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**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CHINESE  
UNIVERSITY ENGLISH-AS- A-FOREIGN-  
LANGUAGE (EFL) TEACHERS' COGNITIONS AND  
PRACTICES ABOUT ENGLISH GRAMMAR  
TEACHING**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.)

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching in university English classrooms in China. Teachers' cognitions are personal and situated teaching principles including their beliefs and knowledge through which teachers enact their practices in classroom teaching. Despite much research conducted on language teachers' cognitions and practices about language teaching, little has been reported on Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in a context where teachers' thinking and decision-making in the classroom are influenced by a range of psychological and socio-cultural factors. These factors range from deep-rooted Confucian teaching principles, a highly centralized education system, high-stakes examinations, to little exposure to any English language environment. This is especially true when the new *College English Curriculum Requirement* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007) was established, which was intended to develop university students' ability to use English, in particular their ability to listen and speak in English.

In order to address this issue, this study investigated Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching, as a response to the new English curriculum development, in a province of China. Framed in Borg's theoretical framework that teachers' cognitions are not only mediated by their previous language learning experience, teacher education programs and classroom experience, but also by contextual factors, a sequential exploratory mixed-methods approach was adopted and implemented in two phases. In Phase One, a large scale questionnaire survey of 314 university teachers provided an overview of Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching. In Phase Two, an in-depth study was conducted on 10 teachers selected from the participants in the first phase. The purpose

of Phase Two was to explore teachers' cognitions and practices qualitatively and examine the relationship between their cognitions and practices as well as the reasons for any incongruence between them.

The research findings reveal that, in general, Chinese university EFL teachers embraced the *focus on form* instruction and perceived that grammar teaching should be completed in a communicative context so that students knew how to use grammar in their speaking and writing activities. However, with regard to their practices in the classrooms, the in-depth study showed that most of the 10 teachers still adopted the *focus on forms* instruction in their grammar teaching. Subsequent interviews indicated that teachers' insufficient knowledge of using the *focus on form* instruction and multiple contextual factors such as institutional issues, especially national examinations that are closely related to their students' needs restricted their classroom practices.

This study makes several significant contributions to teacher cognition research. First, it adds an understanding of teachers' cognitions about language teaching and teacher professional development in different educational contexts, such as EFL environments in one Chinese province. Second, it provides further insight into the research methodology that can be used in investigating teachers' cognitions about language teaching. The mixed-methods approach not only provides insights into teachers' cognitions that can be generalized in similar and related contexts but also sheds light on individual teacher's deep, personal, and situated understanding of language teaching, especially in relation to teaching English grammar. Finally, the study confirms that Borg's theory about teachers' cognitions provides a suitable framework for such research. Similar studies are suggested to adopt this theory to interpret their research findings.

## **DEDICATION**

To the family of Qiang Sun

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a foreign language
MoE	Ministry of Education
ELT	English language teaching
CLT	Communicative language teaching
TBLT	Task-based language teaching
FFI	Form-focused instruction
L1	First language
L2	Second/foreign language
SLA	Second language acquisition
FLT	Foreign language teaching
CET	College English Test
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
CSC	Chinese Scholarship Council

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides background and contextual information pertinent to the current study. It starts with making my research interest explicit, followed by defining the purpose of the study and the specific research questions that this study is going to address. Then, contextual information, including the Chinese educational system, in particular, the role of English in this system is briefly introduced to facilitate an understanding of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices. Finally, an overview of the thesis is presented.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

As a Chinese university English lecturer for several years, I was always bewildered by a strange phenomenon that many Chinese university students frequently made grammatical errors in both their written assignments and their oral English, but seldom made the same mistakes in the grammar test of College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 (CET-4 and CET-6). A puzzling question arose in my mind: why are there different levels of competence demonstrated by Chinese students in different contexts. I questioned this may not be a problem of grammatical competence but grammar teaching methods.

In China, the traditional grammar-translation method has dominated English teaching for decades. It is characterized by systematic and detailed grammar instruction, substantial memorisation of grammar rules and sentence structures, rote learning of vocabulary, and extensive use of translation (Wen, 2012). Within this approach,

grammar is prioritized and taught deductively, that is, by presentation of grammatical rules and structures which are then practised through translation exercises in the form of decontextualized and discrete sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Chinese, together with simple English, is usually the medium of grammar instruction. One of the drawbacks of this method is that it overemphasizes learners' reading and writing, without adequate attention to their speaking and listening.

However, with the rapid economic and social development in China, more qualified foreign language speakers with strong communicative competence are needed (A. Cheng & Wang, 2012). In response to this demand, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE), as the central authority for managing Chinese education, has made several comprehensive top-down English language educational reforms. In a recent reform, the MoE (2007) established the *College English Curriculum Requirements* to guide College English teaching in 2007. In comparison with previous syllabi, the new syllabus accords importance to listening and speaking English (MoE, 2007). It stipulates that College English teaching should focus on cultivating students' communicative competence and enhancing their ability to study independently to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges. The new syllabus requires College English teachers to change from using traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation teaching solely to including new methods such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which enable teachers not only to teach linguistic knowledge to students but also to develop their communicative competence.

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), many researchers argued that explicit grammar teaching should be excluded from CLT (Thompson, 1996). Krashen (1985), for example, claimed that language is not learned from knowing a set of

grammar rules but is acquired unconsciously through the exposure to the language environment. However, this claim sparked robust counter arguments from other researchers who emphasize that grammar attention should be involved as an important part of CLT (Ellis, 1992; Thompson, 1996). They argued that focusing on communication, without attention to grammar, impairs communication. Ellis (1992) also argued that explicit grammar knowledge might not lead to immediate language learning, but facilitate language learning with positive effects at a later stage. Therefore, grammar teaching should not be disregarded in CLT; instead, an appropriate amount of class time should be dedicated to grammar. This calls for a new approach to teach grammar, not a simple return to traditional grammar teaching with grammar rules presented explicitly.

Influenced and guided by the new syllabus and second language (L2) development, Chinese university English teachers and English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers are endeavouring to adopt new communicative approaches in their instruction. However, due to complex reasons, it is controversial whether CLT is successfully being implemented in Chinese English language classrooms (Butler, 2011; cf. Zhang, 2010; 2015). The successful implementation of new communicative language teaching methods into Chinese ELT classrooms and the efficacy of the new curriculum reform appear to depend upon teachers' attitudes or perceptions to a great extent (Borg, 2006). The literature on educational innovations ascribes the gap between a new curriculum being introduced and an implemented curriculum to the complexity of teaching, which involves a variety of complex psychological and sociological processes (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Complex teaching is shaped by what teachers know, believe and think (Borg, 2006); that is, teachers need to incorporate new ideas

into their belief systems before they are able to make changes in their language teaching practices.

Meanwhile, since the 1980s, with the development of second language acquisition approaches and the rise of cognitive psychology, researchers in the field of both mainstream education and language teaching tend to believe that teaching is a cognitive activity, and teachers have their own beliefs about L2 and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Borg, 2003b; Ellis, 2012; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Woods, 1996). As active participants and decision-makers in classroom teaching, teachers play a critical role in language teaching. To understand the process of language teaching, it is necessary to explore language teachers' cognitions - their thinking, beliefs, assumptions, and their relationships with classroom practices. Therefore, research on language teaching has shifted from studying teachers' pedagogical actions to exploring teachers' cognitions about their teaching (Clark & Yinger, 1977). Foreign language teaching methods adopted by teachers are generally influenced by their approach to grammar teaching. Therefore, in order to explore teachers' attitudes toward new language teaching approaches and the new ELT educational reform, it is essential to examine teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

As the above section states, this study investigated Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching when a new curriculum was implemented. The education research paradigm has shifted its focus from teachers' pedagogical actions to teachers' thinking, which is variously defined as *teachers' knowledge*, *teachers' beliefs*, and *teacher conceptions* (Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kagan, 1992). These concepts all acknowledge that teachers have some mental thoughts toward their teaching which affect their actual classroom practices. For the consistency of concepts

about teachers' thinking, this study adopts Borg's (2003) umbrella term *teacher cognition* which refers to "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe and think" (p.81).

Studying teachers' cognitions enables us to understand teachers' teaching processes and their justifications when making decisions in their actual classroom teaching. Teachers' cognitions inform teachers' practices, including class planning, decision-making and post-class reflection. In turn, teachers' classroom practices arouse and reinforce teachers' cognitions; that is, the relationship is dialectical (Richards, 2008). Thus, studying teachers' cognitions is usually accompanied by examining teachers' practices. Although there is a large body of the literature documenting research findings in this area, little is known about how Chinese EFL teachers conceptualise teaching and how their thinking is related to their classroom practices. The current study was conducted to fill this research gap. It explored a group of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching with a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011). It is hoped that the present research contributes to the established research on language teachers' cognitions and practices. The study attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are Chinese English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching in Chinese universities when a new curriculum was implemented?
2. Are there significant differences in their cognitions about grammar teaching in terms of their ages, academic qualifications, years of teaching, and research interest?
3. What are sources of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions?

4. What are the relationships between Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and their grammar teaching practices when a new curriculum was implemented?
5. What factors contribute to the incongruence between teachers' cognitions and their practices?

#### **1.4 The Context of the Study**

The study of teachers' cognitions and practices in isolation from the context where they occur is unable to provide a whole picture of them, as context plays an important role in understanding teachers' thoughts and actions (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Borg (2006) said that "The social, institutional, instructional and physical settings in which teachers work have a major impact on their cognitions and practices" (p.275). Therefore, an introduction to the context of the study is provided here. The current study is conducted in a context of teaching EFL in Chinese universities. An understanding of the Chinese educational system, especially the position of English language education in this system, is useful to understand Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions and their practices. This section, therefore, introduces the Chinese educational system, in particular, the higher education system, with its emphasis on English teaching and learning in China, including English teaching methods, English textbooks, teachers' professional development, the evaluation of students and the recent educational reform in ELT.

##### **1.4.1 A brief introduction to the Chinese educational system**

Like many countries in this globe, the Chinese educational system is highly centralized (Hu, 2005a; Pepper, 2000). As the supreme education administration body in China, the MoE plays a leading role in the whole educational system ranging from kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools to universities. It is accountable

for all education policies, curriculum, teacher recruitment, teacher education and development, textbooks, school infrastructure, school and teacher supervision, school governance, public examinations, and academic accreditation. From 1990s onward, substantial structural reform has been undertaken throughout the whole country. Though the MoE, formerly known as State Education Commission (SEdC) from 1985 until 1998, is still responsible for the overall policy, macro-guidance and administration, education administration authoritative departments at every government level, such as province, municipality, and county, have been granted authority to plan local education development, including making policies with local characteristics, setting goals for local education sectors and integrating central reform programme with their local reform.

Regarding Chinese students' education periods, Chinese students go through several schooling stages before enrolling as university students. Specifically, they start with primary schools for five or six years, followed by secondary schools which are sub-divided by three or four years' junior middle school and three years' senior middle school. After three years' senior middle school, most of them choose to sit the University Entrance Examination. Those who pass the examination have chances of furthering their educational career in a university. There are mainly three types of universities: the first is a normal university, established for training teachers at every level, from early childhood education, primary school, secondary school to universities; the second is a specialized university, which focuses on a particular discipline such as agriculture, medicine, oceanography and forestry; and the third is a comprehensive university encompassing multiple disciplines such as arts, science, engineering, education, law, and medicine, which do not specialize in one discipline.

### **1.4.2 Higher education in China**

As a highly centralized system, Chinese higher education is substantially influenced by the former Soviet Union Model and the planned economy after the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949 (Hu, 2005a). This model existed for several decades and began to be swayed when the Chinese government embarked on reforming its economic policy and achieved a transformation from a planned economy to a market economy in the 1980s. Precisely, in order to meet the increasing demands of economic and social development, the Chinese government switched to a mode of educational reform. A milestone was an important document *Guidelines for Development and the Reform of China's Education System*, issued in 1993, which outlined strategies for the further reform of Chinese higher education system. The *Guidelines* stipulated that transforming the educational administrative system, enlarging government's investment to schools and universities, enhancing the capacity of teachers and educators, and improving the quality of education should be implemented in a new round of education reform. Subsequently, in 1999, the MoE issued another important document, the *Education Promotion Scheme for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which increased the enrolment of students in higher education. In 2015, enrolled university students were almost seven times those in 1998, increasing from 1.08 million in 1998 to 7 million in 2015 (MoE, 2015).

Given the unique features of China's economy and politics, China is still on the way to establishing an ideal educational system incorporating worldwide advanced educational concepts and methods. Up to now, China has established a relatively consistent higher education system. The subsequent sections introduce information about the Chinese higher education with a view to provide a clearer context for this study. This includes the structure of the higher educational system, semesters of institutions and staff of institutions.



#### **1.4.2.1 A brief introduction of Chinese higher education institutions**

In 2014, there were 2329 higher education institutions excluding independent universities in China (MoE, 2014). Among these, 1802 universities or colleges were regular higher education institutions and were funded by the government; 444 institutions were private regular higher education ones, funded by non-governmental agencies such as individuals, businesses or enterprises, and community groups; 295 were higher education institutions for adult students and one was a private adult higher education institutions for adult students. Regular institutions, funded by the government, account for almost 71% of Chinese higher education institutions. They are governed by the state central education management department, the MoE.

#### **1.4.2.2 Institutions' semesters**

In Chinese higher education institutions, only two or three years' diploma and three degrees including bachelor, master and doctor are provided. In this study, only teachers who teach bachelor degree students are targeted. Most bachelor degrees such as education, engineering, science, and business take four years and each academic year of full time university study comprises two semesters with the first semester starting from September to January of the following year and the second semester spanning from March to July. Each semester is made up of twenty weeks and each week consists of five days. Students have two mandatory long holidays: one is eight-week holiday in the hot summer and the other is six-week holiday in the cold winter. Additionally, they also have public holidays to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals or anniversaries of important events.

### **1.4.2.3 Staff of institutions**

The staff working in Chinese higher education institutions consist of academic lecturers, administrative personnel and management personnel. Lecturers are responsible for teaching and research tasks of the university, ranked as assistants, lecturers, associate professors and professors in terms of academic qualifications. They get promoted on the basis of their teaching workload and research capacity. Research capacity is measured by publications and research projects in which staff are involved either as project investigators or project members. Chinese university lecturers not only have to dedicate themselves to the teaching but also have to actively participate into research activities for research outputs. Management staff are the leaders of the faculty or university who are responsible for making plans for the teaching and research, and other aspects related to the development of the university and faculty. Management staff are generally composed of successful and experienced lecturers who usually have the associate professor or professor title. Administrative staff are assistants to management staff and coordinators of university lecturers.

### **1.4.3 English in the educational system**

English is an important medium for Chinese to communicate with people from other countries. The Chinese government attaches great importance to cultivating students' English levels in order to meet the increasing demands of social and economic development. English, therefore, holds a prominent position in the Chinese educational system (L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Wen, 2012). The following sections introduce the role of English at students' pre-university level and university level.

#### **1.4.3.1 English at the pre-university level**

In the current curriculum, English is a compulsory course in both primary schools and secondary schools. Students aged nine in primary school start to learn English and are assessed at the end of each semester (MoE, 2001). A central principle of English teaching syllabus for secondary school students demands students to improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing to be able to communicate freely with others in an English context (MoE, 2011). Nowadays, English has been established as one of the compulsory subjects in some high stakes exams such as *Zhongkao* (Middle School Entrance examination), *Gaokao* (University Entrance examination) and *Kaoyan* (Postgraduate Entrance Examination). English teachers at schools and universities are all qualified teachers and they don't need to graduate from normal Universities but have to hold teacher certificates granted by MoE. English teaching in secondary schools is exam-oriented; English teachers, especially in the last century, used the traditional grammar-translation approaches to teach English (M. Li, 2012). They would ask students to memorize English vocabulary, grammar rules, and text sentences, according little time to pronunciation, listening and speaking. As a result, many students are able to read English texts and follow them accurately in the textbook but fail to communicate with other English speakers. They often cannot follow others' spoken language or respond to other interlocutors in a timely and appropriate manner. Taught in this way, students' reading and writing skills are strong, but not their speaking and listening skills. However, under the traditional Chinese English language teaching, students perform well in the exams and tend to achieve high marks. This explains why the popularity of this teaching approach persists in Chinese ELT, especially in Chinese primary and secondary schools.

### **1.4.3.2 English at the tertiary level**

All students enrolled at university have to study English for at least two years (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1999). Students are categorized as two types: English majors and non-English majors. Non-English majors cover a larger percentage of students, such as science, engineering, medicine, and education (MoE, 2007).

Non-English major students (their English course is called College English) have to complete 256 hours English learning in class, 64 hours per semester and 4 hours per week. Students are evaluated by the semester end exam and CET-4/CET6 held nationwide, organized by the MoE (Y. Jin & Yang, 2006). They are required to pass all semester exams and the CET-4 exam to obtain their degree certificate, but may reach CET-6 level or beyond in optional advanced English courses in the last semester of the second year. Teachers who teach non-English majors may get a monetary bonus or some other awards which help them to upgrade their academic titles. The *College English Syllabus* requires students to communicate in English accurately and fluently, but gives priority to fluency and communicative capability (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1999; Cortazzi & L.Jin, 1996). In the following sections, some multi-dimensional aspects of College English teaching are elaborated.

#### ***College English courses***

In most Chinese universities, College English is an inclusive course named integrated reading. It is made up of many modules such as intensive reading, extensive reading, grammar instruction, translation, writing and speaking (MoE, 2007). This course is characterized by textbook-centred teaching, focusing on the meaning of words and grammatical knowledge, combined with translations and writing. In order to achieve

the teaching goal, teachers have to go through all the texts in the textbook including exercises based on the content of the texts.

Most College English teachers are qualified Chinese teachers with various degrees, ranging from bachelor, master, to doctor. They usually teach integrated reading English and spoken English courses. There are also some foreign English teachers accounting for around 10 percent of the whole English teachers in one university, although the number varies in different universities. Most of them teach spoken English or optional English courses such as British Culture, American Culture and Speech course. A marked difference exists between Chinese and foreign English teachers' approaches: the former show their partiality to teaching content, teacher-centred classroom and rote learning, while the latter support the practical use of language, student-centred classrooms and the process of learning (Cortazzi & L. Jin, 1996).

### ***College English teachers and their professional development***

College English Teachers entitled to teach in Chinese universities need to obtain high education qualification certificates (Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China, 1993). They have to pass a general or comprehensive examination organized by MoE, which tests their knowledge about the subject matter, educational psychology and pedagogy. A prerequisite for examination applicants is a bachelor's degree (or similar qualifications), and/or higher. As well as obtaining higher education certificates, Chinese College English teachers have to graduate from normal universities, specialized language universities or the language department of an integrated university. If they fulfil these requirements, they are able to get a qualification to teach in a university. College English teachers are promoted academically based on several criteria. The most crucial is their research outputs. The quantity and quality of teachers' research publications and projects are listed as the most important criteria. Additionally,

many universities reward teachers who publish articles in highly ranked international journals. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to focus more on their research than their teaching. Chinese universities appear to stress research without much attention given to teaching and how to improve their teaching.

Nowadays, being recruited as College English teachers is quite competitive. With an increasing number of Chinese students going to study abroad in English speaking countries such as America, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, quite a number choose to teach in China after their graduation. Graduates obtaining their bachelor degrees and higher degrees overseas are taken as a priority in Chinese University English teachers' recruitment, because they have learnt English in a pure English context and bring back new teaching methods and teaching concepts. This poses a big challenge for their peers graduating in Chinese universities.

The influx of overseas graduates also arouses the awareness of in-service teachers who decide to improve themselves by further studying abroad, either as visiting scholars or obtaining master or doctor degrees by applying for sponsorship from the Chinese government or supporting themselves financially. Thus, many Chinese university English teachers go abroad for further education in their teaching methods and research fields. With their overseas training, teachers are able to improve their universities' English teaching by introducing new pedagogical methods.

Meanwhile, teacher education seminars are also held periodically by university English departments to develop and strengthen teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge about teaching. Seminar presenters are usually prominent professors in the field of English language teaching, either from top home universities or renowned international universities. Their presentations are predominately concerned with how to do research such as publishing articles in international journals or applying for research

projects. Apart from this, departments also encourage teachers to learn mutually by auditing their peers' classes, or by observing colleagues in the teaching competitions usually held once per semester by the university teaching office.

Finally, members of the Teaching Supervision Committee (TSC), experienced veteran teachers (usually professors) sit in in-service teachers' classrooms to provide suggestions on how to improve their teaching. Each in-service teacher is audited by TSC and receives some feedback on their teaching from TSC. Teachers adjust and improve their teaching skills by reflecting on their teaching practices and taking into account of the feedback and suggestions from TSC.

To sum up, in order to improve their teaching, Chinese College English teachers have several options including overseas study, department training seminars, peer learning and TSC supervision. This signals that their teaching methods and skills are maybe influenced by these elements. It is found that their teaching is not given the same privileged position as their research by their universities.

### ***Evaluation of university students' English level***

University students' English levels are assessed by two major tests. One is the course test at the end of every semester and the other is CET-4 (usually compulsory) and CET-6 (optional). CET-4 and CET-6 are criterion-related norm-referenced tests which evaluate whether students have achieved the goals of *College English Curriculum Requirements* (MoE, 2007). The *Requirements* state that university students should achieve certain goals in general English learning including listening, reading, speaking, writing, translation and vocabulary size. Actually, comprising most of these modules except speaking, CET-4 and CET-6 are held twice a year during their four years university study throughout the country and there are no time limits for students taking the tests. All test papers are marked at the same place (usually Shanghai). Students

spend considerable time preparing for the test as the test results influence job-application and salary (Y. Jin & Yang, 2006). CET-4 must be passed before attempting CET-6, which is a more advanced exam, requiring students to have a larger vocabulary and greater comprehensive English knowledge. College English teaching for CET-4 and CET-6 follows two official documents set by MoE: *the College English Curriculum Requirements* and *the CET-4 and CET-6 Test Syllabus*, both of which describe the objectives and requirements in relation to English teaching.

### ***Education reform in ELT***

Historically, influenced by traditional Chinese Culture, Confucianism and Taoism, and the early grammar-oriented foreign language teaching methods, ELT in China was characterized by teacher-centred and grammar-oriented methods (Anderson, 1993). Hu (2005a) stated that the traditional grammar-translation teaching method dominated ELT for decades and persisted through the whole history of ELT in China. This method features systematic and detailed analysis of grammar, substantial use of translation between students' L1 and the L2, rote memorisation of vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar rules, and an emphasis on written language, highlighting rote learning and a good memorization of vocabulary, grammar rules and sentence structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It is assumed that learners will be able to speak and write correctly and fluently after memorizing vocabulary, grammar rules and sentence structures. However, it produces the opposite result in that learners can read English well, but are not able to speak and write appropriately in English.

In order to overcome this problem, MoE has embarked on several top-down reforms in ELT in higher education for several decades. A recent reform is that MoE established *the College English Curriculum Requirements* to guide University English teaching in 2007 (MoE, 2007). Compared to the previous *College English Syllabus* in



1985, 1986 and 1999, the new syllabus accords greater importance to English listening and speaking. It stipulates that University English teaching should be directed at cultivating students' communicative competence and enhancing their ability to study independently, so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges. The new syllabus requires College English teachers to reform from using traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation teaching to embracing some new methods such as CLT and TBLT which enable teachers not only to teach students linguistic knowledge but also to develop their communicative competence. English teachers are encouraged to carry out student-centred teaching methods and engage students in classroom teaching and learning.

