

“It is not just a theory you should check off”

Influences on Grammar Teaching Practices, a case by case review



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Author: Alva Thyr

Supervisor: Dr. Ellen Turner

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Abstract

Research about grammar teaching practices in Sweden has shown that grammar is something which many teachers value. To further facilitate the development of different teaching practices the present thesis hopes to provide teachers with a reference point for how different teaching practices are constructed. The specific aim of the thesis is to discover how grammar teaching practices are influenced by the curriculum, teachers' experiences with teaching, teaching context, and teachers' formal knowledge about teaching. This understanding is formed through the lens of teacher cognition using the concepts *practical knowledge*, *pedagogical knowledge*, and *culture of teaching* to direct the analysis along with four other constructs. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with four practicing English teachers from three different Upper Secondary Schools in Sweden. The interviews were recorded and after transcriptions were produced the data was coded deductively and inductively to generate descriptive themes. The results show that teachers' decisions about grammar teaching are informed and influenced by multiple interacting factors, including the needs of their students, their knowledge about grammar teaching and their previous experiences with teaching. A common theme between participants was that context and pedagogical knowledge would dictate when to teach grammar and teaching experience would inform which practices were used to do so. Additionally, the results point towards the context as a contributing factor to how teachers develop new knowledge about teaching practices. These findings significantly support the idea that teachers believe grammar teaching is something their students benefit from and that their students' needs are a main concern when electing to include grammar teaching.

Keywords: English grammar teaching, language teacher cognition, grammar teaching pedagogy, pedagogical knowledge, teacher experience

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Introduction

With recent changes to the curriculum for English in Swedish Upper Secondary School, grammar once again becomes a formally recognised part of the language learning policy (Skolverket, 2022a). Where there was previously no explicit mention of grammar in the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011), it is now included as part of the core content under production and interaction. However, explicit mentions of grammar remains excluded from the grading criteria and the curriculum does not specify which grammatical content ought to be covered in each course (Skolverket, 2022a). Even though the curriculum for English is fairly open about which content to include, teachers surprisingly seem to have similar ideas about grammar teaching, for instance that it should be contextualised within the learning of other language skills (Béchy, 2021). In general, research shows that many teachers of English in Sweden consider grammar to be a foundation of the language and therefore it is an essential part when learning a new language (Béchy, 2021; Freeman, 2022). These recent qualitative studies are limited in their comments about teachers' beliefs (Freeman, 2022) or limited in terms of sample size (Béchy, 2021). Therefore, additional research focused on broad descriptions of how teachers think about their grammar teaching would contribute to the understanding of English grammar teaching practices in Sweden.

To further understand the realities of grammar teaching and to form a foundation for this practice in the education landscape, teacher experience is a key source of data. An example of this is seen in Nicholson (2019) who explores teaching practices in the wake of changes to the English curriculum in Australia. Her findings suggest that rather than paying attention to the curriculum when it comes to grammar teaching, many Australian teachers rely on their own practical experiences and their perception of what students need to

succeed (Nicholson, 2019). This raises the question of whether Swedish teachers follow a similar pattern and to what degree the curriculum is relevant for the development of different grammar teaching practices. While the curriculum has some influence on teaching practices, research has shown that in the development of teaching practices teachers draw on additional factors, such as teacher education, course book content, and their own experiences (Coulmel & Schurz, 2020). It is necessary then to consider to what extent the curriculum affects the landscape of grammar teaching within the subject of English or if other factors are more influential.

Previous research about English grammar teaching in Swedish Upper Secondary School (see Béchy, 2021; Freeman, 2022) brings more attention to preferred teaching practices than teachers' thoughts and experiences with grammar teaching. While Béchy (2021) does comment on teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching, the results fail to address how different aspects of the teachers' knowledge and experience contribute to the development of their practices. One way of targeting such a gap is with *teacher cognition* theory developed to understand how teachers rely on knowledge and experience respectively. *Teacher cognition* and teacher identity are two emerging fields within education research that focus on teacher psychology (Mercer, 2018) where *teacher cognition* research has commented extensively on a variety of teaching issues, including grammar teaching, during the last three decades (Li, 2020). Since the 1970s teacher cognition research has generated a number of theoretical concepts for the understanding of how different aspects of the teachers' mental lives, such as their knowledge, their experiences and their personal beliefs, impact the development of their teaching practices (Borg, 2015). How some of these concepts can be

used to understand the grammar teaching practices of English teachers in Swedish Upper Secondary school is further explained in the Background and the Methodology sections.

Teachers' knowledge about teaching and their prior experience with teaching are key facets of teacher cognition research as it relates to the development of different teaching practices. When it comes to grammar teaching research points towards a reliance on experience over theoretical knowledge about teaching practices (Borg & Nishimuro, 2013; Oyandel & Sato, 2019). It is possible that the focus on teachers' preferences brings experience to the forefront subsequently obscuring any reliance on pedagogical theory. Yet, other research findings point towards possible conflicts between the application of pedagogical theories and the experiences teachers have with teaching. An example of this is presented by Oyandel and Sato (2019) who found that teachers avoided group work, which they knew could be beneficial for language development, due to experiences where students became disengaged during such activities. Knowing whether teachers rely more on experiences than knowledge about teaching are valuable insight for researchers and practitioners working with the development of effective teaching practices.

Aside from teachers' knowledge about teaching and their understanding of what their students need, the context in which they are teaching may influence the development of their teaching practices. This includes the type of feature being taught and the students' prior experiences with grammar teaching (Spada & Valeo, 2016), as well as whether the students are accustomed to having a dialogue with the teacher or not (Oyandel & Sato, 2019). The context, including the group of students, and the grammatical content to be taught may impact whether a teacher presents a structure explicitly in isolation from other activities or whether learning grammar is integrated with communication. Researchers typically distinguish

between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) due to their contextual differences and the impact this may have on teachers' methodological choices (Carter & Nunan, 2001). Additionally, the context does not only influence how a teacher chooses to teach it can also be determinant of what type of content is taught. In cases where Upper Secondary students are split into vocational and general programs, such as in Norway, teachers appear to focus on different grammatical contents depending on what group they are teaching (Askland, 2020). Thus, there is clear evidence that multiple contextual factors influence the way in which grammar is taught.

What becomes evident when examining the field of grammar teaching research is that it is a diverse field where different researchers focus on different aspects of this practice. Given that the field is so diverse there is a considerable gap between grammar teaching research and teaching practice, particularly as new research findings do not always contribute to a change in practices (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). By focusing on holistic descriptions of the knowledge teachers rely on in their practice and where that knowledge comes from, the present thesis provides a reference point for the discussion how practices are formed. It may challenge or inspire teachers and educators to think and talk about grammar teaching practices, thus presenting opportunities for the improvement of teaching practices where needed. Additionally, by focusing on broad descriptions rather than isolated constructs this thesis could provide information about interactions between constructs and whether any of them should be the focus of future research.

Aim and research questions

The chief aim of this thesis is to explore how and why teachers choose to teach grammar. In relation to this the thesis presents a discussion of the thoughts and knowledge

teachers have about grammar teaching and how these affect the contents of their teaching. Furthermore, the thesis describes the grammar teaching practices of four Upper Secondary English teachers in southern Sweden and connects these to current research within the fields of teacher cognition and grammar teaching research. The research process is guided by the following research question:

- (1) How are upper secondary English teacher's grammar teaching practices influenced by
(a) the curriculum, (b) their teaching experiences, (c) the context in which they teach,
and (d) their knowledge about grammar and grammar teaching?

The thesis is divided into seven parts; aside from this introduction it includes Background, Methodology, Results and Analysis, Discussion and Conclusion. The Background covers theories and concepts in grammar teaching and teacher cognition research, with relevant research findings and context being presented in the literature review. The Methodology includes information about the participants, the use of semi-structured interviews to gather data, analytical procedures, and limitations of these methods. The Results and Analysis section presents an analysis of the main influences seen in each of the four separate cases while the Discussion focuses on answering the research questions in terms of curricular influence, context influence, experiential influence, and influence from knowledge. Furthermore, the Discussion connects these findings with previous research findings and discusses possible implications for teaching. The thesis concludes with the Conclusion, which sums up the findings, discusses limitations of the thesis as a whole and provides suggestions for further research.

Background

This section includes two parts. The first part explains the theoretical framework of teacher cognition and provides relevant definitions for grammar and grammar teaching. The second part is the literature review which covers research findings in grammar teaching and teacher cognition as well as the educational policies that govern English teaching in Swedish Upper Secondary School.

