FROM PERCEPTION TO PRACTICE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF SIX PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' VIEWS OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CALI

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SANTIAGO DE CALI
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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English teachers in public schools in Cali, Colombia, understand grammar and how these beliefs influence their classroom practices. Grounded in teacher cognition research, the study looks at how teachers define grammar, how they believe it should be taught, and how these beliefs are reflected or not in their everyday teaching practices. This interpretivist, ethnographic design allowed to gather data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations conducted with six non-native English teachers from three public schools. These sources allowed for a close examination of both teachers' stated beliefs and their instructional decisions during grammar lessons. Thematic analysis reveals that teachers consistently view grammar as a central and necessary component of English language learning, usually reflected in the frequent use of explicit form-focused instruction in the classroom. Although teachers expressed awareness of communicative and implicit approaches and recognized the risk of students' disengagement, their practice was usually shaped by contextual pressures such as curriculum demands, ICFES exam preparation, limited time, and classroom management challenges. The findings underline a persistent tension between the pedagogical beliefs of teachers and institutional, classroom realities. This study offers context-specific insights into EFL teacher cognition and highlights the need

for sustained, context-responsive professional development that supports teachers in balancing pedagogical ideals with everyday constraints.

Keywords: grammar teaching, teachers' beliefs, grammar instruction, teachers' cognition, public school teachers

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Chapter 1 Introduction

As a language student, I was always interested in speaking “correctly” and following the right structure I had learned in class. It was like mathematics: everything should match perfectly if you followed the formula. And that paid off in my writing at university; teachers said my writing was very accurate, and I felt successful. Consequently, in my first teaching experience, my focus was on grammar. However, in the first semester of the master's program, I had a teacher who challenged that idea and encouraged teachers to pursue a more meaningful, task-based approach to teaching. That’s where the idea of examining the extent to which public school English teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching in Cali influence their grammar-teaching methodology was born. I questioned my entire teaching practice, wanted to discover what other beliefs I had developed while learning languages and how they were reflected in my teaching, and to uncover discrepancies between beliefs and classroom practice.

Therefore, this study examines what English teachers in public schools in Cali believe about grammar instruction and how those beliefs shape their grammar-teaching methodology. It asks what teachers think grammar is for, how and when it should be taught, and which strategy they report using (explicit, implicit, or integrated). It also examines the relationship between beliefs and classroom actions, noting where they align and where they diverge. To address it, the study describes prevailing perceptions and the methodological choices used

across lesson phases, such as presentation, practice, and feedback, to analyze patterns of alignment and discrepancy.

Research on teachers' cognition shows that teachers' perceptions of grammar, what it is and how it should be taught, are complex, dynamic, and context-related; impacted by prior learning experiences, institutional demands, curricular expectations, and learners' factors (Borg, 2003). As a result, teachers' beliefs are not always reflected in their classroom practice. Teachers may state a preference for communicative or inductive work with forms, yet implement more explicit rule-driven lessons in response to time constraints, assessment pressures, or students' expectations (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Therefore, more embedded beliefs about maintaining control, ensuring accuracy, or meeting exam demands tend to override ideal beliefs.

At the same time, teachers' practical knowledge is strengthened by habit and past apprenticeship-of-observation (Lortie, 1975, cited in Borg, 2003), which makes change slow even when intentions shift (Borg, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

In Colombian public school contexts, grammar has traditionally been the main focus of language teaching. Course topics were grammar tenses or aspects, such as the simple present, the first conditional, and modal verbs, and learning a language was understood as mastering these rules (Cadavid et al., 2004; Hernández & Faustino, 2006; Schulz, 2001). Since the late 20th century, research and language policy discourse have increasingly shifted toward a communicative language teaching and a focus on form approach. In other words, instruction

focused on meaning creates opportunities to address grammar in context (Ellis, 2005; Richards, 2006; Valeo & Spada, 2016).

However, teachers' beliefs and practices are mediated by training and context. As with any change, it is difficult to embrace it without sustained contextualized professional development to understand it. For instance, the lack of appropriate materials, smaller classes, and sufficient instructional time are factors that have often been limited or inconsistent in Colombian Public schools (Cárdenas et al., 2010; Correa & González, 2016). Consequently, even if there are teachers who prefer the communicative approach, they may default to explicit form-focused strategies as a pragmatic response to large groups, limited resources, and test exposure, which reflects tensions between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice (Borg, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2009). In short, to make sense of grammar pedagogy, it is essential to examine how context mediates belief and classroom practice.

Having outlined the focus of this study, it is necessary to clarify why this research matters and what problem it addresses. Despite numerous discussions of grammar instruction in English language teaching, tensions between work focused on grammar and the communicative approach continue to shape classroom practice. Teachers are often expected to promote both accuracy and meaningful communication. Yet, they must do so within difficult practical situations, as mentioned before. These conditions create situations in which teachers frequently must adjust their lessons during class or even contradict their stated beliefs in their teaching practice.

In the Colombian context, there is still limited research that closely examines EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar and their relationship to classroom methodology in public schools. While broader discussions about grammar and communicative teaching exist, there is a need for locally grounded studies that document how teachers understand grammar and how those understandings are reflected in their instructional choices. By focusing on public school English teachers in Cali, this study responds to that need and provides specific contextualized insights into the relationship between beliefs and practice in grammar instruction.

Research question

To what extent do the perceptions of English teachers in public schools in Cali about teaching grammar influence their grammar teaching methodology?

General Objectives

To examine the extent to which English teachers' perceptions influence their grammar teaching methodologies in public schools in Cali.

Specific Objectives

a. To identify the prevailing perceptions that English teachers hold regarding grammar instruction in public schools in Cali.

b. To explore the grammar teaching strategies currently used by English teachers in their classroom practice.

c. To examine the collected data to identify consistencies or discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom practices.

Justification

My reflections on the ideas teachers expressed about grammar instruction and the realities of their classrooms were not isolated. Conversations with colleagues revealed that these tensions are widely shared and remain unresolved in everyday teaching. This recognition points to the need to look beyond methodological labels and examine the beliefs that guide teachers' instructional decisions (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Understanding what teachers believe about grammar, what it is for, how it should be taught, and when it should be addressed helps explain why certain practices persist, why others are avoided, and why inconsistencies between belief and action emerge. In line with teacher-cognition research, such beliefs act as filters and frames for pedagogical choices (Borg, 2003).

Furthermore, research has shown that teachers' beliefs do not always translate directly into classroom practice. Rather than being fixed, beliefs are shaped and negotiated through experience, context, and professional identity. As a result, discrepancies between what teachers say they believe and what they do in their classrooms should not be read as simple contradictions but as indicators of the complex realities of teaching, where core, experience-based beliefs about classroom management, accuracy, and exam preparation can override newer pedagogical orientations (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Looking at these discrepancies is

therefore essential for gaining a more accurate understanding of how grammar instruction is actually implemented.

For these reasons, examining the extent to which teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction shape their grammar-teaching methodology is both relevant and necessary. This research project provides a basis for understanding current classroom practices and offers insights that may inform reflective teaching and professional development in public educational contexts.

To address these questions, it is important to situate this study within the broader field of English language teaching. The following literature review examines key perspectives on grammar instruction, the role of teachers' beliefs, and the relationship between perception and practice, providing the theoretical and realistic foundation for this research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature on teachers' beliefs and perceptions, which will be understood as teachers' cognition in this study, teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction, and the primary teaching methodologies in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This has been a central topic in language education research for several decades. Throughout this time, studies have been conducted across multiple contexts worldwide to examine how teachers' beliefs, experiences, and knowledge shape classroom decision-making and pedagogical approaches. All this is conceptualized as teacher cognition. This is a key concept in the literature review of this research project. The primary aim of this literature review is to outline the foundation for this study, identify gaps in current knowledge, and situate this research within a broader academic discourse.

The review covers teachers' cognition (Borg, 1998; 1999; 2003; 2011; Burns, et al., 2015), its development and influencing factors (Cárdenas et al. 2010; Farrell, 1999; Nazari, et al. 2022), the relationship between teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction and their practice (Borg, 2003; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Schulz, 2001), and implicit/explicit grammar teaching methodology (Jean & Simard, 2011; Moeller & Ketsman, 2010; Valeo & Spada, 2016). These topics align with the objectives of this study: to identify prevailing perceptions of grammar teaching, explore teachers' instructional strategies to teach grammar, and examine the consistency and discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom practices.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, it provides an overview of teachers' cognition and its development, emphasizing the factors that shape it. Next, it examines teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction and their relationship to their practice, including explicit and implicit grammar-teaching methodologies. Finally, it highlights research gaps and justifies how this study will contribute to the field.

Teacher Cognition

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions have been recognized as key to understanding classroom practices, as they provide a broader understanding of the approaches and methodologies reflected in the classroom. These beliefs and perceptions, defined by Richards and Lockhart (1994) as the assumptions teachers hold about language, learning, and teaching, are part of a broader cognitive framework known as teacher cognition. This concept has evolved as a key construct in understanding language teaching practices. Borg (1998; 1999; 2003) defines teacher cognition as the beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions, and attitudes that teachers hold about all aspects of their work.