Although CLT and TBLT have been introduced in Chinese ELT classrooms, a number of observational studies report that so-called communicative activities introduced in class were not in fact communicative and were often mixed with an audio-lingual approach or an explicit form-focused approach (See Butler, 2011, for a review). They are not widely implemented yet due to numerous constraints ranging from general socio-cultural factors to specific institutional factors (Butler, 2011; L. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Specifically, socio-cultural factors and teachers' limited understanding of various methodologies restrict them from implementing communicative approaches in language teaching successfully (see e.g., Zhang, 2010, 2015; Zhang & Ben Said, 2014). Under the deep-rooted influence of Confucianism, education was seen as a way of transmitting knowledge, including cultural transmission, moral transformation and academic teaching. The relationship between teachers and students is one in which teachers are authoritative persons to whom respect and obedience should be paid by students. Students should not question teachers but accept and memorize the knowledge that teachers have delivered. Therefore, students are unwilling to participate in

classroom teaching and learning and always keep silent in class. Without students' enthusiastic involvement and cooperation in classroom teaching, CLT is difficult to implement. Institutional factors including the lack of human resources and meaningful teaching materials, large size classes, limited instructional time, classroom management issues, and College English test systems, limit effective CLT implementation in Chinese EFL classrooms. For example, many teachers have no expertise in implementing CLT because they lack sufficient training (Butler, 2011). Yu (2001) believed at that time that qualified English teachers should be familiar with linguistic, psychological and pedagogical knowledge to implement CLT in the classroom. In large classes, teachers have difficulty in according sufficient time to each student and introducing communicative activities. Confronted by the College English test system, both teachers and students think that CLT might not be as effective as the grammar-translation method as students are under pressure to pass many English tests such as CET-4 and CET-6. In sum, there exists a plethora of factors ranging from socio-cultural to institutional forming the major obstacles to implementing CLT in Chinese College English teaching.

### **1.5 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven chapters which are categorized broadly into the following three sections: (1) Chapters 1-3 introduce the study, including explaining the need for the study, situating the context where the study is conducted and how the study relates to previous existing knowledge and studies, and describing its methodology, research design and theoretical framework; (2) Chapters 4 and 5 present the data and describe research findings; (3) Chapter 7 discusses the research findings, highlights the significance of the study and suggests directions for future research. A more detailed overview is introduced in the following paragraphs.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, the need to study this topic, the context of the study and the layout of the thesis. It starts with introducing a “paradoxical” grammar issue that Chinese English learners have in their English learning. After the history of English language teaching approaches in China is briefly reviewed, the issue is ascribed to English language teaching methods used to teach Chinese English learners. By setting Chinese English language teaching, especially grammar teaching, in the broader international language teaching context, the study is undertaken to explore Chinese EFL teachers’ cognitions about grammar teaching. Then, it describes the context of the study. It outlines the Chinese educational system and highlights the role of English in the whole Chinese educational system, with particular reference to English at the tertiary level. In introducing English learning and teaching in Chinese higher education, the textbooks used by teachers, teachers’ professional development, students’ evaluation, and ELT reform in China are described. The chapter ends with providing an overview of the study.

Chapter 2 establishes a research rationale for the study and provides an overview of existing research on teachers’ cognitions, grammar teaching and teachers’ cognitions in relation to grammar teaching. It points out the research gap with regard to teachers’ cognitions about grammar teaching after reviewing relevant literature and demonstrates how this study addresses this gap. The theoretical framework is also briefly introduced in this chapter.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design of this study. It examines the methodological assumptions and presents a detailed account of the empirical procedures involved in the collection, analysis and presentation of the data, highlighting the steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability of data collection and analysis. The study consists of two phases. In the first phase, a questionnaire survey is designed to

explore all Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in one province of China. In the second phase, an in-depth study is undertaken with ten teachers who are selected randomly from questionnaire participants and are willing to participate in the second phase as well.

Chapter 4 presents the quantitative research findings which reveal how Chinese university EFL teachers perceive grammar teaching based on a large scale questionnaire survey. Meanwhile, in order to explore whether there are any significant differences in their cognitions about grammar teaching in terms of their age, gender, academic qualification, years of teaching, and overseas experience, either *t*-test (two tailed) or One way ANOVA was applied.

Chapter 5 presents the qualitative research findings based on the in-depth study of ten teachers. First, ten teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching are elicited by interviewing them. Next, how these ten teachers implement their practices about grammar teaching is investigated through observing their classroom teaching. A comparison is made between these teachers' cognitions and their practices about grammar teaching so as to examine the relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices. Finally, in order to find out factors contributing to the discrepancies between teachers' cognitions and practices, stimulated recall interviews are undertaken with the teachers.

Chapter 6 combines the research findings from both quantitative studies and qualitative studies to answer the research questions formulated in this study and discusses research findings with reference to literature reviewed earlier and the theoretical framework which underpins it.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter, which summarizes the study as a whole and discusses the implications of the study both at a theoretical and practical level. Finally, limitations of the study are identified and suggestions for further research are also recommended.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter presents a review of literature involving two key concepts in this study: teachers' cognitions and grammar teaching, and a discussion of the theoretical framework which underpins this study. It starts with presenting an operational definition of teachers' cognitions used in this study, including the nature of teacher cognition, factors shaping teachers' cognitions, and the relationship between teachers' cognitions and their practices based on the prior research on teachers' cognitions. A brief introduction of how grammar instruction is implemented in L2, particularly in China follows. Finally, this chapter highlights an identified research gap which this study addresses and a chapter summary is made as well.

#### **2.2 Teacher Cognition**

Teacher cognition plays an important role in shaping instructional decisions in the classroom. Understanding teachers' cognition about language teaching enables us to know more about classroom teaching and teachers' attitudes to curriculum reform. This section starts with introducing the concept of teachers' cognitions, and turns to an examination of several factors mediating language teachers' cognitions, including schooling, teacher education, classroom experience and contextual factors. A discussion of the relationship between teachers' cognitions and their practices follows. Finally, a recent development of language teachers' cognitions and practices in the field of language teaching is briefly reviewed.

### **2.2.1 The nature of teacher cognition**

Research into language teachers' cognitions emerged and flourished as the study of language teaching shifted its focus from a process-product approach to a teachers' thinking paradigm (Borg, 2003a; Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986). Under the deep influence of behaviorism, an old and dominant research paradigm on teaching prior to 1975 was referred to as a process-product approach (Clark & Peterson, 1986). This approach was primarily concerned with the relationship between teachers' classroom behaviors, students' classroom behaviors and students' learning outcomes, among which, a causative relationship is believed to exist. The underlying assumption of the process-product approach was that language teaching was primarily a linear activity where teachers' classroom behaviors had direct effects on students' behaviors and contributed ultimately to students' achievements, thus teachers' behaviors and students' learning achievements had a cause-effect relationship. The research goal of this approach was to describe teachers' classroom behaviors and find out which behaviors were effective by studying links between teachers' classroom behaviors and students' learning outcomes (Borg, 2015; Clark & Peterson, 1986).

Since the 1980s, a new educational research paradigm of teaching has emerged under an influence of cognitive psychology, which focuses on teachers' decision-making and how these decisions reflect their mental lives (Berliner, 1989; Borg, 2003a; Woods, 1996). It primarily studies the psychological processes through which teachers make sense of their work, such as their planning, decision-making in the class, and evaluation and judgement in relation to teaching. In this research paradigm, language teaching is no longer viewed just in terms of teachers' behavior but rather as thoughtful behavior (Borg, 2015). Teachers are not considered as just implementers of actions, but as active and thinking decision-makers who process and facilitate teaching and learning

in the course of their work. The new paradigm integrates teachers' behavior with their thinking underlying their behavior, focusing on what motivates their behavior or action. The assumption of this paradigm is what EFL teachers do in the classroom teaching reflects what they know and believe, and that teacher knowledge and teacher thinking provide an underlying framework to guide their classroom practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Based on this assumption, extensive research on teachers' thinking has become prevalent (Freeman, 2002); however, researchers used multiple terms to define teachers' thinking (Borg, 2003a). In the following sections, a diversity of terms used to describe teacher thinking are discussed so as to make teacher cognition accessible and comprehensible.

### **2.2.2 The concept of teacher cognition**

The term *teacher cognition* is a complicated concept, and researchers have employed distinctive terms interchangeably to refer to it (Borg, 2003a). Its "image" is found in a substantial body of works, which are summarized by Borg (2015) saying that about 60 terms have been used in the language teacher cognition research to refer to *teacher cognition*. Though the denotation of these multiple terms diverged in different contexts, they shared some common features in connotation, highlighting the personal nature, mental lives in nature, role of experience, the interactive influence of cognitive processes and instructional practices (Borg, 2003b). In other words, despite different labels used in teacher cognition research, most terms actually referred to similar concepts in the psychological contexts (Borg, 2003b). Among those labels, *beliefs* and *knowledge* are two most frequently used terms to denote teachers' psychological thinking in a large volume of teacher cognition studies. In these studies, *belief* is usually defined as evaluative proposition that is accepted as true by individuals (Borg, 2001) while *knowledge* as information that is accepted as a fact (Barnard & Burns, 2012). On



the distinction between *belief* and *knowledge*, Pajares (1992) advocated that “*belief* is based on evaluation and judgment; *knowledge* is based on objective fact” (p. 313). This seems to inform us that belief is subjective for it can be inferred from evaluation and judgement, whereas knowledge is objective as it is based on facts (Pajares, 1992). In addition to *belief* and *knowledge*, other terms such as *principles*, *maxims*, *schema*, *personal theories* are also used to refer to the mental processes of teachers (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015).

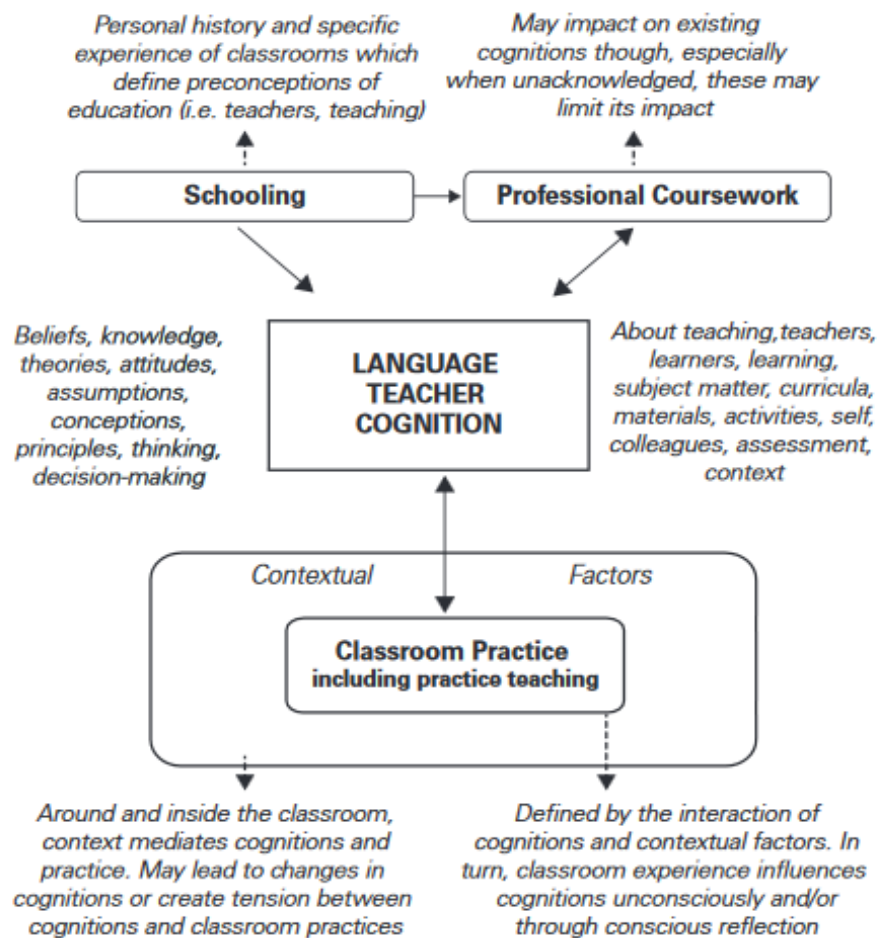
The present study uses *teacher cognition* as an umbrella term to refer to “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003b, p. 81). Teachers’ cognitions are termed as *belief* and *knowledge* interchangeably, sometimes, *ideas*, *plans*, or *teaching principles* are also used as synonymous to teacher cognition. In the following section, factors contributing to teacher cognition are described.

### **2.2.3 Factors influencing teacher cognition**

Teacher cognition is characterized as a tacit, personal-held, practical system of mental constructs held by teachers (Borg, 2015). Borg (2015) set up a model to present several potential factors which contributed to language teachers’ cognitions. According to him, language teacher cognition is attributed to a mixture of factors, including schooling, professional coursework, classroom experience and contextual factors, which are represented in Figure 2.1 (see below). The subsequent paragraphs briefly illustrate how these factors influence teachers’ cognitions.

Figure 2.1 A Model of Several Factors Contributing to Language Teacher Cognition

(Borg, 2015, p.333 )



### 2.2.3.1 Schooling

Schooling, also known as teachers' individual previous language learning experience, is one of the factors influencing teachers' cognitions about language teaching. Teachers' teaching ideas, plans, and other pedagogical knowledge derive from what they have learned during their schooling. They usually introduce their teaching ideas or pedagogical content knowledge to students in a way they were taught when they were students in classrooms learning. Researchers have demonstrated that teachers' previous language learning experience exerts a considerable influence on their cognitions. For example, in a study of six teachers in the United States, Lortie (1975) reported that

teachers accumulated considerable pedagogical experience by observing their own teachers before embarking on their teaching, claiming that this “apprenticeship of observation” could persist over thirteen years (p. 61). Lortie’s study corroborates the idea that teachers, especially novice teachers, incline to introduce experiences of their own teachers’ teaching into their classrooms. In a similar vein, Nespor (1987) stated that teachers’ beliefs took the form of episodically stored material derived from critical incidents in individuals’ personal experience, thus teachers learned a lot about teaching through their vast experience as learners. Nespor argued that teachers’ vast experience of learning constituted their teaching principles. Likewise, Murphy, Delli, and Edwards (2004) believed that a teacher’s belief established early in his life was resistant to change even in the face of conflicting evidence. Their research demonstrates that teachers’ prior learning experience has a long lasting influence on teachers’ beliefs.

Many studies have been carried out on how either pre-service teachers or in-service teachers’ learning experience in different settings shapes the ways teachers conceptualize their learning and teaching. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981), for example, asserted that pre-service teachers’ beliefs were shaped by their own student experiences and these beliefs remained unchangeable while they were undergoing teacher education courses. Johnson (1994) reported in her study that four pre-service ESL teachers’ decision-making in a practicum came from their own experiences when they were L2 learners. Similarly, by conducting a study on 26 in-service ESL teachers’ diaries, Numrich (1996) found that teachers decided to make specific instructional strategies on the basis of their positive or negative experiences of these respective strategies as learners. In exploring teacher beliefs about grammar teaching, Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) found that teachers’ language learning experience played a significant role in teachers’ beliefs regarding formal grammar instruction. In their study,

one teacher said that she received very formal language teaching during her own language study. Though she was using a communicative approach now, she could not completely abandon the teaching method that worked for her. A more recent study conducted by Ng, Nicholas and Williams (2010) also indicated that pre-service teachers' evolving beliefs about effective teaching were influenced by their school experience.

In summary, studies reported here support that teachers' prior language learning experience influences their cognitions. Teachers, both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers, draw on both their positive and negative experiences in formulating their own beliefs about language teaching and learning.

#### **2.2.3.2 Professional coursework**

Professional coursework, also known as teacher education, is another factor exerting an important influence on the development of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2015). Compared with schooling, studies on the influence of teacher education upon their cognitions are often longitudinal, because the change of teachers' cognitions involves comparisons before and after they receive their professional training. Many teachers tend to update their pedagogical knowledge after receiving professional training by incorporating new teaching ideas learned from their training in their language teaching. This is especially true for novice teachers at the outset of their teaching career who lack adequate experiences of teaching to draw on and learn predominately from their professional training.

Some empirical studies have demonstrated that teacher education has a variable impact on teachers' cognitions. Almarza (1996), for example, examined the influence of teacher education on trainees or student teachers by tracking the learning of four students on a Postgraduate Certificate in Education course (PGCE). As a result,

Almarza (1996) found that teachers' professional coursework played a powerful role in shaping student teachers' behavior during their teaching practice, but the influence was varied among the four students for personal reasons and contextual factors. A stronger claim that student teachers' cognitions change as a result of their professional education was provided by Sendan and Roberts (1998), and Cabaroglu and Roberts (2000). The former argued that, on the basis of their findings, the initial professional training promoted changes of trainee's thinking. The latter discovered that student teachers adjusted their existing beliefs after they received professional training, attributing their flexibility to their teacher education training. More recently, Borg (2011) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study examining the impact of an intensive eight-week in-service teacher education programme in the UK on the beliefs of six English language teachers. The study reported that the programme had a substantial positive influence on the teachers' beliefs. The influence was varied in two aspects. One aspect was that some teachers experienced shifts in their previous beliefs about language teaching and learning; the other aspect was that some teachers began to become explicitly aware of their beliefs which were consolidated and extended based on the course experience.

In summary, through reviewing research on the relationship between teacher education and teachers' cognitions and the extent of this impact, it appears that teacher education impacts on teacher cognition but this may vary individually.

### **2.2.3.3 Classroom experience**

Another factor that influence language teachers' cognitions is their classroom experience. In contrast to the direct way that teacher education and teachers' prior language learning experience influence teachers' cognitions, classroom experience contributing to teacher cognition usually relies on teachers' reflection on their own practices (Borg, 2003a; Kagan, 1990; Woods, 1996). Teachers' cognitions may be

reinforced or altered by reflections on their own teaching methods, students' reactions, reflective journals, and peer review (Borg, 2003a; Woods, 1996). Some research has examined how classroom teaching prompts teachers to modify and update their cognitions after they have received several years' professional training or they have taught students for several years. Nespor (1987), for example, found that experienced teachers would adopt methods they found to be effective in their early classroom teaching careers in their current classroom teaching. In a case study, Moran (1996) reported that a teacher in the United States changed her classroom instruction as a result of reflection on students' reactions to her teaching methods.

Comparative studies between novice and experienced teachers have also demonstrated that prior classroom experiences impact on teachers' cognitions on language teaching and learning. For instance, Tsui (2003) found that novice and experienced teachers differed in their attitudes toward language input to students. Specifically, experienced teachers tended to use simple language in the classroom instructions, while novice teachers preferred using formal and complicated language. Tsui explained that novice teachers might underestimate students' comprehension of complex language due to lack of teaching experiences. Gatbonton (2008) conducted a study comparing novice and experienced teachers' pedagogical knowledge, and found that experienced teachers' classroom performance was relatively stable compared to novice teachers'. The experienced teachers had been reflecting on their teaching experiences and kept their teaching methods updated, which appeared to make learning easier for their students, whereas novice teachers were still developing their pedagogical skills, making learning for students more difficult. The difference in the teachers' cognitions about language teaching was ascribed to their language teaching experience.

To sum up, research on the influence of classroom practices on teachers' cognitions suggests that teachers revise or alter their cognitions through their constant interaction with students and by reflecting on their own teaching experiences, and this is especially evident in a comparison between experienced and novice teachers.

#### **2.2.3.4 Contextual factors**

The preceding sections have explained how schooling, teacher education and teachers' classroom practices influence teachers' cognitions from teachers' personal perspectives and these elements can be labeled as internal elements from teachers' perspective. Meanwhile, a wide range of contextual elements, ranging from wide socio-cultural factors such as the education policy of the country to specific factors such as classroom size, types of school and students' needs, also mediate teachers' cognitions.

A number of studies have examined the role of contextual factors in shaping teachers' cognitions and decision-making in the classroom instruction. These may contribute to the mismatch between teachers' cognitions and their practices (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2003b; Fang, 1996; Lee, 2009; Mak, 2011). Fang (1996), for example, argued that contextual factors were a powerful influence on teachers' beliefs and affected their classroom practice when explaining the inconsistency of teachers' beliefs and practice. Fang found that teachers' decision making in practical classrooms was governed by the nature of instruction and classroom settings. Borg (2003b) stated that contextual factors played an important role in determining the extent to which teachers were able to implement instruction congruent with their cognitions. He argued that "contextual factors influenced practice either by modifying cognitions or else directly, in which case incongruence between cognition and practice may result" (p. 82). Lee (2009) reported that constraints imposed by institutional context and values, such as exam pressure and school's policy, led to the mismatches between teachers'

beliefs and practices. Mak (2011) in a case study to explore the tensions between an EFL teacher's beliefs and her teaching practices, also concluded that contextual factors, such as a teacher's local culture, influenced beliefs and instructional decisions. Finally, Basturkmen (2012) in reviewing research exploring the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practices, found that factors, including context, teacher experience and planning, often prevented teachers from implementing their beliefs in their practice.

To conclude, this section explicates several factors influencing teachers' cognitions. These factors are teachers' prior language learning experience, teacher education and their classroom experience as well as contextual factors.

#### **2.2.4 The relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices**

The relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices has received substantial attention in the field of teacher education. Although the relationship between them is still not well defined and a consensus has not been reached, it is generally believed that teachers' cognitions play a crucial role in classroom teaching, and what teachers believe or think, and what teachers assume have a powerful influence on their classroom actions. Pajares (1992) stated that "Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information" (p.325). This suggests that teachers' cognitions exert a powerful influence on their practices, guiding teachers to work in particular ways in their classroom instruction. On the other hand, it is worthy to note that the conflict between them is regularly seen in many studies and a variety of reasons contribute to their inconsistency. The subsequent paragraphs elaborate the relationship between them in greater detail.



First of all, a generally accepted view that teachers' cognitions shape their practices has been well documented (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Farrell & Filion, 2014; Min, 2013; Watson, 2015). For example, Farrell and Bennis (2013) found a consistency between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Min (2013) reported a case study showing congruity in EFL writing teachers' beliefs and practices regarding how to provide written feedback. Similarly, Farrell and Ives (2015) explored the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of one second language reading teacher through a case study. The findings suggest that this teacher's professed beliefs mainly converge with his classroom practices. In the same vein, Watson (2015) explored the significance of an English teacher's conceptual and affective beliefs about grammar for pedagogical practice. The case study provided evidence that beliefs play an important role in influencing the teacher's pedagogy, especially when external constraints do not substantially impact teachers' teaching. In sum, teachers' cognitions display an important role in guiding teachers to implement their classroom practices.

It is worth noting, however, that research on teachers' cognitions suggests they are not always congruent with their practices for a number of possible reasons. These include the following: the difficulty of articulating their tacit beliefs (Calderhead, 1996); tensions between teachers' core and peripheral beliefs (Phipps & Borg, 2009); the complexity of teachers' beliefs (Junqueira & Payant, 2015); teachers' perception of students' individual personalities (Roothoof, 2014); students' expectations (Burgess & Etherington, 2002) and students' needs (Gilliland, 2015); teachers' personal proficiency and individual factors such as their prior experiences (Lee, 2009; Roothoof, 2014); contextual factors such as time constraint (Farrell & Bennis, 2013), high stakes examinations (Watson, 2015) and school context (Gilliland, 2015). Additionally,

Barnard and Burns (2012) have also identified that the selection of research methods may be a factor. For example, Junqueira and Payant (2015) investigated teacher feedback beliefs and practices of a pre-service L2 writing teacher over one academic semester through a case study. The research findings revealed that there were some mismatches between the teachers' stated beliefs and actual practices. The research pointed out the complexity of this teacher's beliefs resulted in the mismatches. In the same vein, Roothoof (2014) presented a comparison between the observation of ten adult EFL teachers and their stated beliefs about oral feedback. The research found that the teachers' stated beliefs are not completely reflected in their actual practices. For example, all the teachers believed feedback to be important, however, they still expressed concerns about hurting students' feelings and provoking negative affective responses. It appears that students' affective feeling and their individual personality hindered teachers from giving oral feedback to students. Gilliland (2015) explored two high school teachers' beliefs and practices about second language writing, and the relationship between them. The research findings showed that teachers' actual practices in L2 writing were constrained by accountability pressures from high stakes writing assessment so that their actual practices were not always consistent with their stated beliefs about how to teach L2 writing.

To sum up, the relationship between teachers' cognitions and classroom practices is complex. Generally, their relationship is consistent and teachers' cognitions play a key role in guiding classroom practices; however, they are inconsistent due to contextual factors.

### **2.2.5 Language teachers' cognitions in the field of L2 and EFL teaching**

The study of language teachers' cognitions has witnessed rapid development since its establishment in the field of second and foreign language education in the 1990s (Borg,

2015). A substantial number of studies reported both in China and internationally have contributed to the expounding of language teachers' complex inner lives underlying their practice (Kubanyiova, 2012).

