

**THE INTEGRATION OF GRAMMAR IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDY
OF HEBEI UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHERS'
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

HAN HONGMEI

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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**THE INTEGRATION OF GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING: A STUDY OF HEBEI UNIVERSITY EFL
TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

by

HAN HONGMEI

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALM	Audio-lingual Method
CET	College English Teaching
CETB-4/6	College English Test Band-4/6
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
FL	Foreign Language
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
FFI	Form-focused Instruction
FonF	Focus-on-form
FonFs	Focus-on-forms
FLTRP	Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
GTM	Grammar-translation Method
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
NHCE	New Horizon College English
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TE	Teacher Education

**INTEGRASI TATABAHASA DALAM PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS:
SATU KAJIAN TENTANG AMALAN DAN PRINSIP
GURU-GURU EFL DI UNIVERSITI HEBEI**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertumpu kepada amalan dan prinsip guru tentang pengajaran tatabahasa dalam konteks pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (BIBA) di China. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk meninjau prinsip guru EFL berbangsa Cina tentang tatabahasa dan pengajaran tatabahasa, meneliti amalan di dalam kelas yang menggambarkan pendekatan cara pengajaran tatabahasa oleh guru, dan menyiasat impak pengalaman dalam bidang pendidikan, pengalaman profesional dan faktor kontekstual terhadap amalan dan prinsip guru berkaitan pengajaran tatabahasa. Peserta kajian ini merupakan enam orang guru (BIBA) yang bekerja di Universiti Hebei, China. Data kajian ini diperoleh daripada temu bual, pemerhatian di dalam kelas, teknik ingat kembali stimulasi dan maklum balas guru tentang karangan para pelajar. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan guru mempunyai prinsip yang positif tentang tatabahasa dan pengajaran tatabahasa dalam konteks pengajaran (BIBA). Namun begitu, beberapa percanggahan dikenal pasti di antara prinsip dengan amalan guru di dalam kelas, dan didapati bahawa amalan dan prinsip guru dibentuk melalui pengalaman profesional serta dalam bidang pendidikan. Selain itu, amalan dan prinsip guru dipengaruhi oleh faktor kontekstual khusus, termasuklah kekangan masa semasa mengajar, silibus, ujian, faktor pelajar, komputer, reformasi pengajaran berdasarkan Internet dan lain-lain. Kajian ini memberikan pandangan tentang bidang pengajaran yang dapat dijadikan cerminan terhadap prinsip guru serta menambah baik amalan pengajaran. Selain itu, kajian ini juga membincangkan keperluan pendidik guru untuk membantu perkembangan para guru melalui inovasi program latihan guru.

**THE INTEGRATION OF GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING: A STUDY OF HEBEI UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHERS'
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the grammar teaching in Chinese EFL context. The objectives of the study are to explore Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching, to examine classroom practices that characterize teachers' grammar teaching approach, to investigate the impact of educational experiences, professional experiences and contextual factors on teachers' beliefs and practice with reference to grammar teaching. Participants of the study were six in-service EFL teachers working at Hebei University in China. The data in this study were obtained through interviews, classroom observations, stimulated recalls and teachers' feedback on students' compositions. The findings of the study indicate that teachers held positive beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching in EFL teaching context. However, several inconsistencies were identified between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. In addition, the research data reveal that teacher's beliefs and practices with reference to grammar teaching were shaped by educational and professional experiences. The data also indicate that teachers' beliefs and practices were influenced by specific contextual factors, including limited instruction time, syllabus, tests, student factors, computer and internet-based teaching reform and so on. This study provides EFL teachers with insights into teaching through which they can reflect on their beliefs and improve instructional practices. It also addresses a need for teacher educators to facilitate teacher development through the innovation of teacher training programs.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Grammar teaching, which has been a research focus of second/foreign language acquisition, has been and continues to be a controversial issue. There is no consensus about how best to teach grammar in second language teaching (Shaffer, 1989; DeKeyser, 1993, 1995; Chaudron, 1977; Ellis, 1991; Johnson, 1994). Due to the inconclusiveness of effective grammar teaching, language teachers are faced with a potentially bewildering range of options for use in grammar instruction. They tend to resort to personal theories for making instructional decisions (Borg, 1998b, 2003c). Thus, researchers began a shift from an etic to emic perspective on teachers' work. In the process of this paradigm shift in second language pedagogy, teacher cognition emerged as "a key source of data in attempts to make sense of formal instruction" (Borg, 2003c, p. 105). Teachers' belief, which is viewed as an essential element of teacher cognition, provides a new perspective on how to best understand grammar teaching.

