the end, while learning grammar, the focus should be where and how to use the language (Sevil).</li> </ul>

## 5. CONCLUSION

As time passes, teachers gain experience and achieve confidence in their teaching. They identify the strategies that might work well while teaching. They improve their understanding in relation to student behavior, classroom activities, educational objectives, and they develop a well constructed belief system on how to teach a language best. Wiseman, Knight & Cooner, (2002) state that experienced teachers "refine and perfect teaching strategies and may become 'experts' in a particular strategy, approach, or philosophy" (p. 17). Experienced practitioners' expert opinion might provide insights into teaching, which can guide prospective and new teachers in developing their own knowledge base on pedagogy and content. Importantly, sharing personal knowledge and belief with other colleagues provides collaboration and dissemination of knowledge and expertise.

This study aimed to elicit practitioners' knowledge on grammar instruction within the case of Basic English Department at Hacettepe University, Turkey. The teaching of grammar was studied as it was determined to be the most reoccurring theme in the data collected during the first cycle of research. In the second cycle of data collection procedure, the aim was to obtain practitioners' first-hand knowledge on their learners' needs and their best practices while teaching grammar.

Even though the findings of similar research support that English teachers promote grammar-based instruction (Borg, 2003; Schulz, 2001; Burgess & Etherington, 2002), practitioners teaching to Turkish learners of English at a tertiary level are in favor of adopting functional teaching methods by incorporating student-centered and contextual teaching approaches within their the most preferred teaching strategies.

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### Extended Abstract

Teacher knowledge has gained great importance in the field of English language teaching. The merging of different aspects on teacher cognition created a substantial body of research, especially on practitioners' knowledge regarding grammar teaching. A number of valuable studies have been conducted in this area (Andrews, 1999; Arıkan, 2002; Ellis, 2006; Borg, 1998a, b; 1999a, b, 2001; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Schultz, 1996, 2001). All these studies elucidate what practitioners know, think, believe and apply while integrating grammar instruction into their own teaching practices and contexts.

Although all the enquiries into teacher cognition provide great contribution to grammar teaching in the foreign language context, not enough research has been conducted to gather data on what Turkish teachers hold in relation to pedagogical knowledge on grammar teaching. Therefore, this study aims to explore the Turkish practitioners' cognition on how to teach grammar to Turkish learners of English as a foreign language. The findings may be of value to especially novice and pre-service teachers who are planning to work as English teachers in Turkey.

This study aimed to elicit practitioners' knowledge on grammar instruction within the case of Basic English Department at Hacettepe University, Turkey. The teaching of grammar was studied as it was determined to be the most reoccurring theme in the data collected during the first cycle of research. In the second cycle of data collection procedure, the aim was to obtain practitioners' first-hand knowledge on their learners' needs and their best practices while teaching grammar.

In this study, the selected research methodology is case study, since the research focus can be defined as "particularistic" in relation to the setting and scope (Merriam, 1998). The study setting was the Department of Basic English at Hacettepe University, Turkey. Eleven Turkish teachers who teach the same level of learners participated in the study. The preferred means of data collection were semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire and a post-conference carried out towards the end of the academic year. The analysis of data collection from seven teachers indicated that teachers' discourse was loaded with grammar teaching. Therefore, in the second cycle of data collection, four teachers were asked to share their knowledge on the underlying reasons of prioritizing grammar instruction, and then on the ideal grammar teaching in relation to their students' needs. The research questions were as follows:

- Why and when do the teachers prioritize grammar instruction while teaching in a general English class?
- What are the teachers' knowledge and beliefs regarding the ideal way to teach the English language grammar in relation to their students' needs?

During the data collection procedure, the participants provided their own reasons for English language instruction being predominantly grammar-oriented. Their views were derived from personal observations, knowledge and beliefs. After the data collection procedure, participants' statements were analyzed and condensed into itemized findings.

The participants shared their invaluable knowledge and beliefs on how to teach grammar best by answering questions on 'the ideal way to teach grammar.' They had a very critical view of the prioritization of grammar instruction and its structural implementation while teaching English. Their descriptions on 'the ideal' revealed prioritizing students' needs instead of prioritizing the structural accuracy. None of the participants believe that explicit grammar instruction is needed for better language teaching. Besides, they all claim that explicit and deductive grammar instruction should not be applied as these are not beneficial to attain the teaching goals.

The data collected from teachers indicate that practitioners do not approve of using explicit grammar instruction while teaching English to speakers of Turkish at tertiary level. Their beliefs and knowledge reflect that they are in favor of teaching EFL through a student-centered approach. While paying attention to learners' needs, they apply strategies which are in line with discovery learning, contextual and functional language teaching methods. Even though the findings of similar research support that English teachers promote grammar-based instruction (Borg, 2003; Schulz, 2001; Burgess & Etherington, 2002), practitioners teaching to Turkish learners of English at a tertiary level are in favor of adopting functional teaching methods by incorporating student-centered and contextual teaching approaches within their the most preferred teaching strategies.