At an international level, research on L2 teachers' cognitions have been concerned with general language teaching up to now. By 'general', here I mean the language is learned in a holistic way and is not subdivided into specific curriculum areas like listening, reading, writing, and speaking. For example, Allen (2013) undertook a study to identify the beliefs about developing language proficiency of a group of North American French-as-a -foreign language teachers, and to determine if their beliefs were consistent with the literature on foreign language teaching. Analysis of the data revealed five distinct beliefs and related corollaries about SLA, which were largely compatible with the current literature on foreign language teaching. Altan (2012) also reported a study to explore Turkish pre-service teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching by using a questionnaire. Their beliefs regarding their attitudes about foreign language aptitude, the difficulty of language learning, the nature of language learning and the effectiveness of various learning strategies were examined. The data revealed that some pre-service teachers' beliefs might surprise language teaching educators and teacher trainers, whereas some others probably confirmed their experiences and intuitions. Similarly, a mixed-methods study was adopted by Busch (2010) to investigate the effect of an SLA course on pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning and those beliefs include several themes, such as the length of time for acquisition, difficulty of language acquisition, the role of culture, the role of error correction, the importance of grammar, and the efficacy of audio-lingual learning strategies and significant changes of teachers' beliefs.

Research on language teachers' cognitions about specific curriculum areas like grammar (Sanchez & Borg, 2014), reading (Vaish, 2012), writing (Gilliland, 2015), listening (Graham, Santos, & Francis-Brophy, 2014), pronunciation (Baker, 2014; Buss, 2015), speaking (Baleghizadeh & Nasrollahi Shahri, 2014), and vocabulary (Macalister, 2012) has emerged and developed rapidly in the past decade. For example, Graus and Coppen (2016) embarked on a study to gain insight into student teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching at Dutch universities. The study found that teachers prefer form-focused, explicit, and inductive instruction and *focus on forms* instruction. However, high-year undergraduates and postgraduates' results showed a different trend with a preference for meaning-focused, implicit instruction, and a *focus on form*. Vaish (2012) studied English teachers' beliefs on bilingualism in an early intervention reading program in the context of Singapore. The research found that teachers believe in an immersion approach and ironically they also believe that L1 can aid in learning English. Graham, Santos, and Francis-Brophy (2014) surveyed foreign language teacher's stated beliefs and practices about listening pedagogy through a questionnaire. Teachers' responses showed a mismatch between teachers' beliefs about the importance of teaching listeners how to listen more effectively and evidence in their stated practice in which the focus was on task completion. Buss (2016) investigated Brazilian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to pronunciation. The findings suggested that teachers generally had a positive view of teaching pronunciation in Brazilian EFL classes. The research also found that teachers' pronunciation teaching practices were still traditional with a focus on word-level features through repetition of problematic word sounds. Baleghizadeh and Nasrollahi Shahri (2014) explored three EFL teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching of speaking skill in English in a qualitative study. The study revealed the interconnected nature of learning experience with their teaching

beliefs. The result also showed that teachers had their unique ways of thinking about speaking. Macalister (2012) examined the beliefs of Malaysian pre-service teachers about vocabulary teaching, engaged in a multi-year trans-national teacher education programme. The outcomes of the study suggested that while pre-service teachers held beliefs that correspond with those of their trainers to some extent, they failed to express them.

To sum up, language teachers' cognitions about both general language teaching and specific language curriculum have been explored substantially internationally. However, research on language teachers' cognitions in some EFL countries such as China was underexplored due to the different sociocultural environment.

In China, there are sporadic studies on language teachers' cognitions which are either concerned with language teaching in a comprehensive way or regarding specific curriculum areas except grammar teaching. For example, Xiang and Borg (2014) reported on a study of examining Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs and practices about effective language teaching in Chinese university classrooms. The findings revealed that though teachers' beliefs were mostly realized in their teaching behaviors and practices, there was mismatch between their stated beliefs and their actual work. The study went on to explain that student factors, institutional factors, and teacher factors jointly contributed to the mismatch. Zheng and Borg (2014) reported on a study examining three Chinese secondary school English teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to TBLT using qualitative methodology. The key finding was that conceptualized in a narrow sense, TBLT was simply defined as communicative activities. The study also showed that the young teacher made a greater commitment to the principles related to TBLT in the curriculum than the other two experienced teachers. The experienced teachers were found to introduce a stronger formal element of

grammar into their lessons which were not advocated by the curriculum. Zheng (2013) reported on a study which explored the features of the teachers' belief system and explained how interactions between different components of teachers' beliefs system contribute to complex features of their beliefs through complexity theory. The study revealed the co-existence of different types of beliefs and the interaction of these beliefs in determining the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practice.

Yang and Gao (2013) examined four experienced Chinese university English teachers beliefs and practices related to EFL writing. The result was three of the four teachers showed consistency between their beliefs and practices in teaching writing, while the fourth teacher's beliefs were partly consistent with his practices. The study also showed that teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching writing were associated with individuals' prior experiences as EFL learners as well as teachers, students' aptitude, self-reflection and collegial influences. Gao and Ma (2011) investigated the vocabulary learning and teaching beliefs held by pre-service and in-service teachers in Hong Kong, and on the Chinese mainland, using a mixed-methods approach. The analysis of the data revealed distinct beliefs held by teachers in the two contexts. The findings suggested a profound contextual influence mediating the participants' vocabulary teaching and learning beliefs. Goh and Chen (2014) explored Chinese University EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching spoken English in China. They embarked on a study to examine the beliefs held by Chinese EFL teachers regarding teaching spoken English and to consider how their beliefs correlate with some main teacher characteristics. The research findings suggested that teachers emphasized the importance of developing students' communicative competence more than focusing on students' linguistic accuracy.

A review of research around Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions shows that most studies are associated with their cognitions about general language learning and specific curriculum courses including vocabulary, writing and speaking. Little research has been undertaken on Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about grammar instruction where Chinese social environment is different from other EFL environments. The present study is undertaken to fill this gap. In the next section, issues and debates surrounding grammar instruction will be introduced and discussed.

## **2.3 Grammar Instruction**

In this section, the theoretical positions that underlie grammar instruction are firstly introduced. Then, seven constructs of grammar instruction related to this study are examined. Finally, the seven constructs in this study are operationalised, based on the preceding discussion.

### **2.3.1 Grammar instruction in SLA**

The role of grammar teaching in foreign language classrooms has been a controversial topic for decades (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; Ur, 2011). One fundamental question concerning grammar teaching in SLA is whether grammar should be taught, and if it should be taught, when and how it should be taught (Ellis, 2006). Unfortunately, though many attempts have been made, researchers have not come to an agreement on this issue (Ellis, 2006; Long & Robinson, 1998; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Despite the controversies and uncertainties surrounding this issue, grammar instruction "continues to be prominent both in course books and in the classroom practice of teachers in school-based foreign-language courses" (Ur, 2011, p. 508).

The underlying theoretical framework of grammar instruction is interface hypothesis. The interface hypothesis is a concept in SLA that describes the relationship

between implicit (also known as “acquired”) and explicit knowledge (also known as “learned”) in L2 teaching and learning (Krashen, 1981). Implicit knowledge is language knowledge that learners possess intuitively in a subconscious process but are not able to articulate in words; explicit knowledge is language knowledge that learners possess by understanding and memorizing rules and are also able to verbalize (Ellis, 2008). The relationship between these two types of knowledge has received considerable attention in second language acquisition research. Basically, there are two positions in the interface hypothesis: the no-interface position and the interface position. The no-interface position states that there is no relationship between these two types of knowledge; in other words, knowledge that has been learned explicitly can never become fast and automatic language knowledge. The interface position states that explicit language knowledge can partly become implicit, and this conversion is limited by various developmental factors. More detail about these two positions is examined in the following paragraphs.

### **2.3.1.1 Non-interface position**

The non-interface position can be traced back to Krashen’s (1982) input hypothesis which distinguished between “learned” knowledge and “acquired” knowledge. He stated that “learned” knowledge cannot be converted into “acquired” knowledge. The position is called non-interface position for there is a strict separation between acquisition and learning. Krashen (1982) saw acquisition as a purely subconscious process and learning as a conscious process, and claimed that improvement in language ability was only dependent upon acquisition and never on learning. Consciously learned language could only be used to monitor language output, but it could never be the source of spontaneous speech (Krashen, 1985). Based on this, Krashen asserted that direct grammar instruction had a “peripheral effect” in L2 teaching and learning (Krashen,



1993, 1999). Furthermore, Krashen claimed that linguistic competence was only advanced when language was subconsciously acquired, and that conscious learning could not be used as a source of spontaneous language production. Echoing Krashen's view, Truscott (1996, 1999) asserted that explicit grammar instruction was short-lived and superficial because it could not bring about communicative competency for L2 learners. He further claimed that the benefits of forms-focused instruction could only be seen in learners' performance of discrete-point tests which measure only explicit metalinguistic knowledge, not the learners' ability to use the target language for communicative purpose.

Krashen and Terrel (1983) proposed that grammatical structures did not require explicit instruction by language teachers and learners. In the Natural Approach, the role of grammar teaching was reduced to a minimum, producing some negative effects on explicit grammar teaching and ultimately led some L2 teachers to drive grammar out of the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, Ellis (2003) found their argument unconvincing because learners exposed to sufficient language practices without attention to correct linguistic forms cannot communicate well with others. Linguistic accuracy should be emphasized in language teaching methods, even in the task-based language learning where communication is emphasized to the utmost.

### **2.3.1.2 Interface position**

In contrast, a group of linguists do not accept Krashen's non-interface position (Celce-Murcia, 1992; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1993). They collectively stated that learned knowledge could be transformed to acquired knowledge through persistent practice of linguistic rules and features. They tended to believe that all kinds of learning followed the same sequence, from declarative knowledge (explicit knowledge about the thing to be learned), to procedural knowledge (knowledge of how the thing is done),

and finally to automatization of this procedural knowledge. Learners moved from one stage of knowledge to the next by practice (R. DeKeyser, 1998). Under this theoretical background, a large number of researchers reignited their interest in research on L2 grammar teaching in response to the interface position (R. DeKeyser, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998; Schmidt, 2001; VanPatten, 2002). Schmidt (2001) framed his “Noticing Hypothesis” and claimed that L2 learners had to notice the input’s forms and the meanings they brought. Based on this hypothesis, it was posited that grammar teaching lost effectiveness if learners failed to put their attention on the forms and under this circumstance, learning could never be converted into acquisition.

VanPatten (2002) suggested that teaching grammar entailed input processing or what he called “processing instruction” (p.755). He asserted that in communicative language teaching approach, L2 learners were unable to prioritize form and meaning simultaneously and they tended to focus more on meaning for communication purpose at the expense of form. He further explained that an initial exposure to explicit instruction combined with a series of input processing activities was intended to encourage learners to grasp L2 language structures and produce them correctly. This created form-meaning connections in input and processed them by grammar rules for meaning. Long is another figure who contributed greatly to this field. In his “interaction hypothesis” (Long, 1983, 1996), learners would redirect their attention to form in meaning-focused communication when their negotiations for meaning broke down due to a lack of sufficient grasp of language forms. He indicated that negotiations served to highlight language forms that were problematic to learners and helped to fill the gap between input and their own interlanguage, thus facilitating output. Long named such attention to form as *focus on form*, which is distinctive from *focus on forms*. The latter refers to traditional approaches to L2 grammar teaching relying on explicitly instructing

grammatical rules and structures to learners as the course (Long & Robinson, 1998). *Focus on form* advocates a combination of a focus on meaning and a *focus on forms*. In form-focused language teaching classrooms, an emphasis is placed on meaning, and learners are also encouraged to notice forms in the input in order to maintain fluent, accurate and meaningful communication.

However, nowadays form-focused instruction has become a widespread view of grammar instruction in L2 teaching (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2001; Long, 1991; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). In the EFL environment, especially in countries such as China where English learners are not exposed to English environment and lack sufficient opportunities to interact with English native speakers and use English in practical English context, how grammar instruction should be implemented has been a controversial problem.

### **2.3.1.3 Summary**

Based on the debate between the interface position and the non-interface position between implicit (also known as “acquired”) knowledge and explicit (also known as “learned”) knowledge, two points are summarized here. First, the necessity of grammar instruction used to be a controversial topic but is not any more (Ellis, 2006). Proponents of explicitly implementing grammar instruction in the classroom prevail over those who object to grammar instruction in the classroom. Second, the way of approaching grammar instruction has evolved from the traditional language teaching method, which gives primary attention to language forms by presenting grammar rules and structures to learners directly, to communicative language teaching which also directs learners’ awareness at language forms but by involving them in meaning-focused communication activities. In the next subsection, several themes in relation to grammar instruction are examined.

### **2.3.2 Recurring themes in L2 grammar instruction**

Now since the significance of grammar instruction is generally established (R. DeKeyser, 1998; Long, 1983; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 2001; VanPatten, 1996), most empirical research has revolved around how to teach grammar (Borg, 1999b; Ellis, 2001; Long & Robinson, 1998). Unfortunately researchers have not reached an agreement on how teachers should approach grammar instruction (Borg, 1999a; Ellis, 2006). Ellis (2006) argued that there is no evidence for a best way to teach grammar; grammar work might be segregated or integrated, deductive or inductive, proactive or incidental, and it might *focus on forms or form*. Borg (1999a) also emphasized that, though explicit grammar instruction facilitated the learning of an L2 in some way, consensus about how best to teach grammar including what language points to focus on (*focus on forms or form*), how to present and analyse grammar (deductively or inductively), how much metalanguage to use, whether to practice grammar points and to correct students' errors has not been achieved. These points are also the foci of the current study. From these empirical studies, recurring themes are identified: *focus on forms* instruction, *focus on form* instruction, deductive approach, inductive approach, corrective feedback, the use of grammatical terminology and drilling (Ellis, 2006). In the following paragraphs, more detail around these themes is reported.

#### **2.3.2.1 Focus on forms**

The most fundamental pedagogical distinction originating from the interface position in SLA instruction is the dichotomy of a focus on linguistic form or meaning (Williams, 2005). Meaning-focused instruction highlights that the objective of language teaching is cultivating learners' communicative competence, not focusing on discrete linguistic items and rules. In contrast, form-focused instruction (FFI) is defined as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay

attention to linguistic form” (Ellis, 2001, pp.1-2). Linguistic form here refers to linguistic features including phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic, and lexical aspects of an L2 language. In order to achieve the purpose of learning linguistic form, two types of form-focused instruction were defined according to the degree of integrating communication in instruction: *focus on forms* and *focus on form* (Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998). *Focus on forms* instruction focuses on teaching language form in isolation rather than the meanings they convey (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002; Long, 1991). This type of instruction is mainly associated with synthetic classroom devices, including explicit grammar rules, repetition of model sentences, transformation exercises and direct error correction. It primarily consists of work on the linguistic items with little attention on communicative language use.

Doughty & Williams (1998) claims that in *focus on forms* instruction, learners engage in production activities ranging from mechanical to more communicative drills. These drills have the pitfall that too much attention to forms results in deliberate rather than automatic language use. Learners taught by *focus on forms* instruction such as the traditional grammar-translation method usually have a good command of grammar knowledge and sentence patterns, but do not have equally strong communicative competence in the context of meaningful communication (Long, 2000). Despite its drawback, this kind of instruction is still used without much attention on communication. It is also adopted widely in EFL contexts especially in countries where examination-oriented English teaching is emphasized. In the following paragraph, *focus on form* instruction will be briefly introduced.

### **2.3.2.2 Focus on form**

As is mentioned in the last paragraph, the concept of *focus on form* is traced back to the distinction made by Long (1991) between *focus on form* and *focus on forms* when

explaining form-focused instruction. Long (1991) defined *focus on form* as “overtly drawing attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication”( pp.45-46). In Long’s view, *focus on forms* is a traditional approach which is based on the assumption that language is made up of a series of grammatical forms that can be acquired successively, while *focus on form* draws learners’ attention to linguistic forms in the context of meaningful communication. The advantage of *focus on form* is it overcomes the limitation that the *focus on forms* shows little concern with communicative use but still retains the strength of the traditional approach. *Focus on form* is associated with a learner-centred approach and happens when the learner is attending to meaning and aims for resolving a communication problem (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

There were substantial studies in the field of SLA examining the effect of *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction and mixed results were obtained. Some studies demonstrated that *focus on form* instruction is more effective. For example, Shintani (2013) investigated the effect of two instructional approaches- *focus on forms* and *focus on form*- on the acquisition of a set of nouns and adjectives by young Japanese children who were English beginners. The study reported that although both types of instruction were effective for the acquisition of nouns, *focus on form* instruction was more effective for the acquisition of adjectives. Burgess and Hetherington (2002) reported research into teachers’ attitudes to grammar and its teaching and learning within an EAP context. Responses from 48 EAP teachers in British university language centres produced both quantitative and qualitative data. Results indicated that the majority of teachers in this study appreciated the value of grammar for their students and had a favourable attitude to the *focus on form* approach.

However, different research findings regarding the effectiveness of two approaches were also noted. Laufer (2006) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of *focus on forms* and *focus on form* approaches in learning new L2 words by 158 high-school learners of English as L2. The study reported that both approaches were effective in learners' acquisition of English vocabulary and *focus on forms* was claimed to be indispensable for L2 vocabulary learning. Norris and Ortega (2000) examined the effectiveness of L2 instruction by conducting a meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental studies. One of the research findings was that *focus on forms* and a *focus on form* instructions were equally effective in facilitating L2 learning.

In sum, mixed results about the effect of *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction have been identified. How Chinese EFL teachers perceive these two methods in grammar teaching is unclear and will be explored in this study.

### **2.3.2.3 The deductive and inductive approach**

Deductive and inductive grammar teaching are generally associated with explicit form-focused instruction. According to Thornbury (1999), a deductive approach begins with the teacher explicitly stating grammar rules or sentence patterns, which the learners then apply to practical use, while an inductive approach does not start with the explicit presentation of the rule, instead, learners are prompted in some way to discover the underlying patterns of the targeted structure and may possibly be required to formulate the rules that govern it. The deductive approach is most closely associated with the grammar-translation method of teaching languages, while the inductive approach is linked to the audio-lingual method, where grammar rules and structures are not explicitly stated but are induced from carefully selected examples or practices in specific situations.

Which approach is more effective in facilitating the learning of L2 language is contentious (Ellis, 2006). Empirical research investigating the relative effectiveness of deductive and inductive approaches to explicit grammar instruction has produced contrasting results. Some studies reported that the inductive approach led to higher gains in learning than did deductive instruction. For example, in a study on 26 university students learning French in an American university, Herron and Tomasello (1992) concluded that an inductive approach was more effective than a deductive approach. Other studies have showed that deductive instruction was more effective. For instance, in a study of New Zealand secondary students learning direct object pronouns in French as a Second Language by isolated grammar instruction, Erlam (2003) revealed a significant advantage for a group taught through deductive instruction over a group taught by inductive instruction.

By the same token, DeKeyser (1995) undertook a computerized experiment with a miniature linguistic system, which included five morphological rules and a lexicon of 98 words with 61 university students in America to compare the effectiveness of explicit-deductive learning and implicit-inductive learning. The study reported that explicit teaching of rules was superior to having students induce the rules for themselves. Robinson (1996) replicated DeKeyser's study in an experiment with 104 adult learners of English as a second language who were randomly assigned to implicit, incidental, rule-search, or instructed computerized training conditions. He also found that students in the instructed computerized training condition outperformed those in the rule-search condition (Robinson, 1996).

In contrast, more studies found there were no significant differences between the effectiveness of these two types of instruction. For instance, Shaffer (1989), in a study on 319 students from three different high schools in America, reported no significant



differences in the relative effectiveness of an inductive and a deductive presentation either when difficult concepts are being learned or when the students are weak. Another example, Abraham (1985), in order to discover whether less rule-oriented grammar teaching might be more beneficial to the traditional deductive approach, studied 61 students in the high intermediate levels of Intensive English and Orientation Program at an American University. Teaching in this study was by two Computer-Assisted Instruction lessons. One took a traditional deductive approach; the other presented many examples of using participles in context without rules explained. The study uncovered no significant differences between two groups of students. Tammenga-Helmantel, Arends, and Canrinus (2014) argued that various approaches to grammar instruction should be adopted in teachers' practices, including deductive, inductive, implicit and incidental grammar instruction. Their quasi-experimental study aimed to compare the effectiveness of four kinds of grammar instruction, finding that they were all effective and it was difficult to judge which one was more effective.

To sum up, the relative effectiveness of the deductive approach and the inductive approach in language teaching is still inconclusive. Most studies examining this theme were conducted in America and New Zealand; however, no comparable studies were identified in an EFL context such as in China.

#### **2.3.2.4 Grammatical terminology**

The use of grammatical terminology in SLA and L2 grammar instruction is also a debatable issue. Some researchers support the use of grammatical terminology in L2 learning. For instance, Berman (1979) advocated a 'label' role for grammatical terminology in language learning, by saying "they [grammatical terms] represent a shortcut to all kinds of devious circumlocutions; they are useful as mnemonic devices and help students to categorize appropriately by fulfilling the classic function of

labelling or naming the elements and classes in question” (p. 295). Hutchinson (1987) argued that in order to talk about a language easily and clearly, learners needed to be familiar with the metalanguage of grammar. Metalanguage here refers to “the names of parts of speech, tenses, etc.” (p.14). Terminology here plays a role of “lubricant” in explaining grammatical knowledge to students by teachers. In the same vein, Faerch (1985) also stated that grammatical terminology played an important role in classroom discourse, enabling students to communicate well with teachers about language:

meta vocabulary [terminology] not only functions in connection with explicit FL knowledge used as a monitor in speech production but is also an important heuristic tool to be used for eliciting information about the FL from professionals who have this knowledge available-FL teachers.( Faerch,1985, p.190)

Faerch argues that terminology is not only useful in the expression of language knowledge but also enables teachers to absorb new knowledge from their peer professionals. Therefore, using terminology is essential and should be integrated into classroom teaching and learning. More recently, Schleppegrell (2013) reported on research in U.S. schools with a majority of English language learners, demonstrating how metalanguage can facilitate L2 development. Similarly, in a study to explore the effect of metalanguage on Iranian EFL university students’ grammar learning, Roshan and Elhami (2016) found that metalanguage facilitated learners to learn grammar points.

In contrast, other researchers cast their doubts on the use of terminology in L2 teaching, and present a range of reasons to avoid the use of grammatical terminology. Mitchell and Redmond (1993), for example, argued that since the aim of communicative teaching was to promote interaction in the target language, terminology was of little importance in the communicative classrooms. Likewise, Halliwell’s (1993) view is that if learners were encouraged to learn terminology, they might develop an ability to talk about the language rather than using it for communication. Sutton (1976)

also stated that no evidence showed that terminology knowledge aided a learner to become a good writer, listener, reader or speaker. He used an analogy that “one can’t become a first rate driver unless he knows the names of all of the parts of an automobile engine” (p.40) to compare the relationship between teaching terminology and learners’ outcome. Similarly, Garrett (1986) argued that knowing grammatical terminology by itself did not promote students’ language proficiency based on two reasons: one was even the most familiar terms could be seriously misleading when used to explain grammar structures or rules. He gave an example that the verb forms labelled “imperfect” and “present perfect” were conventionally said to represent different tenses, but in fact they signified aspect; the other was grammatical terminology could not, of itself, evoke students’ understanding of the processing which led to the production of a grammatical structure. Native speakers of any language encoded and decoded language so automatically and fast because they had no constraints on connecting the meaning and the form of grammatical terminology. The basic associations of meaning and form were established in their mind in early childhood and were taken for granted. However, these terms were learned as a second or foreign language much later by non-native speakers who were not familiar with the actual processing at all in an analytic framework. Therefore, they needed to make a connection between their native language structure and a foreign language structure in order to know the meaning of grammatical terminology.

Though the use of grammatical terminology is still inconclusive, it is essential to know how Chinese EFL teachers perceive the role of grammatical terminology in their grammar teaching.

### **2.3.2.5 Error Correction**

Error correction is an important theme in explicit form-focused instruction (FFI). The efficacy of error-correction has been an area of much controversy in second or foreign language teaching. Up to now, the effectiveness of error correction in second language teaching is still inconclusive.

Some researchers stated that error correction is not effective. In a meta-analysis of research on grammar correction, Truscott (1996) argued strongly that grammar correction in L2 writing classes should be abandoned for the following reasons. Firstly, numerous studies show it to be ineffective; Secondly, one can never expect it to be effective for both theoretical and practical reasons; and finally, it has harmful effects on writing.