At the same time, Galombek (1998) conceives all those beliefs, values, metaphors, and narratives that guide teaching decisions as personal practical knowledge, subdivided into knowledge of self, knowledge of subject, knowledge of instruction, and knowledge of context that work together, consciously or unconsciously, to help the teachers' process of making decisions. Later, Burns et al.

(2015) suggest that teachers' minds are constantly changing; therefore, they should be studied as a dynamic construct that evolves in response to teachers' interactions with students, the world, and colleagues. Likewise, Nazari et al. (2022) emphasize that cognition is not static and it evolves through time. This implies that to truly understand teachers' cognition, it must be studied as a dynamic construct over time rather than at a single moment.

Consequently, a consistent implication across these works is the complexity of the minds that need to study to understand how teacher cognition is reflected in the classroom and the possible implications of their beliefs for teachers' instructional choices. Therefore, it is important to understand how teacher cognition develops and the factors that influence it.

Teacher Cognition and Influencing Factors

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions of grammar teaching are usually shaped by teacher experience and other relevant factors such as teachers' learning experience, classroom practice, context, ongoing professional development, and interaction with students, colleagues, and the world (Borg, 2003; Cárdenas et al., 2010; Farrell, 1999; Peacock, 2001; Pourhosein & Sabouri, 2017). Early experiences as language learners often serve as the foundation for teachers' beliefs. This firsthand experience shapes their assumptions about grammar, instruction, and effective pedagogy; as they themselves are the effective results. Borg (2003) cited Lortie (1975) to describe this influence as the "apprenticeship of observation,"

through which teachers internalize models of teaching before receiving professional training. Further research shows that teacher education can reinforce or expand these early beliefs. However, deeply rooted assumptions tend to persist unless challenged through reflective practice (Abednia, 2012; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Peacock, 2001). Such reflective practice would require interactive reflection and coaching, not just coursework or guiding manuals.

For instance, as Farrel (1999) reports, although the five teachers who participated in the Singapore study offered different reasons for choosing an inductive (implicit) or deductive (explicit) strategy to teaching grammar, they all confirmed that their prior learning experience strongly influenced their preferences for these strategies. As one participant explained: “My past experiences have preconditioned me to choose a deductive method as my usual teaching strategy. I guess I am predisposed to choosing the latter method because I feel more secure with it for various reasons: it is more straightforward to teach it this way (like a lecture), it is easier to test (we just give them exercises to complete), and we can get immediate feedback” (Farrel, 1999, p. 8). Such statements illustrate how traditional methods based on rules persist not necessarily because they are more effective but because they “feel” familiar and safe to teachers. In other words, because it has been used most often, it is therefore assumed to work. For the purposes of this research project, this point out that teacher preference is not neutral; it is shaped by prior learning, and any successful pedagogical intervention should acknowledge and work with these existing perceptions.

Another important factor that shapes teacher cognition is teachers' professional identity. This refers to how teachers make sense of who they are as teachers, the roles they take on, the values they uphold, the emotions they experience, and the purpose that guides their work, which is often expressed through the stories they tell about their practice (Abednia, 2012; Golombek, 1998). While teacher cognition focuses on what teachers know and believe about teaching, professional identity brings to the front the emotional, moral, and relational sides of teaching, including how teachers understand their responsibility toward learners and how they position themselves within their institutions. Research shows that identity influences how teachers read pedagogical challenges, whether they see tensions as problems or possibilities, and how open they are to questioning established routines (Abednia, 2012). In this sense, professional identity does not stand apart from cognition; it mediates it, shaping how beliefs about grammar instruction are maintained, negotiated, or changed over time (Abednia, 2012; Golombek, 1998).

Teachers' Beliefs About Grammar Instruction

There has always been discussion about the importance of grammar, what role it should play in language learning, and how it should be taught. This discussion has shifted the focus from what grammar is to its essential role in language learning (DeCapua, 2017; Ellis, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2003). From a traditional or prescriptive view, grammar is frequently treated as a set of fixed rules

that must be explicitly taught, mastered to become “good” speakers or writers, and is inherently difficult and confusing (DeCapua, 2017). This prescriptive view prioritizes correctness over meaning-making and often associates proficiency with rule mastery. In contrast, linguists have a descriptive perspective on grammar. From this view, grammar is not a list of arbitrary prescriptions but a systematic pattern or blueprint that underlies all language varieties and guides speakers to produce comprehensible language (DeCapua, 2017). This perspective considers that correctness or rule mastery does not necessarily mean producing understandable or appropriate language for the context where the interaction takes place, which is more aligned with real-life situations. Understanding these contrasting perspectives matters because the way grammar is conceptualized directly shapes how it is taught, what is prioritized in instruction, and what teachers view as legitimate language learning outcomes.

Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs about grammar instruction refer to the ideas, thoughts, and feelings teachers express about how grammar should be taught. Schulz (2001) found that many teachers value explicit grammar teaching because they associate it with linguistic accuracy and academic success. In contrast, other studies highlight teachers’ growing interest in instruction focused on meaning, particularly in communicative or task-based contexts (Jean & Simard, 2011). However, even when teachers follow communicative principles, they may still prioritize grammar explanation due to curricular requirements or perceived student expectations (Phipps & Borg, 2009). This suggests that teachers often face

conflicting arguments about their sequencing, as they struggle with the debate between fostering fluency and maintaining grammatical correctness. These findings reveal that beliefs about grammar are complex, and frequently, teachers must balance them between theoretical ideals and their institutional realities.

Explicit, Implicit, and Integrated Grammar Teaching Methodologies

Research on grammar teaching methodologies distinguishes between explicit instruction, which focuses on metalinguistic explanations, and implicit instruction, which integrates grammar into communicative activities. Explicit strategy is based on rule presentation, controlled practice, and direct feedback and has been shown to support accuracy in certain contexts (Jean & Simard, 2011; Valeo & Spada, 2016). For instance, students may be introduced to a grammatical formula and asked to replicate it by substituting words. This process usually begins with a teacher-led presentation in which the topic or tense is explained in detail, including the formula and its exceptions. Learners then engage in practice activities such as fill-in-the-blank exercises or sentence reordering, designed to reinforce memorization of rules so that they can later produce them accurately in communication; that's the expectation.

In contrast, implicit strategy prioritizes meaning and interaction, bringing learners' attention to form only when needed for communication (Ellis, 2006). Teachers typically do this by engaging students in activities such as storytelling, conversations, or reading tasks in which the target structure appears naturally. In

these cases, learners are encouraged to notice the pattern through repeated exposure and use, rather than through an explicit explanation of how the form works. This strategy relies on input, examples, and meaningful use to help students internalize the structure without direct instruction on language rules. However, as reported in the cases reviewed by Moeller and Ketsman (2010), research shows that explicit instruction has historically been the most widely used strategy and has demonstrated effectiveness in language teaching, which explains why it continues to dominate classroom practice, particularly in public schools.

Burgess and Etherington (2002) found that teachers rarely commit to exclusively explicit or implicit instruction; instead, they tend to adopt flexible, integrated strategies that respond to learners' needs. In practice, this often means teachers prepare multiple possible activities for a lesson plan and select among them in real time, which one to use according to the students' moods, engagement, or readiness during the lesson.

Recent research suggests that integrated teaching strategies combining explicit and implicit elements may bring out the most effective results for both fluency and accuracy (Chiroque, 2022; Valeo & Spada, 2016; Graus & Coppen, 2017). However, Vanegas et al (2024) report that many teachers are not being adequately prepared or updated in methodologies that lead to meaningful language teaching and that respond to the teaching context. This implies that a balanced approach may be theoretically effective; however, its success in practice also depends on teachers' pedagogical knowledge and ongoing professional

development. In this sense, Ellis (2005) suggests that Instruction should be predominantly focused on meaning while creating opportunities for focus on form, which reinforces the idea that grammar pedagogy is most effective when teachers can flexibly adapt methods to instructional goals and learner needs, an ability that requires proper preparation and support.

The Relationship between Belief and Practice

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices has been widely recognized as complex, dynamic, and sometimes inconsistent (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Phipps & Borg, 2009). While one would expect a general agreement between teachers' stated beliefs and their actions in the classroom, these relationships are typically partial rather than absolute (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Leback, 2015, Phipps & Borg, 2009). Research consistently shows that teachers often share communicative or learner-centered views while simultaneously relying on form-focused routines when faced with contextual pressures (Cárdenas et al., 2010), such as time constraints, curricular demands, or students' perceived expectations (Burgess & Etherington, 2002).