The theory presented in this section concerns teacher cognition, grammar, and grammar teaching. Teacher cognition is the framework used to understand how the teachers mind works. The theoretical concepts *practical knowledge*, *theoretical knowledge*, and *culture of teaching* are set up to identify relevant parts of teachers' mental lives. Context is another important aspect of the research question and its role within teacher cognition is further defined here. Lastly, some definitions of grammar and grammar teaching are included as foundations for the discussion of grammar teaching practices.

Teacher cognition

Teacher cognition refers to the study of what teachers know, think, and believe and how these relate to what teachers do (Borg & Burns, 2008). It is a field of research which employs many different methodological and theoretical approaches which contribute to an understanding of why teachers teach the way they do (Li, 2020). What teachers think can be influenced by a range of things from personal, professional, physical, sociocultural and historical contexts, yet research often focuses on individual teachers without accounting for many of these factors (Borg, 2019). Context is an important factor in the present research project and the notion of context is further explored at the end of this section. The notion of context in the phrasing of the research question above and throughout the thesis is

multifaceted due to the complex nature of the phenomena being described. As mentioned above teacher cognition research recognises the impact of multiple different contexts, both physical and mental. Thus, context in general includes both the physical place where teaching occurs, the professional environment where the teacher works, the cultural influences of the society and their own personal views. Each of these aspects are included and considered as part of the context in this research project.

The field of teacher cognition research is incredibly expansive and encompasses many different interchangeable terms such as perception, belief, and attitudes (Li, 2020). In essence teacher cognition is an “umbrella term for the unseen dimensions of teacher’s work” and allows researchers to investigate the mental worlds of teachers without needing to separate different interacting concepts of knowing, thinking and believing (Borg, 2019). As such, in this paper, the exploration of what teacher’s do is understood as something which is inherently related to what they think, feel, believe, and know, and that these are not separable aspects of their cognition. There is a danger in the inherent lack of boundary here, where the term teacher cognition itself becomes meaningless, and the ideas it explores remain inaccessible and difficult to understand (Borg, 2019). To address this, a definition of some theoretical concepts, which may be used to provide structure in the analysis, follow here.

Theoretical concepts

Three theoretical concepts, *practical knowledge*, *pedagogical knowledge* and *culture of teaching*, will be used as base definitions for the conceptualisation of teachers thought processes. *Pedagogical knowledge* (Gatbonton, 1999) refers to teachers’ knowledge about teaching, its goals, and procedures, while *practical knowledge* (Meijer et al., 1999) is a result of the teacher’s experiences and reflections on their practice (as cited in Borg, 2003).

The difference between the two could further be characterised by regarding *pedagogical knowledge* as formalised knowledge about teaching with *practical knowledge* representing informal knowledge from teaching. It should be noted that the study of *practical knowledge* is not entirely unproblematic and has been critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to the impact of teachers' beliefs (Borg, 2015). Nevertheless, the differentiation between different kinds of teacher knowledge is important to understand the balance between the two in the development of teaching practices. Additionally, the notion of *pedagogical knowledge* can be divided into several subcategories such as subject-matter knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends (Borg, 2015). Therefore, the term is used as an umbrella term capturing different aspects of teachers' formal knowledge about language and teaching. The third theoretical concept, which supplements the aspects captured by the other two, is *culture of teaching* (Richards et al., 1992) which concerns a teacher's views of good teaching and their role within the organisation where they work (as cited in Borg, 2003). This accounts for the individual teacher's beliefs about what a teacher should be doing, thus addressing the issues around the study of *practical knowledge* not accounting for beliefs.

Definitions of grammar and grammar teaching

The concept of grammar can be defined and understood in several ways. In a broad sense Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia (2016) define grammar as "a meaning-making tool [...] made up of lexicogrammatical form, meaning, and use constructions appropriate to the context and that operate at the word, phrase, sentence and textual level". Furthermore, grammar can be viewed as prescriptive, something which determines how the language should be used, or as descriptive, a set of rules which describe how the language is used by its

speakers (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2016). Depending on the teachers' view of grammar as absolute rules or not, teaching may focus heavily on rules only rather than how context affects grammatical choices (Larsen-Freeman, 2015).

When it comes to grammar teaching the methods vary in terms of being inductive or deductive as well as implicit or explicit. Celce-Murcia (2015) defines *inductive* teaching is an approach where the teacher introduces students to examples of language from which grammatical rules can be derived and generalised. Inductive teaching can be time consuming, and while it does offer student-centred analytical tools, it can lead to uncertainties amongst students who are unfamiliar with working in this way (Siegel, 2020). In contrast to this *deductive* teaching is a more straightforward teacher-led approach where target structures are presented by the teacher and then applied by students during practice (Celce-Murcia, 2015; Siegel, 2020). Implicit instruction focuses on the development of intuitive or automated language abilities for communication and is not aimed towards the development of metalinguistic knowledge about the target features which is significant for explicit instruction (Ellis, 2015).

Literature review

This section is separated into multiple parts each focused on different themes in the literature which are relevant for the research presented in this paper. It begins with an account of developing practices in grammar teaching throughout history and the reported practices presented in current research. This serves as a basis for the understanding of the pedagogical knowledge teacher may have as well as the description of different teaching practices. Secondly it delves into teacher cognitive perspectives on the development of different grammar teaching practices. This is separated into two parts. The first part accounts

for the impact of teacher's beliefs, knowledge, and experiences. The second part considers several contextual factors. Lastly it considers specifically the literature which relevant to grammar teaching practices in Sweden.

A history of grammar teaching

How grammar is taught has shifted over time depending on what is the overarching goal and focus of language teaching and learning. *Grammar translation* teaches language through the medium of written translation between the learner's first language and the target language and focuses heavily on accuracy (Siegel, 2020). Grammar is taught deductively, where students receive explicit explanations of the rules which are practiced in translation exercises, and provided little room for the development of communicative ability (Lally, 1998). One of the drawbacks with *Grammar translation*, which subsequently lead to the introduction of the *Audiolingual approach*, was a lack of attention to spoken English (Bernhardsson, 2019). The *Audiolingual approach* focuses on the development of spoken accuracy through the medium of repetition and a major drawback of the method is that the production of language is largely decontextualised (Siegel, 2020). Another early 20th century approach to language teaching is the *Direct Method*, which exposes students to target language without teaching any grammar first in order to imitate the informal way in which a first language is typically learned (Bernhardsson, 2019). The *Direct method* was first introduced as a contrast to *Grammar translation* and changed the role of grammar from being explicitly taught to something which was acquired implicitly through practice (Lally, 1998).

The 1970s brings what can be thought of a communicative turn to the landscape of second language teaching, with increased focus on communicative ability over linguistic knowledge. This brings and increased focus to *Communicative-Language-Teaching (CLT)*

where teaching focuses on collaborative activities, such as games and role-play, encouraging students to actively use the language in group-work (Derewianka, 2019). To some teachers a communicative approach to language teaching is separate from the teaching of grammar and both play different roles in the classroom (Chiroque Chero, 2022). However, theoretical models of grammar and communicative competence point towards grammar as an integral part of language instruction, even in CLT classrooms (Celce-Murcia, 2019). The communicative turn does not mean that aspects from previously used grammar teaching methods have become completely absent from the modern EFL classroom. One of the more traditional methods still in use is the *Present-Practice-Produce* (PPP) model which includes a presentation of target language by the teacher, followed by exercises for practice and production (Coppen & Graus, 2016). In fact, most researchers appear to suggest that a combined approach, using multiple methods, is likely to yield the best results (Tuomas, 2015).

A more recent focus in the research regarding grammar teaching practices has been the timing of grammar instruction. Findings show that while most teachers, both in EFL and ESL settings, prefer to focus on grammar as it occurs naturally in the classroom they do not disregard the benefits of an structured presentations, particularly with structures that students struggle to grasp (Spada & Valeo, 2016). When including grammar in their writing pedagogy teachers may introduce grammar as an editing component in a two-step writing process, separate from the first step where ideas are generated (Watson, 2015). Time, or lack thereof, is another factor which determines a teacher's approach to teaching. Since deductive teaching is teacher-led some teachers find it more time-efficient and will choose this approach even if they believe students may learn more from an inductive approach (Toprak, 2019). The timing of

grammar research is thus dependent on students' needs, the teacher's perceptions of what is important and considerations of how much time is available.