1.2 Background of the Study

With the rise of communicative methodology in the late 1970s, the role of grammar instruction in second language learning was downplayed, and it was even suggested that teaching grammar was unhelpful and even detrimental to L2

development (Krashen, 1994; Truscott, 1999). However, A great deal of studies emerged which prompted a rethinking of the role of grammar in classroom methodology. The research findings of studies on Natural Approach and Immersion Programs produced evidence against the theory of CLT. Natural Approach, which is a proposed by Krashen and Terrell (1983), emphasizes comprehensible input and meaningful and natural communication rather than formal grammar instruction. Later studies on this approach indicated that purely meaning-focused language instruction does not lead to native-like levels of either grammatical or sociolinguistic competence (Swain, 1985). Studies on Canadian French immersion programs, which involve no attention to linguistic forms, proved that students typically do not achieve very high levels of target language accuracy in spite of years of exposure to comprehensible input and opportunities for interaction (Harley and Swain, 1984; Swain, 1985, 1988). It is suggested that mere comprehensible input is insufficient for the acquisition of high-level linguistic competence and some attention needs to be awarded to formal elements in communicative teaching context. Focus-on-form (FonF) approach (Long, 1991), which was proposed as a solution to resolve the problems posed by purely meaning-oriented approaches, has recently become an important issue in the field of SLA study. FonF approach focuses on the integration of grammatical forms into communication rather than forms in isolation. In this approach teachers are expected to draw learners' attention to linguistic forms as they arise incidentally in activities whose primary focus is on meaning. Research has indicated that teachers who focus students' attention on specific linguistic forms during communication are more

effective than those who never focus-on-form, or who do so only in decontextualized grammar lessons (Lightbown, 1998; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Norris and Ortega (2000) made a meta-analysis of 49 relevant researches and concluded that some kind of focus-on-form is more effective than instruction that only focus on meaning. It is suggested that teachers should integrate grammar instruction and communicative language use in their classroom teaching practices.

A number of researchers argued that grammar and communication must be integrated if the goal of second language learning is the development of communicative competence, enabling learners to use language for communicative purposes (e.g. Doughty & Varela, 1998; Ellis, 1994, 2002a, 2002b, 2003). However, the challenge is to identify the best ways of integrating grammar and communication in L2 classrooms (Nassaji, 1999; Nassaji & Cumming, 2000). Research has been done on alternative ways of treating grammar in communicative context, including studies on discourse-based approach (Celce-Murcia, 2002; Hinkel, 1999), input enhancement (VanPatten, 2002; Dekeyser and Solkaski, 2001; Doughty, 1991; Fotos, 1994;), interactional feedback (Mackey, 1999; Doughty and Varela, 1998), and task-based approach (Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2001; Fotos, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991). Despite attempts to provide teachers with guidance as to how best to teach grammar, such research had not been conclusive in this respect and hence contributed very little to an understanding of this instructional process as it is perceived by teachers (Borg, 2005). In actual classroom practices, teachers tend to develop a personal theory of grammar teaching to make instructional decisions (Borg,

1998b, 2003c). Therefore, an exploration of teachers' cognition is needed in order to interpret their actual practices. However, most recent research on grammar teaching in the SLA field had focused on the learner and learning outcomes, with little attention to what teachers do and why. The teacher, an essential element in grammar instruction research, has been ignored entirely (Borg, 2003). Teachers are individuals who enter the classroom with prior experience (e.g. experience as language learners and teachers) that inform their teaching and shape what they believe and do in the classroom. When faced with challenges imposed by teaching context, teachers may also experience uncertainties and even changes in making instructional decisions. An investigation of the relationship between beliefs, practices, experience and teaching context is more worthwhile in providing an understanding of teachers' cognitive perspectives and actual classroom work.