For instance, Basturkmen et al. (2004) conducted research about incidental focus on form in communicative lessons with three teachers at a private institution in Auckland, New Zealand. Through interviews about their thoughts and anecdotes about previous classes, researchers gathered teachers' beliefs about themes such as when to focus on form in communicative lessons, why, and what type of

corrective feedback they prefer. Then they compare this data with focus on form episodes captured through class observations. The results showed both consistency and inconsistency between teachers' stated beliefs and their practice. For instance, all three teachers were consistent in their lack of enthusiasm for students' initiated focus-on-form episodes, reasoning that they interrupt the communicative flow of the lesson. Similarly, all teachers stated that form should be focused on only in communicative activities when comprehension hinders communication. However, the form-focused episodes derived from their classroom practice were mainly for accuracy in code (grammar), pronunciation, or vocabulary. This shows inconsistency in their beliefs and practice; however, the researchers did not delve deeper into the underlying reasons for these discrepancies, leaving it to be rooted in the teacher's personal pedagogical style.

Likewise, Phipps and Borg (2009) found, through their class observations, that the 3 teachers in their study, carried out in Turkey, presented grammar in a rule-based, expository manner. However, in their interview to discuss the classes, they expressed discomfort with using that approach and explained they did it because they felt that’s what students expected. Previous experience had taught them that when using communicative approaches to elicit rules, students didn’t see it as learning grammar and usually were not very responsive. Therefore, teachers decided to prioritize their belief in the need for engagement to learn and used strategies that kept students engaged and responsive, sacrificing their ideal context-based grammar teaching. Similarly, through the study, teachers became

aware of their use of control practices, such as gap-filling activities and group work, as classroom management strategies to maintain control and keep students calm, which are particularly useful in large classrooms.

Similarly, other studies highlight that teachers may hold multiple and sometimes contradictory beliefs (Basturkmen et al., 2004), which are activated differently depending on the classroom situation, the grammar point being taught, or the degree of student engagement (Jean & Simard, 2011). This dynamic is illustrated by Phipps and Borg's (2009) formulation, "I believe in X, but I also believe in Y," or "I believe in X, but my students expect me to do Y. I believe in X, but my students learn better through Y. I believe in X, but the curriculum requires me to do Y. I believe in X, but my learners are motivated by Y" (p. 387-388). These tensions matter because they help explain why teachers' classroom practices do not always align with their stated beliefs, revealing teachers' belief systems as fluid, context-dependent, and shaped by teachers' experience, classroom interaction, and competing pressures.

According to Farrell and Lim (2005), these discrepancies are not seen as evidence of teachers' incompatibilities but rather of the contextual nature of practice, where pedagogical choices must balance learner needs with institutional realities.

Overall, the literature illustrates the belief–practice relationship as flexible and responsive to context, influenced by the interaction of individual pedagogical beliefs and the demands of regular teaching realities. Indicating that teachers'

perceptions help shape teaching practices in a real classroom context (Chiroque, 2022). Although this body of research provides a broad overview of the relationship between belief and practice, little is known about how these dynamics play out in EFL classrooms in Colombia.

There is limited research in Colombia about EFL and teachers' perceptions of grammar, particularly in public-school contexts. For instance, Schulz (2001) explores teachers' beliefs about explicit grammar teaching and corrective feedback in Colombian public schools in Bogota. The author administered questionnaires to 122 foreign language teachers, from whom 10 were interviewed to uncover the sources. Another questionnaire was also administered to 602 students from different institutions in Bogota. This was also similarly done by Schulz (2001) at the University of Arizona in the U.S., but due to the focus of the current study, only the findings regarding the Schulz' participants from Colombia will be discussed. The findings suggest that teachers and students were more inclined toward traditional language teaching; they consider explicit grammar instruction and corrective feedback to be effective strategies for language learning. At the same time, over 80% of teachers but less than 70% of students "felt that real-life communicative tasks play a very important role as well" (Schulz, 2001, p. 254). Overall, the study highlights the need for teachers to confirm that the strategies they consider effective are also perceived as beneficial by students, as discrepancies in beliefs and expectations between teachers and students can hinder their learning, for example, by reducing engagement and motivation.

Similarly, Cárdenas et al. (2010) explored English teachers' professional development in Colombia. The authors reviewed national and international models to examine how in-service teachers are being supported and what kinds of strategies are most meaningful in local contexts. They argue that traditional, top-down “training”, short workshops focused on techniques, often overlooks teachers’ realities, beliefs, and classroom constraints. For instance, teachers often receive few hours of professional development on one program or new teaching, and then they are expected to master it and implement it. That is why in many public schools, there are still English teachers who do not speak English at all, especially in primary education (Contreras et al, 2024; De Mejia, 2016). For this reason, Cardenas et al. (2010) propose a sustained “teacher development” grounded in reflection, collaboration, classroom research, and, as the author of this research, I add, continued personal guidance over time, aligned with the professional development that public school teachers need to work in contexts like this.

Their analysis also highlights conditions commonly faced by public-school teachers, such as heavy workloads, limited resources, lack of linguistic confidence, and poor institutional support, which directly influence instructional choices, including how grammar is taught. This suggests that what teachers do with grammar is shaped not only by what they believe, but also by the kind of professional development they receive and the contexts in which they work. Overall, the article points to a practical need: if Colombia wants teachers to

balance meaning-focused instruction with informed attention to form, professional development must be relevant, sustained, and aligned with teachers' own conceptualizations and classroom realities (Cárdenas et al., 2010).

Likewise, Correa and Gonzales (2016) identify challenges such as insufficient teacher training, infrastructure, lack of contextual resources, large class sizes, and students' demotivation. They emphasize that in primary schools, these difficulties are compounded by professional development that is sporadic and not calibrated to teachers' needs (Correa & González, 2016). As a result, teachers often rely on explicit grammar explanations and controlled practice because these are doable with large classes, limited materials, and one hour of English class per week. The authors argue that standardized, top-down policy and imported materials overlook local realities, which limits teachers' ability to adopt more integrated or communicative work with form. For my project, this means teachers' beliefs about grammar must be interpreted in light of professional development access and classroom conditions, not in isolation.

Despite this research carried out in Colombia, there is still a need to better understand the extent to which grammar-related beliefs influence teaching methods in this context, what other factors shape those beliefs, and to explore possible variances between what teachers believe and what they do in practice. Taken together, these insights highlight the need for a deeper understanding of how teachers' beliefs about grammar influence classroom practices within specific

contexts, particularly in Cali, where this area remains unstudied, as most published research has been carried out in the Capital of the country, Bogota.

In summary, this chapter has examined the main theories and empirical studies that inform the understanding of teacher cognition, teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction, and the methodologies commonly used to teach grammar in EFL contexts. It has highlighted how teachers' beliefs develop over time, how they are shaped by professional identity and personal practical knowledge, and how these beliefs interact with the practical demands of classroom life. It has also shown that explicit, implicit, and integrated strategies to grammar instruction are used flexibly, depending on teachers' pedagogical orientations and contextual pressures. Despite this body of work, there is limited research that explores how beliefs about grammar are transmitted in public school classrooms in Colombia and how closely they align with teachers' practices. These gaps support the need for a study that examines to what extent teachers' perceptions about grammar influence their instructional decisions and how these beliefs are reflected—or not reflected—in their day-to-day teaching.

The next chapter outlines the research methodology, detailing the approach used to address these gaps and achieve the study's objectives.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This research study aims to analyze the perceptions of public school teachers regarding grammar instruction in Cali. The focus will be on identifying their perceptions and the current methodology used to explore consistencies and discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs and their practice.

This chapter was structured into three distinct sections. Section 2, "Research Design," where I outline the methodological framework of the study, detailing the philosophical approach, research strategy, data collection techniques, participant selection, and procedures used for data analysis. This section explains how the research project was conducted and why specific methods were chosen. Section 3, “Limitations,” presents the challenges and restrictions encountered during the research process. These include practical, contextual, and methodological limitations that may have impacted the findings. Finally, there is a “Summary,” where I provide a brief recap of the chapter's main points, synthesizing the essential steps of the research process. Together, these sections create a coherent and transparent narrative of how the research was designed and its possible constraints.

Research design

The research philosophy for my research was interpretivism, and I have decided to use a qualitative approach, which involves using qualitative methods for

data collection. The research strategy used for this project was ethnographic with an inductive approach, and the time horizon was longitudinal.

Sampling Strategy

Participants

The research involved the participation of six English teachers from the public educational area, focusing on non-native English teachers in public schools in Cali, Colombia. A total of five female and one male teachers agreed to participate in the study. Among the participants, all hold a professional degree in Languages, with several currently pursuing advanced graduate studies, such as specializations and Master's degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The participants' ages range from 31 to 56 years, offering a balanced perspective across different stages of professional development. Additionally, three of the teachers have been teaching for more than 20 years, representing the veteran workforce in the city, while the remaining three have been teaching for between 3 and 14 years, representing early to mid-career practitioners.