However, in a rebuttal to Truscott, Ferris (1999), after examining the research evidence Truscott used to support his conclusions, argued that it was premature to assert that “grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned” (p.328). She concluded that there were at least three important reasons for using error correction practices in L2 writing before it was proven to be ineffective or harmful. She asserted it was too early for a conclusive agreement to make grammar instruction in second language teaching or not. Meanwhile, numerous studies have showed that error correction facilitates grammar instruction. Jean and Simard (2011), for example, in investigating second language high school students and teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about grammar instruction, in Canada, found both students and teachers perceived grammar instruction as necessary and important in language acquisition. The majority of teachers in the study believed that grammatical errors should be always corrected in students’ written work, but oral errors were corrected dependent on whether they interfered with communication. Likewise, Moini (2009) examined non-

native EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar and teaching grammar in an Iranian high school via a questionnaire survey and found that most teachers acknowledged the importance of error correction in grammar teaching, especially in students' writing. Similarly, Schulz (2001) in a study in Colombia and America observed that error correction was favoured by both students and teachers of both two countries.

In addition to the controversy over the efficacy of error correction, the issue of who should provide feedback to students' errors is also unresolved. Research on teacher corrective feedback suggests that learners hope that teachers can give corrective feedback when they make errors (Ellis, 2009; S. Li, 2010). However, due to the complexity and large numbers of language learners in second language classrooms, language researchers and teachers have cast their doubts on this assumption. Peer feedback is now considered an alternative to teachers' feedback (Hu, 2005b; Hu & Lam, 2010). A number of researchers have investigated the effect of peer feedback in students' writings in different sociocultural environments (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Rollinson, 2005; Sato, 2013). Studies looking at whether peer feedback was effective for students in language learning have developed rapidly. For example, Sato (2013) investigated L2 learners' beliefs regarding peer interaction and peer corrective feedback as well when investigating the feasibility of a second language intervention. In a study to examine whether peer review was regarded as an effective pedagogical activity for Chinese adult students in L2 academic writing at a Singaporean university, Hu and Lam (2010) reported a significant improvement in the revised drafts associated with peer feedback. There was a general acceptance of peer review as an appropriate instructional activity among Chinese students. Zhao (2010) reported that students used both teacher feedback and peer feedback in their revised draft of writings but that students used more teacher feedback than peer feedback. M. Yang, Badger and Yu

(2006) also explored Chinese students' beliefs about teacher feedback and peer feedback in L2 writing class. The research found that students used both teacher feedback and peer feedback to improve their writing but teacher feedback was more likely to be adopted. Rollinson (2005) concluded that peer feedback activities could be fully realized after students were well trained and classroom was adequately set-up. The studies regarding corrective feedback including teacher feedback and peer feedback have mostly focused on students' beliefs. How teachers perceive the role of them is not sufficient explored.

In sum, since the role of error correction in L2 teaching and learning and the role of teacher feedback and peer feedback is inconclusive, it would be beneficial to investigate how Chinese EFL teachers value error correction and perceive the role of teacher feedback and peer feedback.

#### **2.3.2.6 Drilling**

Drilling, a technique or tactic used in foreign language classrooms for many years, aims to internalize grammatical structures or sentence patterns by repeating until they are memorized. Initially, drilling is a pedagogical method used in the audio-lingual method to language teaching with an emphasis on repeating structural patterns through oral practice in mechanical ways. Drilling means listening to a model, provided by the teacher, or a tape or another student, and repeating what is heard. The assumption of drilling is that students are able to acquire language items after repetition of them. Later, drilling evolved into any practice in language teaching classrooms which uses specific language items in a controlled manner (Harmer, 2007). In this study, drilling is defined as an instructional strategy used when teachers introduce new language items to their students, to practice items in discrete sentences or in a real communicative context.

Drilling is widely used for teaching and learning new grammatical points to get students to master these grammar points and apply them into their own production outputs. For example, Farrell and Lim (2005) reported on a case study that compared the beliefs and actual classroom practices in regard to grammar teaching of two experienced English language teachers in a Singaporean primary school. When interviewed about the role of drilling in grammar teaching, both teachers said that drilling was an important tool because drilling enabled students to avoid grammar mistakes in their writing. Teik (2011) also investigated pre-service teachers' beliefs about the teaching and learning of grammar in Singapore after a new English Language Syllabus was implemented in 2010. More than a half of the questionnaire respondents responded that students' drilling in the patterns of grammars usage helped them remember the rules. How Chinese EFL teachers at the tertiary level consider the role of drilling in their grammar teaching is unknown. This study addresses this issue.

### **2.3.3 Grammar instruction in China**

Grammar teaching at the tertiary level in Chinese universities has shifted from solely relying on explicit grammar instruction when influenced by grammar-translation method to integrating meaningful classroom activities into indirect grammar instruction nowadays due to the influence of CLT.

Under the influence of widespread SLA theories, such as the interface position, research on English grammar instruction in China has also focused on the way of teaching grammar, meaning-focused or form-focused. For example, Cheng (2013) emphasized that English grammar teaching in China should not only guarantee the correctness of grammar in language use but also focus on the meaning of grammatical structures in language use. Cheng disagreed that grammar should be taught only as the structure and form of the language but highlighted that grammar should be taught in

meaningful activities, giving students the ability to use grammatical rules and structures flexibly in the language practices. His opinion reflects the major goal of College English teaching stated in the *College English curriculum requirements* (MoE, 2007) and is aligned with the requirement of national economic development toward workforce. In order to make students achieve flexibility in using grammar in communicative activities, Wu (2010) initiated a new grammar teaching method which incorporated corpus into English grammar teaching in China. He pointed out a serious problem existing in traditional English grammar teaching that students were still not able to use grammatical structures in real English communications. This limitation discouraged students and undermined their enthusiasm to learn English grammar, whereas combining corpus into English grammar teaching enables students to get access to the usage of grammatical structures in different language contexts. Wu also aimed to develop students' communicative abilities of using English, not just memorizing abstract and static grammatical structures. Du (2009) also called for a combination of explicit grammar instruction and implicit grammar instruction in her study. She argued that Chinese EFL grammar instruction relied on explicit grammar instruction such as traditional grammar-translation method, and failed to foster students' communicative ability in English. In order to address the issue, she suggested that students should be more exposed to English language environments by using multimedia skills. Likewise, Gao (2007) advocated for grammar teaching to develop both students' communicative competence and language accuracy. There are also other similar studies demonstrating the importance of developing students' competence and language accuracy.

It is interesting to note that most of these studies were not empirical studies, and conclusions they drew that both students' competence and language accuracy should be highlighted in grammar instruction lacked sufficient evidence. What's more, the



conclusion they reached is mostly from the perspective of researchers, instead of a teacher perspective. How teachers in China perceive grammar instruction is not well documented. This study aims to address this gap with an empirical study exploring Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions about grammar instruction.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature around two key concepts, teachers' cognitions and grammar teaching. The literature uncovered the genesis and the evolvement of teacher cognitions. Several factors including teachers' schooling, teacher education, classroom experience, and contexts impacting language teachers' cognitions about their classroom instruction were examined. The relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices were subsequently discussed, with a result revealing that both consistency and inconsistency exist between them. Language teachers' cognitions in the field of L2 were finalized in the brief account about teachers' cognitions. In reviewing grammar teaching, several recurring themes in L2 grammar teaching came to the fore and how grammar teaching was dealt with in Chinese EFL teaching was reviewed briefly.

The literature review of two major themes indicates that two areas are well established and explored. However, little research has been conducted to examine Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, especially after a new national curriculum requirement was issued in 2007. This study aims to fill the research gap and also expand knowledge on teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching. The following chapter is going to delineate research methods used in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Chapter Overview

As I embarked on designing my research, I asked myself: what is research, and how should I undertake my research? According to Mertens (2010), research is a systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict and control an observed phenomenon. Research design is mainly concerned with the way an investigation can be processed. Creswell (2014) stated that researchers need to make explicit the philosophical ideas they hold in preparing a research plan. Bearing both Mertens and Creswell's ideas in mind, I am going to present the methodology and methods adopted to conduct this study in this chapter. It starts with presenting a research paradigm which governs the current study and expounds the rationale for using mixed methods in this study. A detailed description of research design is followed. Finally, the specific research methodology is described in more detail, including the participants, the instruments, how the data was collected and analysed, and the ethical issues associated with the research process.

#### 3.2 Research Paradigms

Paradigms, also known as worldviews, refer to the philosophical ideas that guide and frame studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1986). The importance attached to paradigms stems from Kuhn's (2012) influential book titled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In this book, he argued that paradigms existed within any given field, and competing paradigms might exist concurrently, especially within immature sciences. In the following paragraphs, I revisit the quantitative-qualitative debate which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s and introduce a new research paradigm which addresses the 'paradigm wars' between the quantitative and qualitative methods.

### **3.2.1 The positivist paradigm and the naturalist paradigm**

In the social and behavioural sciences, there have been several debates or “wars” on the superiority of two major social science paradigms in the last three decades of the 20th century (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rossi, 1994). Two paradigms, known as the positivist approach or the naturalist (or constructivist) approach, have been argued by many scholars from different theoretical perspectives and their personal experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Positivism underlies quantitative methods, while the constructivist paradigm advocates qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, paradigm wars between them are also called the qualitative-quantitative debate (Creswell, 2014). The debate has been over several important conceptual issues: the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship of knower to the known (epistemology), the role of values in inquiry, the possibility of casual linkages and the possibility of generalization. A contrast between their argumentations is shown in Table 3.1(see next page).

### **3.2.2 The quantitative method and the qualitative method**

The quantitative method supported by positivist paradigm is basically numeric in nature, comprising measurements, tabulations, ratings, and rankings (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). The ontological position of the quantitative method is that there is only one truth and an objective reality that exists independent of human perception. Epistemologically, the researcher and the unknown are independent entities. Hence, researchers are able to study a phenomenon without influencing it or being influenced by it. The goal of the quantitative method is usually to measure and analyse causal relationships between variables within a value-free framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In social sciences, quantitative research refers to a systematic empirical investigation of social phenomena

*Table 3.1 Contrasting Positivist and Naturalist Axioms (From Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 37)*

<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Naturalist</b>
The nature of reality (ontology)	Reality is single, tangible and fragmentable.	Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
The relationship of knower to the known (epistemology)	Knower and known are independent, a dualism.	Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.
The role of values in inquiry	Inquiry is value-free.	Inquiry is value-bound.
The possibility of causal linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects.	All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.
The possibility of generalization	Time- and context-free generalizations are possible.	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses are possible.

via statistical, mathematical or numerical data or computational techniques (Given, 2008). The process of measurement is central to quantitative research because it provides the fundamental connection between empirical observation and mathematical expression of quantitative relationships. In simple words, quantitative research means that researchers collect a sample of numerical data from participants to answer specific and narrow questions.

Quantitative researchers use a variety of well-defined research designs, including correlational survey, experimental and quasi-experimental (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Validity and reliability of quantitative research rely upon careful experiments, observations and instrument constructions such as surveys, questionnaires and other appropriate and standardized research tools (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). A benefit of quantitative research is that researchers can keep a distance from participants or the object of study so potential bias of researchers can be removed. Additionally, quantitative research findings, taking place in a time and value-free framework, can be

used to make generalisations or to test or validate hypotheses or constructed theories. In spite of the advantages of using quantitative methods, quantitative research is also subject to criticisms from other approaches. In social sciences, quantitative research tends to define the universe in an objective and mechanistic way, neglecting the notion of subjectivity, individuality and moral responsibility. The universe should be regarded as a living organism rather than a machine.

By contrast, the qualitative method advocated by naturalist paradigms captures the qualities and attributes of the phenomena being investigated rather than measuring or counting (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Qualitative research is about exploring issues, understanding phenomena and answering questions by analysing unstructured data. In social science, qualitative researchers aim to reach an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and reasons that govern such behaviour. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, and when. Hence, smaller but focused samples are more often used than large samples. Ontologically speaking, qualitative research recognizes reality as multiple and constantly changing, socially and historically constructed. Epistemologically, knowledge claims are based on the meanings of individual experiences, inductively, in real contexts and there is no access to reality independent of our minds (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Qualitative research can provide rich data into human behaviour, which are based on participants' own meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, qualitative research often uses small and focused samples, which are not representative of a large group. So it is hard to make generalisations based on qualitative studies.

It might appear that the quantitative method and the qualitative method are incompatible in the above discussions about two types of methods. The former focuses on the importance of internal validity such as controlled settings, while the latter

heightens external validity such as natural settings. Due to their incompatible nature, paradigm wars, also known as quantitative-qualitative debates, have been fighting against each other. Guba and Lincoln (1994) have repeatedly highlighted the differences in ontology, epistemology, and axiology that exist among two paradigms, thus fuelling the paradigm wars. Smith (1983) stated the incompatibility thesis by saying “one searches for laws, and the other seeks understanding. These positions do not seem compatible” (p.12). However, it can be argued that their wars will never yield any significant result because the two paradigms each have their own advantage in their own methodological positions. For example, in the social science, quantitative methods have more advantages to measure the causal relationship between variables via statistical data within a large group; in contrast, qualitative research gains its strength in conducting an in-depth study to understand human behaviour and the reasons underlying this.

### **3.2.3 Pragmatism and mixed-methods approach**

As paradigm wars were still going on, some influential researchers found that the differences between the two paradigms were overdrawn, and began to challenge the incompatibility between the two (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). They stated that quantitative and qualitative methods are actually compatible, rather than incompatible. Ercikan and Roth (2006) argued against polarizing quantitative and qualitative methods as it is neither meaningful nor fruitful. They believed the two are compatible. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) argued that not all quantitative approaches are positivist and not all qualitative approaches are interpretative. They argued that methodological puritanism or polarization should give way to methodological pragmatism in addressing research questions. This leads to mixed methods research

gaining its popularity as the demise of the polarities and the support of the compatibility of two dominating paradigms (R. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed methods research has a range of definitions. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009), for example, stated that mixed methods research usually involves collecting, analysing and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study that investigates a phenomenon. Mixed methods research is premised on pragmatism, that is, it is essentially practical (Denscombe, 2008). Pragmatism has different argumentations with positivism and interpretivism in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Pragmatism argues that there may be both singular and multiple versions of the truth and reality, and they are shifting between subjective and objective, scientific and humanistic. Pragmatism is a practice-driven approach oriented to the solution of practical problems in the practical world. Epistemologically, pragmatism adopts a pluralist approach to research by drawing on both positivism and interpretive epistemologies and deems reality as both objective and socially constructed (R. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Methodologically, pragmatism suggests that how to answer research questions should be the most useful approach to investigation, so a combination of experiments, case studies, surveys or whatever enhances the quality of the research. Therefore, it is inevitable that mixed methods are used to effectively answer research questions. This does not mean that pragmatism is unprincipled, but it has its own rigid standards that mixed methods research must answer research questions and provide useful answers to questions (Denscombe, 2008).

### **3.3 Research Design**

After a brief investigation of three research paradigms and their underlying methodology and considering the theoretical framework used in the study, I decided to use mixed methods in my study. Before elucidating the rationale behind this study and

illustrating the specific methods used in this study, I revisit the research questions based on the literature review. The present research aims to contribute to the established research on language teachers' cognitions by exploring Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching. This study attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching?
2. Are there any significant differences in their cognitions about grammar teaching in terms of their ages, academic qualifications, years of teaching, and overseas experiences?
3. What are sources of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions?
4. What are the relationships between Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and their practices of grammar teaching?
5. What factors contribute to the incongruence between teachers' cognitions and their practices?

In order to answer these questions, the mixed-methods approach was adopted in this study. Firstly, a quantitative method was employed to elicit an overview of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching and to find out whether there were differences according to age, academic qualifications, teaching experience and overseas studying experiences. Teachers' cognitions are stored in their own minds implicitly, and are difficult to access. They can be expressed through self-reported instruments such as questionnaires (Borg, 2015). A range of studies have adopted questionnaires such as BALLI (Horwitz, 1985) and its adapted version (Tolosa, 2009) and other kinds of inventory (De Garcia, Reynolds, & Savignon, 1976) to elicit language teachers' cognitions. Therefore, in this study, a Likert-scale questionnaire was



administered to answer the first two research questions on the cognitions and practices that Chinese university EFL teachers report about grammar teaching and whether there are significant differences in terms of their age, academic qualifications, teaching experiences and overseas studying experience.

Secondly, a qualitative method was used to explore teachers' deep beliefs about grammar teaching, especially their beliefs related to interactive environments. It is known that teaching and learning coexist in a complex environment where teachers need to make judgements and decisions according to their own prior learning experience and their interactions with students and other environmental factors (Borg, 2015). Teachers' cognitions can be elicited through studying their interactions with the outside world, including their students, classroom environments and institution administrators. To elicit teachers' cognitions made in specific environments and their reported practices in the classroom teaching, a close-ended question item was included in the questionnaire together with semi-structured interviews.

Thirdly, combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study develops a way of triangulation. Triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Denzin (1970) identified four basic types of triangulation, one of which is methodological triangulation involving more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and field documents. Triangulation is a powerful technique that improves the validity and reliability of the research (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Finally, there are multiple benefits for using both a quantitative method and a qualitative method in a single study based on the underlying theories of mixed-methods approach. Mixed-methods research has gained its popularity recently, because of its

integration of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative method is exploratory, involving observing and questioning, which aims to describe events or persons and know more in depth. A quantitative method exerts its strength on generalising population and examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research endeavours to make a deep and holistic view of the event or phenomenon from an emic perspective while quantitative research attempts to measure how variables influence each other and the final result. Mixed methods research which integrates qualitative methods and quantitative methods, aims to include both of their strengths, making research findings more complete and representative compared to using a single method. Therefore, mixed methods, emphasized by pragmatism, were adopted to obtain more data to answer research questions (Creswell, 2014). Briefly, mixed methods are able to acquire an optimal response to research questions.

### **3.4 Methodology**

As noted in the preceding section, a mixed-methods approach was utilized to try to answer the research questions of this study. Based on this approach, a multifaceted research design was applied. In order to reveal different dimensions of cognitions that teachers hold and the instructional practices they implemented in the classrooms, this study investigated teachers' cognitions and their instructional practices through a triangulation of data collection methods including a questionnaire-based survey, interviews, and classroom observations systematically and originally in a natural context (Chinese universities EFL classrooms).

The data collection method used in this study echoes many researchers' contention that when selecting methods for data collection and seeking explanations for the patterns of teacher cognitions, researchers have to apply a variety of techniques

(Borg, 2015; Pajares, 1992; Rokeach, 1968). Pajares (1992) acknowledged the value of questionnaires for uncovering cognitions of teachers, but pointed out that a questionnaire was not sufficient for researchers to explore people’s cognitions thoroughly. He suggested that questionnaires should be supplemented with additional measures such as open-ended interviews and observations of behaviour if more accurate inferences were to be acquired. Rokeach (1968) also stated that people’s cognitions must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do. If a diversity of instruments such as questionnaires, interviews and observations was used, the research result would be more complete. This study followed these guidelines and included all of these methods. The combination of methods was also a consideration of the number of teachers targeted, the geographical distribution of teachers and the time that teachers can spare. Based on above discussions, this study was designed in two distinct but complementary phases. In the first phase, a general understanding about Chinese university English teachers’ cognitions about grammar teaching was explored via a large scale questionnaire survey. In the second phase, an in-depth study was conducted to seek deep knowledge of teachers’ cognitions and practices about grammar teaching with ten teachers selected from respondents to the questionnaire made in phase one. Data were gathered and triangulated using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews. The two-phase design is presented below.

*Table 3.2 Two Phases of this Research and the Participants*

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Participants</b>
1	Questionnaires	Chinese EFL teachers in the universities of one northern province
	Semi-structured interviews	Ten teachers
2	Class observations Stimulated recall interviews	

Two phases are elucidated as follows:

1. Phase one: Elicit Chinese University English teachers' cognitions and practices by the application of Teacher Cognition Questionnaire.
2. Phase two is subdivided into 3 steps:
  - 1) Make semi-structured interviews for participating Chinese university English teachers to find out their in-depth cognitions about grammar teaching, apart from what they have answered on Teachers' Cognitions Questionnaire.
  - 2) Attend and observe participating teachers' English classes to find out what they actually do in their classes when they teach grammar.
  - 3) Make stimulated-recall interviews to participating teachers for identifying how and why they make particular class decisions like that at a certain time.

The subsequent paragraphs give much detail about research design, including participants, instrument, data collection and data analysis procedures in two phases.

### **3.4.1 Phase One: Questionnaire**

#### **3.4.1.1 Participants**

There are approximately 1, 200 public higher education institutions in China (MoE, 2014). Purposive sampling was used to select universities of one province from which participants would be selected. EFL level in the universities of this province ranges from advanced to lower. I used to work in this province and am familiar with the tertiary education there which also facilitates my data collection. Furthermore, the number of 27 universities or colleges in this province was a manageable number for me. Finally, only 25 universities were targeted based on the following criteria. Firstly, they were public universities and colleges. Public universities are funded by public means through

a national or subnational government (such as province or state government), as opposed to private universities; private universities account for only six percent of students' enrolment in China. Secondly, universities and colleges were not newly-founded and were supposed to have four years teaching experience which entitles them to offer bachelor degrees. Finally, universities and colleges had no army or police background. In China, several universities were opened specifically for training army and police talents. Since those universities attached great importance to safety of confidential information, they were hard to access. Based on these criteria, 25 universities were included in the first phase of this study. Their College English Department deans were contacted to seek their approval for their department teachers to be invited to participate in this study.

As a result, 20 universities (80 percent of the universities and colleges), located in different cities of this province, gave approval to get access to their teachers. Using emails and QQ numbers (a communicative tool similar to Skype), 864 potential participants were invited to answer the online questionnaire. They were informed that there was no obligation to accept. The online questionnaire was completed by 180 teachers, 20.8% of those invited to participate, thus providing a satisfactory sample (Dörnyei, 2010).

Additionally, to supplement the number of participating teachers, a paper-based questionnaire was offered to those who indicated they preferred the traditional paper questionnaire to an online survey. A hard-copy questionnaire was given to 210 teachers in three universities in one city of the province during a weekly department meeting. The questionnaires were collected immediately following completion with 134 teachers (63.8%) returning their hard-copy questionnaires. In total, 314 responses were collected (36% of the potential sample) and their demographic information, including their age,

gender, academic qualifications, teaching experiences, overseas studying experience, is displayed in Table 3.3.

*Table 3.3 Participants Completing the Questionnaire*

<b>Background category</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	70	22.3
	female	238	75.8
<b>Age</b>	20-25	10	3.2
	26-30	40	12.7
	31-35	176	56.1
	36-40	38	12.1
	41-45	36	11.5
	More than 45	14	4.4
<b>Academic qualifications</b>	Bachelor's degree	26	8.3
	Master's degree	272	86.6
	Doctor's degree	16	5.1
<b>Professional training</b>	Teachers' university	176	56.1
	Non-teachers' university	138	43.9
<b>Teaching experience</b>	Less than 5 years	64	20.4
	6-10 years	144	45.9
	11-15 years	58	18.5
	16 years and more	48	15.3
<b>Time spent in an English-speaking country</b>	No time spent	166	52.9
	Less than 6 months	56	17.8
	6-12 months(including 6 months and 12 months)	60	19.1
	More than one year	32	10.2
<b>Areas of learning English before university</b>	Rural area	98	31.2
	Urban area	152	48.4
	both rural and urban area	64	20.4

There were 314 participants who completed questionnaire. However, six participants did not indicate gender and four participants did not complete the questionnaire item in connection with areas of learning English before university. Their

data were deleted in the independent *t*-tests and ANOVA but were included in the descriptive statistics. This is because in computing means and standard deviations, participants' demographic information was not needed but was required in computing *t*-tests and ANOVA.

