Degree Thesis
Master's level
Grammar in the English Language Classroom

Teachers’ perspectives on grammar knowledge and instruction

Grammatik i det engelskspråkiga klassrummet
Lärares perspektiv om grammatikkunskap och undervisning

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Abstract:
The purpose of this work is to examine the teaching methods secondary and upper secondary teachers apply to teach grammar in the EFL classroom, as well as their perceptions about the benefits of having grammar knowledge and its benefits to students’ writing. Previous research reveals that grammar teaching is an integral part of language teaching; explicit and implicit methods along with deductive and inductive instruction are the main practices teachers use to transfer knowledge to their students. Apart from that, it is beneficial when teachers have good grammar knowledge; hence students can develop good metalinguistic awareness and writing ability. The theoretical framework is based on teacher cognition theory, as teachers’ personal experiences and knowledge affect their decisions about grammar practices in the classroom environment. A qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with six secondary and upper secondary teachers who teach English as a foreign language in different schools and municipalities in the whole of Sweden are used to conduct the current study. The results demonstrate that indeed grammar teaching is needed to teach a new language. However, factors such as age and type of group influence teachers’ decisions. Above all else, teachers’ highest goal is to help students become good language users.

Keywords:
Grammar teaching, explicit and implicit instruction, deductive and inductive instruction, teachers’ beliefs, metalinguistic awareness, writing skills in EFL
Abstract:

Nyckelord:
Grammatikundervisning, explicit och implicit undervisning, deduktiv och induktiv undervisning, lärarens uppfattningar, metaspråklig medvetenhet, skriftlig färdighet i EFL
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1. Introduction

Grammar has always been a significant part of language learning. According to a study conducted by Nishimuro and Borg (2013), grammar teaching plays a vital role in successful and more accurate learning (p. 30). However, during the last decades, there has been a lot of controversy about if and how grammar should be taught. Sopin (2015) explains in his research that until the end of the 60’s, the explicit method dominated in the language classroom, which was then replaced by the communicative approach, around the beginning of the 70’s: teaching just rules that did not fit the context led to the belief that grammar was not contributing to successful learning; thus, the focus became communicative competence instead. Communication was now favored, but after a certain period of time, researchers concluded that the communicative approach did not enhance learners’ awareness, as the same errors were repeated. Therefore, grammar cannot be excluded from language teaching (pp. 467-468). Another study carried out by Myhill et al. (2013) showed that the most important element for students to thrive is teachers’ subject knowledge which encompasses not only knowledge of the academic field, but also competence to transfer knowledge to their students so they can become skillful language users (p. 77). The demand for appropriate knowledge is higher when it comes to writing; writers need to have developed deep language skills to write good and correct texts (Myhill et al., 2018).

Researchers around the world have conducted different studies about grammar teaching. Schurz and Coumel (2020) performed a study comparing three European countries; Sweden, Austria, and France. These countries do not have English as one of their official languages, but as reported by EF Proficiency Index in 2019, Sweden came second in the worldwide hierarchy. However, the Swedish educational system seems to favor more the communicative approach and to advocate the early exposure to extramural English. Furthermore, the researchers of this study revealed that older research had shown that English was the only subject that could be learned through daily interaction and outside the educational context, as English has dominated in Swedish society for a long time: games, texts, products are translated in Swedish and English, while adolescents have a five-hour daily interaction approximately with the language. Although the Swedish curriculum suggests grammar for grades 7-9, Swedish teachers do not tend to explain rules but focus mostly on fluency (Schurz & Coumel, 2020, pp. 1, 5, 15).

While I was studying on the teaching program, I realized that there is minimal European research on grammar which focuses on upper-secondary school. Several researchers have conducted different studies on grammar teaching worldwide, but there is lack of Swedish research about the specific topic. Hence, this work is based on papers from foreign countries. The higher goal with this thesis is to enlighten teachers about grammar teaching and to inspire future research within this field in the Swedish context.

1.1. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how secondary upper secondary English teachers perceive the use of grammar; more specifically, how teachers teach grammar and what beliefs they have towards grammar knowledge to enhance students’ learning. Therefore, in order to achieve this aim, this work poses the following questions:

- What teaching methods do teachers apply to teach grammar in the Swedish EFL classroom?
- What are teachers’ perceptions about grammar knowledge and its benefits to Swedish students learning of EFL?
2. Background

This chapter consists of two parts; the first part will define key words, since they are the core of this study. Afterwards, a description of the Swedish curriculum for secondary and upper secondary school is provided to comprehend how grammar is a crucial part of language teaching.

2.1. Key terms

2.1.1. Grammar teaching

Grammar teaching encompasses any educational approach to learning grammatical structures either consciously (by learning rules) or subconsciously (by processing knowledge in comprehension and/or production) (Ellis, 2016, p. 84). Ur (1996) underlines that in foreign countries, grammar teaching is a controversial topic; while it is believed that the dispute focuses on whether grammar is needed and should be included in language teaching, the real issue should be if grammar teaching helps or not and to what extent (pp. 76-77). Deng and Lin (2016) present studies which show that a great number of teachers in England have positive attitudes towards grammar teaching as it boosts students’ communicative competence; however, it is vital to have in mind that context is a factor to consider (p. 2). Above all else, Myhill et al. (2013) highlight that grammar teaching enhances students’ metalinguistic awareness and promotes their literacy skills, especially writing. However, Jones et al. (2013) mention that on the one hand, there is limited research on how grammar teaching promotes students’ writing, and on the other hand, it is worrisome that lately teachers tend to lack grammatical subject knowledge (GSK) which prevents them from having confidence and teaching effectively. The core of this study is grammar instruction, and therefore, it is crucial to understand what grammar teaching involves.

2.1.2. Explicit and implicit instruction

According to Ellis and Roever (2021), lately, there has been great interest in investigating how second language learners learn a language and to what degree they are able to process the knowledge they receive (p. 160), but which grammar teaching method is more effective is controversial.

Explicit grammar teaching which is also called the “express method”, relies on techniques, memorization, accuracy, rule learning, and grammar analysis (Ling, 2015, p. 556). According to a study performed by Sopin (2015), explicit instruction can provide accuracy, as implicit instruction is more abstract and can cause difficulties with comprehension. Teaching explicitly is a great support for students who struggle to acquire a second language; hence they have the chance to understand how the set of grammatical rules works. However, it is strongly suggested to contextualize grammar teaching in the classroom environment (p. 469).

On the other hand, a study by Soleimani et al. (2015) shows that explicit grammar is not superior to implicit grammar, but on the contrary, implicit grammar is a more dynamic method based on autonomy; more active learner involvement and fluency instead of accuracy are the main characteristics. A controversial point between explicit and implicit grammar is that of autonomy. Pienemann (1989) supports that explicit knowledge can lead to implicit knowledge, what can be achieved through practice and when learners feel developmentally ready. In this study, the subject matter is grammar teaching, and the aim is to identify grammar teaching methods.
2.1.3. Deductive and inductive instruction

Benítez-Correa et al. (2019) define deductive instruction as the traditional manner to teach grammar. The process involves the introduction of grammatical rules followed by examples indicated by the teacher; in other words, the teacher dominates in the classroom environment and the students then use the grammatical structures in order to produce new examples. It seems that this method favors mostly adult learners, as they have the ability to comprehend abstract meanings (pp. 227-228). In Soleimani et al.'s (2015) study, it is stressed that there are learners who want rule explanations to become able to internalize grammar and use it accordingly in various contexts. Applying explicit-deductive rule learning leads to higher levels of grammatical accuracy, as learners are able to compare previous and current knowledge (pp. 471-472). However, explicit-deductive rule learning seems to work better when the focus is the analysis of simple morphosyntactic structures (Larsen-Freeman, 2015, p. 268).

On the other hand, inductive-implicit rule learning is another method to teach grammar. Students use their cognitive ability to figure out the rules; they are shown examples of a certain grammatical structure in various contexts, so they can figure out the rule on their own. Rules are complex and require more advanced knowledge; hence implicit-inductive instruction favors learning. During this process, the student becomes more active and motivated; thus, the teacher’s presence fades, and the student is more at the center (Soleimani et al., 2015, p. 471). Benítez-Correa et al. (2019) underline that this method suits young learners more, because they cannot handle complexity and learning by practicing is a better alternative (p. 228). One part of this work focuses on the methods teachers use to teach grammar; hence, as deductive and inductive teaching are teaching methods, they need to be defined as well.

2.1.4. Grammar knowledge and Metalinguistic awareness

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023), grammar is defined as the study of the set of grammatical rules. These grammatical rules concern the classes of words, their inflections (endings that modify the nature of the word), and their functions and relations in the sentence. Consequently, having knowledge of grammar means having grammar knowledge. Myhill et al. (2013) define as “grammar knowledge” teachers’ explicit knowledge of grammar in terms of syntax and morphology, for example the syntactic role of a word in the sentence or word classes. It is declarative knowledge, in other words when knowing the rules of grammatical terms, which is conscious and can be articulated, grammatical terminology is used (p. 80).