Teacher	Age	Experience	Current School	Key Qualifications
Teacher 1	45	20 years	Institución Educativa Santa Librada	Bachelor's in Foreign Languages, Master's in TEFL
Teacher 2	53	23 years	Institución Educativa Ciudad de Cali	Bachelor's in Modern Languages, Master's in University Teaching
Teacher 3	56	24 years	Institución Educativa Santa Librada	Bachelor's in Modern Languages

Teacher 4	35	14 years	Institución Educativa Ciudad de Cali	Bachelor's in English
Teacher 5	35	10 years	Institución Educativa Nuevo Latir Sede Isaías Duarte Cancino	Bachelor's in Foreign Languages (Public since 2018)
Teacher 6	31	3 years	Institución Educativa Nuevo Latir Sede Isaías Duarte Cancino	Bachelor's in English and French, pursuing Master's in TEFL

Table #1: description of participants

Setting

The study was conducted with teachers from 3 different public secondary schools in Cali, Colombia, a major urban city known for its cultural diversity and socioeconomic differences: Institución Educativa Santa Librada, Institución Educativa Técnica Ciudad de Cali, and Institución Educativa Nuevo Latir – Sede Isaías Duarte Cancino. All of them are located in the city center, and each responds to different problems based on its location. Therefore, their institutional plan and methodologies try to address that. The public education sector in Cali serves a wide range of students from low- to middle-income backgrounds. Within these public schools, English is taught as a foreign language following the guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education (MEN), which promotes the development of communicative competence but still emphasizes grammar instruction in the curriculum.

According to their Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI) and English Planes de Área, English is taught throughout lower and upper secondary education. In the three schools, students in grades 6 to 11 receive three to four hours of English

instruction per week, equivalent to approximately 160 hours per academic year. In all three institutions, English teaching is formally aligned with a communicative and competency-based approach, following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje (DBA) established by the Ministry of Education. The English programs emphasize the development of the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, through contextualized activities, projects, and classroom tasks. Grammar is described in the institutional documents as a functional component of language learning, intended to support communication rather than be taught in isolation.

Data collection methods

The data was gathered as follows:

- One 30-minute individual semi-structured interview to identify teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching- six teachers.
- Two 60-minute class observations - six teachers

Semi-structured interview

Interviews were conducted with teachers to gather qualitative data about their beliefs regarding how grammar should be taught. The aim was to identify their beliefs and gain a deeper understanding of the underlying origin of those beliefs. The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions to allow for detailed responses. Considering the English level of the participants and the

fact that using their native language would reduce nervousness and facilitate the expression of their ideas, the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Semi-structured interviews are a formal qualitative method to gather data. The interviewer asks questions following a guideline and is free to ask follow-up questions to deepen and uncover further information (Dawson, 2002). This method benefited my research project by allowing me to gain deeper insights into teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction.

Regarding the interview protocol, I asked teachers from public schools a series of open-ended questions to explore the dimensions of their grammar teaching beliefs and practice. First, I asked them to define grammar in their own words and explain which methodology should be implemented when teaching it. Second, I inquired about how they currently teach grammar topics and how they would ideally like to teach them. Third, I explored the main factors they felt influenced their grammar teaching practice. Finally, I concluded with reflection questions to aim to raise awareness of their teaching journey and to think about how grammar instruction could be improved by asking what they would recommend to new teachers.

Each teacher was interviewed in a 30-minute individual semi-structured interview. The interviews took place face-to-face in the teachers' workplace, to facilitate the meeting as they would be in their zone of work. During these

semi-structured interviews, I took notes and made audio recordings to ensure I could take advantage of all the data collected in the analysis phase.

Class observations

Two 60-minute class observations were conducted per teacher, except for teacher 6, to whom I observed 3 times, to gather data and compare teachers' thoughts shared in the interviews with their grammar instructions in the classroom. This helped me bridge the gap between what teachers believe should be done to teach grammar, what they do in practice, and the underlying reasons for those classroom decisions.

According to Katz-Buonincontro and Anderson (2018), observation is an empirical research method used in quantitative and qualitative naturalistic studies focused on understanding behavior and interactions as they unfold in real-time. To conduct the observations, I created a checklist (see appendix #2) for guidance that helped me craft and stay focused on what I wanted to observe, which was identifying the methodologies used to teach grammar. The checklist is divided into five sections. The first section allowed me to identify the behaviors of the teachers and their specific teaching methodologies. The second section provided me with insights into teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction. The third part allowed me to see students' reactions to the provided grammar instructions and identify their engagement. The fourth one referred to the materials and aids the teacher used to facilitate the lessons. And the final section allowed me to compare the

interviews of the teachers with their performance in the classroom as well as to note any extracurricular event or behavior that impacted the classes. This method was essential for gaining contextual knowledge of teachers' everyday experiences and for understanding how these experiences shape their perceptions and instructional decision-making.

Analysis of the data

The qualitative data collected from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the phases proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012): transcribing, coding, theming, and interpreting the data. I used the TurboScribe platform to transcribe all the interviews. Then, I used AI AvidNote to code the data by identifying relevant features related to the research questions while recognizing patterns, similarities, and differences across the data. To strengthen transparency and methodological rigor, this process was closely supervised through systematic manual review of each participant response. Additionally, all AI-generated codes were critically examined, refined and adjusted as needed to ensure alignment with the raw data, and the final themes gathered were validate with continuous comparison with the original dataset. These themes were then used to interpret and connect teachers' classroom practices and grammar instruction beliefs to broader educational contexts and theories from the literature review. Throughout the process, I remained reflexive to ensure credibility and alignment with participants' actual experiences.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of my qualitative study, which offer meaningful insights into teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and classroom practices, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as the experiences of six teachers may not fully represent the broader teaching population. Second, due to time constraints, I was only able to conduct a limited number of classroom observations, only two per teacher, which may have affected the depth and variety of the data collected. The study's scope was also limited by the inability to conduct detailed post-observation reflections with teachers. Engaging in these discussions would have enabled a closer examination of the rationale behind their pedagogical choices at various stages of the class. Third, since all participants came from three different public schools, the perspectives gathered may not reflect the diversity of experiences across different contexts. Finally, while researcher subjectivity is inherent to qualitative research, I addressed it through triangulation and a systematic approach to data analysis. I remained reflexive throughout the process to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the participants' experiences and are fully supported in the data.

Summary

In summary, I employed a qualitative research methodology with an inductive approach to explore teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction in this

study. I adopted an ethnographic longitudinal research strategy to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences over time. I collected the data through individual interview and classroom observations to capture participants' beliefs, practices, and contextual influences. Finally, I analyzed the data using a thematic analysis approach to uncover recurring patterns and themes related to grammar teaching in public schools.

Chapter 4 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from interviews and class observations conducted with six English as a foreign language teachers from three public secondary schools in Cali, Colombia. In order to answer the primary objective of this study, which was to explore their perceptions, methodologies, and alignment or misalignment in the teaching of grammar in their respective educational contexts. The results show a particular and unstable alignment between teachers' stated beliefs and observed practices, mediated by institutional constraints, standardized tests demands, and classroom management concerns.

The findings are organized thematically and structured into 4 themes arising from the thematic analysis of the interviews and the class observation data.

To contextualize, the six teachers participating in this project range from those in their early-career to educators with over two decades of service.

Theme 1: Perceptions of the Importance of Grammar

All participating teachers emphasized grammar as a fundamental aspect of language learning. However, the degree to which they viewed it as the "center" of instruction varied. Findings ranged from views that position

grammar as vital to perspectives that suggest caution against making it the sole focus of instruction. For instance, Teacher 3 stated that grammar is essential and should be known by every student. *"Para mí, la gramática es una parte esencial que debe conocer todo estudiante."* [Author's translation:[1] *"For me, grammar is an essential part that every student should know."]*

Similarly, Teacher 5 further describes it as an indispensable tool: *"La gramática es el instrumento más importante para yo poder enseñar el inglés… sin gramática no podemos formar una oración." ["Grammar is the most important tool to teach English… without grammar we cannot build sentences."]*

These statements reflect a prescriptive view of grammar, aligning with what DeCapua (2017) describes as a narrow definition of grammar where it is conceived as the *"goal that speakers need to attain in order to be "good" speakers or writers of the language"*(p.1). From this perspective, grammatical accuracy is seen as a prerequisite for successful language use. This inclination also resonates with Schulz's (2001) findings regarding the influence of educational traditions and learner expectations in the Colombian context. Schulz found that explicit grammar instruction and over error correction are often perceived as indicators of serious and effective teaching, particularly by students educated within more traditional systems

[1] All translations are done by the author of this research project and will be highlighted in bracket and italic style

such as public schools.

Consequently, teachers may direct their practice toward explicit grammar instruction, not necessarily because they believe it is the most effective strategy, but because it aligns with what students expect, as explicit grammar instruction reflects prior learning experiences in a foreign-language context, such as Colombia (Kaya et al., 2025). This contrasts with the U.S. context described by Schulz, where learners tended to value more implicit and communicative strategies to language learning, a preference that can be explained by greater exposure to and engagement with the target language beyond the classroom.

On the other hand, some teachers expressed more nuanced positions. Teacher 1 acknowledged grammar importance but warned against overemphasis: *"Juega un papel muy importante para mí, pero creo que no lo es todo. Porque pues la enseñanza de la gramática, todos los días, todo el año, se vuelve como monótona." ["For me, grammar plays a very important role, but it is not everything. Teaching grammar every day, for the entire year, becomes monotonous."]*

Similarly, Teacher 2 suggested grammar should be brief and embedded within broader communicative activities:

> *"La parte gramatical la considero importante, pero yo pienso que esa parte debe ser breve, o sea, que el estudiante entienda el sentido de lo que vamos a hacer o las estructuras que vamos a manejar,*

pero que de ahí para allá se defienda como en una serie de actividades de diferentes clases." ["I consider the grammatical part is important; however, I think that part should be brief. I mean, the students should understand what we are going to do and the structure we will focus on. But after that, students must defend themselves with a series of activities of different classes."]