The study of teacher cognition, which is directed at a better understanding of teaching process from an insider view, has been established as a key area of research in the study of teaching since 1980s (Borg, 2006). Teachers' belief, which is viewed as an essential element of teacher cognition, has attracted significant research attention. A range of related studies have been conducted which provide insights on how to best understand grammar teaching behaviors in language classroom (Andrews, 2003; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997; Schulz, 1996, 2001; Woods, 1996; Borg, 1998b; 2006; 2008). It's obvious that the investigation of teacher beliefs and practices has become an important area of inquiry in grammar teaching.

1.3 English Language Teaching (ELT) in China

Foreign language teaching, and English language teaching in particular, occupies a prominent role in Chinese education. In China, English language learning and teaching takes the top priority because it facilitates the access to advanced science and technology, helps students get profitable jobs and provide opportunities for students to further their studies in china and abroad (Zhou & Chen, 1991).

1.3.1 ELT at Primary and Secondary Level

Basic education in China consists of two levels: primary school education and secondary school education. English is considered a compulsory subject in both primary schools and secondary schools in China.

English was made compulsory school subject for primary students in 2001. According to the national policy on primary English, the overall goals of primary English teaching is to “develop students’ comprehensive language competence by making learning a process during which students develop language proficiency, form positive attitudes, improve thinking skills, increase cross-cultural awareness and learn to use learning strategies so as to gradually become independent learners” (Ministry of Education, 2001, p. 1). An activity-based approach is promoted to provide children opportunities to experience the language and facilitate their own discovery of meaning as a first-hand experience (Wang, 2007, p. 95). Formative assessment is advocated as the major form for assessing students’ achievement in English. Test-oriented evaluation is not encouraged for the primary phase.

English education at the secondary level involves two stages: junior secondary education and senior secondary education. According to English Curriculum Standards (Ministry of education, 2003, 2011), students should attain Level 5 by the end of junior secondary school after receiving three years' English education with a minimum of four classes per week. No examination was required for entering junior secondary school due to the 9-year compulsory education program in China. However, English is one of the mandatory subjects tested on entrance examinations to senior secondary school. The entrance examination at this level varies from prefecture to prefecture. It usually includes certain major sections such as listening comprehension, grammar, cloze test, reading comprehension and composition. Due to the pressure from the English entrance examination, the sixth semester is largely devoted to prepare students for the examination.

In senior secondary schools, according to English Curriculum Standards, average students are expected to attain Level 8 whereas Level 9 is designed for exceptionally excellent students. English is viewed as important at this level in that it is tested on university entrance examinations, regardless of majors that applicants are interested in. The sixth semester is likewise normally set aside for the entrance examination. Currently, the focus of English curriculum and instruction in most secondary schools is still on student performance on the various English tests, and in senior secondary school the emphasis is on how many graduates can achieve success in the annual high-stakes college entrance exam.

English education at secondary level in China encountered great changes since 1990s. Before 1990, English teachers in secondary schools in China held that English learning was essentially the same as the learning of grammar. Thus, they taught English with the traditional Grammar-Translation method. The teaching process were featured by teachers' illustration of grammar rules and examples, followed by students' mechanical practice of grammar rules through exercises or pattern drills.