Speaking of metalinguistic awareness, Mousa and Yahya (2022) explain that the term refers to the conscious ability of appropriate communication and use of language. Promoting metalinguistic awareness is important for two reasons; firstly, learners are able to control their oral and written communication by using explicit knowledge, secondly to understand what the messages that they hear or read convey. However, to achieve metalinguistic awareness does not imply only to apply explicit knowledge for communication, but to pay attention in order to use this knowledge appropriately in different contexts. Firstly, teachers should develop their own metalinguistic knowledge to transfer it then to their students (pp. 2-3, 5). Sanosi (2022) underlines that metalinguistic knowledge usually overlaps with the term metalanguage which refers to the use of language to explain language by including the application of deeper grammatical knowledge. Thus, the more metalinguistic knowledge a learner has, the more linguistic proficiency they achieve, hence metalinguistic awareness (pp. 911-912). In terms of writing, Myhill et al. (2018) state that writing is a demanding cognitive process, as every stage of writing requires metalinguistic activity. A writer must have metalinguistic knowledge in writing, which involves grammatical knowledge, knowledge about written genres and the
writing process. Self-regulation is an element that inexperienced writers have not developed yet due to their limited metalinguistic knowledge for writing; thus, they cannot detect writing problems (Myhill et al., 2018). Metalinguistic awareness is the final product when learning English; thus, it is crucial to provide its definition in this study.

2.1.5. English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

As reported in Longman Dictionary (2023), EFL is defined as “English as Foreign Language” and more precisely, as the teaching of English to people who are non-native speakers, do not live in an English-speaking country, and English is not a first language (Longman Dictionary online version).

The European Union (EU) consists of 25 countries and 23 officially languages, as well as 60 indigenous and non-indigenous languages. Among many reasons, multilingualism is one significant factor which forces the use of a common language of communication; outside Europe, English is adopted as the common language of communication, a *de facto lingua franca*; thus, the European world is headed towards the same direction (Kirkpatrick, 2010, pp. 355-356). Hülmbauer et al. (2008) define “English Lingua Franca” as the contact language for people who do not share a common language or national culture, and for them English is the chosen language of communication (p. 27). In everyday life, English is used in different domains, such as entertainment, music, commerce, tourism, but it does not have a continuous presence. However, when it comes to the realm of education, English is the most important foreign language and taught since the very early grades (Kirkpatrick, 2010, pp. 357-358). When it comes to the Swedish context, the official languages are Swedish as the main language, along with the five minority languages: Finnish, Sami, Romani chib, Meänkeli, Yiddish, and Swedish Sign Language. In general, Sweden's official language is Swedish in international contexts (Språklag, 2009). Hence in this study, English is considered as a foreign language or a lingua franca just because it is not a national language in Sweden.

2.2. Swedish curriculum for secondary and upper secondary school

The Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket* henceforth) is the central administrative authority responsible for the Swedish public school system for all grades (preschool, grades 1-9, upper secondary and adult education). One of their main duties is to plan and make decisions on course syllabi, grading criteria, or the publication of general recommendations. The agency also issues diplomas of certification to teachers of all grades (*Skolverket*, 2010, pp. 4-5).

With regards to the subject of English, secondary and especially upper secondary students are expected to communicate unhindered and correctly in diverse social contexts both in speaking and writing; reception (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing) are expected to be rich in content and without restrictions. When it comes to grammar, the steering documents include it in language teaching. Teachers have the freedom to choose material and content, as well as how and what will be taught in the classroom, but it is not explicitly stated how grammar should be taught. Students are already presumed to acknowledge the basics from previous grades. However, the content of the steering documents for English changed as of 1st July 2021 for secondary and upper secondary school. Now, it becomes more concrete what is expected from students to work with, learn and know; grammatical phenomena, among others pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical and syntactic structures, spelling, text structure,
stylistic and rhetorical terms have a central place adapted to each student’s level for production and interaction (Skolverket, 2021a; Skolverket, 2021b).
3. Previous Research

This section presents results from previous research which focus on the research questions of this study. However, there is a lack of European research in English grammar teaching for secondary and upper secondary school; thus, international research was selected in order to conduct this work.

3.1. Methods to teach grammar

3.1.1. Explicit and Implicit teaching

Given the fact that there is minimal qualitative research into teacher cognition and grammar teaching in Japan, Nishimuro and Borg (2013) performed a study that aimed to show how three high school Japanese teachers teach English to their students and what shaped their decisions. The study was carried out at a private boys’ high school where the graduates entered university by having a final grade based on their academic and extra-curricular achievements for the previous three years rather than via high stakes\(^1\) examinations. The participants were three male Japanese teachers with an average of 25 years of teaching experience. Pre-observation interviews, classroom observations, and post-observation stimulated recall interviews were carried out. Approximately nine hours of recorded interviews and 4.5 hours of recorded classroom observations which corresponded to two 45-minute lessons combined with the materials used in the lessons were the available material for analysis. Results of the study showed that the three teachers designed grammar-based lessons to teach English. During these lessons, the teacher’s presence dominated rather than students’ which resulted to the fact that there was no time left to include communicative activities which could engage students more (p. 37). The rationale behind this decision was that on the one hand, the status quo in education in Japan prescribed explicit education; thus, grammar teaching held a great role in EFL teaching. Furthermore, the content of the curriculum was very specific; thus, the lack of time limited them. On the other hand, the teachers explained that acknowledging their students’ needs, explicit grammar teaching would be the best method to help students acquire fluency and accuracy. Furthermore, students feel security. However, what was slightly different was the use of terminology; whereas it can be helpful for weak students or students who pursue higher studies, not all three teachers had the same perspective on the aspect of terminology (p. 41).

A mixed-methods study was conducted by Janfeshan (2017) in Kermanshah, Iran. The core of that research was to extract information about the beliefs and practices of teachers in Kermanshah. The participants were 43 teachers, 18 females and 25 males who had a bachelor’s or a master’s degree in applied linguistics and had either taught or were teaching English to high school students. Their teaching experience ranged from 9 to 28 years. The Grammar-Translation method which is very common in Iran was the adopted method by most of those teachers. The study was conducted by applying quantitative and qualitative methods in order to examine teachers’ practices, as well as their beliefs towards grammar teaching and learning, and the factors that could affect their teaching approach. Despite teachers’ positive attitudes towards grammar, there were different point of views on some specific practices and beliefs. There was no significant difference between negative and positive answers about including grammar as a teaching approach. However, grammar cannot be successfully taught without extensive grammatical terminology. Above all else, grammar teaching is important, as it offers

\(^1\) High stakes decisions: major, life-affecting decisions about which students will pass or not pass a course when they leave school or which students will be admitted to university (Bachman & Damböck, 2017, p. 14)
the possibility for deeper understanding and mastering of a language, but to give students the chance to discover the rules out of examples is vital. Nevertheless, the participants’ teaching approach to grammar teaching had changed since they started working as teachers; experimenting with new ideas in the classroom, student feedback and self-discovery were the main three reasons that affected their stance. Lastly, a large proportion of teachers agreed that regardless, grammar teaching contributes to accurate language and avoidance of ambiguity in communication; however, to teach grammar is not as easy as it may seem, as there can be obstacles, such as lack of students’ motivation and interest, as well as lack of good available resources for use (pp. 344-349).

3.1.2. Deductive and Inductive teaching

AlAbri et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative research study in secondary schools in Oman about grammar teaching. The focus of their study was to investigate the beliefs and the practices of six English language teachers with a focus on deductive and inductive grammar teaching. Five informants had received a bachelor’s degree from Omani universities and their teaching experience ranged between 7 and 9 years; only one participant was the most experienced (30 years) with a bachelor’s degree from a British university. Two semi-structured interviews along with classroom observations were used to collect data. Each grammar lesson lasted 45 minutes. A first round of interviews was performed before the classroom observation and the second round afterwards. The findings showed that the deductive approach prevails in the Omani classrooms. Despite teachers’ knowledge about the advantages that inductive teaching has, they concluded that the deductive method was chosen due to a number of reasons; students’ struggle to comprehend grammar concepts together with the thought that students need to be well-prepared for the exams are influencing factors in teachers’ pedagogical decisions. In addition to that, other reasons like teachers’ own experience or avoidance of challenges were further explanations. Lastly, limited class time, the curriculum, and students’ proficiency were also included as arguments (pp. 403-406). The table below offers an overview of the classroom observations.