These views align with Ellis (2006) and Valeo and Spada (2016), who argue that grammar instruction is most effective when integrated into meaningful tasks rather than treated as isolated rule learning. This highlights pedagogical awareness from the participants and provides a light of possibilities toward a more communicative approach to teaching English in public school.

The classroom observations confirmed teachers' perceptions of grammar as a foundational component of English language learning. Grammar consistently held a central place in classroom instruction across lessons and grade levels, either as the explicit focus of the lesson or as a supporting element within vocabulary, reading, or test-preparation activities. Even when grammar was not the stated objective of the class, the teachers frequently drew students' attention to grammatical accuracy when they expressed themselves, clarifying the correct forms through metalinguistic explanations and using Spanish to ensure comprehension. This observed predominance of grammar reflects the prescriptive views

expressed in the interviews, where grammar was described as essential for sentence construction, correctness, and academic success.

Overall, these findings suggest a duality among English teachers from public schools in Cali regarding the perceived importance and role of grammar in the classroom. They considered grammar as essential but challenged: it is viewed as the foundation of language learning, and at the same time as a potential obstacle to communicative engagement if overemphasized. This duality reflects the broader global debate in language pedagogy, where grammar remains necessary in the classroom but must be balanced with opportunities for authentic communication. In the Colombian public school context, where grammar has historically dominated curricula (Cadavid et al., 2004; Kaya et al., 2025), these varied perceptions highlight both continuity with tradition and emerging shifts toward communicative approaches.

These perceptions highlight that while grammar is considered essential, teachers differ in how they believe it should be positioned within instruction. These conceptualizations of grammar's role directly shape teachers' methodological choices, particularly in relation to the use of explicit or implicit grammar-teaching strategies, which are explored in the following theme.

Theme 2: Teaching strategy: Explicit vs. Implicit

This theme explores teachers' inclination towards grammar-teaching strategies identified in the interviews and observations. When asked directly about their preferred strategy for teaching grammar, most participants reported a preference for explicit instruction. Four teachers stated that they favored presenting grammatical rules directly before moving into practice. For instance, Teacher 5 justified her preference for the explicit strategy through an analogy with mathematics:

"Yo lo hago de forma explícita, porque yo les digo a ellos que el inglés es como la matemática, que así como en la matemática hay fórmulas en el inglés". ["I do it explicitly, because I tell them that English is like mathematics, that just as in mathematics, there are formulas in English".]

This analogy is a conception of grammar as a fixed, systematic body of rules that learners must master before using the language, which aligns with traditional and prescriptive views of grammar instruction (DeCapua, 2017). Similar reasoning appeared in teachers 3 and 6. They emphasized explaining structures first and then assigning controlled practice activities. Example, Teacher 3 "*Yo siempre enseño primero la gramática, y colocamos ejercicios para que ellos la hagan, y ya cuando yo veo que han entendido la estructura o las reglas, entonces se aplican en la producción de texto" ["I always teach grammar first and I put exercises for them to complete and when I see that they have already understood the structure or the rules,*

then they are applied in the production of texts"].

In contrast, two teachers preferred an implicit strategy, emphasizing the introduction of grammar through context and communicative activities, arguing that direct grammar explanations can lead to students' disengagement. Teacher 1 expressed that explicit grammar lessons risk monotony: *"Implicita me parece mejor, menos monótona." ["I think implicit is better, it is less monotonous."]*

She further warned that constant focus on grammar can bore students: *"La enseñanza de la gramática de una manera cotidiana aburre a los estudiantes" ["Teaching grammar on a daily basis bores students"].* Similarly, Teacher 2 reinforced this perspective, suggesting that grammar should not be the central focus of instruction but instead, emerge naturally from meaningful tasks: *"Que no sea la gramática la que sea el centro de atención…que la actividad nos lleve a la parte gramatical." ["Let grammar not be the focus of attention...let activity take us to the grammatical part".]*

These views align with communicative language teaching principles where grammar is treated as a resource for meaning-making rather than the primary focus of instruction, and learners' attention to form arises within communicative contexts (Ellis, 2005).

One participant, Teacher 4, acknowledged the usefulness of both explicit and implicit strategies, suggesting a hybrid position. This teacher recognizes the importance of practice and interaction, as well as the need

to explain grammatical forms beforehand: *“Considero que las dos se pueden. Porque si yo no le digo cómo se hace, entonces para llevarlo a la práctica ya es complejo.” [“I believe that both are possible. Because if I don’t tell the student how it’s done, then putting it into practice is complex."]*

This response reflects an emerging and unresolved integration of methodological strategies. Although Teacher 4 recognizes the importance of communicative use, explicit explanation is still positioned as a prerequisite for interaction rather than as something that can emerge during communication.

Regarding this theme, observations revealed a strong inclination to teach grammar explicitly. After analyzing the class observations carried out, from a total of 13 observations, one was considered mixed, one implicit and 11 were considered explicit, indicating a strong predominance of explicit instruction across observed lessons for addressing grammar aspects. The classes would start with the teacher writing the topic on the board, then explaining the rule, and finally having students propose examples using the formula already explained. If there was an error, the teacher would correct it immediately and have the student repeat it correctly. Even some teachers who expressed a preference for implicit or integrated instruction tended to rely on explicit explanations during class. These findings suggest an existing tension between teachers' stated belief in integrating grammar instruction with context and their classroom practice.

Notably, the observations also revealed that when contextualization was present in the lesson, it usually occurred after the rule explanations rather than serving as the means to focus attention on grammar aspects. This suggests that explicit instruction works as the default strategy in which teachers try to integrate communicative and contextual elements. Consequently, observations revealed a partial alignment between beliefs and practice. Teachers' perceptions help shape their practical choices, adapting them to the context in a pragmatic way rather than fully aligning with communicative or implicit ideals.

Taken together, these findings indicate that four of six teachers prefer explicit grammar instruction. However, in the interview, five out of six expressed concerns about the need to implement strategies such as games, playful activities, and digital exercises to avoid monotony and student disengagement, and these concerns were confirmed by the observations. These tensions anticipate potential inconsistencies between beliefs and observed classroom practices, which are explored further in later themes.

Participant	**Preferred Grammar Strategy**	**Coding Evidence (Excerpt)**
Teacher 1	Implicit	*"Implícita me parece mejor, menos monótona.["I think implicit is better, it is less monotonous."]*

Teacher 2	Implicit	*“La gramática debe ser breve y de ahí para allá que el estudiante se defienda como en una serie de actividades de diferentes clases.”[“Grammar should be brief and from there, the student should defend in a series of activities of different types.”]*
Teacher 3	Explicit	*“Yo siempre enseño primero la gramática, y colocamos ejercicios para que ellos la hagan.” [“I always teach grammar first and I put exercises for them to complete”]*
Teacher 4	Explicit (mixed awareness)	*“Tengo que enseñarle cómo, de dónde sale, para cuando él vaya a interactuar ya sepa.”[“I have to teach them how it works and where it comes from, so that when the student goes to interact, he/she already knows”]*
Teacher 5	Explicit	*“Yo lo hago de forma explícita… el inglés es como la matemática, hay fórmulas.”[“I teach grammar explicitly… English is like mathematic, there are formulas ”]*
Teacher 6	Explicit	*“Me gustaría enseñarla de forma explícita… les explico primero el sujeto, luego el tema.” [“I like to teach grammar explicitly… First, I explain the subject, then the topic(grammar tense).”]*

Table 3: Teachers’ Stated Preferences for Grammar Instruction. Note. Coding was based exclusively on participants’ responses to the direct interview question regarding their preference for explicit or implicit grammar instruction. General descriptions of classroom practices were not used to determine preference.

Theme 3: Challenges in Teaching Grammar

This theme highlights various difficulties that teachers face when teaching English grammar in public schools. Participants expressed several factors that challenge instructions, and they must sometimes manage them with limited resources and strategies. The most frequently cited challenges concerned student attitudes and resources. These challenges were not only described in interviews but also observed in classrooms, where they directly shaped instructional choices and student engagement.

Several teachers emphasized that students often perceive grammar as boring, repetitive, and disconnected from their interests. For instance, teacher 6 noted: *"Los estudiantes en ocasiones la perciben como muy aburrido. Se aburren cuando hay que en ocasiones repetir oraciones" ["Sometimes, the students perceive grammar as very boring. They get bored when occasionally they have to repeat sentences."]*

Similarly, Teacher 5 noticed students' attitude as a difficult challenge often present in the class: *"Bueno, una de las dificultades es la actitud de los pelados." ["Well, one of the difficulties is the attitude of the teenagers."]*

According to some teachers, the reasoning behind these attitudes is the context and a lack of openness to the possibilities that studying can bring. This view was reflected in teacher 5, who stated that some students'

life projects are not to attend to university but rather to earn money quickly.