Among the 314 participants, there were 238 female participants (75.8%) and 70 male participants (22.7%). More than half the participants were aged from 31 to 35 (n=176, 56.1%). A small number of participants were aged from 20 to 25 (n=10, 3.2%) and more than 45 (n=14, 4.4%). There were similar numbers of participants in other three age ranges, 26 to 30 (n=40, 12.7%), 36 to 40 (n=38, 12.1%) and 41 to 45 (n=36, 11.5%). A greater number of participants received formal teachers' education programmes when they were undergraduates (n=176, 56.1%) than those who did not (n=138, 43.9%). The majority of participants had master degrees (n=272, 86.6%), and the others held bachelor degrees (n=26, 8.3%) and doctoral degrees (n=16, 5.1%). Nearly half of the participants had studied English in English speaking countries, but their time studying overseas differed. By contrast, more than half of participants had not had an opportunity to study overseas (n=166, 52.9%). Almost half of participants had six to ten years teaching experience (n=144, 45.9%), about one third participants had had more than 10 years teaching experience (n=106), and approximately one fifth participants (n=64, 20.4%) had taught College English less than 5 years. Finally, nearly half the participants had studied English in urban areas (n=152, 48.4%), almost one-third in rural areas (n=98, 31.2 %) and one-fifth had studied in both rural and urban areas (n=60, 20.1%).

The profiles of participants generally reflect the distribution of University English teachers across the whole country. Firstly, there are more female teachers than male participating in this research, reflecting gender imbalance in the workforce of language

teaching in China (Chen & Wu, 2011). This might be attributed to the fact that many pre-service female students opt for language teaching including English as their majors when they are enrolled as university undergraduates, whereas male students display their preferences on other subjects, such as science, engineering, and electronics. Male students do not show much interest in learning linguistics, let alone choosing it as a major, which they might need to work in for a lifetime.

Secondly, there are more teachers aged 31 to 35 or having 6 to 10 years teaching experience in the age distribution of participants, which is consistent with the whole country. Chinese universities had to recruit a large number of teachers to deal with the increase in numbers of university students due to the expansion of Chinese universities starting in 1999 (Wan, 2006). As a result, numerous young teachers were incorporated in the teaching teams of university teachers, including teachers of English, a large number of whom were young graduates. The demand for university English teachers was not satisfied until the enlargement of university students almost came to an end and kept a steady pace from 2012 onward (Hayhoe, Lin, & Zha, 2011; Wan, 2006; Zhongguo jiao yu guo ji jiao liu xie hui, 2008). Therefore, thousands of eligible university teachers were recruited during this period. Most were around 30 years of age. That's why there were many teachers aged from 31 to 35 who participated into this study.

Thirdly, most participants held master degrees and higher, reflecting university English teachers' academic qualifications throughout the whole country. Owing to an increasing number graduating with master degrees in China, with many receiving their master degrees and higher overseas, the job market for English teachers' has become extraordinarily competitive. Only those with master degrees and above have a chance of obtaining a job in a university (Zhongguo jiao yu guo ji jiao liu xie hui, 2008).



Meanwhile, since many Chinese universities push their veteran teachers without postgraduate degrees to extend their academic qualifications, many veteran teachers have pursued their master degrees willingly or unwillingly. These points explain that why there are nearly 90% teachers holding master degrees or doctoral degrees in this research.

Finally, university English teachers have various chances to advance their study in overseas countries. English teachers further their study abroad with three sources of funding (Zhongguo jiao yu guo ji jiao liu xie hui, 2008). One is self-funding; many well-off teachers choose to study abroad either as visiting scholars or to obtain their postgraduate degrees by self-funding. Another is university support. Many Chinese universities or departments have programmes of cooperation with overseas universities, most of which are in English-speaking countries. Through one of the cooperation programs, Chinese universities regularly select several excellent teachers to receive professional training in foreign universities where Chinese teachers are accorded the chances of improving their language skills and developing their research expertise. A third way is sponsorship by the Chinese government for university teachers to pursue their overseas study. In 1996, the Chinese government set up a specialized institution named China Scholarship Council (CSC), responsible for selecting Chinese university teachers to study abroad and providing them with financial assistance (Huang, 2003). According to the statistics released by CSC, there are 32,500 Chinese who are awarded scholarship either for being academic visitors or pursuing their master or doctoral degrees per annum (CSC, 2016).

#### **3.4.1.2 Data collection**

Phase One was designed to seek a general understanding about Chinese University English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching by conducting a

questionnaire-based survey with reference to several themes. It was also intended to explore the sources of Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions. The data collected were used to look at whether there are significant differences between teachers of different ages, academic qualifications, teaching experiences, overseas studying experiences. Using a questionnaire has several advantages in research. It is applicable to measure a large number of inquiries effectively within a short time and at low cost. It is supposed to be a least threatening tool, when applied under conditions of confidentiality, and therefore, more participants are engaged to participate in the research (Brown, 2001). Compared to face to face methods, a questionnaire gives respondents sufficient time to consider questions, enabling them to give more reliable and sensible answers to these questions. It can be administered to respondents in different locations by using mail, email, telephone or website.

On the other hand, a questionnaire is not a perfect tool for collecting data and has a number of disadvantages (Dörnyei, 2010). One is that respondents are not able to clarify and expand the issues, which possibly results in their inaccurate responses. Another is that most questionnaire items are pre-set and restrict respondents from giving further explanations or replying about the issues, which possibly lowers respondents' motivation. Besides, respondents read differently into question items and their responses are based on their own interpretations and so misinterpret the question items. Finally, respondents may choose replies that appear socially desirable.

In spite of the imitations noted, a questionnaire has been a useful tool to explore language teachers' cognitions and possibly continues to be a valuable one to elicit teachers' cognitions. Borg (2015) stated that questionnaires had been extensively used in investigating teachers' and students' beliefs in a series of studies and would continue to be involved in the research of language teacher cognition. In the case of this study, a

questionnaire was administered to explore Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in a province of China. Due to a wide geographical distribution and a large number of potential participants involved in this phase an online questionnaire was adopted. A web-based questionnaire was used as it provided easy access for participants and can be completed online without much effort and inconvenience. Instructions for completion were stated at the beginning of the questionnaire.

### **3.4.1.3 Instrument**

#### ***Development of the questionnaire***

The questionnaire used in this study named Teachers' Cognitions Questionnaire (TCQ, see Appendix A) was a cluster of questions primarily selected from two questionnaires, one is Andrews' questionnaire called *Beliefs about language, language learning and language teaching* (Andrews, 2003) and the other is from a PhD thesis (Lívia, 2006). The principal aim of Andrews' questionnaire was to obtain an overview of the beliefs and attitudes of a large sample of untrained graduate Hong Kong secondary school teachers of English about language and language learning. In this questionnaire, 43 items are related to teachers' cognitions about grammar and grammar pedagogy. Andrew categorized the items into six themes which were *focus on forms* instruction, focus on meaning instruction, the inductive approach, the deductive approach, the value of drilling and the importance of metalanguage (using grammatical terminology). Items related to five themes were included in the current questionnaire. The theme of focus on meaning instruction was not included because in formal education, instructional models solely focusing on meaning are rare (Graus & Coppen, 2016). In reality, focus on meaning instruction is usually superseded by *focus on form* instruction. The other items were selected from a questionnaire used by a PhD thesis with primary and

secondary school English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching (Livia, 2006). All 35 items were grouped into six themes and they were *focus on forms* instruction, *focus on form* instruction, the inductive approach, the deductive approach, the value of error correction, and the importance of the metalanguage.

The questionnaire for this research comprised 45 items with 18 items selected from Livia's, 25 items selected from Andrew's and 2 self-developed items. All 45 items were classified into seven themes: *focus on forms instruction*, *focus on form instruction*, a deductive approach to the teaching of grammar, an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar, using grammatical terminology, the value of correcting grammatical errors and drilling. I adapted some items because their vocabulary was not suitable for Chinese readers. For example, Chinese avoid using the absolute tone in their expressions; therefore, words like "all", and "always" are seldom used; therefore, all of words with absolute tone were deleted. Additionally, I also developed two items (42 and 43) which were based on examination of the literature on teachers' cognitions and second language grammar teaching.

Content validity for this survey was established through a review by a panel of experts, six University of Auckland TESOL lecturers, and a pilot test. The review panel experts were asked to examine the validity, clarity and suitability of the questionnaire. As a result, they gave me many constructive suggestions ranging from the format of the questionnaire to the wording of questionnaire items. Based on these suggestions, the questionnaire was slightly modified. These modifications contained putting column headings on each page, simplifying the introductory words at the beginning of the questionnaire, and correcting grammar mistakes of several questionnaire items.

After the modification of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 25 Chinese university English teachers who were either enrolled as PhD students or

visiting scholars in The University of Auckland. They completed the questionnaire and offered feedback on the questionnaire in terms of content, language and structure of the questionnaire, and its appropriateness for Chinese university teachers. For example, some teachers provided their feedback that some of the terms used in the questions, such as “consciousness-raising tasks” and “form-focused instruction”, were so formal and academic that not all participants would understand what they meant. Such terms were subsequently clarified. The pilot study resulted in the questionnaire being more appropriate for eliciting Chinese teachers’ cognitions about grammar teaching. The final instrument used in this study is described in the next paragraph.

### *Content and structure of the questionnaire*

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1 provided information about participants’ background, for example, age, gender, teaching experience, academic qualifications, and overseas studying experience. Section 2 was a 45-item TCQ designed to elicit responses to different statements about teaching grammar. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale. They could tick (✓) in a box according to their own understanding. The Likert-type scale is a widely used method of scale construction due to its simplicity, versatility, and reliability (Dörnyei, 2010). Participants were not required to judge the items but indicated to what extent they agree or disagree with the items in the questionnaire. Statements in TCQ were classified into seven themes investigating the cognitions teachers held about grammar teaching method. All items in the questionnaire are represented in Table 3.4.

The items were placed in a random order to assess whether respondents gave consistent answers to the themes. If their answers toward similar statements were very different, their questionnaires would not be included. Section 3 consisted of two

*Table 3.4 Themes of Questionnaire Items*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Items (45)</b>
focus on forms instruction	7,13,20,21,27,30
focus on form instruction	2,3,9,10,24,25,28,32,33
a deductive approach	1,4,5,6,18,29,38
an inductive approach	8,12,14,17,31,34,40
use of grammatical terminology	15, 22,23,26, 35,37,45
correction of grammatical errors	11,19,36,42, 43,44
use of drilling	16,39,41

multiple-choice questions. One question asked participants to identify how they implemented grammar teaching in their classrooms from a list provided or to note their own grammar teaching methods. This enables participants to describe their grammar teaching practices in the classrooms as explicitly as possible. The second multiple-choice question similarly identified the sources of teachers' cognitions.

#### **3.4.1.4 Data analysis**

The data collected through the questionnaire in Phase One were mainly quantitative data. The quantitative data represent the participants' responses to close-ended questions with five-point Likert scales. Raw data yielded by these questions were entered into a data base in the computer software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) 22.0 for Windows. Data were first screened for missing values. Participants who only answered the first section but didn't supply any information in the second and third sections were eliminated. Participants who only missed several responses (less than three) were still taken into account. These data were considered for a simple reason that in interviewing several teachers who missed the responses, most of them said they missed them because they could not rate them accurately at first glance and they wanted to come back later. Unfortunately, they forgot to come back to

those items after filling all the other items in the questionnaire. Consequently, their data were retained and scored as neutral.

Once the data were screened and got ready, statistical analyses were carried out on the data by a confirmatory factor analysis, the calculation of descriptive statistics and some inferential statistical analyses. A confirmatory factor analysis with the principal components method of extraction was used to test the consistency of the number and loadings with pre-established seven themes included in TCQ (See appendix A). Descriptive statistics including a variety of mathematical mean values, frequencies, and standard deviations were computed: means for overall teachers' cognitions, means for each of the seven broad groups, and means for the seven groups across the sample. Inferential statistics, either independent sample *t*-test or ANOVA, were used to find statistically significant relationships between teachers' backgrounds in the first section of the questionnaire and the cognition variables in the second section. There are two assumptions underlying the *t*-test and ANOVA (Brown, 1988). They are:

1. the scores in each group are normal distributed;
2. the variances for the scores of the two or more than two groups are equal.

The data yielded from the questionnaire met the above two requirements after calculation. And distribution was normalized. Therefore, either the *t*-test (two tailed) or ANOVA was used to test for significant differences between teachers' background, such as age, gender, academic qualifications, professional training, overseas study experience, academic experience and their English learning regions with their cognitions in relation to the seven thematic cognitions. The standard of  $p < 0.05$  was used to establish significance. In selecting statistical procedures and the standard "*p*" value, personal communication with an expert on statistics in the social sciences was conducted and research literature on the topic was consulted for guidelines.

### **3.4.1.5 Reliability and validity**

Several measures have been undertaken in the design of the questionnaire in order to enhance its validity and reliability. Firstly, efforts were made to get access to all target universities department dean. In this way, as many potential teachers as possible could be contacted. The final numbers of participating universities and teachers suggested that the sample could be considered representative of the population. The reliability of questionnaire, based on a previously employed instruments which had been validated, should not be controversial. Finally, the questionnaire was piloted to ensure its unbiasedness, clarity and suitability in content and structure for the population.

In order to measure internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above 0.7 (DeVellis, 2012). In calculating Cronbach alpha of the total scale and seven subscales, seven items were deleted because of their outlier data. These items are 23, 24, 25, 34, 36, 38, and 44. These items were not so consistent with the items in that category. If they were included in the calculation, the inter reliability of each subscale would be reduced and so were excluded from the final data analysis. The value of this questionnaire was fairly high, 0.91. Meanwhile, each subscale was also calculated and the values were all above 0.7. Since Cronbach alpha values are quite sensitive to the number of items in the scale (DeVellis, 2012), values of subscale were lower than the total scale. The final categories of items used in data analysis and their Cronbach alpha coefficient are presented in Table 3.5.

In order to validate the questionnaire, 45 items in this section were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using the principal component of extraction. The EFA was implemented to look at whether the number of factors and loadings on them was consistent with the pre-established seven categories in the questionnaire. The result



*Table 3.5 Questionnaire Themes and their Cronbach Alpha Values*

<b>Questionnaire themes</b>	<b>Items in questionnaire (38)</b>	<b>Cronbach alpha values</b>
focus on forms instruction	7,13,20,21,27,30	0.768
focus on form instruction	2,3,9,10,28,32,33	0.711
a deductive approach	1,4,5,6,18,29	0.738
an inductive approach	8,12,14,17,31 ,40	0.709
use of grammatical terminology	15, 22,26, 35,37,45	0.713
correction of grammatical errors	11,19,42, 43,	0.702
use of drilling	16,39,41	0.703
The total scale	all items	0.91

showed that seven items were inconsistent with the subscales they belonged to and were eliminated from the following data analysis. A principal component analysis based on a varimax rotation was then conducted on the remaining 38 scale items. A seven-factor structure was imposed, derived from the original scale. The yielded seven subscales and their contained items were consistent with the original scales and accounted for 48.429% of the variance (see Table 3.6). The factor analysis supports the construct validity of this section of the questionnaire.

### **3.4.2 Phase Two: In-depth study**

In Phase Two, an in-depth study was undertaken to investigate teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching and the relationship between them. A triangulation method which included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall was used to gather data. More information including participants, data collection and data analysis procedures in this phase is detailed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 3.6 Pattern/Structure Coefficients for Seven Themes

Item	Themes						
	forms	form	deductive	inductive	terminology	Drilling	Error correction
Q-20	0.514						
Q-7	0.498						
Q-27	0.426						
Q-13	0.424						
Q-30	0.355						
Q-21	0.345						
Q-9		0.430					
Q-32		0.418					
Q-10		0.416					
Q-2		0.404					
Q-3		0.384					
Q-33		0.363					
Q-28		0.335					
Q-5			0.594				
Q-6			0.574				
Q-18			0.563				
Q-1			0.429				
Q-4			0.409				
Q-29			0.393				
Q-17				0.560			
Q-8				0.523			
Q-14				0.493			
Q-31				0.475			
Q-40				0.470			
Q-12				0.419			
Q-37					0.568		
Q-45					0.537		
Q-35					0.528		
Q-15					0.500		
Q-26					0.487		
Q-22					0.372		
Q-19						0.520	
Q-42						0.520	
Q-43						0.464	
Q-11						0.423	
Q-16							0.563
Q-39							0.539
Q-41							0.501
Eigenvalue	6.123	3.503	2.412	2.086	1.496	1.425	1.357
% of variance explained	16.114%	9.217%	6.349%	5.490%	3.936%	3.751%	3.571%

### **3.4.2.1 Participants**

Sixty respondents who responded to the questionnaires in the first phase indicated that they were willing to participate in this phase by returning their consent forms to me. Given time constraints and cost limitation, a purposive sampling was adopted. Twelve teachers in the universities of two cities were selected randomly from those who gave their consent to participate in the second phase. They were then contacted and provided with documents including participant information sheet (see Appendix G) describing the research project, its purpose and procedures and a consent form (see Appendix J) requesting their consent to have the classes audio recorded. Teachers were also told that they were able to withdraw at any period of the study for any reasons. All twelve teachers agreed to be interviewed, but two teachers withdrew from the subsequent class observations because their students felt uncomfortable if they were observed by a stranger. Ten teachers completed the entire procedures of the second phase (see Table 3.7). Out of ten participants, six were females and the rest were males. Pseudonyms were used here in order to protect their confidentiality as stated in the ethics application form.

### **3.4.2.2 Data collection**

The data collected in this phase are qualitative, comprising semi-structured interviews with ten participants, class observations' records and stimulated recall accounts. More detail on collecting qualitative data is elaborated in the following sections.

#### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Interviews are frequently used in qualitative research. An interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to acquire facts or statements from the interviewees. Creswell (2012) points out that interview has

*Table 3.7 Ten Participants' Demographic Information in the Second Phase.*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Overseas study experience</b>	<b>Normal university (yes or no)</b>
Yang	Male	46	Master	10 years	12 months	Yes
Wei	Male	40	Bachelor	16 years	6 months	No
Liu	Male	35	Master	12 years	12 months	No
Fang	Female	33	Master	10 years	No	Yes
Yan	Female	33	Master	7 years	6 months	No
Hai	Female	32	Master	7 years	No	No
Chen	Female	34	Master	7 years	12 months	No
Hui	Female	32	Master	7 years	No	Yes
Ping	Female	32	Master	6 years	No	No
Bing	Female	28	Master	3 years	No	Yes

a great advantage in obtaining in-depth information and therefore has been frequently used in qualitative research. There are several benefits of using interviews in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Firstly, greater information can be elicited through the interview process than through questionnaires. The researchers can ask interviewees any questions that they are concerned about. Secondly, interviews enable the researcher to investigate reasons for unexpected or unusual answers to the questionnaire items. Face to face interviews allow researchers to raise any questions at any time during the process. Thirdly, interviews enable interviewees to explain their attitudes toward a particular question. Last but not least, interviewees can bring a fresh perspective to the topic under investigation, one which was not investigated by the questionnaire items. The interview is also a widely used strategy in the study of language teacher cognition (Borg, 2015).

Teachers' cognitions can be elicited by analysing teachers' remarks about their beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, practical theories and other similar mental constructs. Interviews includes three forms: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Borg, 2015). In a structured interview, interviewees are asked similar questions in a predetermined format. Emphasis tends to be on how interviewees respond to the questions that researchers are concerned with. Typically, the interviewer records interviewees' answers, which will be transcribed and coded according to researchers' purposes. A semi-structured interview is a kind of interview directed by some general themes rather than specific questions, in which interviewees can freely talk about their ideas toward the pre-set themes by researchers. A benefit of a semi-structured interview is that interviewers are able to control the procedure flexibly, and interviewees are encouraged to talk about these themes without diverting. A semi-structured interview is suitable for a study where a small number of respondents are interviewed in-depth and where a researcher aims to capture some elements from natural conversation. An unstructured interview, as opposed to a structured interview, refers to an interview in which questions are not pre-arranged, advocating a free flow in a natural conversation. In an unstructured interview, an interviewer is able to discover important information which does not seem relevant before the interview and ask the interviewee to go further into the new topic. It allows for the interviewer to build better rapport with the interviewee due to its similarity with a normal conversation. Compared to structured interview and non-structured interview, semi-structured interviews can better serve research purposes by encouraging respondents to talk about the themes with which research is concerned (Borg, 2015). The tacit and unobservable aspects of participants' mental lives can be explored through semi-structured interviews (Kagan, 1992).

Based on advantages of semi-structured interviews and research purposes of this study, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were adopted in this study. Ten teachers were selected from volunteers who expressed their willingness to continue participating in this study. The time and the place of interviews were chosen by teachers at their convenience. These places were usually their offices or Teachers' Lounge and interviews were scheduled on working days. The language used in interviews was primarily Mandarin although they were English teachers. Most teachers said that they felt restricted if using English to reveal their teaching opinions, and talking in Chinese was convenient for them to express their ideas toward grammar teaching. Some teachers occasionally used English to illustrate their opinions. Meanwhile, the interviewer focused on the interviewee's feelings, using "you" as the subject of the sentence to encourage the interviewees to give more information from their point of view. Before interviewing teachers, I invariably began with an approximate 30-minute talk with teachers, which was aimed to seek whether teachers understood several terms and theories used in my questions, such as *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction, the deductive and inductive approach. I undertook this step due to the experience learned in the pilot interviews. In the pilot interviews, I found that many teachers were unfamiliar with grammatical terminology such as *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction. Therefore, it is essential to give them some brief introduction about these concepts widely used in the field of ELT and SLA. The interviews confirmed that some teachers indeed had difficulty in understanding those terms. After I explained these terms to them, they began to absorb these words and connected them with their teaching. Teachers began to talk with me after comprehending these words.

The ten teachers were interviewed individually for approximately 50 minutes by me according to a list of pre-set questions (see Appendix B). They were also asked to

expand on their responses to the questionnaire items. With the permission of teachers, interviews were audio-recorded for further transcription and analysis. I also made notes in each interview in case some teachers' remarks were missing from audio recordings. For ethical reasons, teachers were informed about the purpose of the interview, their identities would not be disclosed to the third party, and that although their exact words would be used, the identity of the speaker would not be revealed. In doing so, participants participating in the study were encouraged to reveal their true thinking and ideas without anxiety and nervousness.

In summary, interviews in this study served several purposes. Firstly, they complemented the outcomes of the questionnaires by exploring issues in greater depth, for example, by finding out why participants answered the questionnaire in a way. The semi-structured interviews also were able to probe teachers' cognitions pertinent to the seven themes. The final purpose of using semi-structured interviews here was to gain insight into the factors which might influence teachers' instructional decisions in teaching grammar through discussion of their language learning experiences, teacher education careers and their classroom practices.

### ***Classroom observations***

A classroom observation is another way of acquiring teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching. Observations are widely used in social science research as a data collection strategy (Creswell, 2012). It is extensively used in language teacher cognition research as well (Borg, 2015). According to Borg (2015), language teacher cognition should be studied with reference to what happens in classrooms. Researchers, occasionally, need to understand teachers' pedagogical actions, not only focusing on teachers' thinking without taking their actions into consideration. Relying on classroom

observations, researchers are able to collect direct information from their own observations rather than participants' self-reported accounts (Dörnyei, 2007). Observational data can provide research opportunities to gather information in a real context, enabling researchers to understand the context of programmes, the information that participants' unconsciously miss or which they cannot express in their words.

Given the importance of classroom observations in examining teachers' cognitions and practices, and exploring their relationship as well, I decided to include classroom observations. Specifically, after revealing the purpose of classroom observations, I negotiated with ten teachers and asked them to nominate one session to be observed. Each was observed on how they implemented their grammar teaching in the natural setting of the classrooms within three months. The focus during classroom observations was on key instructional episodes in teachers' pedagogical actions about grammar teaching related to seven prioritized themes. Classroom observations were non-participatory and I audio recorded the whole session with a voice recorder. Field notes were made simultaneously to supplement the audio recordings.

In summary, there were two main purposes for me to use classroom observations. One was that the data gained from classroom observations and interviews could confirm or complement the data from the questionnaire, thus forming triangulation, to improve the internal validity of the results. The other purpose was to look at exactly how teachers implement their grammar teaching in the classroom. They might strictly follow their cognitions or not when undertaking grammar teaching. The underlying reasons for the congruence or incongruence were explored in post-class stimulated recall interviews. It is worthwhile to note that one of the problems related to observations could be summed up in what Allwright and Bailey (1991) described as "the observer's paradox" (p. 70). This refers to the phenomenon that the presence of tapes, audios and observers might



change the behaviour observed, leading to the contamination of data. In order to minimize the negative influence of digital audios in the classroom, a statement was made in front of observed students and teachers alike beforehand, saying that recording classroom observations only served a research purpose, and their identities would be protected and kept confidential. Despite the problems of using classroom observations as it is time-consuming and obtaining ethical approval from the concerned people is difficult, observation has become an increasingly common data collection strategy in language teacher cognition research (Borg, 2015).