Table 1. Overview of classroom observations (AlAbri et al., 2022)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deductive Grammar Teaching</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lesson was teacher-centred where teacher engaged in giving instructions, providing explanation, and eliciting responses</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teacher presented rules explicitly as &quot;form + use + example&quot;</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher used drills to consolidate grammar item</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lesson was mainly traditional with explicit teaching of grammar rules</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There was noticeable use of grammar terminology by teacher and students</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teacher corrected all grammar errors</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inductive Grammar Teaching</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Lesson was communicative throughout</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Teacher presented language examples and instructed students to discover the rules</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Students practised the rules in authentic contexts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Grammar concepts were integrated into speaking and writing skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY:  Y: Observed  L: Limited occurrence  X: Not observed
A quasi-experimental research study was performed by Benitez-Correa et al. (2019) in a public high school in Ecuador. At that school, students had five 45-minute EFL classes a week. The purpose of the research was to examine whether the deductive or the inductive approach was more effective for students. For that study, the participants were two classes, 70 students in total, and three teachers; one teacher was holding lessons during the process and two teachers were observers. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted with ten EFL teachers and pre- and post-tests on structures were tested on twenty high school students. For the main experiment, two classes were selected, and each class was then divided into a control and an experimental group. Before the study started, the groups were administered pre-tests. Then, one group received deductive teaching with an explicit approach and the other one inductive teaching with an implicit approach. The procedure lasted ten weeks with ten 1.5-hour lessons. After the experiment, the students were administered post-tests. The results revealed that in terms of grammatical knowledge, both groups ranged on the same levels before the intervention. Even though both groups’ knowledge was improved after the post-tests, the significant difference between the groups was that the inductive method was more effective. In terms of rapport, both approaches established effective rapport. However, the inductive method seemed to be slightly more effective when it comes to teacher-student interaction, students’ motivation, respect towards the teacher, or confidence to ask for further explanations (pp. 229-233).

3.2. Teachers’ grammar knowledge and Students’ learning

Wilson and Myhill (2012) carried out a study in the UK. The core of the study was to explore teachers’ personal epistemologies in terms of metalanguage when it comes to embedded grammar when teaching and writing poetry. For the experiment, 31 secondary English teachers participated. Lesson observations and interviews were conducted to collect data for analysis. The teaching material for examination was called Playing with Words and three teaching units were included, one class observation for each unit, in other words, 93 observations in 31 schools. Grade 8 was the selected class. Explicit teaching of grammar was linked with the teaching of writing. The outcome was that teachers were feeling very confident when teaching literary metalanguage, in other words literary terminology, such as metaphor or rhyme. Literary metalanguage seemed to dominate in teachers’ lessons and during the interviews, some mentioned how important its use is. However, during the interview, some teachers expressed anxiety when using some more advanced terms, like onomatopoeia, meter, and caesura. In relation to linguistic metalanguage, many teachers seemed not to feel comfortable but fearful to use grammatical terminology during their lessons. Moreover, an explanation for not including it was that it is constraining and imposes rules. It was also revealed that most teachers had little or no linguistic components in their degrees, a fact that possibly shaped their opinions about linguistic metalanguage (pp. 560-565).

Myhill et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative research study in the Midlands and in South-West of England. Their aim was to investigate whether embedded grammar teaching contributed to students’ writing improvement. The grammar material was based on teaching units linked to the genre of writing being taught (narrative fiction, argument, poetry) during a whole year. To carry out their study, it was necessary to examine teachers’ grammatical knowledge. Thus, the participants were 32 teachers from 32 different schools randomly chosen, and one class from each school was included in the study as well. Grammar knowledge tests were given to the teachers before the study having as a purpose to examine their grammatical content knowledge of teaching grammar. The material was an extract from the novel Pride and Prejudice. Lesson observations during the teaching of the three taught genres for each teacher together with
teacher interviews after every observation were the used methods. In addition to that, one student from each class was selected to talk about their experience with their writing progress and new knowledge. The findings revealed that the teachers had problems with grammatical explanations. A big number of teachers struggled to define and explain grammatical metalanguage. It was easier to use semantic than functional definitions, or even invent their own definitions. Furthermore, their weakness to provide clear syntactic explanations, as well as generalized principles for writing and deficiency of correct application of terminology led to more confusion rather than clarity and an inability to show meaningful connections between grammar and writing. Questions posed by students which demanded metalinguistic knowledge led to the change of discussion or inability on the teachers’ part to complete their lesson plans. However, teachers either having some grammatical knowledge or less seemed to be confident when teaching in the classroom (pp. 84-87).

Another study by Jones et al. (2013) performed a mixed-methods approach in the South-West and the Midlands regions of England to find out whether contextualized grammar can be beneficial for students’ writing. Secondary teachers and students participated in the study, more precisely 32 mixed comprehensive schools with 32 teachers and 855 students aged between 12 and 13 years old. The teachers were interviewed, and questions such as working experience, degree subject, and gender were the primary questions. In addition to the interview, the teachers underwent a test so their GSK would be evaluated, lesson observations were also included in the experiment. The study was blind, and the participants were not told that grammar was the focus of examination, but just writing. Thus, three teaching materials based on different writing genres were used (fictional narrative, argumentative, and poetry); three weeks were needed for teaching each unit. The focus of the intervention was not grammatical errors or accuracy, but how the writers could make grammatical choices and fit them in the context accordingly, thus, the students were administered pre- and post-test samples of writing. Two groups were tested: a comparison (control) and an intervention group. The findings showed a positive effect which means that both groups made progress, but the difference was fairly higher in favor of the intervention group and above average in writing achievement. Nevertheless, the focal point here is that only the more able writers profited and showed progress than the less able ones. When it comes to teachers, the study demonstrated that only teachers who had teaching experience between 5 and 10 years were the most effective. On the contrary, inexperienced teachers lacked confidence and flexibility to use the materials suitably, whilst highly experienced teachers used deeply embedded pedagogical practices, but at least they could adapt to the situation by modifying their working methods.

Naming the study above as the “parent study”, Myhill et al. (2018) implemented a new mixed-methods study in England with a quasi-experimental design and complemented by a qualitative dataset. The difference of this study with their previous one was the smaller sample size, the non-randomized controlled trial, and the preliminary data analysis phase determining the characteristics of writing. The participants were less-proficient writers aged between 12 and 13 years old, 315 students in total with one comparison and one intervention group. The selection was made using national test results for writing at age 11. Students were expected to reach level 4, whereas some others would achieve higher levels. Pre- and post-tests were administered. The aim was to examine whether grammar teaching would help less-proficient students to improve their writing along with the pedagogical choices to consider matched to students’ needs. The experiment illustrated that less-proficient students’ writing incorporating grammatical metalinguistic knowledge improved in terms of sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. The intervention group showed significant progress in comparison with the
comparison group because of teacher’s effect. However, despite the lower progress for the comparison group, the comparison group had quick improvement within a 4-week period.

**Summary of previous research**

Findings from previous research show the different methods teachers in different parts of the world use to teach English to their students. These methods are explicit and implicit, deductive and inductive. Despite that in some countries, there are rules and norms like in Japan where the curriculum relies on explicit education, there are still teachers who try to modify their teaching. Teachers in Middle Eastern countries like Oman and Iran tend to use the traditional way of teaching. Given the fact that those teachers had acquired their teaching degree in their home countries; their experiences and beliefs are already formed, which leads to the point that their teaching follows a similar pattern which in their eyes can offer security and accuracy to learn English. On the other hand, teachers in Ecuador use also traditional teaching techniques, but take the chance to try different methods from the normal, like the inductive method. There, the student is more included and engaged. However, what is common is that grammar teaching is considered as an integral part of language teaching regardless of how it is taught.

When it comes to teachers’ grammar knowledge and if grammar can contribute to students’ writing skills which is a demanding process in language learning, it is pinpointed in this thesis, teachers are afraid of using linguistic metalanguage just because they do not have knowledge. This means that they cannot help students broaden and deepen their knowledge. Anglophone countries like the UK and Australia have undermined the importance of grammar which has led to the fact that teachers prioritize other domains, like literature, and lack grammatical knowledge. Nevertheless, the outcome from previous research was positive when grammar was incorporated into teachers’ lessons, as students’ writing showed significant progress and the intervention seemed to be beneficial both for strong and weaker students.
4. Theoretical Perspective

The following section will highlight the theoretical framework which will be used to analyze the collected data. A general overview of the chosen theory will be presented, as well as how this approach is relevant for this study.

4.1. Language Teacher Cognition (LTC)

The adopted theory for this study is Language Teacher Cognition by Borg (2003). The major idea of this approach is that teachers’ experiences form and influence their decisions in the classroom. Borg (2003) defines Language Teacher Cognition as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching - what language teachers know, believe, and think” (p. 81). Four fundamental factors that affect teachers’ awareness and teaching are pinpointed below (Figure 1) and those are: teachers’ previous education, professional education and coursework, contextual factors, and lastly classroom practices (pp. 81-82).