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government initiated a nation-wide curriculum innovation. China initiated a new curriculum reform in basic education in 2001. The senior high school English curriculum, along with all other subjects, was redesigned as part of that reform in 2003. The new Curriculum standard, which emphasizes the communicative aspect of learning English, promotes the shift from grammar and vocabulary focused teaching to the development of overall language competence (Ministry of Education, 2003). The new national curriculum has had a profound effect on the way language is viewed and taught in schools. It promotes a learner-centered approach to language teaching with an emphasis on providing a common foundation for all students and a keen concern for meeting students' personal interests, individual needs, and learning potentials (*ibid.*). However, there are clearly constraints on some communicative methods and an unsurprising tendency for lessons to be book-based or teacher-centred (Ross, 1993; Schoenhals, 1993). Due to the test-driven culture of education in China, the focus of English curriculum and instruction in most schools is still on student performance on the various English tests, and in senior high school the emphasis is on how many graduates can achieve success in the annual high-stakes

college entrance exam (Leung & Rua, 2012). As a result, teachers resorted to traditional way of teaching, which placed more emphasis on preparing students for tests. Grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary and translation was emphasized, typically in multi-choice examination-preparation exercises. In addition to class work, students may spend long hours completing English homework, reviewing vocabulary and grammar notes, going over model examination exercises and memorizing texts.

1.3.2 ELT at Tertiary Level

In tertiary education in China, there are two main EFL programs for English language teaching. One program is designed for those undergraduates who specialize in English studies, namely English majors. Students enrolled in such programs are trained to be English teachers, linguists, specialists in English literature or other work where a sophisticated command of English is required (Sun & Sun, 1989; Zhao & Campbell, 1995). The other program, which is also called College English Teaching (CET) program, is designed for those undergraduates who are non-English majors. Two different national curricula have been set up respectively for these two programs. The curriculum for English majors is divided into two stages. The first stage, which lasts two years, consists of required courses such as intensive reading, extensive reading, listening comprehension, speaking, and writing. The objective for the first stage is to provide learners a solid foundation in English vocabulary and grammar which will allow transition to more advanced work. The second stage covers two years for four-year universities/colleges and one year for three-year institutions. At this

stage, a dozen of new courses are introduced apart from some rollover courses from the first stage, including English literature, American literature, linguistics, translation, and other academic courses. After three or four years of English learning at colleges or universities, they (English majors) are expected to acquire a large vocabulary, a sophisticated knowledge of English, very high skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, and a firm foundation in specialist areas (Zhao & Campbell, 1995).

College English, an English language course for non-majors in China, is one of the essential courses designed for all college and university students. It also consists of two stages: a compulsory stage and a selective stage. The first stage, which lasts for the first two years, involves courses related to basic language knowledge and skills. The second stage, which lasts for another one or two years, consists of ESP courses. The Teaching Requirements for College English Curriculum (2007) clearly defines the standards of skills in terms of vocabulary, reading, writing, listening and speaking in three respective levels, namely, basic level, intermediate level and advanced level. Each level is concerned with restrictive requirements in above aspects. A placement test is first administered to assign newly enrolled undergraduates to suitable bands. The students may begin their English study at different Band levels according to their respective proficiency in English. Students' English proficiency is routinely assessed by the college final exam at the end of each semester and CETB-4 (College English Test Band-4), a nationally standardized examination organized and directed by the State Education Commission of China. Without passing the English exam, students cannot obtain their graduate diplomas or become post-graduate students.

College English has been playing an increasingly important role in training students to become qualified graduates from institutions of higher learning in China. At present, college graduates are expected to have an intermediate or higher proficiency in English. Therefore, College English Teaching has attracted much interest both at home and abroad. In order to provide a complete picture of CET in China, the researcher begins with a general overview of the development of English education at the tertiary level over the years.

The history of English education in China can be traced back to English education in the mission schools in the nineteenth century in China. Before the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, most English departments were found in the limited number of universities in the big cities, many of which were set up by missionaries from the West. The prevailing approach was a teacher-centered, grammar-translation pedagogy. Due to China's alignment with the Soviet Union in the 1950s, Russian played a dominant role in foreign language education. In the early 1960s, English took the place of Russian and regained supremacy as the main foreign language in China. In 1961, the syllabus for English majors at tertiary level was defined. Another important step was extending the learning of English to science and technology university students. The first syllabus for these non-English major students was issued the next year (Lam, 2002). At that time, the influence of audio-lingual method, together with drills and substitution tables, became popular (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China's economic and educational development was disrupted and there appeared a whole decade of chaos in

educational system. In those dark years, the status of English language suffered a setback. The learning of anything foreign was banned in educational institutions. By the late 1970s, English resumed its importance with the reform and modernization of the nation. However, with a big gap to bridge after a low period of nearly ten years, the emphasis of English teaching was placed on skill-based courses only. “Functional and situational approaches became more common but were often synthesized with more traditional grammar-translation approaches in what was often termed a ‘Chinese eclectic approach’.” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 54)