### ***Stimulated recall***

Classroom observations tend to be not the sole data collection strategy employed in language studies as they are insufficient as a means of gathering data in depth and guaranteeing the validity of the inferences made (Duff, 2008). Consequently, verbal commentaries such as stimulated-recall interviews usually complement observations. Stimulated recall is applied to study teachers' decision-making at a particular time in the classroom. According to Calderhead (1981), a stimulated recall usually involves the use of videotapes or audiotapes of participants' behaviour, which are used later as a prompt to aid participants' to reflect on their thought processes at the time of their behaviour. This form of interview generates verbal commentaries about cognitions occurring during previously performed behaviours by using a stimulus. Teachers cannot express their thinking concurrently with their teaching, hence, retrospective verbal accounts are required to explore their inner thoughts when they make interactive decision making.

Stimulated recall is deemed an effective way of acquiring these accounts and has been described as the major source of data for interactive thought (Clark & Peterson, 1986). From the 1970s onwards, stimulated recall has been widely applied to the study

of teachers' interactive decision-making (Borg, 2015). For example, a researcher used stimulated recall to investigate the miscommunications in interactions between first and second language speakers of English in a New Zealand university (Barnard & Burns, 2012). Typically, either video or audio recordings are taken by researchers in their observations, which are then used in the interviewing process (Moreland & Cowie, 2007). A good point of using a stimulated recall is that the data allows participants to explain their decision-making and retrieve their thinking with the help of a stimulus—either video recordings or audio recording (Mackey & Gass, 2013).

Stimulated recall interviews were used in this study to elicit teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching and identify reasons which contributed to the incongruence between their cognitions and practices. In this study, shortly following the observations, the same ten teachers were interviewed again. Interviews took a form of stimulated-recall interviews that gave teachers opportunities to recall their covert and implicit mental activities that accompanied their explicit behaviour (Gass & Mackey, 2013). Teachers were also requested to reflect on their teaching activities which had been observed by me in their classes. In addition, they were asked to explain general approaches to grammatical issues which had been recorded in field notes made by me. They were also asked to clarify what influenced their classroom decisions on grammar teaching and the factors which contributed to a match or mismatch between their responses in the questionnaire and their actual practices.

Therefore, stimulated recall here served two purposes: One was to explore teachers' cognitions when they make classroom decisions about grammar teaching; the other was to find out the reasons why their cognitions revealed in the questionnaires and interviews matched or mismatched their actual classroom teaching.

### **3.4.2.3 Data analysis**

In this phase, data were mainly generated by a triangulation of methods including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall, which generated qualitative data. According to Creswell (2012), there are six steps in analysing and interpreting qualitative data: Collecting data, preparing data for analysis, reading through data, coding data, coding the text for description to be used in the research report and coding the text for themes to be used in the research report. I followed this principle for data analysis in this phase. To be specific, once data were collected successfully, a preparation for data analysis was made. First, all interviews and audio documents (including those made in interviews, classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews) were fully transcribed and later, translated into English versions verbatim by myself. All English versions were then returned to ten teachers seeking their suggestions on whether transcribed ideas reflected their ideas genuinely or not. Most teachers commented on my translation and provided their feedback on the English versions. After several rounds of revision of English versions, the final version was ready to be coded. Then, data from all the instruments were manually analysed. They were coded deductively by using the seven categories of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching specified in the questionnaire. A bottom-up open-coding approach (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) was adopted. Appendix K, L and M shows several samples of coding each of the instruments to illustrate all coding procedures in this study. Formal coding commenced with reading through the transcripts. When I was reading the transcripts, sensitive parts such as key words, phrases, and sentences were highlighted, and notes were also made on the margin, which guided me to seek teachers' pedagogical ideas about a particular topic. The aim of this initial reading and coding was to elicit ideas of the themes emerged in the data. Following the initial reading and

coding, line-by-line coding was adopted in order to find more relevant ideas. As suggested by Charmaz (2006), line-by-line coding not only ensured themes grounded in the data, but helped avoid missing important themes. Finally, useful ideas were identified and sorted out in the files.

#### **3.4.2.4 Reliability and validity**

In order to ensure reliability and validity, several aspects were particularly highlighted here. First, participant teachers had options of choosing the language they used in the interview. Most teachers had a preference for their first language-Mandarin, and several ones combined English with Mandarin. They believed that if they were asked to use English, they were not able to consistently describe their inner thoughts with proper English words and had difficulty to speak out all their thoughts. Using their first language, teachers had no difficulty in expressing their ideas and so avoided misunderstandings. Second, stimulated recall interviews were conducted once classroom observations were completed. Stimulated recall interviews were done immediately with the teachers in case they forgot their cognitions if some time elapsed. Each teacher was requested to fix a time for the classroom observation and stimulated recall immediately after the classroom observation. Third, the translated English transcripts were sent to all ten teachers to seek their feedback on the transcripts. Teachers also were able to add explanations to transcripts. One teacher made minor corrections on the transcription. Checking transcripts are of paramount importance because the researcher “is accurately portraying the meaning attached by the participants to the events and the degree to which the participants’ viewpoints, thoughts and experiences were accurately understood and portrayed” (Louis, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.112). Last but not the least, information from different sources such as interviews and classroom observations, were triangulated. There were several forms

of triangulation in this study. First, there was a triangulation in the data sources. A triangulation of data sources allows answers to research questions from multiple perspectives. For example, factors shaping teachers' cognitions and practices could be indicated through their responses in the interview and classroom observation, and complement their answers on the questionnaire. The second form of triangulation was achieved by several data collection methods so as to enhance the accuracy of the information. Finally, a triangulation of data types was completed. Both quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered in order to answer the research questions to the utmost.

### **3.5 Ethical consideration**

This research has been approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee whose reference number is 9809. Researchers have to draw participants' attention to the ethical issues embedded into the study and protect the rights and interests of all participants. In the following, I will describe the measures I took to ensure the integrity of the study.

- Minimize the impact of my intrusion in teachers' classroom teaching. In the classroom observation, in order not to distract students' attention, I did not use a camera to video-record the classroom teaching but employed a compact voice recorder to audio teachers' instruction. Meanwhile, I was sensitive to the possible impact of my involvement in influencing teachers' routine teaching. For achieving this purpose, interviews and classroom observations were scheduled beforehand. I also did not ask teachers to nominate more sessions for my classroom observation.
- Respect and protect participants' anonymity rights and confidentiality. Participants' pseudonyms were used in this study to protect their anonymity

rights. Some researchers might say the mere use of pseudonyms will not protect participants' identities completely (Dörnyei, 2007; Duff, 2008). The more description about participants required in the research possibly enables their identities obvious to the people around them. However, in a large province with more than 20 universities and almost 1000 University English teachers, it is difficult for other people including their close friends and colleges to identify them according to limited background knowledge disclosed in the study. Therefore, their identities can be protected in this study. Meanwhile, confidentiality is also an important concern in this study. All data gathered in this study were kept and remained confidential, so that readers have difficulty in recognizing participants through their data.

- Obtain participants' informed consent. In order to gain informed consent from participants, Participation Information Sheet (See Appendix E, F and G) and Consent Form (See Appendix H, I and J) were issued to them which outlined clearly what would be involved in the study and what would be expected from them. In this way, participants' rights are safeguarded and their documented and formal consent are gained as well.

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter described and justified the research approach used in this study to investigate teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching for English language in Chinese university classrooms. A mixed-method approach was adopted: a triangulation of methods including questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and stimulated recall were utilized to gather data. Information on and justification of these approaches, including the participants, data collection, data

analysis and ethical consideration was also presented. In the next two chapters, research findings based on both the questionnaire study and the in-depth study will be reported.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### 4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter reports the results of the questionnaire conducted to investigate Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and their self-reported practices about grammar teaching, and the sources of their cognitions in a province of China. It starts with providing an overview of Chinese teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching through descriptive statistics. Statistical analyses, including *t*-tests and ANOVA, were calculated to look at whether there were significant differences in teachers' cognitions according to their characteristics, demographics and experiences. Sources of teachers' cognitions were explored by calculating participants' responses toward a questionnaire item, followed by teachers' self-reported practices of their grammar teaching. A comparison is made subsequently between teachers' cognitions and their self-reported practices. Finally, a summary is briefly presented.

#### 4.2 Teacher Cognitions about Grammar Teaching

##### 4.2.1 An overview of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching

In order to obtain a general view of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, the descriptive statistics of seven thematic cognitions were computed in Table 4.1.

As can be seen from the Table 4.1, the means of *focus on forms* (2.87) and error correction (2.98) are lower, below 3, suggesting that most teachers do not believe that traditional grammar teaching methods, with a sole focus on the accuracy of language, are important in their English teaching classrooms. By contrast, it appears that most



teachers largely have strong beliefs in the *focus on form* (3.93) instruction, whose item mean is high. It would appear that most teachers accept the importance of learning a language in a communicative context rather than relying on the traditional grammar teaching methods such as grammar-translation instruction, in which grammar is taught in discrete and decontextualized sentences. Teachers perceived that they ought to highlight the importance of fostering university students' communicative competence, instead of fixing students' attention on their grammar accuracy invariably.

*Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Seven Themes of Teachers' Cognitions*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Item mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>
Forms	6	17.19	2.87	3.83
Form	7	27.50	3.93	3.51
Deductive	6	21.57	3.60	3.43
Inductive	6	22.49	3.75	2.99
Terminology	6	18.42	3.07	3.46
Error correction	4	11.92	2.98	2.57
Drilling	3	11.08	3.69	1.56

The value of deductive and inductive teaching approaches is rated similarly, 3.60 and 3.75 respectively, both above 3.0. This suggests that teachers have no preference for one or other of the two approaches and think both approaches should be adopted in grammar teaching. As for other two thematic cognitions, drilling is deemed as important by teachers, with a relative high item mean (3.69). It seems teachers generally consider that it is important to practice grammar points if students want to internalize them. In contrast, teachers do not appear to perceive using terminology (3.07) as important for teaching grammar in the classroom. While teachers have a favourable attitude to using terminology, it is not as strong as their attitudes toward drilling when instructing students to learn grammar.

With specific reference to error correction, two items, 42 and 43, were designed to elicit teachers' cognitions about whether they agree with error correction of their writing and of their speaking. The responses toward two items were that 61.5 % of the participants (including strongly agree) agreed that it was important to correct students' errors in their written work, whereas 53% of the participants (including strongly disagree) disagreed that it was important to correct students' errors in their oral work. This suggests that teachers perceived it important to correct students' error in their written work rather than in their oral work.

#### **4.2.2 Teachers' background and their cognitions about grammar teaching**

The study of individual differences in second language learning and teaching has been widely discussed (Dörnyei, 2005; Robinson, 2002; Skehan, 1989). One of the basic argumentations is that individual factors have an effect on the cognitive processes (Ellis, 2012). Individual difference constructs refer to individual's dimensions of personal characteristics, which distinguish them from each other, such as personality, language aptitude, motivation, learning styles, and learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2005). In this thesis, individual differences are included in the background information, for example, age, gender, present academic degree, professional training, years of teaching, overseas studying experience, and the region in which they had had previous language learning experiences. The following section reports on data which have been analysed to investigate whether teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching differ significantly according to the above background factors. The data were analysed using either independent sample *t*-tests or a one-way ANOVA.

##### **4.2.2.1 Age and teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching**

To investigate whether age might influence teachers' cognitions, one-way ANOVA was conducted. Although in the questionnaire, teachers were grouped into six age ranges,

for the purpose of analysing the data, the six age ranges are combined into 3 age ranges: less than 20 to 30, 30 to 40, and greater than 40. Data from three new age ranges show this is also a normal distribution and suitable for one-way ANOVA. The results are presented in the following table.

*Table 4.2 ANOVA Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Ages*

Themes	20-30		30-40		More than 40		F	p
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
forms	17.84	4.12	17.33	3.60	16.55	4.07	2.095	.125
form	27.48	5.09	27.40	3.28	27.73	2.83	.258	.772
deductive	21.28	3.40	21.51	3.34	21.84	3.62	.478	.620
inductive	22.36	4.05	22.39	2.89	22.77	2.43	.546	.580
terminology	18.60	3.42	18.19	3.22	18.77	3.91	.903	.406
error correction	12.84	2.79	12.11	2.54	11.00	2.21	3.909	.067
drilling	10.76	2.05	10.83	1.67	10.77	1.42	.053	.948

The above table demonstrates that the age does not make a significant difference in teachers' cognitions about all themes of grammar instruction, because the *p* value of each item is above 0.05. This suggests that the age does not significantly influence teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching.

#### **4.2.2.2 Gender and teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching**

There were more female than male participants in this study, which is consistent with the fact that Chinese university English female teachers outnumber male teachers. Table 3.3 indicates that 75% of questionnaire participants are female and only 25% are male. The data were analysed using independent samples *t*-tests to see whether there were significant differences in teachers' cognitions about English grammar teaching made by gender. The results are presented in Table 4.3.

*Table 4.3 Independent Samples T-Test Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Gender*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
forms	Male	17.11	4.42	-.118	.906
	Female	17.18	3.68		
form	Male	28.06	3.47	1.416	.155
	Female	27.38	3.54		
deductive	Male	21.86	3.12	.915	.361
	Female	21.43	3.54		
Inductive	Male	22.57	2.82	.287	.775
	Female	22.45	3.08		
terminology	Male	17.74	4.05	-1.847	.066
	Female	18.61	3.28		
error	Male	11.91	3.23	.091	.928
	Female	11.88	2.36		
drilling	Male	11.34	1.60	3.125	.089
	Female	10.64	1.67		

As can be seen from Table 4.3, there are no significant differences between male and female teachers in their cognitions about grammar teaching. For each theme of teachers' cognitions about English grammar teaching the *p* value is above 0.05. This suggests gender does not make significant differences in teacher cognitions about the themes related to the teaching of English grammar.

#### **4.2.2.3 Academic qualifications and teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching**

To explore whether teachers' academic qualifications make a significant difference to their cognitions about EFL grammar teaching, one-way ANOVA was conducted. Three groups are teachers with bachelor degrees, master degrees and doctor degrees respectively. The research results are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 One-way ANOVA Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Academic Qualifications

Themes	Bachelor		Master		Doctor		F	p
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
<b>forms</b>	21.23	2.94	16.79	3.55	17.5	5.72	17.723	.000*
<b>form</b>	26.38	4.46	27.51	3.41	29.25	3.00	3.349	.036*
<b>deductive</b>	22.85	2.43	21.38	3.45	22.75	3.86	3.240	.041*
<b>Inductive</b>	23.62	3.76	22.32	2.91	23.50	2.42	3.230	.051
<b>terminology</b>	19.84	2.82	18.33	3.40	17.63	4.76	2.754	.065
<b>error</b>	13.23	3.18	11.71	2.44	13.38	2.63	7.188	.001*
<b>correction</b>								
<b>drilling</b>	10.92	1.71	10.75	1.64	11.56	1.93	1.892	.153

Table 4.4 reveals that academic degrees make significant differences in teachers' cognitions about English grammar teaching for the themes of *focus on forms* ( $F=17.723$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), *focus on forms* ( $F=3.349$ ,  $p=0.036$ ), *the deductive approach* ( $F=3.240$ ,  $p=0.041$ ), and *error corrections* ( $F=7.188$ ,  $p=0.001$ ).

The later Post Hoc LSD tests, presented in Table 4.5 (see next page), were conducted in order to get a further understanding of inter-group differences. The results show that differences mainly occur between teachers with bachelor degrees and those with higher degrees including master degrees and doctoral degrees. There are no significant differences between teachers with master degree and those with doctoral degree. The two postgraduate degrees focus on research, while bachelor degrees emphasize teaching more. Hereafter both master and doctoral teachers are called postgraduate degree teachers.

*Table 4.5 Post Hoc LSD Result of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Academic Qualifications.*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Group(I)</b>	<b>Group(J)</b>	<b>Mean difference</b>	<b>p</b>
forms	Bachelor	Master	4.44	.000*
		Doctor	3.73	.001*
	Master	Doctor	-0.71	.447
form	Bachelor	Master	-1.12	.045*
		Doctor	-2.87	.010*
	Master	Doctor	-1.74	.118
deductive	Bachelor	Master	1.47	.036*
		Doctor	.096	.929
	Master	Doctor	-1.37	.117
error	Bachelor	Master	1.52	.003*
		Doctor	-.14	.010*
Correction	Master	Doctor	-1.669	.857

#### **4.2.2.4 Teaching experience and cognitions about grammar teaching**

In order to examine the possible impact of teaching experience on teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, one-way ANOVA was performed on the data for participants with different teaching experience: less than 5 years, 6-10 years and more than 10 years. Teachers who have less than five years teaching experience are usually named as novice teachers; those with six to ten years' experience were defined as teachers with intermediate experience; and those who have more than ten years are treated as experienced teachers (Gatbonton, 2008; Tsui, 2003). The results of the tests are summarized in Table 4.6 (see next page).

The above table suggests that teachers' teaching experience does not make a significant difference in teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, because the *p* value of each item is above 0.05. This suggests that teachers' teaching experience does

not influence teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, which is consistent with the result that age does not appear to influence teachers' cognitions.

*Table 4.6 One-way ANOVA Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Teaching Experience*

Themes	Less than 5 years		6-10 years		More than 10 years		F	p
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
forms	17.47	3.89	17.43	3.50	16.70	4.20	1.329	.266
form	27.88	4.82	27.33	2.96	27.51	3.27	.526	.592
deductive	21.13	3.02	21.61	3.38	21.77	3.71	.736	.480
Inductive	22.41	4.03	22.38	2.83	22.70	2.42	.388	.679
terminology	18.41	4.08	18.22	3.09	18.70	3.54	.577	.562
error	12.47	2.40	12.00	2.73	11.47	2.36	1.197	.232
correction								
drilling	10.64	1.93	10.95	1.61	10.69	1.57	1.177	.310

#### **4.2.2.5 Overseas study and cognitions about grammar teaching**

To investigate the impact of teachers' overseas study experience on teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, independent samples *t*-tests were performed on the data for teachers who have had overseas study experience and those who have not. The results are summarised in Table 4.7 (see next page).

Table 4.7 indicates that teachers who have had overseas study experience in English speaking countries are significantly different in their cognitions about the themes of *focus on form* in grammar instruction ( $t=-2.385$ ;  $p=0.018$ ) from teachers who have not. That is, teachers who have overseas study experience are more in favour of *focus on form* than those who have not.

*Table 4.7 Independent Samples T-Tests Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Overseas Study Experience*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
forms	No overseas study experience	17.46	3.68	1.308	.192
	Have overseas study experience	16.89	3.98		
form	No overseas study experience	27.06	3.58	-2.385	.018*
	Have overseas study experience	28.00	3.38		
deductive	No overseas study experience	21.23	3.32	-1.859	.064
	Have overseas study experience	21.95	3.51		
inductive	No overseas study experience	22.25	3.16	-1.495	.136
	Have overseas study experience	22.76	2.77		
terminology	No overseas study experience	18.43	3.30	.072	.942
	Have overseas study experience	18.41	3.64		
error correction	No overseas study experience	11.93	2.50	.077	.939
	Have overseas study experience	11.91	2.64		
drilling	No overseas study experience	10.67	1.62	-1.508	.132
	Have overseas study experience	10.95	1.72		



#### 4.2.2.6 Professional training and their cognitions about grammar teaching

Professional training here means whether teachers graduate from teachers' education university or not. In China, university lecturers can be teachers graduating from teacher education university or not. Teachers graduating from teachers' education universities not only receive pre-service programme training but also in-service training on their professional development, whereas teachers who do not graduate from teachers' education universities only receive in-service training on their professional development. In order to examine teachers' professional training's impact toward their cognitions about grammar teaching, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted between teachers who graduated from teachers' universities and who graduated from other universities, and the results are presented in Table 4.8.

*Table 4.8 Independent Samples T-Tests Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Professional Training*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Groups</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
forms	normal	16.92	3.78	-1.415	.158
	nonnormal	17.54	3.88		
form	normal	27.96	3.64	-1.380	.168
	nonnormal	27.81	3.33		
deductive	normal	21.15	3.38	-2.468	.014*
	nonnormal	22.10	3.43		
inductive	normal	23.44	3.13	-.316	.752
	nonnormal	22.55	2.81		
terminology	normal	18.24	3.56	-1.052	.294
	nonnormal	18.65	3.63		
error	normal	11.60	2.67	-2.477	.014*
correction	nonnormal	12.32	2.44		
drilling	normal	10.80	1.55	-.085	.932
	nonnormal	10.81	1.81		

It can be seen from Table 4.8 that teachers' professional training makes a significant difference in teachers' cognitions of the themes of the *deductive approach* ( $t=-2.468, p=0.014$ ) and *error correction* ( $t=-2.477, p=0.014$ ) about grammar teaching. Teachers graduating from teacher education universities are less likely to use the deductive approach and correct students' errors than those not.

#### **4.2.2.7 Teachers' English learning regions and their cognitions about grammar teaching**

Compared to urban school students, who get more access to English environment by attending tutoring courses, rural school students have fewer opportunities to learn English and use it in real contexts. They are usually taught by the traditional grammar teaching method, whereas urban school students have the chances of practicing English in the communicative context. It is assumed that the region in which teachers learned English as students may impact on their later cognition about grammar teaching. To test this hypothesis, one-way ANOVA was performed on data from teachers who learned English prior to entering university in a rural area, an urban area or both. The results of ANOVA are summarised in Table 4.9 .

According to Table 4.9, one-way ANOVA results suggest that the regions in which teachers learned English, rural area or urban area, did not make significant differences in their cognitions about grammar teaching ( $p>0.05$ ).

#### **4.2.2.8 Summary**

This section reported on data analysed to investigate whether teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching differ significantly according to their background factors, including age, gender, academic qualifications, teaching experience, overseas study,

*Table 4.9 One-way ANOVA Results of Teachers' Cognitions Categorized by Regions of English Learning*

Themes	Rural areas		Urban areas		Both rural and urban		F	p
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
forms	17.04	4.38	17.41	3.59	17.02	3.51	.373	.689
form	27.12	2.95	27.68	3.95	27.83	3.18	1.027	.359
deductive	21.39	3.61	21.55	3.49	21.90	2.99	.415	.661
inductive	22.34	2.82	22.51	3.31	22.68	2.48	.239	.788
terminology	17.90	2.79	18.50	3.94	19.27	2.93	2.984	.052
error correction	11.57	2.88	12.06	2.37	12.15	2.49	1.391	.250
drilling	10.85	1.70	12.22	1.57	11.10	1.42	1.338	.264

professional training, and previous English learning regions. The research results show that age, gender, teaching experience and regions in which students previously learnt English do not make significant differences for teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, whereas academic qualifications, overseas study experience and professional training do.

### **4.3 Sources of Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching**

In the previous section, Chinese university teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching have been explored through the second section of the questionnaire. In this section, sources of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching are discussed, based on one questionnaire item in the third section of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). In order to address this question, the responses to the second question in the third section of teachers' cognitions questionnaire were analysed and reported in the following table.

*Table 4.10 Sources of Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching (One participant may have more than 1 item responses)*

<b>Source items</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>percentage</b>
1. English learning experience at the primary or secondary school	170	54.1%
2. English learning experience at the university or college	222	70.7%
3. Experience at the practicum of university or college	110	35.0%
4. Peer learning	62	19.7%
5. Overseas study experience	44	14.0%
6. Administrators' advice (such as from University Teaching Supervision Committee's suggestion)	44	14.0%
7. Teachers training seminar held by university or college	64	20.4%
8. Students' feedback	152	48.4%
9. Reading research articles or research reports	128	40.8%
10. Others ( their own teaching experience)	160	50.9%

Table 4.10 outlines the sources of cognitions about grammar teaching indicated by participating teachers. The sources noted most frequently were: English learning experience at the university and college (70.7%), English learning experience at the primary or secondary school (54.1%), and students' feedback (48.4%). Participants also reported that their cognitions developed from their practicum experience (35.4%) and research readings (40.8%). A smaller number of participants reported their cognitions about grammar teaching originated from teacher training seminars, peering learning, overseas study experience and administrators' advice, which covered 20.4%, 19.7%, 14.0% and 14.0% respectively. Additionally, just under 50% of participants indicated that their cognitions also derived from other factors, including their own teaching experience.