Teacher cognition and grammar teaching

Teachers have different beliefs about the benefits of grammar teaching, all of which influence the decisions they make in their practice. The way in which teachers conceptualise grammar significantly impacts the way they teach as teachers who believe grammar is about rules and not use are more likely to engage in teaching that disregards contextual differences (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Research shows that teachers working with a communication focused approach find a major benefit of explicit grammar teaching was that it helped students use the language with higher degrees of accuracy (Chiroque Chero, 2022), possibly promoting the idea that grammar is about rules. Specifically, many teachers consider grammar to be an essential component when working with writing skills (Askland, 2020; Nicholson, 2019). In some cases, teachers were found to effectively use individual grammar worksheets as classroom management tools (Borg & Phipps, 2009). Here the choices around grammar instruction do not only reflect what the students should learn but also the teacher's responsibility to maintain an environment where learning is made possible. Other views include the belief that explicit grammar teaching is necessary for the development of metalanguage so that students can communicate effectively about how they language works (Askland, 2020).

As seen in Borg & Nishimuro (2013) pedagogical choices made by teachers appear to be largely based on experience rather than knowledge. One way in which teachers use experience to inform their grammar teaching practices is when determining what students find difficult to learn (Toprak, 2019). Further research suggests that when teaching

experiences conflict with pedagogical knowledge held by teachers the practical knowledge wins out in the development of teaching practices. For instance, contrary to what pedagogical theory suggests, teachers have been shown to include explicit instruction based on student input and to exclude group work based on teaching experiences (Borg & Phipps, 2009; Oyandel & Sato, 2019; Spada & Valeo, 2016). Additionally, Nururus et al., (2015) have found that beliefs about grammar teaching differ between EFL teachers with more or less experience, lending further support to the idea that experience significantly impacts teaching practices. Specifically, Oyandel och Sato (2019) find that teaching experience creates conflicts with pedagogical knowledge but resolves conflicts related to classroom communication as teachers learn from experience what works or does not work.

Additionally, teachers may be reluctant to teach grammar due to lack of trust in their own grammatical knowledge and abilities (Hill & Petrarki, 2011). For the interested and dedicated teacher this lack of confidence does not have to be the end of grammar teaching. As Nicholson (2019) shows, even when grammar teaching has not been present in a teacher's degree studies they can gain a boost of confidence from their own independent learning, classroom experience or by learning from more experienced teachers. However, lack of confidence does not account for all instances where teachers may be reluctant to teach grammar. Sometimes the issue is far more complicated, as negative experiences with grammar and grammar teaching as well as the teacher's perception of their own role and identity influence their ability to teach this content (Hill & Petrarki, 2011; Watson, 2015). Mercer (2018) suggests that the teachers' own perceptions play a key role in shaping the students' perceptions of the content, thus further complicating situations where teachers feel negatively about their teaching. Lastly, it is worth noting, that teachers' lack of confidence

does not only extend to their content knowledge. Other areas where teachers may be less confident in their knowledge include the impact of developmental stages on L2 learners; similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition, and between child and adult learners; as well as the role of age in second language acquisition (Kvist, 2014).

Contextual influences

Access to English outside of the classroom is a contextual factor which evidently affects the teaching methods employed by teachers. There is some belief that the best environment for language learning is an immersive setting which the language classroom can seek to imitate but not recreate fully (Scott, 2016). For EFL learners, communicative activities become an important part of their learning experience as they may not regularly encounter the language outside of the classroom (Spada & Valeo, 2016). In such a context a *focus-on-form* approach which brings attention to grammatical features as part of a communicative activity as they occur naturally allows the student to both learning opportunities and exposure to target language. Further evidence that increased access to English outside the classroom may have an effect on the development of grammar teaching practices is provided by Coumel & Schurz (2020). Their findings show that EFL instruction in countries with a higher presence of English outside the classroom (EE), such as Sweden, tend towards implicit and fluency-based practices while explicit instruction is more common in countries with less EE.

Educational policy and the curriculum are other factors which impact teaching in multiple ways. For instance, a previous curriculum in Ecuador promoted the use of inductive teaching, a practice which remained in use by many teachers even after the curriculum shifted towards a communicative approach (Chiroque Chero, 2022). This suggests

that teachers are likely to continue to work with methods they are familiar and comfortable with despite curriculum changes. The finding is further supported by the notion that younger and less experienced teachers typically teach grammar in the way they were taught as they have had less time to be influenced by new theories or peers (Freeman, 2022). Additionally, teachers may include different contents depending on if they teach in a vocational program or not (Askland, 2020).

English Grammar Teaching in Sweden

In the curriculum for English in Swedish Upper Secondary School it is stated that “language phenomena such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical structures, sentence structure, spelling ...” should be included in student production (Skolverket, 2021, my translation). This formulation occurs across all levels of Upper Secondary English in the most recent edition of the curriculum. However, it is left to the teacher to decide which grammar to teach since the curriculum does not state specifically which grammar items should be taught at any of these levels. Furthermore, the curriculum states the development of accuracy in more formal contexts as part of the learning goals for courses progressing through Upper Secondary school (Skolverket, 2021). This is one of the areas where teachers have been found to call attention to grammatical features, citing context as an important factor when motivating students to learn and practice grammar (Freeman, 2022). Additional guidelines about the role of grammar teaching in the curriculum for English are provided in the commentary material where it is stated that this contributes to the students’ ability to communicate in more varied and demanding contexts (Skolverket, 2022b). This aligns with the views expressed by many teachers, that grammar is a precursor to the development of more professional or formal language (Freeman, 2022).

Research shows that most English teachers in Sweden include grammar in connection with other activities, typically writing, citing context as important for engagement (Béchy, 2021; Freeman, 2022). In lower secondary school teachers sometimes employ methods such as PPP, while upper secondary school teachers tend to not use similar methods instead choosing to focus more on grammar in students' production (Béchy, 2021). Generally, English teachers in Swedish Upper Secondary school focus on task-based learning activities or communicative approaches (Freeman, 2022), where grammar could be included to support the development of communicative competence in speech and writing (Petersson, 2016). This focus on production could be a result of the increased focus on communication in the curriculum noted by Gustafsson (2011, as cited in Siegel, 2020). In fact, Freeman (2022) finds that some teachers in Sweden believe that students do not need to be taught grammar as they can pick it up naturally from other activities.

The commentary material to the English curriculum suggests that teachers rely on their own knowledge of the language as well as available teaching materials (Skolverket, 2022b). In an analysis of how two different textbooks present grammar From (2022) finds that this mostly follows a *focus-on-forms* approach, with de-contextualised introduction of grammatical structures and exercises for practice. This approach could be related to the lack of prevalence of target structures in the text favouring isolated grammar teaching. In terms of practise these textbooks included mechanical exercises rather than communicative ones (From, 2022). These contents then appear to go against the communicative approach which is promoted by the curriculum and preferred by many EFL teachers. Indeed, the findings of Béchy (2021) indicate that teachers in Swedish Upper Secondary school choose not to use the

grammar content presented in the English textbooks as they feel it does not match the syllabus or the level and interests of their students.

Methodology

The methods used to achieve the aims of the project are interviews with teachers and content analysis on the interview transcripts. This section will contain information about how these methods are used to achieve the aims and how respondents were chosen. It concludes with an outline of ethical considerations and possible limitations of the methods.

Qualitative interviews

Given that the aim of the study was to understand the reasoning behind how English teachers in Swedish Upper Secondary school think about grammar teaching the best way to gather materials would be through interviews with teachers. The benefit of qualitative interviews as opposed to a questionnaire is that this allows the respondent to influence the direction of the questioning, potentially eliciting richer answers for a deeper understanding of the respondent's thoughts and values (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2017). The context of the present study was suitable for 'semi-structured interviews. Since the field of grammar and grammar teaching is well researched it was possible for the researcher to develop broad questions based on an understanding of existing theory, which according to Dörnyei (2007) is required when the semi-structured interview is used for data collection. The semi-structures interviews use of broad questions allows the respondent to elaborate on their personal experiences without restricting their answers to pre-determined options, as one would with an entirely structured interview (Dörnyei, 2007). Another reason to use semi-structured interviews was to limit the scope of potential answers thus allowing the researcher to obtain data sets which are more comparable even in a small-scale analysis (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2017).