“Esa es una de las mayores dificultades porque, como te digo, hay muchachos que están cerrados… los muchachos están en otra sintonía, ellos ya no quieren; el proyecto de vida de ellos no es la universidad.” [“That’s one of the biggest difficulties because, as I say, there are students who are closed-minded... they are in another mood, they no longer want; their life project is not university.”]

Teacher 5 followed up, reporting that some students want to be influencers to earn money fast:

“No, de la mayoría aquí es conseguir plata inmediata. O sea, te hablo de esta institución. Muchos sí tienen su proyecto de vida en la universidad, pero otros no. Otros quieren trabajar, quieren conseguir plata… ellos quieren ser influencers.” [“No, for most of them here it is to get immediate money. I mean, I’m talking about this institution. Many do have their life plans at university, but others don’t. Others want to work, want to earn money... they want to be influencers.”]

These attitudes reflect a deeper issue: grammar instruction is often perceived as irrelevant to students' lived realities related to their context. As for language learning, research on motivation (Dörnyei, 1998) highlights that learners engage more when instruction connects to their identities and aspirations. In contexts where students prioritize economic opportunities or

digital careers, teaching grammar as abstract rules can draw students away. Therefore, it is important that teachers adapt methodologies to reframe grammar as a tool for real-world communication and opportunities, rather than limit it to an academic subject.

Likewise, Teacher 4 also expressed that limited access to technological tools, such as the internet and projectors, restricts teachers' strategies for presenting topics or engaging students with language in more visual and interactive ways in order to catch their attention. For instance, Teacher 4 explained that students' emotions also play an important role: *"A veces la parte tecnológica, las emociones de ellos. Sí, porque a ellos casi no les gusta que uno esté escribiendo así, así, así y así, sino que a ellos les gusta como más visual." ["Sometimes, the technological aspect, students' emotions because they usually don't like that teacher is writing like this and this (writing on the board). They like it more visual."]*

This limitation was also observed during classroom visits, where instruction relied heavily on the board and textbook exercises. Teachers made efforts to engage students orally; however, students' English level and the lack of visual or digital support limited opportunities to present grammar in multimodal or contextualized ways. Or sometimes, setting up the projector took more than 15 minutes of the class, and then the teacher had to run to complete the lesson. This was the case of Teacher 2. Contrary to Teacher 3, who has a projector installed in her classroom and when used

to do interactive activities on platforms such as Jeopardylab, as mentioned in her interview, students demonstrated higher levels of engagement and participation, which was evident through their active participation. However, those live interactive exercises continue to be of multiple choices regarding grammar rules or metalanguage. Therefore, grammar often remained abstract and teacher-centered, reinforcing the perception that grammar instruction was isolated rather than meaningful.

Besides the above observations, issues related to students' attention, classroom noise, limited instructional time, and low participation frequently emerged during lessons and directly influenced instructional decisions. In response to these challenges, teachers often used explicit grammar explanations to maintain structure throughout the lesson and regain students' attention, first by writing explanations on the board for students to transcribe into their notebooks, and then through controlled practice. Although several teachers expressed concerns that grammar-focused instruction can be monotonous for students, observations showed that rule-based teaching was repeatedly used during moments of disengagement or disruption. Teachers attempted to counterbalance this with games, live interactive activities, or contextualized examples; however, these strategies were used to support accuracy-oriented lessons rather than replacing them. This indicates that pedagogical challenges not only coexist with grammar instruction but also

actively help shape how grammar is taught, reinforcing explicit strategies even when teachers recognize their motivational limitations.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that three of the four teachers who reported preference for an explicit strategy and putting grammar at the center of the class later on expressed that teaching grammar all the time leads to students' disengagement. For instance, Teacher 3 stated grammar was essential in class… and then further highlighted the importance of games and playful activities to enhance grammar: *"Me parece que todo el día enseñar gramática vuelve la clase cansona. ["I think that teaching grammar all day makes the class tiresome".]* Teacher 3 then expressed an attempt to contrast this tediousness with "*Los juegos, los diálogos de aplicación, y todo eso" ["The games, application dialogs and all that"].* This is similar to Teacher 6 who seeks to counter this by incorporating games and playful activities *"Busco estrategias dinámicas como juegos… para que ellos jugando la puedan aprender" ["I look for dynamic strategies like games… so that they can learn grammar through playing".]*

This apparent contradiction reveals a deeper pedagogical tension. Although these teachers conceptualize grammar as central to language learning and prefer explicit instruction, their classroom experience has shown them that daily rule-focused grammar instruction in English class negatively affects students' engagement. As a result, teachers try to soften grammar instruction through games, dialogues, and playful activities.

However, these strategies are often used as complementary practices rather than a deep shift toward language teaching focused on form.

Additionally, the contradiction illustrates the tension between teachers' beliefs and practice described by Borg (2003) and Phipps and Borg (2009), who cited (Freeman, 1993, p. 488) as exemplifying “tensions” as ‘‘divergences among different forces or elements in the teacher’s understanding of the school context, the subject matter, or the students”. For instance, teachers recognize the clarity of explicit instruction but also its limitations in sustaining students’ motivation. Their attempts to integrate communicative tasks remain limited by institutional expectations regarding standardized test preparation and classroom realities such as behavioral challenges. This implies that to address these challenges, professional development should not only focus on training teachers in alternative strategies but also on supporting them in integrating these tensions within their specific contexts.

Overall, the challenges teachers face in grammar instruction reveal a triple tension: a) between students' interests and traditional rule-based methodologies, b) between teachers' stated beliefs and the realities of classroom engagement, and c) between pedagogical ideals and systemic constraints such as resources, curriculum, and assessment demands. These challenges interact, shaping teachers’ day to day instructional decisions and leading to adaptive and sometimes contradictory classroom practices. In

this sense, the challenges reported by teachers work not only as obstacles but also as indicators of the factors that guide and constrain their instructional choices. Building on this understanding, Theme 4 examines the institutional and personal factors that influence how grammar is taught in public schools.

Theme 4: Factors Influencing the Teaching of Grammar

This theme explores the factors that shape teachers' decisions regarding what and how to teach grammar. Data from the interviews and the observations highlight institutional factors such as the ICFES test, the curriculum, and teachers' experiences, such as personal learning and continuous professional development as main factors influencing English teachers' instructional choices in secondary public schools. One of the most prominent institutional factors influencing grammar instruction was the ICFES test, particularly in upper secondary grades, which were the focus of this research. As Teacher 6 explained, grammar instruction in public schools is often shaped by the demands of standardized assessment:

> *"En los contextos de los colegios públicos… se centra más en la enseñanza de estructuras gramaticales, debido a que los estudiantes al grado 11 presentan la prueba del ICFES… esa prueba está más enfatizada en la comprensión lectora y en la comprensión de la gramática y vocabulario. No les evalúan… la pronunciación ni la*

escucha." ["In public school contexts… English teaching is more centered on grammar structures because students present the ICFES test in grade 11… that test emphasizes reading comprehension and the understanding of grammar and vocabulary. The test doesn't evaluate students' pronunciation nor listening."]

This quote illustrates how the standard test requires English teachers to prioritize grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension over oral skills. Even when pedagogical beliefs favor more communicative approaches.

Similarly, Teacher 2 reported that lesson planning is organized around topics expected to appear on the test: *"Básicamente los últimos años es centrado en la temática que uno sabe va a salir en la prueba, de esa manera se organiza el plan de aula" ["Basically, the last years are centered in the themes we know will appear on the test (ICFES), that way the Plan de Aula is organized."]* This illustrates how instructions driven by standardized assessments narrow the scope of English teaching, giving privilege to grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension over oral and communicative skills.

The reported influence of standardized texts on teaching English in public schools was confirmed by the observations. Teachers had to plan and organize entire lessons around the explanation of the different types of activities they would face in the test, and from there, align the exercises

and activities of the topics they needed to cover throughout the semester, simulating the structure of the ICFES test to get students used to the exercises with the hope of increasing their chances of succeeding. This happens especially in upper secondary grades, which was the focus of the study. This was the case for Teachers 2 and 1, who worked with 10 and 11 grades. Even lessons framed as reading or project-based activities often incorporated grammar-focused tasks aligned with test formats, such as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc. This suggests that external assessment pressures work as a powerful organizing force in grammar teaching, often overriding teachers' expressed intentions to prioritize communication or context integration. This creates a misalignment between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities where grammar becomes central, not necessarily because teachers believe it should be, as is the case with Teachers 1 and 2, but because the demands of the educational system require it.