In sum, teachers' prior English learning experience, their university professional training, their teaching experience and students' feedback contributed to teachers'

cognitions about grammar teaching significantly. Other factors such as peer learning, overseas study experience, administrators' advice and seminar run by their universities also play a certain role in shaping their cognitions.

#### 4.4 Teachers' Practices about Grammar Teaching

Teachers' practices about grammar teaching were investigated with an item in the third section of the questionnaire (see Appendix A). Teachers were asked to indicate which several grammar teaching practices, related to the seven thematic teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching they used. They were also required to report other grammar teaching practices they used. The result of grammar teaching practices they reported is shown in Table 4.11.

*Table 4.11 Chinese University English Teachers' Practices about Grammar Teaching in the Classrooms (One participant may have more than 1 item responses)*

<b>Items of teachers' practices about grammar teaching</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>percentage</b>
1. I teach the rules first and then give some activities for practice.	160	51.0%
2. I encourage students to discover the rules of a new grammatical structure for themselves.	192	61.1%
3. I provide students with a lot of opportunities to use grammar in context.	238	75.8%
4. Since terminology is difficult for students, I use students' L1 to explain grammar.	162	51.6%
5. I don't correct students' grammatical errors in their oral practice, but correct them in their written work	194	61.8%
6. I emphasize students' language accuracy more than their communicative competency.	26	8.3%
7. I ask students to drill grammar points when explaining grammar explicitly.	134	42.7%
8. Other	158	50.3%

Several points from Table 4.11 are noted here. Firstly, most teachers highlighted the importance of fostering students' communicative competence in their teaching practices. For instance, 75.8% of participants reported that they provided students with abundant opportunities to use grammar in context, whereas only 8% of participants reported that they emphasized students' language accuracy more than their communicative competence.

Secondly, more than half teachers stated that they used both an inductive approach and a deductive approach in their grammar teaching in EFL classroom teaching. Table 4.11 shows that more than three-fifths participants (61.1%) stated that they encouraged students to discover the rules of a new grammatical structure for themselves and more than half of the participants (51.1%) reported they taught grammar rules first and then gave some activities for practice. This suggests that many teachers incorporated both approaches into their grammar teaching practices.

Thirdly, more than 60% of the participants reported that they seldom corrected students' oral grammar mistakes, but corrected them in their written work, implying that correcting grammatical errors in students' oral work was not as important as correcting students' written work. While the necessity of correcting students' errors in written work was acknowledged, the need of correcting them in oral work was not valued. Analysis of the data also indicated that more than half of the participants (51.6%) stated they used students' L1 to explain grammar. This indicates that more than half the participating teachers used terminology in the explanation of grammar points but tended to use students' L1 to refer to the terminology.

Fourthly, less than half of the participants (42.7%) reported that they asked students to practise grammar points, showing that drilling grammar points is not so popular but still gains a prominent position in EFL classrooms.

Finally, more than half of the participants reported other ways of teaching grammar. However, the approaches they indicated here were similar to the listed items on the questionnaire but were described using different vocabulary and sentence patterns. For example, one teacher said that in explaining new grammar points, he set examples for students to figure out rules by themselves, actually, it is an inductive approach. Therefore, the responses in the section in the questionnaire on alternative ways of grammar teaching reported by the teachers are not further explained here.

In sum, this section discusses teachers' self-reported practices about grammar teaching in terms of seven themes. The research findings are briefly summarised as follows:

- Three quarters of teachers preferred the *focus on form* approach to the *focus on forms* ;
- More than half of the teachers reported they used both the deductive approach and inductive approaches;
- More than three fifths teachers reported that they corrected students' errors in written work but seldom in the oral practice;
- More than half of the teachers disclosed that they used students' first language to refer to grammatical terminology.
- Only slightly more than two fifths teachers reported that the required students to practise grammar points in their classroom teaching.

#### **4.5 A Comparison between Teachers' Cognitions and Their Practices Reflected on the Questionnaire**

Teachers' cognitions and their reported practices about grammar teaching in terms of seven themes were compared. The comparison indicates that most teachers' reported

practices about grammar teaching in terms of seven themes are consistent with their cognitions.

Firstly, most teachers responded that they had a preference for *focus on form* instruction, when reporting their cognitions about grammar teaching (3.93, above 3.0). Likewise, in their reported practices, most teachers (61.1% of the entire respondents) said they created many opportunities of using grammar in context for students, which aimed to develop students' communicative competence in the language teaching. In contrast, in reporting teachers' practices about grammar teaching, only a small number of participants (8.3%) reported that they emphasized students' language accuracy more than their communicative competency, which is consistent with their cognitions about *focus on forms* instruction (2.87). Therefore, it would seem that teacher' reported practices are generally consistent with their reported cognitions about grammar teaching regarding *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction.

Secondly, both the deductive and inductive approaches, were valued by most teachers (3.60 and 3.75), which is consistent with their self-reported practices (51% and 61.1%), suggesting that about a half of the teachers used both approaches in their grammar teaching practices. Thus, their reported practices match their elicited cognitions with reference to the dichotomy of the deductive and the inductive approaches.

Thirdly, more than three fifths teachers (61.8%) revealed that they corrected students' grammatical mistakes in students' written work but seldom did in their oral work. This generally corresponds with their cognitions (3.87 and 2.64), suggesting that they believe it was important to correct students' errors in their written work but not in their oral work. When confronted with grammatical terminology to explain grammar points, most teachers reported that they used students' mother tongue. This is consistent



with their cognitions reported in item 8 of the first section of the questionnaire, and item 23 of the second section. The former recorded that more than half of the participants used both Chinese and English in teaching grammar and the latter item showed almost half of the teachers agreed that teachers should use Chinese when they explained grammar rules using grammatical terminology.

Finally, almost half the teachers reported that they usually drilled grammar points in grammar teaching classrooms (42.7%), which is consistent with their cognitions associated with drilling (3.69).

In all, a general congruence is evident between teachers' cognitions and their reported practices in terms of seven themes. This implies that teachers' cognitions contributes significantly to their practices by providing guidance on their classroom instruction.

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the results of a questionnaire to explore teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching, and the sources of teachers' cognitions, were reported. Firstly, an overview of Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching was presented using descriptive statistics. Secondly, in order to find out whether teachers' background information impacts on their cognitions, either *t*-test or ANOVA was computed. The sources of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching were also discussed through a multiple-choice questionnaire item. Finally, teachers' self-reported practices about grammar teaching were examined by their responses on a multiple-choice questionnaire item. A generally consistent relationship was evident between teachers' cognitions and their reported practices. The next chapter will report research findings from an in-depth study investigating teachers' cognitions and practices qualitatively.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM AN IN-DEPTH STUDY

#### 5.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, research findings of the in-depth study in which ten teachers' cognitions and practices were examined are reported. Specifically, research data from interviews to elicit cognitions ten teachers held about grammar teaching in terms of seven themes are firstly reported, followed by a brief account about how ten teachers implemented their grammar teaching in their actual practices based on classroom observations. Subsequently, data from the interviews and classroom observation are analysed to compare the teachers' cognitions and practices and reasons for any discrepancies between the teachers' cognitions and practices elicited through stimulated recall interviews are investigated as well. Finally, a conclusion is drawn on the basis of the above research findings.

#### 5.2 Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching

In this section, ten teachers' cognitions related to the seven themes elicited from semi-structured interviews are reported. These interviews were carried out in Mandarin, and then were recorded and translated by me. For ethical consideration (see 3.5), I use teachers' pseudonym here in reporting data.

##### 5.2.1 Focus on forms or focus on form instruction

Three distinctive views about the *focus on forms* or *focus on form* instruction, were expressed by the ten teachers during their interviews. Six teachers (Wei, Yan, Hai, Chen, Hui and Bing) remarked that they adopted the *focus on form* instruction in grammar instruction. The other four teachers held different opinions. Two teachers reported that

they preferred to use the *focus on forms* instruction, while the last two teachers expressed a belief that both the *focus on forms* instruction and the *focus on form* instruction should be implemented in grammar teaching. More detail is elaborated in subsequent paragraphs.

Firstly, six teachers out of ten responded that they preferred the *focus on form* instruction to the *focus on forms* instruction in their interviews because teachers should teach students how to use grammar points in context and focus on the meaning of grammar points. They unanimously argued that English grammar teaching in tertiary education was to enable EFL learners to use grammar accurately and appropriately in communicative context. For example, when they were asked to present the ideal grammar teaching method in their interviews, one of six teachers, Hai said,

I believe university English teachers are supposed to teach students how to use grammar and language in the specific context in English teaching classes. In this sense, I think it is more important to develop students' communicative competence than emphasizing their grammatical accuracy solely. In my class, I encourage my students to produce the output of language as much as possible despite that there may be some minor grammatical mistakes in their utterances occasionally. I seldom correct their mistakes. (Interview, Hai).

In this excerpt, Hai emphasized that using grammatical points in language expressions was the priority of his grammar teaching. He said that he encouraged students to speak and write as much as possible to develop their communicative competence, and seldom corrected their grammar errors in their utterances. It was apparent that he emphasized more *focus on form* instruction than the *focus on forms* instruction.

The same attitude toward the *focus on forms* or the *focus on form* instruction was also reflected in other five teachers' interviews. They believed that the purpose of

learning grammar for students should be how to use English as a tool to interact with others, especially for advanced English learners. They had learned English at least seven years prior to their entry to their university study. As advanced and long-time English learners, they were supposed to be taught in a way that they learned English for communication. Therefore, the *focus on form* instruction is more important than the *focus on forms* instruction in grammar teaching. For example, when asked what kind of grammar students needed, Chen stated,

Identifying the purpose of grammar teaching was important for teachers before teaching grammar to students. Teachers should not teach grammar just because grammar per se was a core component of language. The significance of grammar teaching lies in teaching students how to use grammar in the communicative activities, especially for advanced English learners. Students who are able to find out answers to the questions concerned with grammar items in paper tests does not mean he has a good command of grammar knowledge. Instead, using grammar accurately and appropriately to communicate with others demonstrates that they have captured solid grammar knowledge and skills. Therefore, students should be taught to learn grammatical points in the communicative context such as dialogues, texts, and so on (Interview, Chen).

In stating her views, Chen pointed out the purpose of grammar teaching for university students. She argued that the ultimate purpose of grammar teaching for them was to use English in communicative activities, not to memorize monotonous grammar rules and achieve good marks in discrete paper-based tests. Therefore, in order to achieve this purpose, grammar should be taught through a *focus on form* instruction emphasizing the meaning not the form of grammar points.

In the same vein, other teachers such as Bing said that grammar teaching should emphasize students' fluency and be implemented in meaningful language contexts. In her interview, she explained her ideal grammar teaching method as follows:

It is important to teach students how to use grammar in the language context. I find students taught by traditional grammar teaching methods have difficulty in using Standard English and frequently use Chinglish. Chinglish can also be understood by Chinese interlocutors, but cannot always be followed by native speakers. Therefore, students have to learn how to use Standard English including grammatical structures, vocabularies and formulaic English. I find it is effective to learn grammar with the help of a corpus which contains the usage of a particular point in different context. The corpus linguistics instructed us how to use a certain grammar points in diverse contexts (Interview, Bing).

Bing thought that students taught by traditional grammar teaching methods spoke so-called Chinglish not Standard English. In order to assist students in grasping Standard English, she suggested teachers adopt a pedagogical approach emphasizing the use of grammar points in grammar teaching such as corpus linguistics. Actually, she advocated that grammar teaching should adopt *focus on form* instruction.

In contrast to the six teachers who have a preference on *focus on form* instruction, two teachers reported that they adopted the *focus on forms* instruction in grammar instruction. For example, when asked to explain his grammar teaching methods in the interview, Yang espoused the *focus on forms* instruction in grammar teaching. He stated that presenting grammar rules to university students remained important. Though university students had learned grammar systematically prior to university study, they still made grammatical mistakes in their writing and speaking. Sometimes, they made serious mistakes, which led him to doubt whether they had mastered fundamental grammar knowledge in their previous English study. Therefore, he believed he had to present some basic knowledge about grammar such as the rules and the structures to students again. His view was reflected in his words in the interview, presented as follows:

One prominent problem that students taught by me have is they cannot write grammatically correct sentences, even the simple ones. They frequently use wrong verb tenses and wrong verb forms and fail to locate modifiers. They are not familiar with complex and compound sentences as well. Therefore, students need to consolidate their basic grammar knowledge such as verbs (i.e. several frequently-used verb tenses and their passive voice forms), adjectives (i.e. comparative degree and superlative degree), noun plural forms, complex sentences and compound sentences. I really doubt that they have learned these in their secondary schools. Or they have forgotten them. Therefore, I need to reintroduce grammatical rules to them and enhance their basic grammatical knowledge. (Interview, Yang).

Yang revealed a view toward form-focused instruction based on his own teaching experience. He found that some students had problems in their general grammatical knowledge, even though they had learned them during their secondary schooling. For such students, it was necessary to present grammar rules and to equip them with fundamental grammar knowledge.

Finally, two teachers, Fang and Ping, said they believed that both methods should be integrated into grammar teaching due to their individual merits. For example, as an experienced teacher, Fang, when she was asked to explain how she works on her grammar teaching in the class, she said that teachers should encourage students to speak and write in English not only accurately but also fluently. She illustrated her perceptions in relation to the *focus on forms* or the *focus on form* instruction in this way:

I think both methods are equally important. I encourage my students to speak fluently and accurately. It is often the case that taught by a grammar teaching focusing on forms, students tend to feel restricted and are unwilling to open their mouth to express themselves. On the other hand, taught by a grammar teaching focusing on form, students are quite likely to make some grammatical errors in their writing and speaking. In order to balance students' communicative competence and grammatical accuracy, I support combining both focus on forms and focus on form methods in grammar teaching. (Interview, Fang).

Fang thought that cultivating students' communicative competence and raising students' accuracy consciousness were equally important in grammar teaching. An optimal way of achieving this purpose was combining two methods into their grammar teaching. A sole emphasis on any method was not sufficient. Therefore, it was better to adopt both methods in grammar teaching.

Ping also supported adopting both methods in grammar teaching but for a different reason. Ping believed that teachers supported using both methods because it satisfied students' needs to the greatest extent. In her opinion, students with varied English levels should be treated differently in their English learning classrooms. Those who did not have solid fundamental grammatical knowledge should be taught by traditional grammar teaching methods which highlighted the accuracy of the grammar and assisted students to strengthen their grammar skills, whereas those who had basic grammar knowledge should be taught by the *focus on form* methods which focused on students' fluency in speaking and writing. Her view is reflected in this excerpt:

University students have learned grammar comprehensively in their previous English learning before being enrolled as university students, but still have difficulty in using grammar in communicative contexts. As advanced English learners, it is time for them to learn how to use grammar structures and rules flexibly. Given to this issue, it is better for teachers to adopt the focus on form instruction in grammar teaching. However, students don't have the same level of grammatical ability. Some students have solid grammatical knowledge, whereas some students lack basic grammatical knowledge. For example, some students cannot distinguish "subject" from "predicate". Therefore, teachers have to treat these students differently. For students who have strong grammatical knowledge, they can learn how to use the knowledge to promote their communicative competence. For students who are short of sufficient grammatical knowledge, they have to use focus on forms method to teach them some basic grammatical knowledge and structures (Interview, Ping).

In this excerpt, Ping, when asked to explain why she adopted both methods in grammar teaching, suggested that students had different English levels and should be treated differently. Students who had weak grammatical knowledge should be taught in a way similar to traditional grammar teaching. The method starts with presenting rules to students, followed by several examples and ends with several practices. Students who had basic grammatical knowledge such as the rules of grammar, should be taught in a way to promote their communicative competence by using these grammar knowledge.

In sum, three main views of teachers' cognitions toward form focused instruction are reported in this section. Six teachers advocated that the *focus on form* instruction should be involved in grammar teaching. They held the belief that teachers were supposed to develop students' communicative competence by using *focus on form* instruction. In comparison with this view, two teachers supported that *focus on forms* instruction was supposed to be used in grammar teaching, whereas another two teachers responded that both methods should be combined into grammar teaching which suited students' needs at different English levels.

### **5.2.2 The deductive and inductive approaches**

With regard to teachers' cognitions about the deductive and inductive approaches, six teachers out of ten reported that the inductive approach was suitable for grammar teaching in their grammar teaching classrooms, while two teachers argued that they preferred the deductive approach in grammar teaching and the last two teachers remarked that both approaches should be adopted in grammar teaching. The points are examined further in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, the same six teachers as supporting the *focus on form* instruction reported that the inductive approach should be employed in grammar instruction when they were



asked to explain their grammar teaching in the classroom. They argued that students should be able to discover grammatical rules instead of being passive recipients of grammatical knowledge. They should be proactive in engaging in grammar learning.

For example, Wei said,

The ideal method of teaching grammar is that teachers ask students to find out the grammatical rules from English model sentences. Specifically, when students have difficulty in analysing or translating a sentence with a complex grammar issue, teachers should not point out the grammar point and its related rules embedded in the sentence but demand students to do this. The role of teachers is to provide assistance to students to retrieve grammar rules. Or they can complement students' discovery by presenting more detail about that particular grammatical point explicitly (Interview, Wei).

In this excerpt, Wei argued that when students were confronted with grammar issues in English class, it was better for them to discover grammar rules before teachers provided more information about that particular grammar point. Likewise, Hui made the similar remarks about how to teach grammar when her students encountered grammatical problems. In her interview, she said,

In university English teaching classrooms, it should be students who are encouraged to discover grammatical rules rather than their teachers present grammatical rules to them explicitly. They have learned English systematically for several years prior to their university study. As advanced English learners, they should be able to discover those grammar rules which they have learned previously. If they fail, they can turn to consult them in the grammar books and other reference books. Unlike their secondary English teachers, university English teachers should teach them how to use grammatical knowledge in the output of language (Interview, Hui).

Hui pointed out that it was students who should discover grammar rules by themselves, rather than teachers presenting them explicitly. She emphasized that university students had learned English comprehensively for several years, and should not need grammatical rules presented to them anymore. She remarked that the role of

University English teachers in grammar teaching was supposed to assist students in using grammatical points in the language context by themselves.

Yang and Liu, had a contrasting view stating that they preferred the deductive approach in grammar teaching. When asked to explain their grammar teaching, both remarked that when students made grammatical errors, they tended to present that grammar point systematically. Specifically, they would give the rule of that grammar point followed by several examples in discrete and decontextualized sentences. They ended up with several practices of implementing these grammar points. For example, Yang illustrated his grammar teaching as follows:

When I find that students have difficulty in some particular points, I present that grammar points explicitly to them. I pointed out the grammar point directly and introduced its related grammar rules. I don't ask students to discover rules of that peculiar grammar points. Time is really limited. I have to make use of the classroom time. If I ask students to speak out the rules and the structures, it takes them some time to respond it (Interview, Yang).

Yang explained that limited classroom time restricted him from using the inductive approach and so he would use the deductive approach to present grammar points explicitly. Liu when interviewed had a similar view. When asked to describe his way of tackling grammar issues for his students, he responded that he had been calling for more time to be allocated to English teaching. However, assigned classroom English teaching time was shortened and so he had to adopt English teaching methods which did not take much time. When teaching grammar in his class, he preferred to present grammar rules to students directly rather than asking students to discover rules. He thought that Chinese students were not active in the class and were unwilling to cooperate with teachers. He did not want to waste time persuading them to respond to his questions.

The remaining two teachers argued that both the inductive approach and the deductive approach had to be employed in their English teaching classes. Teachers needed to use the deductive approach to explain grammar explicitly when students are unable to discover grammar rules by themselves. For example, Fang said,

When teaching grammar, I first locate this grammar point in the texts and then list more sentences with the same grammatical structure to students, and they are required to find out what grammar features these sentences have, or what sentence patterns they belong to. This is aimed to ask them to find out the grammar rules underlying these sentences and give me more similar sentences like these. If most students can discover the grammar points underlying these sentences, I will no longer explain the rules and other detail related to the grammar points. However, if only a small part of students respond, I figure out most of them have difficulty in understanding these sentences, either they have forgotten the grammar rules or they are not very sure about them. Then I will explain the grammar points and their rationale to students, helping students retrieve the language points they have learned before. (Interview, Fang).

The above excerpt indicates that Fang had a preference for the inductive approach, but she adopted the deductive approach if students could not discover particular grammar points. She would base her decision upon students' needs. In most cases, she preferred to use the inductive approach; however, if students had difficulty in recalling grammar rules and sought teachers' help, she would present grammar rules to students to help them sort out grammar issues they confronted. Ping expressed the same view with regard to using the deductive approach or the inductive approach in grammar teaching. For example, Ping remarked,

I seldom explain grammar rules to students directly because I know they have learned them with great detail during their secondary school. I usually ask students or assist them to discover the grammar rules that they have learned before. If most students cannot pinpoint the grammar rules behind these sentences, I will give them explicit teaching at length. Otherwise, I skip the direct

and formal explanation of grammar rules. The classroom teaching time is so limited that I do not want to waste my time of explaining the grammar points that they have learned. (Interview, Ping).

In her interview, Ping argued that she employed both the deductive approach and the inductive approach in her grammar teaching classrooms. Normally, she asked students to discover grammar rules by themselves and seldom explained grammar rules to students directly. Only when students were unable to find out the grammar rules, did she explain grammar rules explicitly in detail. She ascribed her cognitions toward this issue to limited time for classroom teaching and the students' previous learning in their secondary schools.

In sum, in terms of a deductive and an inductive approach about grammar teaching, six teachers preferred to use the inductive approach, two teachers said that they utilized the deductive approach, and two teachers supported using both approaches.

### **5.2.3 Grammatical terminology**

There are two issues in regard to the theme of grammatical terminology in the in-depth study. One is whether teachers support using grammatical terminology in grammar instruction and the other is, if so, what language do they use, English or Chinese. These two issues are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs.

All ten teachers said that they used grammatical terminology in grammar instruction. They explained the use of grammatical terminology not only enabled students to distinguish different grammar points but helped them understand particular grammar points. For example, Yan made an analogy between terminology and a person's name. She stated that grammatical terminology was just like names of her student. If she didn't know her students' name, she was not able to make distinctions between them. Knowing grammatical terminology, in her view, was useful for

university students to distinguish different English grammar points. Additionally, Yan added that if students knew grammar terminology, they were able to understand teachers' grammar instruction better and became more engaged in the classroom instruction. She found that students who knew grammatical terminology outperformed in learning grammar those who did not. Yan's observation was echoed by Hui who revealed her view of the importance of using terminology as follows:

It is certainly helpful for students to know grammatical terminology. At least, remembering grammatical terminology can facilitate them to differentiate different grammatical points. I encourage my students to remember the terms like attributive clause and appositive clause, so that they can differentiate two types of clauses. Otherwise, they are quite likely to get confused about the distinction of two types of clauses, because both clauses can start with "that" (Interview, Hui).

Hui supported using grammatical terminology in grammar teaching classrooms by making an illustration. She thought that at least, students who knew the meaning of grammatical terminology were able to discriminate grammar points and understand the distinction between similar grammar points.

As well as Yan and Hui, Ping also favoured using terminology in grammar instruction, but presented a different reason to support her viewpoint. When asked the role of terminology in grammar instruction, she replied that using terminology was pivotal in formulating rules and creating a precise meaning for students. For example, she said,

Using grammatical terminology is important for teachers to present grammar rules to students. Terminology usually labels the elements of a typical point. For instance, in this sentence, "I am a student", "I" is subject, "am" is predicate and "a student" is predicative. If teachers don't use terminology like subject, predicate and predicative, it is difficult for them to present rules to students (Interview, Ping).

Ping emphasized that the role of using terminology was formulating grammar rules to students, which was essential in grammar instruction.

In sum, teachers all supported using grammar terminology in grammar teaching enabled students to make distinctions between different grammar points and facilitate their understanding of grammar points during discussions.