The research design follows a scheme typically used in semi-structured interviews. An interview guide (Appendix B) was developed based on previous research and piloted on teacher students, as suggested by Dörnyei (2007). In particular the design of the interview guide drew on inspiration from Béchy (2021) and Nicholson (2019) who use a similar research design. The final list of topics included in the guide were determined by the researcher as those likely to elicit relevant data to answer the research questions, following the insights gained from relevant theory and literature. The interview guide is divided into three parts following the suggestions by Christoffersen & Johannessen (2017). The first phase is introductory and covers demographic information with factual questions. The second phase focuses on teaching practice and experiences. The third closes the interview with a deeper dive into the respondents' thoughts about grammar teaching and the curriculum. Given that Swedish and English were shared languages between the participants and the interviewer, participants were encouraged to choose a language for the interview that they felt most comfortable with.

The interviews were documented through audio recordings and notes taken by the interviewer. The audio recordings were manually transcribed by the researcher in preparation for data analysis. For content analysis the recommended approach is an edited verbatim transcription which leaves out irrelevant sounds but preserves the expressions of the participant as closely as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was the approach followed in this instance and the transcription included repeated words, false starts, and audible cues. As with any transcription of audio, non-verbal cues and intonations may have been lost in the process (Dörnyei, 2007). Using a detailed transcription in this case proved to alleviate this issue as it helped the researcher recall the demeanour of participants during the interviews.

Additionally, since the focus of the analysis was the content of what each participant said these limitations were considered acceptable. To supplement the recordings research notes could be used to reconstruct the interview. This approach is recommended by Christoffersen and Johannessen (2017) as a preventative measure, allowing the researcher to maintain the data collected in each interview even if a recording should be rendered unusable. The recordings are stored on a secured flash-drive along with the transcripts.

Piloting process

As previously mentioned, the initial interview guide was piloted on teacher student participants. Here the piloting process was mainly used to gain insight into the flow of the interview, timing of the questions, and the expected length of each interview. Under different circumstances using teacher students for the pilot study could have been a problem as their experiences cannot be expected to match those of a practicing teacher thus resulting in vastly different answer to the questions about experience. However, since the primary reason for conducting a pilot study was to evaluate the construction of the interview guide, teacher student participants were regarded as sufficient. Another benefit of using teacher students was that they were accessible and offered valuable input on the construction of the interview guide as part of the piloting process.

As a result of the pilot interviews questions about the use of personal materials were moved from the first phase about demographic information to the second phase related to teaching practices. Furthermore, questions about the planning process and changes in the curriculum were added to facilitate answers related to these topics.

The respondents

Christoffersen and Johannessen (2017) suggest that for a project of this scale it may be possible to achieve the aims with even with as few as 3-5 respondents given that the selection of informants is homogenous. To achieve this the selection of participants required them to be practicing English teachers in Swedish Upper Secondary School. Contact with possible participants was established using a network of connections within southern Sweden and four teachers from three different schools elected to participate in the study. Given the small number of participants the scope of the thesis is more akin to a case study focusing on holistic and detailed descriptions of participants thoughts, knowledge and perceptions of grammar teaching (Duff, 2012). As explained by Duff (2012) the advantage of the case study that it can be used to frame larger phenomena in a way that is more accessible and concrete.

Table 1: Participants

Alias	Teaching experience	School	Currently Teaching
<i>Teacher A</i>	17 years as a certified teacher at <i>School A</i> , some prior experience	<i>School A</i>	English 6
<i>Teacher B</i>	35 years certified, worked at multiple schools	<i>School A</i>	English 5 and remedial English
<i>Teacher C</i>	3 years certified	<i>School B</i>	English 5-7
<i>Teacher D</i>	30 years certified with a few years of experience before that, worked at different schools	<i>School C</i>	English 5-6

Formaterad tabell

In this case the four participants are the cases considered. As seen in Table 1, they work at different schools and have different teaching experiences, thus each of them may provide a unique view of how teachers think about grammar teaching. One major difference between the teacher is that *Teacher B* and *Teacher D* work mainly with students in vocational programs, while the others do not. The benefit of selecting participants from different schools and programs was to obtain a broader description of practices and possible differences depending on workplace and student profiles.

Qualitative content analysis

The data analysis followed a typical qualitative content analysis procedure where each interview is first transcribed, then coded individually before the list of codes is compared between transcripts allowing for the grouping of overarching themes (Dörnyei, 2007). Due to the prevalence of pre-existing research within the field it was possible for the researcher to develop an initial template of codes from the theoretical framework. Thus, the initial coding stage followed a variant coding approach with a priori top-level codes developed from theory and literature. The codes were checked internally during the early stages of coding to ensure that they were explicit enough and could be appropriately applied to relevant sections of the data. Having explicit descriptions of the codes is essential to avoid mistakes and it would have been ideal to utilise external checks, as discrepancies between different coders could highlight weaknesses in the template (Dörnyei, 2007). However, given the time frame of this project it was not possible to utilise external checks and internal checking is deemed sufficient. The a priori top-level codes and their descriptions along with their relation to the research questions are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Description of top-level codes

Code	Description	Relation to research questions
Role of grammar	Defines grammar and the role of grammar in language learning, language use and in the classroom.	Research question 1d; influence from knowledge about grammar
Pedagogical knowledge	Teacher knowledge based on didactic theory, subject knowledge and policy. Formal knowledge about teaching.	Research question 1a and 1d; influence from curriculum and grammar teaching knowledge
Practical knowledge	Professional experience. Teacher knowledge that comes from experiences with teaching.	Research question 1b; influence from teaching experiences
Teaching practices	Descriptions of what the teacher does in their own teaching.	Research question 1; describes teaching practices
Teaching context	Influences from colleagues, the school they teach at, the types of students they teach etc. Physical and sociocultural context.	Research question 1c; influence from context, i.e. physical context
Culture of teaching	Defines good teaching, the teacher's role and responsibilities, explains what the teacher should or should not do.	Research question 1c; influence from context, i.e. cultural context

Motivations and preferences	Especially focuses on the planning process. Why is grammar included or not? Includes personal feelings representing individual context.	Research question 1; this may highlight multiple influences on teaching practices
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For the most part the top-level codes are clearly differentiated from each other to capture different aspects of the participants' thought process during the analysis. As previously mentioned, they were developed in accordance with theoretical notions. There is some overlap, for instance the *Role of grammar* is regarded as content knowledge, a specific type of *Pedagogical knowledge*. Given the nature of the thesis it is reasonable to separate it from other instances of *Pedagogical knowledge*. Additionally, there is possibly some overlap between *Practical knowledge* and *Teaching practices* given that the data consist of reported practices or participants' experiences with their own practices. Lastly, *Motivations and Preferences* is a somewhat diffuse construct in relation to the research questions as it is intended to capture specific individual expressions of beliefs and influences on participants teaching practices which are not strictly associated with any other construct.

Coding process

The analysis began with the researcher familiarising themselves with the material during the transcription process, gaining an idea of the contents within each interview. The coding then proceeded to the first stage where each transcript was treated individually. Using NVivo software the researcher assigned the a priori codes (see Table 2) to relevant portions of each transcript. At this stage the data is treated in broad strokes, deductively assigning chunks

of data to each coding category for further inductive analysis in the second stage. The second stage of coding was iterative, which meant that the data was processed in a cyclical manner until the point of saturation where no new knowledge emerged (Dörnyei, 2007). Here all transcripts were treated together using NVivo software to further analyse the data under each code looking for common themes. This was an inductive step seeking to find the best descriptors of the teachers' mental processes in relation to their practices. At this point of coding attention to detail and nuances within each top-level code became increasingly important to isolate different features of what is expressed in the data and subordinate codes were developed to describe these. Finally, these results are once again separated and represented to show the influences on grammar teaching in each separate case.

Ethical guidelines

Since the research conducted in this study involves human subjects several measures have been taken to ensure that the research remains ethical and causes minimal harm to any participants. To achieve this, four ethical principles, as suggested by the Swedish Research Council, are considered as detailed below.

Firstly, to be accordance with the *Information requirement*, any participants should be informed about the purposes of the research and the affiliations of the researcher (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). This includes a description of methods and benefits of the research, which has been communicated to any participants through e-mails prior to interviews as well as the consent form (appendix A).