In the 1980s, the launch of Reform and Opening policy in China resulted in a boom in international exchange. The government sent numerous exchange students abroad to learn advanced science and technology. As a result, there was a nationwide craze for studying abroad, and this fuelled the demand for the TOFEL test. English teaching programs, such as *Follow Me* and *Sunday English*, became popular with Chinese learners. During this period, English language teaching (ELT) in China took on a new look. New language learning theories and pedagogies, notably communicative language teaching, were introduced and promoted.

During the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, CET also experienced a short-term prosperity. A large quantity of qualified English major graduates and post-graduates were sent to universities and colleges to teach English. Meanwhile, some colleges and universities began to use teaching facilities such as video, multimedia systems, and sound-laboratories for their English classes. In the late 1990s, the new textbooks of *College English* were adopted. The new textbooks, which were

developed on the basis of communicative language teaching syllabus, involved within each unit a greater variety of tasks and exercise types on grammar, vocabulary and translation, including pair and group work for problem-solving activities. However, “the pedagogic techniques employed with these new media and new textbooks have changed little from the more traditional ones” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 58). Thus, pedagogic innovations were expected to be launched.

In 2004, a large-scale CET reform in China, led and supported by the Ministry of Education, was first initiated in a few selected universities. Later, the experimental reform was expanded to a number of higher institutions throughout the country. The *College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR)*, which was issued by the Ministry of Education in 2004, stipulate that “the objective of College English is to develop students’ ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking” (Ministry of Education, 2004). It is clear that the new teaching requirements lay more emphasis on communicative competence of college students. Therefore, the new requirements advocate a shift from teaching reading and writing to language communication and language use.

Meanwhile, the utilization of modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in universities led to changes of teaching models and approaches. With the growth of modern information technology, the central and local governments have made efforts to introduce ICT into higher education. Between 2002 and 2004, a large number of computer labs, multimedia classrooms, as well as college websites were built up in a number of universities. In ICT-based teaching environment, students

have far wider choices and resources for their English learning. Teachers were faced with more pedagogical options in language teaching. However, they also encountered challenges imposed by contextual constraints such as limited teaching hours, lack of lesson supervision, tests, etc. (Wu, 2008; An, 2005; Zheng & Davidson, 2008). Teachers had controversies over the issue as to whether or not to teach grammar and how best to teach grammar in college English teaching. Due to teachers' divergent views over the issue, they vary greatly in the treatment of grammar in actual classroom teaching.

Overall, the CET reform in China signifies a departure from the traditional, teacher-centered and grammar-focused teaching to a learner-centered, communicative approach. This communicative approach promotes a pedagogy that clashes with the prevailing traditional thoughts and practice that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture of learning (Hu, 2002). As a result, teachers are faced with challenges in adapting to the changes in the new teaching context and mediating the conflicts in their long-held beliefs and teaching practices. To explore in depth the current changes in EFL teaching and a diversity of perspectives, relevant research is needed to investigate EFL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices and. Besides, teachers are viewed as a crucial factor for the quality of education. Their cognitive perspectives on CET reform and classroom practices determine to a certain degree the success of the teaching innovation (Tsui, 2003; Zheng, 2005). An endeavour undertaking the study of teachers' beliefs and practices is particularly worthwhile in illuminating how teachers manage their teaching work in a new teaching context.