![Diagram of Language Teacher Cognition](image)

Figure 1. Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg 1997)

Teachers being previously students themselves are affected by their own experiences. Those experiences shape cognitions and pedagogical decisions they make later on in the classroom (Borg, 2003, pp. 86-88). Teacher education programs can also influence their knowledge and practices. Some studies have shown that they can influence teachers’ awareness, but still, this can be individual and not a rule (Borg, 2003, pp. 88-91). Research has found that there are significant differences between experienced teachers and beginners, as they focus on different aspects of teaching; on the one hand, experienced teachers tend to pay more attention to language issues, but on the other hand novice teachers are more interested in classroom
management (p. 95). Furthermore, Borg (2003) adds that contextual factors, such as parents/guardians, the school, tests, available resources, students’ knowledge, lesson plans, classroom context, as well as workload and working conditions can have a role on teachers’ cognitions and sometimes have a negative impact that makes them adopt practices contra their own beliefs (pp. 94-96).

This study wants to explore what teachers think about grammar. According to Borg (2003), research has shown that a considerable number of native teachers of English do not have adequate grammatical knowledge, whereas many non-native teachers of English have positive attitudes towards grammar and consider it being a crucial part of language teaching; thus, grammar should not be completely excluded. What is important to mention once more is that previous personal experiences define the practice of grammar teaching (pp. 99-100).

This particular theory was chosen, because the aim of this study is to understand teachers’ perspectives. I consider that teaching practices depend a lot on teachers’ previous experiences and knowledge. There are determinant elements that can affect teacher practices, such as lessons and strategies that might work well or mistakes that could help teachers see how to improve their lesson planning. On the other hand, there are some other factors that teachers are obliged to involve in, such as curriculum mandates and national tests. In Sweden, teachers have the freedom to choose teaching material, as well as how they want to distribute the teaching time. Grammar is mentioned in the steering documents as a part of language teaching; however, it is not clearly stated how it should be taught. So, I reflect that teachers’ personal experiences could act as a defining point to decide whether there are advantages or disadvantages to teach grammar, and therefore to include it in the EFL classroom.
5. Methods

In this section, the material and the method of this study will be discussed. Interviews were used to conduct the pilot and the main study. Information about the selection of participants will be provided, as well as the procedure of the implementation, method of analysis, reliability and validity, and finally ethical considerations are also included.

5.1. Semi-structured interviews

Cohen et al. (2018) describe interviews as a useful method to collect data, since the researcher has the possibility to explore in depth, something that surveys cannot do. They can be seen as a powerful tool of research along with several other benefits, such as online communication, exploration in depth regarding complex issues (p. 508). Moreover, Cohen et al. (2018) mention that there is an authentic and vivid interaction between interviewers and participants. There is no limit concerning the number of the questions included, but the purpose of the interview sets the limit. Above all, the most important element is that the interviewer has extracted by the informants all the necessary information that answer the posed questions (p. 512).

Because the purpose of this work is to examine how upper secondary school English teachers perceive the use of grammar; thus, the choice of interviews and more specifically semi-structured interviews was considered as the most appropriate tool to conduct the study. However, since this study should be conducted within a short period of time, it was a high priority to find informants who would participate and talk about their beliefs towards grammar and their practices in their classroom. Here, it is important to mention that surely, interviews have advantages but on the other hand, there are also disadvantages.

One positive aspect that I experienced when conducting the interviews was that I had the chance to meet the participants on Zoom and record with sound; hence I could see their facial reactions and hear the tone of their voice which mirrored their feelings. The participants and I did not have to travel a big distance to meet each other, hence saved travel time, as well as the access was fast without complications. Cohen et al. (2018) clarify that the location does not become a problem. People can stay connected any time without thinking about the distance that separates them (p. 538). On the other hand, holding classroom observations would give me a better picture of how teachers act in the classroom, and I would not have just “words” but real facts. Denscombe (2018) explains that there can be a difference between what people say and what people do, automatically this means that we do not always present real situations; thus, this factor affects the validity of the study (p. 293).

Another advantage with semi-structured interviews is the method to gather data. Open-ended questions are highly desirable, because the informants give plenty of details on the topic under examination (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p. 174). It is important to remember that the interview guide is based on the research questions, and it is recommended to start with warming up questions such as experience, place of work, etc (Dimenäs, 2007, p. 52). Cohen et al. (2018) highlight that interviews are considered as a successful recipe to conduct a study; there is a direct interaction between the subjects, probing and follow-up questions reveal more details about the participant’s personality. Moreover, the interviewer has the opportunity to approach the participant closer, and therefore, to extract truer information (pp. 508, 513). However, holding a semi-structure interview also indicates several disadvantages. Despite the unpredictable spontaneous questions that can possibly arise during the process, it is crucial to have in mind that straightforward questions cannot always give the desirable results. In addition
to that, questions with yes/no answers need to be excluded, because they cannot be elaborated, but they can be included only as follow-up questions (McKay, 2006, pp. 52-53). Hence, the researcher needs to include questions that serve the target. Finally, it is significant to inform the participant before the interview starts that anonymity is assured, as this factor can affect their answers (Wray & Bloomer, 2013, p.174). For this interview, open-ended with follow-up questions were used and limited to cover specific topic, the interview guide (see Appendix 2, Interview Guide) was structured based on the two research questions.

### 5.2. Selection of informants

Non-probability purposive samples were used to find participants for the study. According to Cohen et al. (2018), non-probability samples are more relevant for qualitative research and their main characteristic is uniqueness. The participants represent themselves and nothing else; thus, the researcher uses them to address questions to a particular group (2018, p. 223). In the current study, the informants are secondary and upper secondary school teachers whether licensed or not who teach English 5, 6, 7, or English in the introduction program\(^2\), but certainly they do not represent a wider population. However, the purpose of the interview was to gather as much rich and relevant information as possible. The participants were randomly found. Actually, it was quite hard to find teachers through municipalities. Approximately fifteen e-mails were sent to fifteen school principals of different municipalities all over the country; some e-mails were never responded to, and some school principals gave a negative answer. The alternative method to find participants was contact through Facebook, as there are some relevant groups for English teachers. Some volunteers responded by writing a private message; in total, I received nine answers, but only six were deemed necessary, hence the first six Facebook users/secondary and upper secondary teachers who had contacted me were selected. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 222) state that volunteer sampling is preferred when there is no other option to conduct the interview. So, this was an alternative thought to find participants than ending up with no participants at all. Here below, there is a table with an overview of my six participants.

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\(^2\) Introduction program: according to the guidelines of the Swedish National Agency of Education (Skolverket, 2022), students who have not completed their grades from previous years will study the introduction program which will give them the opportunity to enter a national program or to become eligible to find work.
Table 2. Overview of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Licensed</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Location of studies</th>
<th>Teaching subjects</th>
<th>Teaching courses in English</th>
<th>Life in an English-speaking country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Non Swedish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English, Religion</td>
<td>5 &amp; 6, grades 7-9</td>
<td>No, non-native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Non Swedish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Abroad &amp; Sweden</td>
<td>English, SVA, Italian, Greek</td>
<td>Introduction program, 5, 6, grades 7-9</td>
<td>Yes, non-native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Non Swedish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English, SVA</td>
<td>Introduction program,</td>
<td>No, non-native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>Non Swedish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>Introduction program, 5, 6, 7</td>
<td>No, non-native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English, Religion</td>
<td>5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>Yes, non-native speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher F</td>
<td>Non Swedish</td>
<td>Not yet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>English, SVA</td>
<td>Substitute teacher for secondary &amp; upper secondary</td>
<td>Yes, native speaker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3. Implementation

This study is qualitative research, a phenomenographic approach, as the purpose is to describe and interpret a phenomenon, more specifically to explain how people perceive a situation, what their beliefs and experiences are (Eriksson Barajas et al., 2013, p. 125). Consequently, this method was chosen since the study intends to examine teachers’ perceptions towards grammar teaching and practices in the EFL classroom. Qualitative studies consist of two parts; a pilot study comes first, and then, the main study follows.

5.3.1. Pilot study

For the pilot study, there was one participant who matched the criteria, an upper secondary teacher in English. The estimated time for the interview was 30-45 minutes and the interview lasted 35 minutes. The interview guide included questions based on the topic of the thesis with follow-up questions. However, two changes were made after a discussion with the supervisor. The first change concerned the reformulation of a question, as further explanation was needed to help the informant have a clearer picture of what was asked. The second change concerned the connection of two questions in one, as the answer was likely the same. Wray and Bloomer (2013) point out that conducting a pilot study helps to identify issues and correct them before proceeding to the main study and only a small number of participants is needed (p. 12).
5.3.2. Main study

For the main study, there were six participants who were secondary and upper secondary teachers in English with various backgrounds, one teacher (Teacher F) was not licensed whereas the other five were licensed. The average duration for conducting the interviews was 20-25 minutes, the interview process in total lasted a week. Since the study was carried out within a short period of time, there was no possibility to post letters for their written consent, but the letter of consent (see Appendix 1, Letter of Informed Consent) was e-mailed to each teacher beforehand. Thus, when I met each participant on Zoom, I asked if they agreed to participate in the process. They all agreed to proceed; hence, I had their oral approval which was recorded, and then, I was ready to record the interview by following the interview protocol (see Appendix 2, Interview Guide).