Secondly, to be in accordance with the *Consent requirement*, any participants have the right to decide for themselves whether to participate in the research or not and to what extent they participate (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Since the research involves direct

contact with each participant it is deemed necessary for them to sign a consent form prior to the interview. The consent form includes information about the researcher, aims of the research as well as information about the participants right to withdraw from participation at any time and without repercussions of any kind.

Thirdly, to be in accordance with the *Confidentiality requirement*, any identifying information about participants should be kept securely by the researcher (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). For this reason, participants in the study are assigned code names, and this assignment along with any other identifying information is kept securely in the possession of the researcher. Finally, to be in accordance with the *Use requirement*, the information collected about participants may not be used for any other purpose than this research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002).

Limitations

There are two main limitations to consider when using interviews as a method for data collection. Firstly, since interviews can be personal and do not allow the respondents to remain anonymous there is a possibility that answers are edited to show the participants best side (Dörnyei, 2007). Secondly, since each participant is aware of the topic of the interviews before agreeing is possible that those who are uncomfortable with it or feel negatively about it in some way choose not to participate (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2017). It is not possible to avoid either of these limitations as they are inherent to the method and the ethical requirement of informed consent. The consequence of this is that the findings of this study are skewed in relation to what the respondents perceive the ideal teacher to represent and that the expressed opinions are not representative for all teachers. Given the aims of the research, both limitations are negligible.

Furthermore, one should consider the researchers' influence and any limitations with semi-structured interviews specifically. Interviews are reliant on the researcher's social skills and ability to elicit information which answers the research questions (Dörnyei, 2007). During the semi-structured interview the researcher has to quickly formulate questions which facilitate a meaningful discussion related to the topic of research and which can achieve the aims of the study (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2017). Respondents can only provide answers to the exact questions asked at the time of the interview. As such the choices made by the interviewer throughout the interview process will undoubtedly affect the results. A thoroughly prepared and carefully designed interview guide should sufficiently limit the researcher's impact on the results, though it may never completely eliminate it (Christoffersen & Johannessen, 2017).

Results and Analysis

This section will bring up key insights from the second stage of coding and connect them to findings from previous research. To highlight influential factors apparent from each separate case this section is presented case-wise with a summary at the end. For further discussion of common themes across cases and implications of these results, see the Discussion.

Where quotes are included, they reflect the words of the participants as closely as possible with some modifications allowed for integration and readability. In the cases of all participants except *Teacher C* the interviews were conducted in Swedish, and quotes chosen from those transcripts were translated by the researcher.

Teacher A: “Really, they should have learned this”

It is evident from the practices described by *Teacher A* that student’s needs play an important role when teaching grammar and this appears to be the starting point for much of their grammar teaching. *Teacher A* explains that they “have many students who say that we had five different teachers in lower secondary school and none of them taught any grammar” and “some [students] never really learned subject-verb-agreement and find it extremely difficult to deal with things that should have been solved long ago. Really, they should have learned this in lower secondary school”. This is a clear contextual influence since *Teacher A* might not teach grammar the same way, or even at all, if the students did not need it. This context is also something which *Teacher A* finds complicates grammar teaching since some students are helped more by teaching than others. Not only are students separated by differences prior knowledge but as *Teacher A* sees it, some students have “an ear for language [...] they have good grammatical knowledge simply from listening”. This type of practical knowledge influences *Teacher A*’s view on which type of grammar instruction suits different

individuals in their group. For instance, *Teacher A* brings up reading as way for students to improve their language through exposure, thus developing their ear for language and becoming better at recognising when something is wrong.

In addition to the contextual influence from teaching context and students' needs, physical and cultural contexts work as both positive and negative influences on grammar teaching. Cultural and historical context appears as negative influence since “[*Teacher A* thinks] that before it felt like grammar has gotten a bit of a bad reputation, that it felt a bit old fashioned to work with grammar”. This change in perception may be related to the communicative turn where grammar teaching shifts from a central position in language teaching to a peripheral one (Celce-Murcia, 2019), thus grammatical drills are perceived as the old way of teaching. This cultural context could possibly cause teachers to move away from direct grammar teaching in favour of other activities. However, *Teacher A* recalls that *School A* has offered “lectures about grammar teaching, but the entire team did not necessarily participate [...] we invited someone from the university to talk about it” as a form of professional development. Offering such lectures is a way in which the school may highlight the importance of grammar teaching, yet as participation is voluntary teachers may opt out in favour of other activities. *Teacher A* speculates that it possible that they could improve their grammar teaching by learning more about how grammar can be taught, but there are also other areas which would be interesting to focus on and “you have limited time”. One thing seems to have been accomplished by the school's influence in favour grammar teaching what *Teacher A* describes as an agreement between the teachers on what grammar content to focus on in English 5, English 6 and English 7 respectively.

However, in the case of *Teacher A* their pedagogical knowledge works as one influence in favour of their inclusion of grammar in teaching. At the core of this is their perception of learning goals which include grammar, [to convey meaning, avoid confusion, use the language] and to reach the higher grades. Grammar is viewed as important to fully grasp the language a *Teacher A* defines it in terms of “rules” and as “a skeleton for the language”. Furthermore, *Teacher A*’s pedagogical knowledge extends to teaching materials with the observation that textbooks targeting the same grade levels often include similar grammatical contents. This influences grammar teaching as *Teacher A* will use tests developed from textbooks as a starting point to identify learners needs and potential problems. In this use the contents of the textbooks influence which grammatical content is considered relevant for each course. However, *Teacher A* does not use textbook materials without using their pedagogical knowledge to consider their purpose and usefulness in teaching. Typically, only some parts are selected for use in teaching, a practice which is consistent with previous research findings (Béchy, 2021).

Practical knowledge influences which teaching practices continue to be used in the classroom. One example of this influence is *Teacher A*’s preference for worksheet practice over digital exercises due to their perception that students were more engaged with them, less prone to be distracted, and might feel that they accomplished more in the class. That students feel more accomplished when engaged in more direct teaching activities such as this is further implicated by previous research (Coppin & Graus, 2016; Spada & Valeo, 2016). However, *Teacher A* does note that in their classroom students are not motivated to learn grammar, because they only need it for tests:

It feels like a conflict, that when [the students] write normally, when they work, they always have those supports [word processors] and then where there is a test [...] they don't have access to that [...] they don't see that they struggle with something because they always have that help, so they only feel that they aren't good at grammar when there's a test.

One way in which *Teacher A*'s practices may be influenced by this is in the use of students' own production, specifically common mistakes, as a starting point for grammar teaching. In that way it is pointed out to the students where they may have something to work on and it lays a foundation for discussion around suitable corrections.

Lastly, *Teacher A* is influenced by their own perception of what good teaching is and their role as a teacher. In this case, good teaching is about allowing the students to develop both their writing, their reading, and their listening skills. When it comes to grammar, they state that "it is more important to have a short moment with it and then doing something else", maintaining a position where grammar is not central to their teaching. When grammar teaching does occur, it follows an inductive approach:

[they teach] through dialogue with the class [...] starting with translations or other sentences so they can try and see "what is wrong here?", "why is it wrong?" or [...] "why do we have this form?", "why is it were, not was?" asking questions and [...] explaining why it is in a certain way and then follow up with some kind of exercise.

This way of teaching, with teacher lead discussions and pair-work, appears to be motivated by another core principle, that it is “important that [the students] understand that they are not the only ones who find it difficult”. These two beliefs are part of the ongoing conflict that *Teacher A* appears to have with their grammar instruction, a strong belief in collective learning conflicts with the sense that the students in the classroom have different needs.

Teacher B: “Having fun with English”

The case of *Teacher B* shows evidence of how the pedagogical knowledge which influences teaching practices extends beyond the teacher’s knowledge of the subject and related policy documents. Much of this comes from their work with Krashen’s theory, as described below:

I begin by telling the students at the beginning of a new semester about old man Krashen, [...] professor emeritus in the US somewhere. [...] what he researched once upon a time was language learning and stress and he found that stress simply works as an affective filter [...] In the moment where you become stressed [...] it becomes more difficult to learn anything and it becomes more difficult to show what you know.