Furthermore, participants frequently cited the school curriculum as a key factor in their grammar instruction. For instance, teacher 5 described the curriculum's role in the selection of topics to teach, indicating that topics are sequenced systematically: *"Nosotros manejamos una planeación, entonces todo viene como desglosadito, primero veo presente simple, que es el verbo* to be*, luego veo con los muchachos el pasado del verbo* to be *y así sucesivamente" ["We handle a planning, then everything comes as*

broken down, first I see the simple present, which is the verb to be*, then I cover with the students the past of the verb* to be*, and so on."]*

This was supported by the other participants, specifically, teacher 6, who reported that *"Principalmente influyen los componentes curriculares que brinda el colegio" ["The main influences are the curricular components provided by the school."]* This type of curricular structure reinforces a linear grammar-based progression, which may provide clarity but also reduces grammar to isolated units. This reflects a tension between syllabus design and teachers' attempts to integrate skills holistically (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These institutional frameworks constrain teachers' flexibility and therefore shape grammar teaching into a predictable sequence that does not align with communicative goals.

Teachers' personal learning histories and professional development also influenced their grammar teaching. For instance, Teacher 1 reported that she moved away from the explicit grammar-teaching strategy because her observations indicated that this approach did not lead to successful learning outcomes for students: *"Perdían el examen la mayoría. Empecé yo a ver a través de mi bagaje, de mi trasegar por la educación, de que no funcionaba porque les hacía los exámenes y todos los perdían." ["Most students failed the test. I started to notice through my baggage, my background through education, that it didn't work because I gave them exams and they all failed."]*

Similarly, teacher 6 noted that his master's studies have reshaped his perspective: *"Ha cambiado mucho desde que comencé a estudiar mi máster. He aprendido cosas nuevas y, pues, la gramática, vuelvo y te digo, es importante, pero no debe ser el centro del aprendizaje de una enseñanza."["I have changed a lot since I started studying for my master's. I have learned new things and grammar, I say it again, is important, but it shouldn't be the center of learning in teaching."]* However, it is interesting to note that Teacher 6 expressed a preference for explicit grammar teaching in public school, on the grounds of his experience and for more clarity for students, and then reiterated that grammar should not be the center of the class.

Furthermore, while some teachers consciously distanced themselves from the ways they were taught, others reported adapting strategies they perceived as effective in their own learning. On the one hand, Teacher 3 expressed that: *"Con tal de no repetir como me la enseñaron a mí, que era solamente escribir y no pronunciar, pues yo ya desarrollo las cuatro habilidades con los niños" ["With the aim of not repeating how I was taught, that was only writing and no pronunciation, thus I now develop the four skills".]* On the other hand, other participants reported using strategies they experienced themselves. For example, Teacher 4 reported that*: "Pues, hubo profesores que me inspiraron mucho. Entonces, la idea es… motivar a los chicos por el inglés" ["There were*

teachers who inspired me… the idea is to motivate students about English".]

Likewise, Teacher 6 reported that his learning experience doesn't influence them that much because learning English at a university is different from learning English at a school.

> *"El aprendizaje de inglés en la universidad se da para que los estudiantes aprendan la habilidad de comunicarse. Entonces, por eso considero que no influye mucho, porque quizás de cierta parte uno lo podía aplicar, pero en la parte comunicativa se pierde, porque al final del día ellos les van a evaluar la comprensión lectora."*
>
> *["English learning in college is meant for students to learn the ability to communicate. So, that's why I think it doesn't have much influence, because maybe at some point you could apply it, but in the communicative part, you get lost, because at the end of the day, they will evaluate your reading comprehension."]*

These findings illustrate the role of teacher cognition (Borg, 2003), where personal learning histories and professional development shape instructional choices. Teachers either avoid using strategies they consider ineffective or adapt strategies they find motivating and engaging. Overall, this theme shows that grammar instruction in public schools is shaped by a complex interaction of institutional requirements and personal professional trajectories. While curriculum guidelines and ICFES tests have a strong

pressure toward explicit form-focused instruction, teachers' learning histories and ongoing professional development influence how they negotiate, adapt, or resist these demands in their classrooms.

Contextualizing Findings with Previous Studies

Analyzing the data in terms of previous studies related to teachers' cognition and the debate between their stated beliefs and practice, this section outlines the findings of the current study with previous literature on the field and how this study contributes to the field. This section is organized in the order the findings were presented.

The finding that all participating teachers conceptualized grammar as an essential component of language learning strongly confirms previous research on teachers' beliefs in EFL contexts, particularly in public educational settings. Similar to Schulz's (2001) study in Colombian public schools and Jean and Simard's (2011) findings in other foreign language contexts, teachers in this study associated grammar with correctness, sentence constructions, and academic success. This alignment suggests that grammar continues to work as a central marker of "legitimate" teaching, especially in contexts where learning outcomes are measured through formal and standardized assessments. It is worth noting that rather than representing a resistance to pedagogical innovation, these beliefs appear to reflect deeply rooted educational traditions, learners' expectations, and

institutional norms that show teachers' understanding of what effective English instruction should look like in public schools.

At the same time, the presence of more nuanced perspectives, where grammar is viewed as necessary but insufficient on its own, extends existing literature by illustrating the internal complexity of teachers' belief systems. This finding resonates with the studies of Borg (2003) and Nazari et al. (2022) who conceptualize teacher cognition as dynamic and evolving rather than fixed. Teachers expressed concerns about monotony and disengagement, indicating an awareness of communicative principles and learner centered pedagogies, even when such principles were not fully taken into practice, suggesting that those ideals just need to be linked to contextualized professional development. In this sense, as Farrell and Lim (2005) expressed, teachers' beliefs about grammar should not be interpreted as rigid adherence to prescriptive models but as situated responses shaped by experience, professional identity and interaction with students. This dual positioning of grammar as both foundational and potentially limiting mirrors the pedagogical tensions reported by Phipps and Borg (2009), reinforcing the idea that teachers usually hold multiple and sometimes competing beliefs simultaneously and they prioritize one or the other depending on the context and the situation.

Regarding the dominance of explicit grammar instruction observed in this study, previous research confirms the prevalence of rule base teaching in EFL classrooms, particularly in public school contexts (Farrell, 1999; Moeller &

Ketsman, 2010; Phipps & Borg, 2009). As in Farrell's (1999) study, teachers in this research project justified explicit instruction in terms of clarity, structure, faster feedback and instructional efficiency, especially when working with learners perceived as having low proficiency levels or limited exposure to English outside the classroom, exactly as in the context of the participants of this research. These findings suggest that explicit grammar teaching persists not necessarily because teachers regard it as the more theoretically effective strategy, but because it provides a sense of pedagogical security and accountability within demanding classroom environments. In this sense, explicit instruction emerges as a rational response to contextual constraints such as standardized tests preparations, curricular demands, limited resources, and students' proficiency levels and behaviors; rather than a simplistic or outdated methodological choice.

In contrast to studies conducted in contexts where communicative or integrated approaches are more fully practiced (Ellis, 2005; Valeo & Spada, 2016), the participants of this study rarely permitted grammar instruction that emerged organically from activities focused on meaning. While some teachers expressed awareness of implicit strategies in interviews, classroom observations revealed that such approaches functioned mainly as supplements to explicit instruction rather than as core pedagogical drivers. This misalignment can be explained by contextual factors such as restricted instructional time, large class sizes, limited access to technology, and the pressure to prepare students for standardized assessments. Therefore, the findings suggest that methodological choices are not only driven by

beliefs but structurally limited, reinforcing the argument by Cárdenas et al. (2010) that pedagogical innovation cannot be meaningfully implemented without considering institutional and resource conditions.

The partial alignment and frequent tension between teachers' stated beliefs and their observed classroom practices provide strong empirical support for the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice described in teachers' cognition research. In alignment with Basturkmen et al. (2004) and Phipps and Borg (2009), some teachers in this study expressed communicative or integrated ideals but practiced mostly explicit grammar instruction focused on accuracy. Notably, this study reinforces the view that such discrepancies should not be interpreted as a sign of professional inconsistency. Instead, they reflect context sensitive belief activation where different aspects of teachers' belief systems are foregrounded depending on instructional goals, student behavior, and institutional demands. This finding extends existing research by illustrating how these tensions unfold in Colombian public secondary schools, a context that remains scarcely represented in the literature.

An additional explanation for the prevalence of explicit grammar instruction lies in its role as an implicit classroom management tool. Classroom observation revealed that explicit grammar teaching frequently happened in moments of low engagement, noise, or time pressure, suggesting that rule based instruction provides teachers with a predictable structure through which they can maintain control and pace. This interpretation aligns with Phipps and Borg's (2009) findings

that teachers often rely on tightly structured grammar activities, such as drills or gap filling exercises, to keep control of classroom dynamics. Acknowledging this alternative explanation strengthens the analysis by recognizing grammar teaching as both a pedagogical and management response, which further explains why explicit instruction persists even among teachers who express reservations about its motivational impact.