5.4. Method of analysis

The study includes interviews with six English teachers. Each interview was transcribed, the content was used for analysis to draw results. Each participant was anonymized as “Teacher A-F”. In the transcriptions, the interviewer and each informant are identified as “Speaker” or “Speaker”. I had saved the Zoom meetings, so then I could isolate only the audio. Afterwards, I used the transcribing program of Word 365 and printed out the conversations as documents. Since the program does not transcribe the whole conversation accurately, I had to hear the conversations again in order to correct or fill in missing words. Then, I divided the responses according to the research questions; more specifically, I grouped them into two categories, as I have included two main questions for my thesis. After that, I made a deeper classification based on the introduction, background, previous research, and theoretical framework of this study so I could write my data analysis. LeCompte (2010) points out that before starting the transcription process, it is helpful to organize the material. A table to concentrate some basic information about the informants can be seen as practical, and then identifying the linking pieces to tie them together and structure the answers into coherent and cohesive texts act as the main idea of the analysis. Cohen et al. (2018) point out that organizing, analyzing, and presenting data by research question is functional, because this process brings together all the relevant data which provide a collective answer to each question (p. 662). Moreover, transcriptions provide important details and accurate verbatim record of the interview, but non-verbal aspects are omitted. However, it can be problematic when participants speak with soft voice or in broken sentences. Then, the researcher needs to hear again in order to include what was omitted, a fact that makes transcriptions time-consuming (p. 646).

5.5. Reliability and validity

Cohen et al. (2018) mention that it is difficult to achieve complete validity and reliability in research since perfect construction and settings do not exist. Alternatively, the higher goal is to maximize the degree of validity and reliability respectively (p. 246). Validity is an important element for conducting trustworthy research, otherwise without it, the study is worthless. More validity is ensured when bias is minimized, for example attitudes, opinions and expectations of the interviewer, a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in their own image, the effort of the interviewer to shape the informant’s answer in order to support their theory, and possible misperceptions regarding what is asked (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 271-272). Hence, the interview guide was simply structured to avoid potential misunderstandings or question marks. Leading questions were not included, on the contrary open-ended and follow-up questions were administered, so the participants could develop and deepen their answers. Conducting
Qualitative research means that risks such as behavior and environment have a negative impact on consistency. However, in the present study the conducted pilot study served as a method of limiting bias which according to Cohen et al. (2018, p. 273) this is another way of overcoming bias.

Reliability refers to accuracy and precision. However, it can also be affected by bias. The interview must be well-structured with the same format and sequence of words for each respondent. Poor prompting and biased probing, changes to wording of questions undermine reliability since each question will not be the same for each participant, therefore, it is vital to minimize such issues. Moreover, it is crucial that the interview questions are open-ended, so each participant will avoid yes or no answers, but they will give their own answers enriched with details. The researcher needs to have in mind that other problems can appear, such as the respondents could give an answer to please the interviewer. Thus, the questions need to be thoroughly structured and not to seem different than what is socially acceptable (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 273). Replicability is a term connected to reliability; performing the same study and having the same result shows that reliability was high. However, in qualitative research there can be modifications, thus having the same outcome is not fully applicable. On the contrary, it is more possible for quantitative studies to release similar results (Dimenäs, 2007, p. 252; Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 270-271).

5.6. Ethical considerations
The Swedish Research Council (2017) specifies that participants are required to be appropriately informed about the research project before agreeing to participate and mentions four aspects which must be considered; secrecy, professional secrecy, anonymity, and confidentiality (p. 40). Hence, these four principles were seriously taken into consideration when designing this study, so the participants would not be put in any risk of being revealed. A letter of informed consent (see Appendix 1) was sent out by e-mail to each participant in advance; the participants were informed explicitly about the aim of the study, as well as how their personal data would be used (p. 41). Before starting the interview, the informants were reminded orally that our conversation would be recorded and that it was only me who would have access to the raw material which would then be kept till I obtain a passing grade, afterwards it would be deleted. Each participant would be decoded (the teachers were named “Teacher A, B, C, D, E, F”) and no personal information which could track back to them would be included, apart from the absolutely necessary for transcription, and, therefore, presentation of my results. Cohen et al. (2018) also make clear that when performing an interview, it is of greatest significance to protect the participants and their dignity. The researcher must consider the impact that research can have on individuals. Thus, it crucial to provide anonymity and confidentiality. This needs to be clarified from the beginning. Ensuring personal integrity is mandatory, but what is more important is that the agreement needs to be valid, and the promise must be kept (pp. 129-130).
6. Results

This section presents the results of six interviews performed with high school teachers in English. The interview is based on the two research questions; the first one focuses on the methods teachers use to teach grammar and the second one on teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of teaching grammar in the EFL classroom. However, the starting point of the result presentation is the definition of grammar.

6.1. Definition of grammar

The most significant part of the interview was to define what grammar entails according to the teachers. Grammar does not only concern grammatical rules to understand and explain grammatical phenomena (such as how tenses work, articles for countable and uncountable nouns, regular and irregular verbs, and possessive pronouns), but also something deeper; grammar can also refer to syntax, as during a lesson, teachers show how sentences are structured or talk about word classes. Teacher A said that teaching grammar means to explain grammatical rules and the basic principles how a sentence is built. Teacher B stated that grammar includes all the grammatical and structural rules that we must use when speaking a language. Furthermore, grammar is students’ metalinguistic awareness to use the language appropriately by knowing the hidden rules behind grammatical phenomena. Teacher C explained that grammar is all about understanding the structure of the language. It is necessary to have good grammatical knowledge, if one wants to become an independent speaker or writer. Teacher D said that grammar is about rules and syntax. According to Teacher E, when a teacher wants to teach a language, he/she is obliged to know grammar: placing the constituents in the right order is crucial if you are supposed to speak correctly. On the other hand, Teacher F considered that grammar is not only about grammatical rules and syntax, but it might also include aspects like learning how words are built, fixed and idiomatic expressions.

6.2. Methods to teach grammar

According to the Swedish steering documents, students should be taught grammar. However, it is not described with specific details how teachers should teach, except for the fact that there are a number of phenomena they should know.

6.2.1. Explicit and implicit grammar teaching methods

All teachers agreed that the determinant factor is the group of students. More specifically, the age or the level are the two aspects that affect them. Teacher A considered that a combination of both methods is the key for successful learning. In the beginning, students need some more time with explicit learning due to the fact that some rules and structures are totally different from their mother tongue, such as irregular verbs, but giving some time to adapt, they can evolve and automatize knowledge. Then, they can understand easily why a phenomenon is the way it is, and they can find out the rule themselves. Teacher B supported that:

Both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly helps students motivate their answer. The same time implicit instruction trains the subconscious; thus, students pass to another phase, that of starting to automatize knowledge and have language awareness. So, both are important.

Teacher C agreed that both are important. Students should know rules, but they should also understand language autonomously. Teacher D stated that the target group will show how a
teacher should act. The little ones can learn through games, as it can be easier for them. On the other hand, older students and especially adults want to hear the rule. It is easier for them, especially when they struggle. However, easy rules do not need to be explained explicitly. Next, Teacher E hesitated for a while and could not decide what is better, but after some thought concluded that a combination of both can be the key to a good learning. Only the very difficult parts should be taught explicitly, otherwise implicit teaching helps students to train their cognitive abilities. Thus, students could be helped if taught implicitly because they can gain much more. Through the feedback they receive, they can understand grammar. To conclude, Teacher F believed that students should be taught only explicitly:

Students should be taught explicitly, they learn another language. A foreign language. If you do not teach them explicitly, they cannot understand structures, forms, and semantic expressions. If you do not do that, they will not probably use the language appropriately.

6.2.2. Teaching rules deductively and inductively

Just as grammar can be taught or learned explicitly or implicitly, there are different ways to explicitly learn rules. Students need to learn grammatical and syntactic rules, but the method can vary. All six teachers agreed that they teach grammar rules both deductively and inductively. Teacher A points out that they have explained the grammatical rules and afterwards write example sentences on the board, so the students deduce the rule. It is easier for students who have Swedish as a first language to understand the English structure, as both are Germanic languages and share similarities:

Usually, I see that my Swedish students do not have difficulty to grasp new information. Indeed, word order can be confusing because in Swedish we use canonical and reverse order, but in English it is only canonical. However, it is not something difficult to learn, thus I do not explain such simple things. What I would explain is tenses, because in Swedish we use only one type of Present. In English, there are two; for the current moment and what we usually do. So, yes maybe I would start from the rule there.