This influences a teaching practice which fosters students to recognise their own mistakes and to feel comfortable and confident with their own abilities, where students can “rest in the knowledge that that [they] know more than [they] think [they] do”. To reduce stress *Teacher B* has developed teaching practices which prepare students to meet stressful situations and to self-correct their language without relying on digital tools. The most distinct of these practices is that written assignments are produced using the testing software even in a practice

environment. This prevents students from feeling that grammar knowledge is only needed for tests, and since students become accustomed to writing without auto-correction there is less stress when that is not available during a test. *Teacher B* finds it important that “[students] see their own mistakes and have an opportunity to think about how they happened” and that “they can rest in the knowledge that they know more than they think”. Once an assignment has been handed in, students are provided with a copy where autocorrect is enabled so that they can see and correct their own mistakes.

The influence of pedagogical knowledge extends to the perception of the teacher’s role and responsibilities, which determine what is important in practice. In this case, Krashen’s theory, as described by *Teacher B* above, extends the responsibilities you have as a language teacher. To teach the students the language you must also care for their wellbeing as students to enable them to learn and recognise that sometimes students struggle because of interference from negative emotions rather than lack of ability. As *Teacher B* sees it “[their] task [as teacher] is to make the affective blanket, together with the student, become smaller [...] so that the student has a chance to reach what they know”. In grammar teaching *Teacher B* seems to address this with a focus on developing student’s awareness and understanding of when and why something is wrong, and how they can correct it. The focus on comfort extends to classroom environment where it is important to *Teacher B* that “you should feel safe with your classmates”. Particularly, *Teacher B* notes that less proficient students who are allowed to leave the regular classroom for a smaller group can be more expressive there.

The case of *Teacher B* presents a conflict between the interpretation of the curriculum and the teacher’s knowledge about grammar and its role. Grammar is identified by

Teacher B as a requirement to reach higher grades and a component of communicative ability, “it is with the help of grammar that you become better at building longer sentences”. Yet, *Teacher B* mentions how international guidelines, specifically the CEFR, include communication with speakers that are interested in understanding what you have to say. Here *Teacher B* concludes “there will never be anyone that does not understand if you say, “jane drive the car””, which would lessen the importance of grammar if the objective were to make sense rather than to be accurate. However, the importance of grammatical accuracy remains important to *Teacher B*, particularly for students who may work in internationally in the future, “[they] need to be able to communicate in speech and writing in such a way that [they] do not embarrass [themselves]”. The sentiment here is that if you are lacking in grammatical ability this may cause poor communication which results in potential embarrassment. In fact, the importance of accuracy in oral communication becomes even more important as *Teacher B* describes how they teach students to listen to their own production, written and spoken, to hear inaccuracies in their own language or to physically feel how it works when you speak it.

Colleagues as part of the cultural context have little apparent influence on the teaching practices developed by *Teacher B*. One reason for this is that they work shorter hours, and as a result there is less opportunity for them to interact with colleagues. When such interactions occur it appears that often *Teacher B* is the one to offer help with students that are struggling, not entirely unexpected as part of their role is to work individually with such students. One way in which cultural context does influence teaching practices is through the similarities between Swedish and English. *Teacher B* will bring these into teaching, both to show students how they can use their knowledge of Swedish to figure out English and when

that does not work. At other times, it appears that *Teacher B* is entirely willing to go against what they perceive as the cultural norm. The following statement stands out:

when we as Swedes say that we shouldn't have homework we are fooling ourselves and the students [...] it allows students who want to study to do so, the ones who haven't finished can complete the assignment and those who do not care to do it can respectfully not do it.

This statement refers to, and disagrees with, a perception among teachers that you should not assign more work than what can be reasonably completed during school hours. Even so, to assign homework is to *Teacher B* a double-edged sword since extra work at home cannot fix some problems if the student does not have sufficient help.

Lastly, issues related to grammar teaching occur from contextual influences related to the prior knowledge that students have. One struggle is the differences between Swedish, which most students are proficient in, and English, which uses passive constructions that are not used in Swedish. The passive voice is something which typically appears in Upper Secondary School and the struggle for *Teacher B* is "how do I teach something which [the students] don't understand in their own world?" Other issues have occurred with students that have severe gaps in their prior knowledge, and when "[someone else] contacted the primary school, [the answer they got] was the student worked so hard and I did not know what to do." This points towards a mismatch between what lower secondary school teachers can teach students and what upper secondary school teachers expect their students to know. This is an unavoidable influence on teaching where the gaps in knowledge need to be addressed for the student to progress or even pass the class.

Teacher C: “You should not force grammar just for the sake of it”

In the case of *Teacher C*, the decisions to teach grammar is influenced by context and pedagogical knowledge. Contextual influence relates to how grammar is taught “when [*Teacher C* deems] that students are held back by their lack of understanding” and the perception that “you should not force grammar just for the sake of it”. These sentiments promote teaching practices where grammar is treated as needed, rather than as a rule. Pedagogical knowledge is reflected in the definition of grammar as “the rulebook, the basis, the foundation of language” and “the solid foundation that remains the same”. *Teacher C* explains that to them a limited understanding of grammar may limit the way you express yourself, which highlights the role of grammar as a communicative tool. This is similar pedagogical notions central to the communicative turn, which carry through in the teaching practices described by *Teacher C* who prefers “to include a lot of written exercises so they’re not just using [...] grammar in isolation”. Furthermore, *Teacher C* believes in “variation, especially when you have students with different needs and circumstances”. These preferences carries over into a practice which is influenced by students’ preferences, offering different materials to students who want them. From this it can be concluded that grammar is taught as needed given the context, and this need is determined based on pedagogical knowledge.

Teacher C continues to show their pedagogical knowledge around the issue of grammar teaching when discussing the curriculum. Since the curriculum is not explicit in terms of which content to include *Teacher C* worries that their standards for what is required at different levels does not match the standards of other teachers. While these concerns are somewhat addressed in the commentary material (Skolverket, 2022b), which suggests that

teachers rely on their own knowledge of the target language, the demands of the content they are teaching and available teaching materials when deciding what grammar to teach, this appears to have little influence on the teaching practices developed by *Teacher C*. Rather, context and the students they teach appear to have a stronger influence given the following statement:

If I have a very advanced group of students, maybe I don't need to teach subject verb agreement maybe I need to teach complex sentence structure instead. If I have another class, I might take it to the basic level instead, explaining how irregular verbs exist etc.

Perhaps it is this strong influence from sources other than the curriculum that underlies the concerns with equity which appear to be central to their idea of good teaching and the school's responsibility towards their students:

we're not creating equality or equity in our teaching, which is a flaw in the system because we should. Every student should graduate with the same understanding for the same grade [...] If we want grammar to be central [...] then we need to have a unified view on how important it is, how it should be taught, when it should be taught, what should be included, what do we expect of [the students].

Pedagogical conflicts such as the one described in the statement above are not only related to the curriculum and context in which one teaches, it may also be related to the differences between the teacher's specialised subject knowledge and what they need to teach their students. In the case of *Teacher C* this is specifically related to their own recent experiences

with more advanced grammar at the university level making it at times difficult to simplify so the content makes sense to the students. As an example, *Teacher C* explains that “it’s difficult [to do] exceptions in the English language [...] there’s no reason for it, it’s just how it is, and you have to memorise it [...] how [do you] explain that without making them frustrated because they want very clear answers”.

While pedagogical knowledge and context appear as influences on what is taught by *Teacher C*, practical knowledge influences in what way they teach it. The teaching practices described by *Teacher C* are teacher-centred and deductive with “a presentation by [themselves], explaining very basic [...] from the start, [...] very concrete, very basic simple language [...] continued by clear examples, spoken and written”. This gives them the opportunity to have solid control of the learning and the opportunity to gauge student responses, to see if they are engaged with the content or if there is any confusion. Based on these insights from teaching they can adjust their teaching to the situation. This focus on having control of the class through teaching supplements previous findings by Borg and Phipps (2009) where teachers’ practical knowledge promoted the use of worksheets for classroom management.

Finally, collaboration with colleagues appears as an additional contextual influence on teaching practices, primarily in the selection of teaching materials. *Teacher C* it appears that the colleagues at *School B* meet to “review research [but grammar] is not necessarily the focus, [people focus on] teaching students with different diagnoses [and] how we deal with social issues in society”. Subject related discussions appear to occur even outside meetings dedicated to the discussion of research. On such occasions *Teacher C* and their colleagues “are talking more about assessment and materials” and “when it comes to

like, eh, the swapping of teaching materials that we have, we had grammar in mind". This final comment is interesting as suggests teachers at *School B* collaborate on decisions regarding teaching materials and may even use the same ones across the school.