1.4 EFL Teacher Education at Tertiary Level in China

Language teacher education refers to the field of professional experiences, processes and activities through which individuals learn to teach languages (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Freeman, 2001; Tsui, 2003). It is argued that teachers' personal theories are constructed and developed in a learning process through a range of learning activities as language learners and as teachers (Zhang, 2011). Among these activities, teachers' professional training experience serves as a crucial factor which influences the development of teachers' beliefs. To seek an understanding of the beliefs Chinese university EFL teachers hold about language teaching, a brief introduction is necessary of current situations in university EFL teacher education in China.

For most university EFL teachers in China, the in-service education usually includes national-level training programs and school-based teacher training programs. National-level training programs are mostly provided by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). As an academic and educational publisher, FLTRP pays great attention to the development of ELT as well as teachers' professional development in China. Since 2006, a series of national training programs have been conducted for in-service EFL teachers in tertiary education. These programs mainly include training programs for college English teaching and training Programs for teacher education and development. The former focuses on the teaching techniques for using the newly-adopted textbook of New Horizon College English (NHCE). The latter places emphasis on teacher trainees' English proficiency levels, knowledge

about language in general and language teaching theories and methodology. The most common practice in these training programs takes the form of lectures from experts in education and lesson demonstrations given by experienced teachers. The school-based teacher training programs aims to update ideas of teaching or learning and improving classroom practice through lesson demonstration. These programs take a variety of forms, including teaching and research activities such as collaborative lesson planning, and classroom observation and post-lesson review.

With college English teaching becoming one of the hot topics in China, teacher education has also become a concern not only for scholars and teachers, but for educational leaders in China. The project entitled “A Study of the Models of Development of Chinese University Teachers of English (2001-2005)” was launched in response to the ongoing CET reform among non-English major programs in China. At that time, many teachers found themselves faced with challenges posed by the new curriculum, new teaching materials as well as the new technologies. Many teachers felt the need for professional support from teacher educators to help them cope with their problems in classroom teaching.

However, compared with the development of the English curriculum, that of teacher education in China lags behind. Though educational leaders recognize the importance of EFL teacher professional development, the current programs available to teachers are inadequate (Gu, 2009). Zhou’s study (2008), through a nationwide survey, indicated that the existing teacher development programs had not adequately met the increasing demands of the teachers. She addressed in this study the existing

problems with the present professional training programs, “while teachers at the elementary and intermediate levels are institutionally supported for professional development in China, the need for university teacher development remained unrecognized and institutionally overlooked over the years. As a result, most of the university teachers walk into classrooms without sufficient training, leaving students to become the objects of their years of experiences in trials and errors.” Besides, most current in-service teacher development programs are still heavily focusing on making teachers equipped with language knowledge, theories and best teaching methods. The professional training programs available for teachers tend to be theoretical, academic and research-oriented, and are mostly set up to “facilitate promotion of the more linguistically and academically competent teachers” (Sunderland, 1990, p. 246). This type of teacher training approach views teachers as knowledge receivers, like their students, coming to learning with no prior knowledge (Gu, 2009). Although teachers feel happy for the educational opportunities, but it remains a question what and how much they have really learned and what changes such learning brings to their practice.

In the context of a booming demand for EFL education in China, the shortage of teachers qualified to teach in such programs, and ineffective teacher professional development programs, the study addresses the need to explore Chinese EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices in order to make recommendations for new and effective teacher professional development programs in China.

1.5 Problem Statement

There has long been a debate about the role that grammar plays in language teaching. Since Krashen (1982) proposed monitor theory, in which grammar is viewed as unnecessary in natural language acquisition, many researchers came up with opposite opinions. A series of studies were conducted abroad in support of grammar teaching (Long, 1983; Ellis, 1994, 2001, 2006; Nassaji, 2000). In these studies, grammar is emphasized as essential in enhancing L2/FL acquisition. In Chinese context, the similar issue has attracted great attention in foreign language acquisition (SLA) research. In college English teaching context in China, the CECR places more emphasis on enabling students to enhance fluency through communicative activities. Communicative teaching approach was promoted in EFL classrooms and English teaching has been carried out at the expense of language accuracy. Some researchers expressed concern that grammar instruction has been neglected in Chinese EFL classroom (Wang, 2004; Hu, 2002). This concern was previously addressed by Skehan (1996) and viewed as a global phenomenon. Many researchers (Hu, 2002; Dai, 2005; Wang, 2004) discussed the necessity of grammar instruction and argued that grammar instruction should be integrated into Chinese EFL classroom. The challenge confronting teachers so far is how to develop communicative competence as well as linguistic competence of the learners.