Teacher B said that both methods are beneficial for students. They create or apply the rules. However, it is better when they find out the rule themselves, because they become teachers on their own. Teacher C agreed that the combination of both methods has positive results. It is always good to have balance and variation. Teacher D gave a similar answer to Teacher C, but adds that sometimes, it is beneficial for students to accept challenges and dare to solve a bit more advanced tasks than the level they are at. Teacher E said that it is good to practice knowledge, but the same time to switch to the inductive method is more stimulating for the students. To conclude, Teacher F’s answer was similar to the other participants’ above but added that teachers are also guided by their students.

6.2.3. Effective methods according to teachers

All teachers mentioned that effectiveness depends on the target group. According to Teacher A, students have different needs. Sometimes, the explanation of a rule is the most appropriate solution. Teacher B mentioned that some students want explicit learning, while some others want the challenge. Teacher C gave similar answer to the other two teachers above. Teacher D reported that teachers should choose appropriate material to enhance students’ motivation. Explanations should be given only when there is difficulty to understand a phenomenon. Regarding Teacher E, the inductive method seems to be the most appropriate, even if previously it was stated that explicit teaching can be beneficial. Using inductive or implicit methods, students reflect more and find the clues themselves, but surely, it depends on the level and the age of the students. Teacher F argued that students who study English 5 are more immature,
and some of them do not have even a pass grade from before. For that reason, it is good to repeat some theory and be more precise. On the other hand, students who study English 6 and 7 are usually more mature, as they either write national tests or study English as a preparatory course to enter the university. So, inductive, or implicit instruction is more appropriate for them, because they are supposed to know the language to a great extent.

6.3. Teachers’ perceptions about grammar

Apart from knowing how grammar can be taught, according to the six teachers of this interview, a deeper understanding about teachers’ beliefs towards grammar is presented in the following section.

6.3.1. Teachers’ Grammatical Knowledge

Teacher A argued that it is important to have good knowledge; otherwise, students will have many unanswered questions. More specifically, Teacher A said:

> Teachers are not Gods, thus they cannot know everything. However, I believe that a teacher should have good knowledge. There are teachers who do not like grammar, and they choose to work with advanced groups where you are supposed to know grammar from before.

On the other hand, Teacher B claimed that it is not a choice but mandatory for teachers to know grammar. Sometimes, there are students who have questions why this and that is or is not correct. So, knowing grammar helps teachers to teach better. Teacher B explained further that teachers should not have very advanced knowledge of grammar, but certainly, their level should be adequate to be able to explain to students who will study at university for instance.

> In Sweden, people learn a language without knowing the rules, and if you ask something, they just tell you that it is like that. They do not know the hidden aspects, in other words what is behind. So, teachers should know grammar, students ask, and you have to explain. It helps us speak and write better, learn other languages as well (Teacher B).

Teacher C reported that good grammar knowledge should be one of the qualities/characteristics of a language teacher. People who learn by listening or are beginners are not aware of rules:

> As a teacher, you need to be a good guide. I have a lot of students who do have many questions. I would be lost if I did not know grammar. Of course, I cannot know everything. I teach the introduction program, so my students have different cultural backgrounds. However, I can recognize some structures, as English is a Germanic language, and some languages have similarities.

Teacher D said that even if a teacher is not a fan of grammar, at least some knowledge of basic rules such as tenses and articles, as well as to analyze main and dependent clauses and explain the constituents that are needed, and this is what grammar is about. Teacher E claimed that teachers knowing grammar is crucial, though they may not need to teach it very often:
It is not very often that I will teach or lecture on grammar, but I think it is important to know it. First of all, it is crucial for students to be able to use it, and to know how to develop it and understand more about language itself.

Teacher F highlighted that maybe modern times do not demand the traditional manner of teaching grammar, because functional grammar has started to be popular, although, learners still need to learn rules in order to understand how language functions. So, teachers need to be able to have that grammatical knowledge. If for instance, a teacher works with novels, idiomatic expressions can appear, and it might be difficult for students to comprehend them. If the structure is changed, then the meaning is different. Therefore, teachers must be able to explain language and know the features of sentence structures well.

Despite the fact that all six participants mentioned that teachers should have good grammatical knowledge, they claimed that still it is impossible to know everything. For this reason, to be updated and well-informed is vital; educational courses through universities, access to books to refresh their memory, as well as the Internet can be useful resources for updating teachers’ grammatical knowledge.

6.3.2. Benefits of teaching grammar

This subsection concerns the possible benefits that according to participants of this study students may have if they have a teacher who is good at grammar. Five teachers expressed similar opinions, and the fifth teacher in order had a slightly different point of view. Teacher A answered that it is good to have such a teacher, because in fact knowing grammar is a preparatory phase to be able to evolve and master a language. Language learners not only learn rules but learn structures. Thus, they can become good writers. How people talk differs a lot from how people write. Accordingly, a good learner is not a person who knows only how to speak or how to write, but a learner who can perform both abilities quite well. That is an individual effort but having a teacher who has good grammar knowledge can motivate the student to want to evolve. Teacher B’s answer was that absolutely it is positive. Having this grammatical aspect as a teacher, students can understand why and how to use a language. How teachers teach grammar is an issue, as sometimes, the use of difficult terminology can cause confusion. Teacher C highlighted that it is a win-win both for students and teachers if teachers have good grammatical knowledge; students learn more effectively, and teachers become better professionals. Teacher D stated that:

Surely, it is very positive. It may be a good motivation for students to want to do research. Not everybody is interested in grammar, but there are people who really are. But to give a more specific answer to your question, I consider that a teacher who knows grammar can give more details and explain deeper a phenomenon. Hence, students learn better, write better, speak better, and feel even lucky to have such a teacher who is competent.

Teacher E said that it might be positive and negative at the same time. On the one hand, it helps, and students have the opportunity to practice and develop their grammatical skills. On the other hand, it may affect them negatively in terms of what their teacher focuses on, for example too much grammar. So, there is a need to make a distinction between what is needed and what is not. However, it is usually beneficial to develop grammatical skills. Finally, Teacher F pointed out that the guess is that it is only positive. The main goal is to teach so that students should learn and apply a language appropriately.
7. Discussion

This section focuses on the discussion of the results in combination with the background, the previous research, and the theoretical framework of this study.

7.1. Definition of grammar

When interviewing the participants, it was crucial to start by defining what grammar means. All six teachers gave a similar answer, that grammar is about rules and structures like Merriam-Webster dictionary (2023) explains. Thus, students need to be taught grammar in order to learn the target language, and it is teacher’s duty to include it in their teaching. Teacher B developed their answer and said that grammar is also something deeper. Students learn the hidden rules which means that they deepen their knowledge, hence they obtain the ability to master the target language. This leads to the fact that they can use language correctly in different situations, as it is not enough to just know the rules but using them properly and make meanings. The ability one develops to master a language is what is called metalinguistic awareness and it is the final product when learning a new language, to speak unhindered and write correctly (Mousa & Yahya, 2022). In order to achieve that, firstly the teacher needs to have proper knowledge, not superficial but explicit knowledge of the language (Sanosi, 2022). The hidden rules that Teacher B named is the combination that Mousa and Yahya (2022) call grammatical terminology together with the ability to understand what the different messages they receive mean every time. Teacher C stated that having knowledge of the structure of the language is important in order to have good productive skills, in other words to be a good speaker and writer. Myhill et al. (2018) present that writing is a demanding process where well-developed skills are demanded if someone wants to be a good writer, something that is in line with Teacher C’s statement. Realizing how language is structured helps the learner to have a better understanding of how and when rules are used. Teacher F added that grammar is not only rules and structures, but also idiomatic expressions. Indeed, when writing, it is vital for the writer to have all this knowledge which helps for error detection and self-regulation, an ability that only experienced and well-educated writers have (Myhill et al., 2018). A statement from Teacher E was that it is teacher’s obligation to include grammar in their teaching. It is a fact that the curriculum makes clear that grammar is a part of language teaching. In Sweden, students learn English since a very early age, consequently they are supposed to have developed a good understanding and command of the language when they start at secondary and especially at upper secondary education. However, what is not stated explicitly is what teachers should teach (Skolverket, 2021a; Skolverket, 2021b). But now with the new teaching curriculum, it has become more concrete what student should know. For this reason, the teachers of this study agree to some extent but there is a slight difference in their definitions about grammar. Skolverket’s (2021a) guidelines are not very clear about whether and how to teach grammar. This along with teachers’ personal experiences and beliefs (Borg, 2003) have played an important role in shaping their definition of grammar and their views on its importance.