Teacher D: "It is important to not stagnate"

Teacher D has a strong idea of what good grammar teaching is, stating that "[students] should know how to use [grammar] in practice, that it is not just a theory on the whiteboard or something you should check off a list". This notion informs their teaching which follows the traditional PPP-model with presentation followed by practice before production. A lesson about nouns might start with "[them listing] a few nouns in English, then we look at conjugation. We look at which ones there are, and I add the ones that haven't been said. Then they get exercises, and they can look at the board". This is not to say that *Teacher D* has only one way of teaching, instead they say that "I teach in many different ways. I think that is the key" and "even if I have an idea about how to do something, since I have done it in so many different ways [before], I select what suits the group [in the moment]". In this way, *Teacher D* relies both on their perception of what is important in grammar teaching, their personal context, but also the practical and pedagogical knowledge they have accumulated throughout their career which enables them to be flexible depending on student form.

In the case of *Teacher D* it is highlighted how the practice of grammar teaching changes over time as influences from cultural contexts are challenged by practical knowledge developed by individual teachers. When they started their career, teaching culture promoted ideals where "the harder your tests were, the lower the student's scores were, the better you

were as a teacher”. This is something which *Teacher D* has moved away from to benefit their students due to practical experiences with the following:

I saw that if the students thought they failed they threw the paper and said “when can I do it again?”, and I said “no, you can’t do that now” [...] when I started changing [things] and said, “now you will do four parts and I count the total” [...] that hysterical action of just throwing the paper, I don’t have to think about that anymore, there are no students who throw their tests.

In this case, the practical knowledge gained from the experience has had a significant influence on *Teacher D*’s practice which challenges the previous contextual influence from other teacher’s beliefs. It is part of the reason why *Teacher D* has developed a model which offers multiple opportunities “I don’t have a big test on the verbs, I have quizzes that I add together. But, if you ignore those, if you don’t show up then you get a big test instead”. On another occasion *Teacher D* notes how the level of their assignments has caused their students to raise their own expectations:

When I have an assignment I make sure it fills the requirements for C [...] so I’ve had students who told me [they] didn’t think [they] would pass, [but really, I ask for it to be on a C-level] so they have raised their own base standards, that’s really good. [...] one student with a D grade thought he would have an F.

Furthermore, *Teacher D* notes that “if I see that the students know it [I] might not need to go through [pronouns] but other times I might need to” and “I begin in one way and if I see that they know it I move on quickly and then I slow down with things that I see are more

difficult”. Thus, the pace of instruction, the difficulty of assignments and the format for testing is influenced by what they see in the classroom, rather than any pedagogical knowledge they have gained outside it.

Pedagogical knowledge appears as underlying foundations related to content and the need for grammar teaching. *Teacher D* defines grammar as the foundation and their view is descriptive as “[grammar] does not define how you use the language, but it makes it easier to not be misunderstood”. This is pedagogical knowledge which informs teaching in terms of the goals with grammar teaching. Furthermore, their practices are heavily guided by a familiarity with the steering documents and the sense that “you should cover both, the core content and the grading criteria, [...] the most important part is the writing”, once again using pedagogical knowledge as an argument for what to focus on in teaching. The importance of writing is further highlighted in the testing of grammatical knowledge, *Teacher D* explains “it might be enough for them to write an introduction or summary, and I might tell them I will focus on how you write not what you write”. Lastly, *Teacher D* states that feedback should reflect to what has been taught, thus, emphasising how it is important for teaching to be contextualised and not separate from the use and practice of language.

A contextual factor which has a large influence on teaching in the case of *Teacher D* is the presence of dyslectic and vocational students in their classroom. *Teacher D* reports to “have adapted all [their] teaching due to having dyslectic students in the classroom”. These adaptations include exemptions where dyslectic students are not required to write on the board or read aloud in front of everyone, with reverse adaptations being made to allow students who want to show off to do so. The adaptations made for vocational students

are with concern for the demands of their future careers where they will need to write by hand. These demands have influenced *Teacher D* to require their students to do so in class, even if that is not specified in the curriculum for English. While these influences are not exclusive to grammar teaching, they show *Teacher D*'s awareness of students' educational needs which are not subject related, thus enabling them to be accommodated for in their practice.

Lastly, the case of *Teacher D* shows the individual teachers' own role in seeking professional development when that is not provided by the school. *Teacher D* claims that "I have not been provided any professional development at all because the municipality always prioritised other things". Yet, they found other avenues for improving their pedagogical knowledge because "it is important to not stagnate". Currently, the teachers at *School C* are working together in examining grammar teaching practices. One such avenue is seeking recommendations from other professionals as in addition to creating their own materials for teaching, *Teacher D* uses material sourced from Cambridge as "it was recommended by a professor". This points towards how teachers as individuals decide their own practice and what they find it important to improve, regardless of how the organisation influence them.

Discussion

The main goal in this paper has been to understand how and why teachers choose to teach grammar. This understanding is developed from the participants' thoughts and beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching as framed by teacher cognition theory. The focus of this discussion is to summarise the results of the analysis in relation to the research questions and to discuss the implications of the findings. As such, each part of the research question is discussed individually in its own section.

Influence from the curriculum

This part of the discussion focuses on research question (RQ) 1(a): how are grammar teaching practices influenced by the curriculum? The analysis suggests that curricular knowledge is a significant part of teachers' knowledge about teaching, particularly when it comes to identifying the goals of teaching. One such goal is the role of grammar in the development of writing skills. Where previous research (Askland, 2020; Nicholson, 2019) has pointed towards this as a common belief held by teachers, it is interesting to note that this connection is emphasised by *Teacher D* as the most important part in relation to the curriculum. The curricular demands, in terms of grading criteria, further influence the development of practices by *Teacher A*, *Teacher B* and *Teacher C*, who focus on assessing students' skills and addressing grammar as needed. Additionally, the curriculum influences teachers' view of their responsibilities as teachers, as evidenced by *Teacher D*'s comments on their responsibility to cover all aspects of it. Yet, when it comes to grammar, teachers appear to be influenced more by the grading criteria and goals for teaching than the inclusion of grammar as part of the contents for teaching.

While the curriculum plays a significant role in how teaching practices are shaped this is not without its critiques. *Teacher C* raises the concern that when the contents of grammar teaching remain unspecified there is increased risk that students do not acquire similar levels of knowledge. Previous research suggests that younger teachers' practices differ significantly from more experienced teachers (Chiroque Chero, 2022; Freeman, 2022), thus there is real concern that an ambiguous curriculum allows for differences depending on teachers' experience. However, previous research further points towards context and access to EE as a significant factor which may require teachers to adapt their pedagogy for the benefit of their students (Coumel & Schurz, 2020). Given that the grammar content in the curriculum is recently changed, and that other factors clearly play a role where differences in teaching practices are concerned, further research is needed to address how this change will affect learning outcomes.

Influence from teaching experiences

This part of the discussion considers RQ 1(b): How are grammar teaching practices influenced by teaching experience? Naturally, teachers benefit from experience in the development of their teaching practices. One obstacle faced by newer teachers, as suggested by the present findings, is how to teach grammar in practice. As the findings suggest, a teacher with more experience may be able to pull out past lessons and materials if they discover the contents need to be covered in their current class, whereas the less experienced teacher possibly would have to develop a new teaching plan in this scenario. Previous research on the differences between less experienced and more experienced teachers further suggest that experience helps with classroom communication (Oyandel & Sato, 2019), possibly because teachers become more confident in their role. As shown by the results

presented in this thesis, less experienced teachers may struggle to find a way to communicate their advanced knowledge in way that is comprehensible to their students.

Contextual influences

This part of the discussion considers RQ 1(c): how are grammar teaching practices influenced by context? The most apparent influence of context in the results is related to the adaptation of teaching practices to student needs and circumstances. Previous research (Askland, 2020) indicated that teachers would adapt their practices depending on if they were teaching vocational students or not, and similar practices were identified here. Both *Teacher B* and *Teacher D* are influenced by what their students may do in the future, which is determined by the type of program they study. While Askland's (2020) findings could be interpreted as curricular influence, the findings of the present research suggest that differences are more of a contextual concern as both participants reference future circumstances rather than the curriculum. Another circumstance which influenced teaching according to the results is the presence of dyslexic students, which caused *Teacher D* to adjust their teaching to accommodate their needs. However, the adaptation to students' needs is not entirely unproblematic and differing needs in the classroom appears as a struggle for *Teacher A*. These difficulties appear to be similar to the conflicts between teacher identity and teaching requirements (Watson, 2015).