Overall, this study contributes to the field of EFL teacher cognition by offering a contextually grounded interpretation of how grammar teaching is negotiated in public schools in Cali. While previous research has established that teachers' beliefs do not always translate directly into practice, this study illustrates how grammar instruction emerges as a hybrid practice shaped by teacher cognition, institutional accountability, and classroom realities. By integrating interview data with sustained classroom observations, this research moves beyond self-reported beliefs to reveal how teachers adapt, compromise, and prioritize in real instructional contexts. In doing so, it confirms existing theories of belief–practice mediation, extends them to an underexplored Colombian context, and raises further questions about how professional development initiatives might better support teachers in balancing pedagogical ideals with systemic constraints.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the perceptions of grammar instruction of public school teachers in Cali Colombia. In relation to the research question, the findings of this study indicate that the perceptions of English teachers about the importance and role of grammar have a strong influence on their grammar teaching methodologies. This influence is most clearly reflected in the predominance of explicit, form focused instruction, which aligns with teachers' views of grammar as an essential foundation for sentence construction, accuracy, and academic success. In this respect, the first and second specific objectives were achieved: teachers' prevailing perceptions consistently positioned grammar as indispensable, and their classroom practices largely mirrored these beliefs through rule explanation, controlled practice, immediate correction, games, and interactive exercises highlighting accuracy. However, the influence of perceptions was not linear or absolute. While teachers' beliefs shaped their methodological orientations, classroom observations revealed that these beliefs were frequently mediated by contextual, institutional, and systemic factors, resulting in partial and unstable alignment between what teachers reported believing and what they did in practice.

More specifically, the findings demonstrate that although several teachers expressed preferences for implicit or integrated strategies to teach grammar and acknowledged the motivational limitations of constant rule-based teaching, their classroom practices continued to emphasize explicit instruction. This misalignment

does not reflect a lack of pedagogical awareness but rather a process of professional negotiation, in which teachers balance their beliefs with the demands of standardized testing, curriculum structures, classroom management challenges, time constraints, and limited resources. In particular, the pressure of the ICFES examination and the curriculum driven by grammar appeared as powerful aspects shaping instructional decisions, often overriding communicative intentions. As a result, explicit grammar teaching functions not only as a pedagogical choice but also as an institutional and behavioral management strategy that provides structure and control in complex classroom environments. Therefore, in direct response to the research question, I conclude that teachers' perceptions significantly influence grammar teaching methodologies; however, this influence is negotiated, limited, and reshaped by external requirements and classroom realities, producing instructional practices characterized by tension, -between students' interests and traditional methods, teachers' beliefs and actual classroom practices, and pedagogical ideals and the systemic constraints- adaptation, and teachers' commitment rather than full consistency between beliefs and practice.

Although this research project has multiple strengths, it is worth highlighting some specific limitations that, if overcome, could have contributed positively toward the results and findings of this study. First, understanding teachers' cognition as a dynamic construct, I believe the collection of data consistently over a specific and longer period of time would have provided clearer evidence of the underlying process of making decisions for the lessons before,

within, and after the classroom. Second, given the limited sample size, the findings from this study should not be generalized to all public schools in Cali. Rather, further research is recommended to shed light on the different aspects that affect English grammar teaching in public schools and on its positive or negative impact on students' outcomes. Finally, I believe having more than one interview and two observation classes per teacher would have provided more insights to fully comprehend the complexity of teachers' minds and how it influences their decisions in the classroom. Therefore, interviews after observations would have been of great help in the process.

Despite these limitations, this study makes two key contributions. First, it provides a contextually grounded contribution to the field of English as a foreign language, supporting Borg's (2003) conceptualization of teacher cognition by offering empirical evidence of how teachers negotiate English grammar instruction in Colombian public secondary schools, an underexplored context. By integrating stated perceptions of teachers with sustained classroom observations, this study goes beyond self-reported beliefs to uncover how grammar teaching actually unfolds in practice, under real institutional conditions. The findings demonstrate that grammar instruction is not simply the direct demonstration of teachers' beliefs, but rather the result of ongoing professional negotiation in which beliefs interact with contextual pressures such as standardized testing, curriculum structures, student behavior, and resource limitations. In this sense, grammar teaching emerges as a blended practice shaped simultaneously by teacher

cognition, institutional responsibility, and classroom management demands, extending existing models of belief–practice mediation proposed by Borg (2003), Basturkmen et al. (2004), and Phipps and Borg (2009).

Given the complexity of teachers' cognition and the many factors that play a role in an English classroom in public schools in Cali, Colombia, this study sought to examine the extent to which English teachers' perceptions of grammar instruction and their prevailing teaching strategies differ across public schools. The findings revealed that grammar is considered essential and that rules should be mastered in order to learn the language. Therefore, grammar is usually placed at the center of lessons, which are largely taught explicitly in the English classroom, confirming that teachers' perceptions not only influence grammar instruction but also serve as a filter for practical and pedagogical decision-making processes. Findings also revealed that teachers' methodological decisions within the classroom are mediated by factors such as curriculum, standardized tests preparation, students' attitudes, and institutional limitations. These insights provide clear details for understanding current classroom practices and offer insights that inform reflective teaching and professional development programs for teachers in similar educational contexts.

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Appendix 1 Semi-Structured Interview

Sección 1: Percepciones de los profesores sobre la enseñanza de la gramática

¿Cómo define usted la gramática en el contexto de la enseñanza del inglés?

¿Qué papel cree que debería tener la gramática en sus clases de inglés?

¿Usted prefiere enseñar gramática de forma explícita (primero las reglas) o implícita (primero los ejemplos)? ¿Por qué?

Sección 2: Prácticas de enseñanza y metodologías:

¿Cómo suele introducir un nuevo tema gramatical en sus clases?

¿Cómo cree usted que se debería enseñar la gramática?

¿Qué factores influyen en tu decisión sobre qué temas gramaticales enseñar?

Section 3: Factores que influyen en las percepciones y decisiones:

¿Cómo aprendió inglés?

¿Cómo influye la forma en la que aprendió inglés en la forma en la que usted enseña gramática?

¿Qué tan seguro/a se siente al enseñar gramática? ¿Qué factores contribuyen a o desafían esa seguridad?

¿Qué dificultades enfrenta al enseñar gramática?

Sección 4: Reflexión y Evolución

¿Han cambiado sus creencias sobre la enseñanza de la gramática con el tiempo? Si es así, ¿qué causó ese cambio?

¿Qué consejo le darías a un/a nuevo/a profesor/a sobre la enseñanza de la gramática?

Appendix 2 Classroom Observation Form

Grammar Instruction in Public Schools: https://forms.gle/cFcpd7eCgBhUdF8y6

Keep your eyes and ears on the language the teacher uses to do the class or explain grammar aspects (L1 or L2)?

Teacher Name: _____
Date of Observation: _____
School: _____
Grade Level: _____
Lesson Topic: _____
Observation Duration: _____
No. of Students Present: _____

Section 1: Evidence of Grammar Teaching Methodologies

Objective: To explore the grammar teaching methodologies currently used by English teachers in their classroom practice.

Behavior / Action	Check if Observed	Detailed Notes / Examples
The teacher writes or explains grammar rules on the board or aloud.	☐	
The teacher teaches grammar rules before showing examples (deductive approach).	☐	
The teacher presents examples first and then elicits grammar rules from students (inductive approach).	☐	
To teach grammar, the teacher uses isolated drills or exercises focused on form and accuracy.	☐	
The teacher engages students in communicative activities (e.g., role-plays, information gaps) to practice grammar.	☐	
The teacher introduces grammar using real-life contexts or authentic texts (e.g., videos, readings).	☐	

The teacher integrates grammar instruction with listening, speaking, reading, and/or writing skills.	☐
The teacher uses visual aids (charts, timelines, drawings) to explain grammar points.	☐
The teacher uses students' native language (Spanish) to clarify grammar.	☐
The teacher uses textbook activities for grammar practice.	☐

Section 2: Inferring Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Grammar Instruction

Objective: To identify teachers' prevailing perceptions about grammar instruction.

Behavior / Indicator	Check if Observed	Notes / Quotes / Inferred Belief
The teacher expresses that grammar is essential for language mastery (verbally or through emphasis).	☐	
The teacher focuses primarily on correct usage and accuracy.	☐	
The teacher encourages students to notice or reflect on grammar patterns.	☐	
The teacher links grammar instruction to real-life communication.	☐	
The teacher responds positively to students' grammar-related questions.	☐	
The teacher shows frustration or dismisses grammar errors.	☐	
The teacher makes it clear to students that the grammar point is not being taught randomly. It's	☐	

part of what they are expected to learn according to national, regional, or school-level educational standards.

Section 3: Student Responses to Grammar Instruction

Objective: to examine classroom interactions and engagement with grammar teaching.

Student Behavior	Check if Observed	Notes / Examples
Students ask questions about grammar.	☐	
Students complete grammar-focused tasks with attention and participation.	☐	
Students engage in peer discussion about grammar (in pair/group work).	☐	
Students struggle with or show confusion about grammar tasks.	☐	

Section 4: Materials & Teaching Aids Used

Type of Material Used	Check if Used	Notes / Description
Board / Whiteboard	☐	
Textbook / Worksheet	☐	
Digital presentation / Projector	☐	
Flashcards / Grammar charts	☐	
Audio / Video resources	☐	
Online tools / Apps	☐	

- What grammar point(s) were taught?
- Was the instruction explicit, implicit, or mixed?
- How did the teacher's observed practice align with their previously stated beliefs (from the interview)?
- What contextual factors (e.g., student behavior, time pressure, lack of materials, class size) may have influenced the instructional choices?