7.2. Teaching methods

This subsection discusses grammar teaching methods. In this study, the most dominant methods that teachers employed to teach grammar in English are explicit and implicit together with deductive and inductive strategies.
The common point for all six teachers was that grammar teaching is vital for language teaching (Janfeshan, 2017), but the group guides the teacher in applying the appropriate method. Teacher A said that both methods are needed, but starting with explicit knowledge suits best as learners need concrete knowledge in the beginning, so they are able to understand the differences that may exist in the first and target language respectively. Even though the explicit method is a fast way to learn a language, and it offers security and accuracy (Sopin, 2015). Teacher A stated that “automatization” is something that comes after some time. Which method is more suitable to use is an ongoing debate, and especially the explicit method has received much criticism because it does not help the learner make associations and meaning between rules and context, but for Teacher A, and also Teacher C, it is about a process that has a certain starting point and can lead to autonomy (Pienemann, 1989). Teacher B seems to have a similar thought, that both methods are needed and complement each other. Having good explicit knowledge and applying it appropriately in various circumstances is the final product of language learning, thus automatization or awareness (Pienemann, 1989; Sanosi, 2022; Mousa & Yahya, 2022). On the other hand, Teacher F seemed to be very absolute with their belief; explicit is the only way for students to learn a foreign language correctly. Teacher F’s statement overlaps with Nishimuro and Borg’s (2013) research. There are some countries where the status quo in education demands a specific manner of teaching. In Japan, teachers’ belief is that teaching explicitly offers accuracy regardless of students’ level. Given the fact that Teacher F does not have a Swedish nationality, one can assume that Teacher F has also received explicit education previously in their life, a fact that possibly had affected their beliefs to a great extent (Borg, 2003). On the other hand, Teacher E was the only teacher who argued that both methods are valuable, but teaching implicitly gives the opportunity to train cognition, thus students can reach fluency (Soleimani et al., 2015). According to previous research, successful language teaching can be accomplished without extensive explanation of terminology (Janfeshan, 2017). Considering Teacher E’s background being Swedish and acquiring a teaching degree in Sweden, it is natural that the particular teacher has such beliefs. In Sweden, communicative skills are prioritized, thus cognition needs to be trained. Lastly, Teacher D’s answer was in line with Soleimani et al.’s (2015) explanation on explicit grammar teaching; some students face difficulties to understand new rules, thus explicit teaching offers the possibility for accuracy and limited errors. Previous research has shown that explicit teaching benefits students, as explaining terminology can help them comprehend more effectively (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013).

Apart from the explicit and implicit approach, teachers use deductive and inductive methods to teach grammatical rules. Again, the common factor that affects teachers’ decisions is the group according to the six participants. Teacher E stated that the inductive rule teaching can be more beneficial, as students are stimulated. Previous research in Ecuador indicated that the inductive method was beneficial not only in terms of learning, but also other factors which are equally important and affect learning were slightly different favoring the inductive approach, such as students’ motivation, their interaction with their teacher, and confidence. These conditions contribute to better teaching and learning (Benitez-Corra et al., 2019). On the other hand, the other five teachers seemed to have a positive attitude to both methods. According to their answers, a combination of both can have good outcomes. For instance, Teacher A said that starting with the rules and then working with examples can be helpful when a grammatical phenomenon might be confusing, whereas Teacher B stated that indeed it is good for students to act autonomously and find out things themselves. There are some languages which share similarities, for example Swedish and English. Kirkpatrick (2010) states that English is a de facto lingua franca and within Europe the English language is used on a daily basis. Thus, it is natural for Swedish students not to face extreme difficulties. However, indeed there can be differences between two languages, for example the progressive tense does not exist in the
Swedish grammar. Hence, teaching deductively can help students comprehend the difference (AlAbri et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Teacher B supported that the group factor is a significant detail to have in mind. Young students like challenges and experiments, as opposed to older learners who can understand abstract terms and feel more secure when the material is more guided and concrete (Benitez-Correa et al., 2019).

Above all else, which method seems to be more effective is a question that does not have a straightforward answer. According to the participants of this study, there are always factors the teacher needs to consider, such as age, group, and students’ level. Borg (2003) explains that contextual factors affect teachers’ decisions. Sometimes, it can happen that a teacher chooses a method contra their own beliefs, because the highest priority is the final result. So, helping students to learn as effectively as possible will be affected by such details, thus the teacher needs to involve all means to bring the desirable result, in other words effective teaching which will lead to successful learning (Borg, 2003, pp. 94-96). Despite that Teacher F had stated previously that explicit grammar teaching was the most effective method, they stated that the group and the status of the group or the individual will define the method. When finishing grade 9 to continue to upper secondary, there can be students who do not even have a pass grade. However, they are expected to have knowledge from previous years (Skolverket, 2021a). In this case, explaining rules can help for better comprehension (Sopin, 2015). On the other hand, students who study English 7 for instance have more advanced knowledge and can work with complex tasks (Soleimani et al., 2015).

7.3. Teachers’ perceptions about grammar knowledge and its benefits

This subsection discusses teachers’ perceptions about teachers’ grammar knowledge and what benefits students have when their teacher is well-educated in grammar.

All six informants highlighted the importance of grammar. A teacher should have this kind of knowledge, but there were some different points of view when it comes to the extent of grammar knowledge. For instance, Teacher B stated that it is mandatory for a language teacher to have good grammar knowledge, otherwise it will be difficult to answer students’ questions. There is no need to have advanced knowledge, but it is important for this knowledge to be adequate to face challenges and answer not only superficial questions but give some deeper explanations. Previous research made clear that teachers who lacked grammar knowledge had difficulty to explain syntax and morphology; thus, they could not help students with their questions (Myhill et al., 2013; Wilson & Myhill, 2012). However, there can be teachers who have some knowledge. In that case, the important element is that the teacher has good knowledge in order to help students rather than to confuse them (Myhill et al., 2013). Explaining rules that demand metalinguistic knowledge can become really challenging. As Teacher B stated, it is important that the teacher can explain the hidden aspects. When teaching a language, it is crucial that teachers have explicit knowledge; otherwise, they are limited and cannot explain deeper meanings. In addition to that, teachers should master their knowledge in order to make meaningful connections. When teachers have done that, then students learn more effectively (Mousa & Yahya, 2022). Especially, when working with more advanced groups as Teacher A stated, then knowing explanations is important. Furthermore, Teacher C argued that individuals who learn to speak by listening are not aware of rules. This can be problematic for teachers in countries where grammar is not considered to matter. For example, in recent years teachers in England have been choosing other paths to acquire a degree, by studying literature courses for
instance, and have undermined grammar lessons (Myhill et al., 2013). This leads to the fact that teachers do not feel confident, as a result they avoid teaching grammar because they do not have the knowledge to explain (Wilson & Myhill, 2012). What this statement conveys is that students mirror their teachers; teachers who cannot give more explicit explanations cannot equip their students with more advanced knowledge so they can become experts themselves. The explanation above is in line with Teacher F’s answer that maybe today, it is considered old fashioned to teach traditional grammar, as correct communication is the real issue. However, in order to do that, the learner needs to have good foundations. Thus, a teacher needs to have expertise in grammar and not just abstract explanations (Myhill et al., 2013) to manage to make their students reach awareness; the highest goal is to make students use rules correctly and create meaningful oral or written conversations (Mousa & Yahya, 2022; Sanosi, 2022).

Having a teacher with good grammar knowledge means benefits for students. Teacher A supported that when teaching a language, students learn rules, but applying these rules together students produce longer structures. However, knowing how language exactly works is a bonus, as not everything is the same. For instance, how people speak differs much from how people write. Myhill et al. (2018) state that writing is a very demanding process. There, the writer does not only need to know rules, but they need to know how and when to apply rules, as well as be aware of writing rules and the writing process in order to produce good texts. The writer is required to execute simultaneously a number of activities which demand advanced knowledge and abilities. To reach that level, the learner needs to go through various stages. This cannot be achieved without a competent teacher who can guide appropriately. Teacher C’s answer agreed with previous research. Both sides are favored; teachers become better professionals and students become better learners. Nevertheless, Teacher D explained that the usage of difficult terminology can confuse learners. What previous research has found is that this depends on the teacher. Highly experienced teachers can create confusion due to the fact that they use advanced explanations. On the other hand, inexperienced teachers lack flexibility and stick to the books which can also be problematic, as teaching only according to the books implies that the needs of students who need more support and adaptations are left out (Myhill et al., 2018). However, terminology can help less-proficient students (Myhill et al., 2018) or students who pursue higher studies (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013). Lastly, Teacher E’s answer is totally different to the other five teachers. Even if it was previously stated that indeed grammar teaching is needed and can have a positive effect, this answer on benefits is different. While previous research has shown that grammar can benefit students, Teacher E considers that it may also affect negatively. Given the fact that this teacher holds a Swedish nationality and has acquired a teaching degree in Sweden, along with only two years’ teaching experience, we can speculate why Teacher E has such beliefs; the fact that teachers in Sweden tend to base their teaching on a communicative model rather than have a focus on grammar together with the fact that the teacher is not particularly experienced could mean that the teacher may not have much grammar experience and focuses on other aspects while teaching (Borg, 2003; Myhill et al., 2013; Jones at al., 2013).