Furthermore, the results show that in some cases the school context directly influence teaching in some areas. One example of this is *School C* where teachers work together to determine which materials to use, which influences them to use the same materials. Additionally, where you work may provide you with access to professional

development or not. Previous research suggests that in-service training and professional development is valuable (Hill & Petrarki, 2011) and can give teachers a boost of confidence in their teaching (Nicholson, 2019). It could then be possible that the ability to accommodate different students displayed by *Teacher C* and *Teacher D* and *Teacher A*'s struggle to do the same is related to whether they have participated in professional training or not. However, further research is certainly needed to assert whether professional training would mediate *Teacher A*'s conflict with their teaching practice.

Teachers' knowledge about teaching

This part of the discussion considers RQ 1(d): How is grammar teaching practices influenced by teachers' knowledge of grammar and grammar teaching practices? From the results it can be concluded that teachers' conceptualisation of grammar play a significant role in the development of their teaching practices. This is consistent with previous findings where regarding grammar as rules only appeared to push teachers towards a more explicit and decontextualised grammar teaching practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). The results point towards the participants being somewhat split between teaching grammar as rules and teaching it as something which is contextual and depends on use. Thus it is clear that they incorporate the use portion of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (2016) definition. Furthermore, while the results include few mentions of specific pedagogical theories aside from *Teacher B*'s mention of Krashen, pedagogical theory is referenced implicitly in *Teacher A*'s mention of word processors acting as supports when it comes to grammar. The discussion there is not unlike the idea of scaffolding, which helps students reach slightly further than they are otherwise able. The findings further imply that teachers may use their knowledge about grammar to anticipate areas which their students would find more difficult, thus

enabling them to adjust their practice to meet such difficulties. This somewhat differs from previous research findings which indicated that teacher would rely on experience to inform them about difficult content (Toprak, 2019). However, given the complexities of teachers' cognitions it is possible that both experience and subject knowledge play a role in enabling teachers to include difficult content in a meaningful way.

Previous research does suggest that lack of knowledge may cause teachers to feel less confident about their teaching (Hill & Petrarki, 2011). However, none of the participants express any concern that their grammar knowledge is insufficient for teaching. In fact, in the case of *Teacher B* and *Teacher C*, their advanced knowledge of grammar helps them understand why certain things are more difficult. Their struggle lies in processing that knowledge and bringing it down to a level where students can understand it, thus pointing towards general teaching knowledge as another key component in the development of their teaching practices. In this case, previous research would indicate that teachers' working in an environment where they can learn from other teachers and explore research developments in language pedagogy are likely to improve as educators (Freeman, 2022; Nicholson, 2019).

Conclusion

A perhaps unsurprising observation in the results is that all four factors considered in the research question do influence how and why teachers choose to teach grammar. However, what the results do show is that the curriculum, context, and teacher's knowledge about teaching mainly influence when to teach grammar and what to teach. Students' need for additional grammar teaching to reach learning goals was the main reason for the inclusion of grammar in most cases. The curriculum is seen to have a minor and indirect influence on this, and the role of grammar had a more direct influence. On the other hand, practical knowledge had a larger influence on how teachers taught grammar. Where teachers experienced positive and desired effects of their teaching they would continue to teach in similar ways, regardless of influence from school context or cultural norms.

Furthermore, the findings show that physical and social context plays role in the development of teachers' knowledge as it regulates access to professional development and engagement in professional discourse about teaching and learning. Limited access to such things may hamper teachers' ability to develop new and better practices, unless they find other avenues in which to engage with colleagues. It is rather outside the scope of this research to determine whether limited access to professional development impacts the quality of teaching, and further research would be needed to determine the effect. Additionally, while the research presented here reflects on how practices are impacted by teachers' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences, they reveal little about how these practices are perceived by the students or whether certain practices are more successful than others. Thus, further research about grammar teaching practices could benefit from a more experimental approach which accounts for learning outcomes. Finally, an interesting aspect which is not fully explored in

this thesis concerns the differences between teaching in vocational and non-vocational programs.

Lastly, there are certainly limits to what could be expressed and extrapolated from the data collected in this study. The thesis covers a broad view of the topic where at times it may have been more interesting to delve even deeper into parts of the participants' mind. During the transcription process there were moments where certain expressions and views could have been questioned more. These missed opportunities can be attributed to the inexperience of the interviewer. Additionally, all prospective participants were informed that the research was about grammar and grammar teaching, so teachers who are not comfortable expressing their views on the topic may have elected to not participate. It is possible that a study with participants who have little interest in grammar teaching would produce entirely different results.

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Appendix A

Consent to participate in research

Project Name Teacher perceptions of grammar and grammar teaching

Researcher Alva Thyr **Email** al1771th-s@student.lu.se **Telephone** 072-3250629

Ändrad fältkod

Supervisor Ellen Turner **Email** ellen.turner@englund.lu.se

Ändrad fältkod

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to gain further insight into how teachers of English in Swedish Upper Secondary School think about grammar and grammar teaching. The research is carried within the scope of the teacher education program at Lund University and the resulting thesis will be published at Lund Student Papers (<https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/>).

Ändrad fältkod

Procedures

Data is collected through one-on-one interviews with teachers. The interviews are voice recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be taken by the researcher to preserve the confidentiality of any participant.

This includes:

- Assigned codenames for each participant in any documentation pertaining to the study
- Secure storage of audio recordings, notes, transcripts, and any other identifying information.

Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns at any time about this study and your participation in it, you may contact the researcher using the information provided on the first page of this document. If any problems occur which you feel you cannot discuss with the Researcher, you may instead contact the supervisor Ellen Turner by email at ellen.turner@englund.lu.se

Ändrad fältkod

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form. Once the form is signed, you are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time for any reason until the time of publication. Upon withdrawal from the study any data collected from you will be returned by the researcher or destroyed. Note that your relationship with the researcher, if any, will not be negatively impacted by withdrawing from participation in this research.

Consent

I hereby confirm that I have read and understood the information in this document and that any questions pertaining to it have been asked and answered. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without cost. I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to participate in the research outlined in this document.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Phase 1: Demographic

- What subjects do you teach?
 - For how long (years) have you taught English?
 - At what school/level? Has it always been the same school?
 - What other schools?
 - Which courses do you currently teach? How many classes?
 - How many lessons per week?
 - How long is each lesson?
 - Do you use a textbook? Which one? Why?
 - Tell me a little about your education. Where/what did you study? Are you a certified English teacher? For how long?
 - What is your favourite area of the English subject to teach?
-

Phase 2: Teaching practice

- How would you define what grammar is? *Descriptive/Prescriptive.*
- Do you teach grammar? In what way? What does a typical grammar lesson look like?
 - How do you introduce structures? *Powerpoint/Whiteboard/Other*
 - Related to what other content?
 - What exercises/activities do you give your students?

- What materials do you use? *Coursebook/Digital/Personal/Collective*
 - Does the choice of material affect what you teach?
 - Do you reflect on how students can become more independent? *Livslångt lärande.*
 - Do you find it difficult to teach grammar? In what way?
 - What do you feel works best? In your experience, are students motivated by your grammar teaching?
 - Do you create your own material? In what situation? What type of material?
-

Phase 3: Motivations

- What motivates your teaching? *Lesson plan/content, exercises, curriculum, textbooks, student proficiency or expectations.*
- Describe your planning process. How do you decide what grammar content to include?
- Based on your teaching experiences – what way do you feel is the best way to teach grammar? Why? *Follow-up on different ways of teaching grammar.*

- Do you feel confident in your ability to teach grammar?
 - Have you had any professional development on grammar teaching? *Fortbildning*.
 - Do you talk about it in your team? Is it something you feel should be talked about?
-

Final phase: Only a few questions remaining.

- In your professional opinion – is learning grammar an important part of learning a language? In what way? On what level?
- Do you think grammatical knowledge is important for students to achieve the goals in English? Explain.
- The curriculum was updated in 2021 and now includes the following content under production/interaction: *Språkliga företeelser, däribland uttal, vokabulär, grammatiska strukturer och meningsbyggnad, stavning, textbindning, inre och yttre struktur samt anpassning, i elevernas egen produktion och interaktion*.
 - Has this change affected your way of teaching?
- Concluding question. Do you have any other thoughts about what we've discussed.
- Is there anything you would like to add?