It is widely acknowledged that some attention needs to be awarded to formal elements in communicative teaching context (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Ellis, 1994, 2002a, 2002b, 2003). Many attempts have been made to study how best to integrate

grammar into communicative teaching context, however, no definitive answers have been provided. Long (1988, 1991) and Doughty (2001) argued strongly that focus-on-form is an effective approach because the acquisition of implicit knowledge occurs as a result of learners attending to linguistic forms at the same time they are engaged with communications. Other researchers (DeKeyser, 1998), however, have argued that a focus-on-forms approach, which acknowledges the value of explicit grammar teaching and practice, is helpful in promoting language learning. It is worth noting, however, one point of agreement in the two approaches: instruction needs to ensure that learners are able to connect grammatical forms to the meanings they realize in communication. The fact that so much controversy exists points to the need for more research.

The role of formal instruction itself has long been controversial, and SLA research has failed to yield firm guidelines for grammar teaching methodology (Ellis, 1994). In classroom teaching, teachers tend to draw on their personal theories/beliefs to make instructional decisions (Borg, 1998b, 2003c). These theories/beliefs are particularly useful in changing their instructional practices to cope with instructional contexts which are ill-defined (Borg, 1999b). The change in classroom practices may in turn improve students' learning outcomes (McCutchen et al., 2002). The study of teachers' beliefs and instructional practices proved to be a fruitful terrain in ELT research. A great number of studies had been conducted in a global context on teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to grammar teaching (e.g. Burgess and Etherington, 2002; Borg, 1998b, 2003a, 2008). These studies indicate that teachers'

beliefs about language teaching have a direct influence on their teaching practices. However, many previous studies had been conducted relying on the questionnaire results based on teachers' stated beliefs and practices. Further insights into teachers' beliefs and practices are needed for the absence of detailed qualitative data.

In local context, ELT in China has undergone dramatic changes since the CET reform in 2002. EFL teachers, who are faced with challenges in their classroom teaching, have also experienced uncertainties and even changes in making instructional decisions. Besides, teachers are individuals who enter the classroom with prior experience (e.g. experience as language learners and teachers) that inform their teaching and shape what they do in the classroom. To explore in depth the current changes in EFL teaching and teachers' perspectives on this issue, relevant research is needed to investigate how EFL teachers' beliefs and practices are shaped by their prior experience and teaching context. Recently, some studies on teacher cognition have appeared in Chinese ELT context. However, most of the studies in this field focus on EFL teaching in general and the research on teachers' cognition about grammar pedagogy are particularly rare. Besides, more attention is needed to be given to the experiential and contextual factors that play a vital role in shaping teachers' beliefs and practices (Borg, 2006). The present study addresses the gap by describing in-depth the relationship between beliefs, practices, experience and context.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the integration of grammar and English language teaching. This study therefore has the following specific objectives:

1. To explore teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching in Chinese EFL teaching context.
2. To examine classroom practices that characterize teachers' grammar teaching approach in Chinese EFL teaching context.
3. To analyze to what extent teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching are consistent with their classroom practices.
4. To investigate the impact of educational and professional experiences on teachers' beliefs and practices with reference to grammar teaching.
5. To investigate the impact of teaching context on teachers' beliefs and practices with reference to grammar teaching.

1.7 Research Questions

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching in Chinese EFL teaching context?
2. What classroom practices characterize teachers' grammar teaching approach in Chinese EFL teaching context?
3. To what extent are teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching consistent with

their classroom practices?