7.4. Method discussion and limitations of the study

Since teachers’ beliefs were examined, the most reasonable thought was to choose interviews for conducting this study. However, this study is limited by time and number of participants. The outcome represents only what these six teachers believe about grammatical knowledge and instruction, thus the results cannot generalize what English teachers over the whole country believe about grammar. Holding interviews was positive, as teachers revealed more details in response to probing questions. But if a questionnaire had also been administered, then more informants would have participated ensuring with this way more validity. However, conducting
the study within a short period of time limited the alternatives. Another limitation was that the 
study focused on teachers who have received teaching education, so they are aware of what the 
teaching profession includes in terms of assessment, knowledge, and strategies to teach a 
language. Also, previous research shows that grammar teaching is effective when the teacher 
is a qualified language teacher. Finally, another limitation was that the participants taught 
subjects in the humanities. Possibly, the outcome would differ if also teachers who teach science 
subjects, such as mathematics or chemistry, had participated in order to have another point of 
view. Using Borg’s theory (2003) fitted the purpose well, as teachers had to present personal 
thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. However, what was challenging for this study was to find 
previous research studies, especially in Sweden, as there is not much research conducted on 
that topic. It was even more challenging to find research based on the benefits that grammar 
offers.
8. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate how secondary and upper secondary English teachers perceive the use of grammar; more specifically, how teachers teach grammar and what beliefs they have towards grammar knowledge and how students benefit from it. Six secondary and upper secondary teachers present their practices and beliefs towards grammar knowledge and what it can mean for their students and in general after their school studies.

To have a better understanding of this work, it was noteworthy to define what grammar is for the six informants. The study concludes that indeed grammar is a vital part of the teaching process and without it, knowledge is superficial. Having grammar knowledge conveys better command of the target language, as language users can understand and give messages, sometimes with deeper meanings. However, knowing grammar by itself is not sufficient. Grammar is not only about rules and structures, but the ability to make meaningful connections between rules and context. This ability is achieved when students have competent teachers who have mastered their explicit knowledge of the language. This becomes even more complicated when students have to write; writing demands a combination of functions simultaneously. The more knowledge one has, the better texts one can produce. This is in line with Myhill et al.’s (2018) research about writing as a demanding cognitive process where metalinguistic and writing skills need to meet each other and constitute the ingredients of meaningful texts.

Explicit and implicit instruction together with the deductive and inductive approach are the most dominant methods teachers tend to use for grammar teaching. However, factors such as group and age influence teachers to choose the approach that fits and works best. The participants consider that the most effective strategy is a combination of methods, because there are a number of factors which affect teaching and teachers’ decisions. On the one hand, there are students who struggle with language learning but also students who need a concrete pattern to feel safe. The teacher’s presence is necessary to show examples and guide their students, so students can feel safe and reproduce this knowledge. On the other hand, there are students who want the challenge and learning through interaction fits them best. Hence, they are kept stimulated and active to find out how language works. Which method is appropriate for each group and accordingly each student is the teacher’s judgement which can be affected by various factors, such as students’ progress, teacher’s personal experiences and beliefs, as well as the curriculum and classroom time (Borg, 2003).

Nonetheless, to reach a good level of knowledge and consequently to transfer valuable knowledge to students depends a lot on teachers’ knowledge, and mostly, grammar knowledge. Knowing grammar does not only mean rules and structures, but grammar is a valuable tool that opens the doors for meaningful written or oral conversations and deeper understanding of a language. Thus, a competent teacher has these characteristics. However, teachers’ education does not only enhance their competency, but also promotes students’ proficiency; good students can become better, weaker students can become better (Myhill et al. 2013; Myhill et al. 2018).

8.1. Future Implications and Research Ideas

This thesis is qualitative research and conducted during a short period of time, only six English teachers were interviewed across the whole country. It would be interesting to conduct a study with longer duration in order to interview more teachers, and therefore, to gather more material for analysis. Maybe, to include a larger number of questions would be a choice as well. Another idea could be to enlarge the method to conduct the study by including surveys. In that way, there would be plenty of available material, and in addition, the study would be more
trustworthy thanks to triangulation; the use of mixed methods would ensure a more valid result. Another thought could be to do further research on assessment and include more models to judge students’ progress. Also, what teacher students think about grammar instruction might offer useful information. Lastly, more research on what teachers believe about grammar knowledge and instruction is needed.

As a teacher student myself in Sweden, I have observed that grammar teaching is undervalued. There is more focus on communication rather than language structure. Definitely, students should not have metalinguistic knowledge to a great extent, as not everybody likes grammar or will become a teacher in the future, but students should have at least some basic grammar knowledge to know how language is structured and how to use it accordingly in different contexts. Otherwise, communication can be problematic, even more troubling when it comes to writing which is a more demanding process. Modern times demand good command of a language for the sake of correct communication in a number of areas (for example education, technology, medicine, commerce). Albeit, when it comes to teachers, it is vital to have deeper metalinguistic knowledge. Teachers’ duty is to transfer knowledge, guide students correctly and make them good language users.
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Appendices

Appendix I: Letter of Informed Consent

Information om min undersökning kring grammatikundervisning i det engelska kassrummet och Samtyckesbrev

Hej!

Jag heter Stavroula Papalexi och läser till ämneslärare i engelska och svenska som andraspråk vid Högskolan Dalarna. Nu under våren skriver jag mitt examensarbete och behöver göra en undersökning. Syftet är att lyfta fram lärare perspektiv om grammatikundervisning och undervisning i det engelska klassrummet. Undersökningen kommer att presenteras i form av ett examensarbete vid Högskolan Dalarna.


Högskolan Dalarna är ansvarig för behandlingen av personuppgifter i samband med examensarbetet. Som deltagare i undersökningen har du enligt Dataskyddsförordningen (GDPR) rätt att få information om hur dina personuppgifter kommer att behandlas. Du har också rätt att ansöka om ett så kallat registerutdrag, samt att få eventuella fel rättade. Vid frågor om behandlingen av personuppgifter kan du vända dig till Högskolan Dalarnas dataskyddsombud.

Ytterligare information finns av nedanstående ansvariga.

________________________  ____________________
Stavroula Papalexi  Jonathan White
e-mail: h16stapa@du.se  e-mail: jwh@du.se
tel:  tel:
Samtyckesformulär

Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig informationen om studien och har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

☐ Jag samtycker till att:

• delta i studien “Grammar in the English Language Classroom: Teachers’ perspectives on grammar knowledge and instruction”

• uppgifter om mig behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i studiepersonsinformationen

• följande personuppgifter samlas in: lärarexamen & lärarlegitimation (om finns eller ej), erfarenhet (år), program & årskurs läraren undervisar, ytterligare behörighet (om den finns men inga frågor om vilka ämnen, bara om intervjupersonen vill nämna)

• personuppgifter kommer att användas till analys av resultat

• de insamlade uppgifterna kommer att bevaras till dess att uppsatsen är examinerad och godkänd, dock högst tre år räknat från att datainsamlingen påbörjats

• intervjun ska spelas in med ljud på mobilen

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Ansvarig för studien: __________________________________________

Ort och datum: __________________________________________

Namnteckning: __________________________________________
Appendix II: Interview guide

❖ Teachers’ background
1. How long have you been working as a teacher? How long have you been teaching English?
2. Do you have a degree?
3. Are you a licensed teacher?
4. Where did you study to become a teacher? In Sweden, abroad, both?
5. Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country?
6. Except English, do you teach any other subject? (optional)
7. Which courses do you teach: course 5, 6, 7 or introduction program?

❖ Defining grammar knowledge and mentioning the different methods of grammar teaching
8. What is included in grammar for you?
9. According to the Swedish steering documents for English, school students should develop grammar knowledge. How should they be taught, explicitly or implicitly? Motivate your answer.
10. If your answer in the previous question included “explicitly”, how do you teach rules? Deductively or inductively? Why?
11. Which method seems to be more effective for the students in your experience? Please motivate your answer.

❖ Teachers’ perceptions about grammar
12. How much have you studied grammar? To what extent?
13. Do you enrich / broad your knowledge in grammar? If yes, how?
14. Do you feel secure or insecure when/if you teach grammar? Why?
15. Do you think that teachers should know grammar? If yes, to what extent? If not, why?

❖ Benefits of knowing and teaching grammar

16. Do you think that teachers profit by knowing grammar? Elaborate your answer.
17. Do you believe that teacher students should be taught grammar? Why, or why not? To what extent?
18. Is it positive or negative for students to have a teacher with grammatical knowledge? Does it help them? Yes, or no? Why?
19. Do you believe that grammar is an important part of the language development?

Thank you for your participation!