4. What impact do educational and professional experiences have on teachers teaching beliefs and practices with reference to grammar teaching?
5. What impact does teaching context have on teachers' beliefs and practices with reference to grammar teaching?

1.8 Significance of the Study

By focusing on actual teaching processes of EFL grammar teaching, this study will shed light on the complexities of grammar instruction and contribute to the qualitative exploration of grammar pedagogy in the following ways:

1. The investigation of teachers' practices focuses on how teachers integrate grammar instruction into English language teaching. As there has been little relevant research based on actual classroom observation at Chinese university settings, this study aims to fill some of the gaps in this area by providing a picture of Chinese EFL teachers' instructional behaviors with regard to grammar teaching in communicative context.

2. The probe into teachers' beliefs is essential for clarifying the role of grammar in language learning and teaching, and to help improve grammar teaching practices. In addition, teachers' beliefs in this study are examined with direct reference to teachers' actual classroom practices. Compared with the studies of teachers' stated beliefs, this study can provide a more realistic understanding of teachers' thinking, behaviors and their relationship.

3. Teachers are individuals who enter the classroom with prior experience (e.g. experience as language learners and teachers) that inform their teaching and shape what they believe and do in the classroom. An investigation of the relationship between beliefs, practices, experience is more worthwhile in providing a better understanding of teachers' cognitive perspectives and actual classroom work.

4. By looking into the contextual factors shaping teachers' beliefs and practices, this study serves as an impetus for Chinese university EFL teachers to reflect on their own teaching and seek more alternatives for improving their teaching practices. Such an exploration also provides important implications for more effective teacher education that facilitates reflective teaching and teachers' constant professional development.

1.9 Scope and Limitations of the study

In exploring teachers' beliefs and its relationship with teaching practices, the scope and of this study is narrowed down in the following ways:

1. Participants involved in this study are limited to 6 teachers teaching non-English-major students at Hebei University. Therefore, the research findings are not generalizable to other university school teachers in general. Since the researcher intends to do an in-depth study of this particular group of teachers, limiting the scope of participants may allow the researcher to come up with a more detailed picture of their practices and underlying beliefs with specific reference to grammar pedagogy.

2. Within the whole range of grammar pedagogy, this study focuses on how teachers integrate grammar into English language teaching. Thus, it will not depict the whole picture of grammar teaching in general.

3. Among the factors shaping teachers beliefs and practices, the study concentrates on the experiential and contextual factors. It is argued that the relationship between beliefs and practices in language teaching is not linear due to the mediating influence of a variety of factors. An investigation of teachers' experience as learners and teachers allows the researcher to explore in depth the process in which their beliefs and practices are constructed and developed at different stages of teaching career. In addition, the study of contextual factors may help interpret the relationship between teachers' beliefs, practices and teaching context in more intelligent ways.

1.10 Definition of terms

Grammar: Larsen-Freeman (2003) defines grammar as “one of the dynamic linguistic processes of pattern formulation in language, which can be used by humans for making meaning in context-appropriate ways” (p.142). In this definition, grammar is viewed as a dynamic process which involves relationships among form, meaning and use.

Grammar Teaching: Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in

comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it (Ellis, 2006).

Grammatical Competence: According to Canale and Swain (1980), grammatical competence is the knowledge of the language code (grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.).

Communicative competence: Knowledge of a language and the ability to use the language. In Canale and Swain's (1980) definition which has long been employed in TESOL, communicative competence consists of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Communicative Language Teaching: An approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992).

Teacher Cognition: A field of education research and theory which focuses on the thinking processes, beliefs, and decision-making used at various levels during the planning, delivery, and evaluation of teaching. In this construct, teaching is perceived as a cognitive activity in which teacher beliefs play an important role in shaping their instructional decisions; that is, what language teachers think, know, and believe greatly impact their decision making and actions in the classroom (Borg, 2003a).

Teachers' Beliefs: Borg (2001) defined the term "belief" as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour." (p. 186). Teachers' beliefs refer to