There were two views among the ten teachers as to which language to use for grammatical terminology. Eight teachers said that it was better to use both English and Chinese to refer to grammatical terminology, although in most cases, teachers used English in grammar instruction. However, they needed to repeat some difficult English grammatical terms in Chinese when their students didn't know the meaning of the English terms. They added that many English grammatical terms were long and the use of abstract English vocabulary made them difficult to remember for students who only knew them in Chinese. For example, when asked what language they prefer to use, Hai stated as follows:

I find most students have difficulty in remembering these terms in English. English vocabulary is one of difficulty points for English learners. Memorizing abstract and long grammatical terms seems to be an impossible task for Chinese university learners. Sometimes, I may forget the English form of grammatical terms by myself. In response to this, I usually use grammatical terms in English first and then repeat it in Mandarin. This is especially the case for freshman who usually learned grammatical terminology in Mandarin in their secondary schools. They usually have difficulty understanding grammatical terminology in English (Interview, Hai).

In this excerpt, Hai states that English teachers had to use both languages to discuss grammatical terminology, because when university students learned grammatical terminology in secondary schools, their English teachers usually used Chinese to teach them. As a result, students were familiar with grammar terms in

Chinese, but not in English. If teachers used only English terminology, a large number of students would be at a loss to know what teachers were talking about. Therefore, English teachers had to repeat the terminology in Chinese again so that students were engaged in the classroom teaching. The same view was expressed by Chen who explained that, since her students were in their first year in the university and knew only Chinese grammatical terminology, she had to use Mandarin to refer to the grammatical terminology. For example, she said,

I think it is a common sense that learning terminology is useful for English learners, especially for beginning students. Given most Chinese university students learned grammatical terms in their mother tongue, it is better for teachers like me to use both Chinese and English to refer to grammatical terminology when students are just enrolled as university students. Teachers can consider using English more in explaining grammar knowledge as students are gradually familiar with these English terms. Considering my students' English level, presently I think I have to combine Chinese and English into explaining grammar knowledge (Interview, Chen).

Chen noted that teachers were supposed to use English to refer to terminology if students were familiar with English grammatical terminology. However, if not, she preferred to use both English and Chinese. Other teachers, such as Ping, articulated the same view. She remarked that remembering many long words of grammatical terminology was a "torture". She frankly admitted that even she herself could not remember all of them. She, therefore, supported using grammatical terminology in English and Mandarin concurrently.

Contrary to the view that most teachers held, two teachers, Wei and Hui, reported that they used grammatical terms in English frequently in their classroom teaching, and seldom used them in Chinese. They explained that university students were supposed to get used to the new classroom teaching style in which their university English teachers, unlike their secondary English teachers taught students in English throughout

the whole sessions. Students needed to remember these grammatical terms in English, gradually accumulating a lot of terms. For example, Hui said, she often used English grammatical terms exclusively in her class, especially in her explanations of grammar points. As advanced English language learners, university students were expected to adapt to the new teaching environment in which they were substantially exposed to the English context. Memorizing grammatical terms was one part of their requirements.

Another reason Wei and Hui presented was that students had to read English grammar books, not Chinese versions of grammar books. There could be misinterpretations in books translated into Chinese due to mismatches between the two languages and different thinking patterns of two peoples. For example, Wei said

I find that if students don't recognize and understand terms, they are unable to read English grammar books well. As a result, they cannot use grammar flexibly in speaking and writing as well. I often encourage my students to read English grammar books, not the translated version or English grammar books compiled by Chinese authors using Chinese. These books usually contain mistranslated grammar points, which might misguide English learners. Knowing grammar terms is a prerequisite of reading English grammar books. (Interview, Wei).

Wei argued that students should consult English grammar books compiled in English, not ones translated into Chinese when they were dealing with grammar issues. Therefore, they needed to know English terminology.

On the basis of the above statements, it was concluded that all teachers tended to believe that using grammatical terminology was necessary in grammar instruction. In regards to the language to be used for grammatical terminology, most teachers agreed



that combining Chinese and English to refer to those terms is reasonable, with only two teachers preferring to use English.

#### **5.2.4 Error correction**

Two major issues arise in regard to error correction of grammar. The first is, whether teachers think they need to correct students' grammatical errors, if so, do they correct errors in students' writing, speaking or both; the second is, who should provide corrective feedback, teacher feedback or peer feedback. The following paragraphs describe the ten teachers' responses to these questions in the interviews.

The ten teachers agreed it was important to correct students' grammar mistakes in their writing. They believed that if students' grammar mistakes were not corrected in a timely way, they would not be aware of these problems and would likely keep making the same errors. They agreed that grammatical mistakes were a great barrier to students producing comprehensible language. Therefore, they strongly believed in correcting students' grammatical mistakes in their writing. For example, Liu said that correcting students' grammar errors was a good way to help students know the correct form of the language usage. When his students wrote sentences using incorrect time and tense, he would correct them without hesitation. He gave an example in order to support his point of view. One day, one of his students constructed a sentence with an incorrect verb tense in a translation practice. He told her to be mindful of the time and tense of the verb in her utterances and asked her to say it again. The second time she noticed the tense and used a correct form of the verb. Liu continued to explain his motivation of correcting this students' error. He was afraid that if he didn't correct students' grammatical errors, they might make the same mistakes constantly. He thought that Chinese students were often unaware of time and tense, because time and tense was not

an issue in Chinese grammar. If they were not notified of their mistakes, they tended to consistently use the wrong time and tense in their English sentences.

Other teachers expressed the similar views about error correction. For example, Fang said,

I always correct students' writing mistakes. Usually I assign many writing tasks to my students, such as translating some Chinese sentences into English versions or writing an essay. Many students are subject to different kinds of grammatical errors. In order to assist them to achieve high accuracy in their language, I point out their errors. If their mistakes were not corrected, they might influence readers to read and understand their writings. I do not give them direct correction but underline the errors they committed (Interview, Fang).

Fang reported that she corrected students' grammatical errors in their writing because of the importance of language accuracy. She thought that students' grammatical mistakes in their writing might lead to readers' misunderstanding about their writing.

In contrast to teachers correcting students' grammar mistakes in their writing, all teachers said that they did not believe in correcting students' mistakes in their speaking because that it was common and inevitable for students to make grammar mistakes in oral language particularly for English grammar points that are not featured in Chinese. For example, Liu said,

I rarely correct students' oral grammatical mistakes. I believe that if students' utterances make sense, I mean what they say can be followed by other students, I don't need to correct their mistakes. It is common for them to make some simple grammatical mistakes in their speaking. For example, Chinese students use too many "the" in their utterances. In most cases, using an excess of "the" before nouns doesn't influence listeners' understanding. If students are careful about this, they can avoid making the mistakes like these (Interview, Liu).

Liu argued that correcting students' oral grammar mistakes was not always necessary, especially if the error did not influence the sense of the utterance. He went on explaining that some of those minor mistakes may have been corrected if speakers had been attentive in their speaking. Liu's view was echoed by other teachers such as Hui who said that,

I seldom correct students' mistakes in these oral English. It is inevitable that students might make mistakes in their speaking. Chinese students have to put extra attention to the differences between their mother tongue and English. For example, students don't need to tell "he" from "she" and fix their attention on the time and tense of Chinese sentences, but they need to do this in English. This easily leads to students' unconsciousness of notifying these grammar distinctions between their first language and a foreign language they are learning. In this case, I will not correct students' mistakes because they make mistakes due to the carelessness and not their inability of noting the differences between two languages (Interview, Hui).

In this excerpt, Hui stated that she was not eager to correct students' grammar mistakes in their spoken English, because most students' mistakes happened because of the differences between Chinese and English. If students bore those differences in mind, they were less likely to make mistakes. They made mistakes because they were used to their mother tongue and were oblivious to some of the features of English grammar.

Other teachers also held the same opinion, responding that it was not surprising to find students making grammar mistakes. For example, Ping said,

I seldom correct students' speaking errors. Grammatical errors are ubiquitous, not only EFL speakers, but even native speakers make grammar errors in their speaking occasionally. It is acceptable for non-native learners of English to make mistakes as long as their expressions do not confuse the listeners. For example, use "he" to replace "she". Therefore, teachers don't need to correct students' grammar errors at this time (Interview, Ping).

Other teachers agreed with Ping in saying that, if grammar errors made by students in speaking did not impact the communication, she would not correct them. Making grammar errors in speaking was natural, even native speakers made grammar errors occasionally as well.

As for whether teacher review or peer review should be the way to correct students' grammar errors, seven out of the ten teachers, replied that both ways should be integrated into their grammar teaching classroom. Only three teachers reported that students' grammar mistakes were corrected only by themselves.

When teachers were asked who should correct students' mistakes, themselves or students, most teachers reported they adopted both ways because each has its advantage. Teacher review is easily and readily accepted by students, while peer correction is more suitable for large size classes where teachers are unable to correct all mistakes due to the large number of students and time constraints. They explained that students hoped teachers to read their writing or listen to them and point out their mistakes. Therefore, teacher review is the priority of their grammar error correction for students. However, as there were usually more than 60 students in their classes, correcting errors of all students for them was a tough task. In order to deal with this dilemma, they frequently adopted peer review in their classrooms. For example, Liu and Fang said,

Due to the large number of students, I have no time and energy to correct all of their mistakes. What I usually do is to highlight their mistakes and get themselves to correct them. In class, I will take some time to point out some common errors made by all students. Sometimes, I divide students into several groups and ask them to correct their group members' mistakes in their writings reciprocally. The purpose of this is not making students feel discredited when their students correct their mistakes but they can learn from each other. The drawback of this is students sometimes make the wrong corrections because of their limited English levels. I tend to use two methods alternatively to correct students' mistakes (Interview, Liu).

I adopted both two ways in my classes. Teacher review is definitely needed in grammar error correction and peer review is also a good way for students to get feedback about their writings. Encouraging students to correct their mistakes mutually can not only help others find their mistakes but also allow them to learn from each other. Students are greatly benefited from this process. Besides, I am increasingly aware of another merit of peer review, which is it is suitable for a large-size classroom. In a class with many students (in China which is often more than 60), teachers cannot correct all students' grammar errors, an effective way of them is to divide them into several groups and ask students to correct each other's writing. By this way teachers can be free from of correcting many students' writings and save their time to do something else. Meanwhile, students' mistakes can also be corrected. (Interview, Fang)

Liu and Fang supported the use of both teacher review and peer review in their grammar teaching classrooms. They both said that teachers were supposed to provide feedback on students' errors, although peer review was also adopted by them due to a large number of students in their classes.

In contrast to most teachers combining both teacher review and peer review in their grammar error correction classrooms, three teachers, Wei, Chen and Ping, responded that they did not like peer review and corrected students' grammar mistakes themselves. They thought students did not take it seriously when they were asked to correct grammatical errors for their classmates because they did not think it was their job to correct their peers' errors. Some students also had difficulty in identifying grammatical errors that their classmates made, and so made incorrect corrections for their classmates. Therefore, they were not keen on involving peer correction in their grammar instruction. For example, Wei said,

I don't ask students to provide feedback mutually, because students are not responsible about their "jobs". Some of them think it is teachers' job not theirs. Some students are unable to find out the errors due to their poor English level. Besides, they possibly are not able to detect the errors of

their classmates. I used to adopt peer correction in my class. However, many students complained that some of their mistakes were not identified by their group members. So, I don't use peer review any more in my class (Interview, Wei)

Wei's remarks were echoed by Chen and Ping who said that sometimes it was a waste of time to ask students to correct their classmates' mistakes. Some of them were irresponsible and unwilling to point out grammatical errors to their group members.

In brief, all teachers replied that teachers should correct students' errors in written English, but not in the spoken English. With most teachers saying it is better to adopt both teacher correction and peer correction, with only three teachers expressing a preference for teacher-only review.

### **5.2.5 Drilling**

When teachers were asked their opinions about the role of drilling grammar, most teachers responded that they were in favour of drilling. They thought that students could not remember grammar points without drilling. Practice could help students transfer grammar rules into short-term memory to build grammatical knowledge in long-term memory. This point is exemplified by several excerpts of interviews from teachers. For example,

I always ask my students to do some practices to deepen what they have learned about that particular grammar point. If I only present grammar rules and structures to students without practice, I am afraid that students only learn some complex and abstract theoretical knowledge and still have difficulty in using it flexibly. Considering students have to focus on improving communicative competence in university English learning according to the new syllabus requirement, I have to drill grammatical points (Interview, Yang).

I like drilling grammar points. I not only explain grammar rules and present examples to students, but also drill those grammar points in class. Without drilling, students cannot understand and

remember those abstract and theorized grammar rules thoroughly, let alone producing correct sentences in their English learning with them. From the psychology perspective, grammar rules are grammar knowledge stored in short-term memory, which are needed to be converted into long-term memory knowledge (Interview, Liu).

I give several examples to students and ask them to drill grammatical practices. I do so because several students gave me feedbacks that they are tired of boring and abstract grammatical rules presented by me and hope to do some practices using these grammar points. They responded that without drilling, students would easily forget grammatical rules very soon and they were unable to make correct sentences as well (Interview, Chen).

The above three teachers acknowledged the role of drilling in grammar teaching. They believed that memorizing grammatical rules without drilling for students was inadequate for their grammar learning. If students wanted to understand theorised grammar points, and to use them flexibly, it was necessary for them to drill grammar points in class. Yang asked students to practise grammar points because he wanted to develop students' communicative competence and to meet the requirements of the new curriculum, while Liu based his view on a psychological theory about the distinction between short-term and long-term memory. Chen justified her perception of drilling grammar points by saying as it meets students' needs and prevents students feeling bored and frustrated about grammar points. She further explained that some students in her class often complained that it was hard to understand tedious grammar points if teachers only showed them some theorized grammar rules and structure. She thought students hoped that teachers drilled these grammar points and it facilitated their understanding of these grammar points in greater depth. On the whole, these teachers supported drilling grammar points for a range of reasons.

Conversely, three teachers, Wei, Yan and Bing, stated that they were against drilling grammar points in the writing course by saying it was wasting time. They

argued that since university students had learned them in their secondary schools, teachers should not allocate the time again to drill them. Teachers should only be required to present several examples to students when explaining grammar points. For example, Bing said,

I used to be a senior middle school English teacher, knowing that *secondary school curriculum requirement* stipulates that students have to grasp basic English grammar skills. That means that most students have learned grammar systematically before enrolling as university students. Why I spare my limited classroom time to drill grammar points again? Besides, according to the current *College English curriculum requirement*, cultivating students' solid grammatical knowledge is not the priority of College English teachers, and developing students' speaking and writing competence is more important for them. I prefer to assign more time to students' speaking and writing. (Bing, Interview)

She said she preferred to skip drilling grammar points to save time for students to read and write in the class. The other two teachers shared the same attitudes as Bing, both arguing that practising grammar points in grammar teaching was not essential. They said that they had to make full use of the limited class time and avoid repeating the practice of grammar points.

In summary, it is evident that most teachers were in favour of drilling grammar points in grammar teaching. Teachers who supported drilling grammar points said that drilling them facilitated students' understanding of grammar points, enabling them to use them flexibly in communicative contexts. However, some teachers were against practicing grammar points in grammar teaching as it was a waste of time and teachers should accord more time to students for improving other skills.



### **5.2.6 Summary**

This section reports the results of ten Chinese teachers' cognitions about grammar instruction in terms of seven cognitions themes by analysing their interview remarks. The teachers' views differed in relation to two of the themes. Most teachers supported a *focus on form*, although four teachers favoured either *focus on forms* instruction solely or both *focus on forms* instruction and *focus on form* instruction in grammar teaching. Similarly, six teachers reported that the inductive approach should be used in grammar instruction, whereas two teachers focused on the deductive approach exclusively and two teachers relied on both.

However, with some of the themes, there was general agreement. All teachers favoured involving grammatical terminology in their grammar instruction, with most supporting the use of both Chinese and English and only two saying using English was sufficient. Similarly, all teachers favoured correcting students' grammar errors in their writing but not in speaking. Most teachers agreed that both teacher review and peer review should be adopted although a minority used only teacher review. For the final theme, most teachers supported drilling grammar points in grammar teaching with only three against the practice.

### **5.3 Sources of Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching**

In the interviews, one question was designed to delve into the sources of teachers' cognitions. The question asked all ten participants, to talk about the factors that influenced their conceptualisation of grammar teaching. Several factors were identified which included their prior English learning experience, classroom teaching experiences, peer feedback, research articles, overseas study experience, students' needs, practicum experience, training seminars held by their institutions and

administrator's advice. The teachers' responses are summarised in Table 5.1 (see next page).

All teachers indicated that their prior English learning experiences and students' needs were two important sources of their cognitions about grammar teaching. They consistently referred back to grammar teaching knowledge from their previous language learning knowledge taught by their secondary English teachers and University English teachers. At the same time, they also took students' needs into their consideration, remarking that a focus on meeting students' needs was paramount in their teaching, without which, teaching was not effective and successful. Therefore, they always kept their students' needs in mind when thinking about how to deal with grammar teaching.

Classroom experience was indicated as another important source of their cognitions by all teachers except Bing. Their classroom experience triggered new ideas about grammar teaching and generated their more cognitions. Reading research articles was also suggested by seven teachers as an important source of their cognitions. These teachers said they updated their cognitions about grammar teaching by reading relevant research articles about grammar teaching methods and ways of implementing them in the classroom. They tended to incorporate these new pedagogical skills into their own teaching ideas, which contributed to their cognitions about grammar teaching. Peer feedback was also identified by six teachers who said they also constructed their own teaching principles about grammar teaching by learning from their peers. In order to encourage teachers to learn for each other, many Chinese universities asked teachers to audit their peer teachers' class with a view to enrich their own teaching methods. These teachers said that they responded to constructive and effective feedback from other

Table 5.1 Sources of Ten Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching

	Prior language learning experience	Classroom teaching experience	Peer feedback	Research articles	Overseas study experience	Students' needs	Practicum experience	Training seminars
Yang	√	√		√	√	√		√
Wei	√			√		√		
Liu	√	√			√	√		
Fang	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Yan	√	√	√	√	√	√		
Hai	√	√		√		√		
Chen	√	√	√		√	√		
Hui	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Ping	√	√	√	√		√		
Bing	√		√		√	√	√	√

teachers and combined it into their own thinking, updating their cognitions about grammar teaching.

Additionally, several teachers responded that their overseas study experiences contributed to their thinking about grammar teaching. Five teachers said observing their visiting overseas institutions' teachers' classes gave them ideas for teaching grammar, for example, through cultivating students' speaking. Several teachers also stated that their practicum experiences and training seminars held by their universities and schools also led to the formation of their cognitions about grammar teaching. Three teachers, who had graduated from teacher education institutions, remarked that through observing English teaching in secondary school classes and in the university, they learned a lot. Four teachers said that they also learned from training seminars held by the university or the faculty, by gaining tips on how to implement English language teaching in the class, and on how to handle grammar teaching, one of the priorities in those seminars.

In summary, teachers' prior language learning experience, students' needs, teachers' classroom experience, peer feedback, academic articles, practicum experience and training seminars were indicated by the ten teachers to shape their cognitions about grammar teaching.

## **5.4 Teachers' Practices about Grammar Teaching**

The actual practices related to the seven themes of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching were identified by my classroom observations and they are presented in the following.

### **5.4.1 Focus on forms or Focus on form instruction**

The research findings revealed that all teachers invariably adopted *focus on forms* instruction in grammar teaching when engaged in grammar instruction. To be specific, when teaching grammar, teachers usually started with pointing out grammatical points underlying the sentences and then gave several examples to show how grammatical points were used in some discrete sentences. The examples usually took the form of translating Chinese sentences into English ones. Episode 1 below illustrates how Hai presented a grammar point to his students in class.

#### Episode 1:

Teacher (T hereafter): There is an important language point here. Please look at the last sentence in paragraph 4:

*Mattel refashioned the doll into a decent, all-American---although with an exaggerated breast size ---version and named it after Barbara, who was then a teenager.*

Do you notice this sentence has a special feature in language use?

Student(S hereafter): ... (quiet, no response)

T: Please pay attention to *although with an exaggerated breast size*. This is a unique structure used in English grammar. That is, *Conjunction + Preposition Phrase*, 连词加介词短语. This structure makes sentences concise and succinct. Next, I would like to give you an example to show how to use this grammatical point. For example,

*Even though with the same educational background, he was better paid than his wife.*

How to translate this sentence?

S: 尽管有着相同教育背景，但是他还是比他老婆工资高 (saying the Chinese translation together)。

T: Great! The same example is like, even though with the same ability, men are better paid than women.

In this episode, Hai adopted a method similar to the traditional grammar-translation method. First, he asked students to find a grammar point used in the text in the textbook. If students were unable to identify it, he pointed out the grammar point by outlining its structural form. He illustrated this point by asking students to translate a sentence where this language point was embedded. His teaching method fostered students' understanding by emphasizing its structure and the grammatical rule. He drew students' attention to the accuracy of using grammar points focusing on the form of a language point.

In another teacher's episode, a similar teaching method was also witnessed. Episode 2 showed how Ping taught grammar in her classroom when her students had difficulty with a particular grammar point.

Episode 2:

T: Please note the sentence here.

*Many new structures are built with a new type of steel joint, an I-joint, which appears to be the most durable type of joint.*

Who can tell me the sentence pattern of this long sentence?

S: 定语从句 (several students said in Chinese at their low voice)

T: Yes, this is an attributive clause, and *which* refers to *an I-joint*. Who can translate this sentence?

S: .... (Silent) Are you familiar with the attributive clauses?

S: .... (quiet)

T: all right, let's review the grammatical knowledge about attributive clause. Please look at this sentence in the PPT slide.

*The young man cheated his friend of much money, which was disgraceful.*

Is this an attributive clause?

S: Yes. (in chorus).

T: How to translate this sentence?

S: 那个年轻人骗了他朋友许多钱, 这是不光彩的.

T: Awesome! *Which* here is traced back to refer to the major sentence *The young man cheated his friend of much money*. The attributive clause is not difficult but important in the reading and writing.

In this episode, given the importance of the attributive clause in English learning, Ping wondered whether her students grasped this point by asking students to identify an attributive clause in the text they were learning. She did not get any response from students. Being aware that students might have difficulty in understanding the attributive clause, she decided to help students review this grammar point. She did not state the grammatical rules directly, but provided a simple sentence including an attributive clause to students. This time students were able to recognize the attributive clause in the sentence and translate it into Chinese. Here Ping aimed at guiding students to recognize the attribute clause from the simple wording of a sentence with an attributive clause to a complex wording sentence with an attributive clause. Her students' positive response demonstrated the success of her strategy. Ping's teaching principle was to focus on the structure of the attributive clause, not how to use the attributive clause in a communicative context. Her grammar teaching method could be categorized as *focus on forms* instruction.

The observations on other eight teachers' English teaching revealed similar approaches teachers adopted when they were confronted with grammar teaching. More information, therefore, is not presented for the same situation. Based upon these observations, it is concluded that teachers primarily utilize the *focus on forms*

instruction to implement grammar teaching. That is, teachers usually presented several examples where grammar points were used in the decontextualized discrete sentences followed by a requirement for students to do several exercises in the form of translating Chinese sentences into English.

#### **5.4.2 The deductive and inductive approaches**

The classroom observation revealed all teachers adopted the deductive approach in grammar teaching. When teachers needed to present grammar points to students in classroom teaching, they usually started with asking students to recall grammar points that sentences in English texts encompassed and rules of grammar points. They then presented the rules of grammar points that were the focus of the lesson and some decontextualized sentences as examples of the usage of the grammar points. They finished by asking students to practice them by translating discrete Chinese sentences into English ones. In Episode 3, Yang used this approach.

Episode 3:

T: Look at the first sentence. *It is generally accepted that the experiences of a child in his first years largely determine his character and later personality.* What sentence pattern is used in this complex sentence?

S: ... (Quiet)

T: Read it carefully and work on your brains. There is a clause in this sentence.

S: 主语从句, Subject clause (some students).

T: Awesome. Yes, in this sentence, *It* is the formal subject of the sentence and the real subject should be the clause *that the experiences of a child in his first years largely determine his character and later personality.* So the sentence is a subject clause. The structure of *it is (was)... that...* is a typical sentence pattern that the subject clause utilizes. There are a lot of examples of using this grammar point. Do you know a famous novel Jane Austin's *pride and prejudice*? In



this book, the first sentence is *It is a truth acknowledged, that a single man in possess of a good fortune, must be in a want of a wife*. This is also a subjective clause. *That a single man in possess of a good fortune, must be in a want of a wife* is the real subject of the sentence. Now you do an exercise to use this grammar point. Please translate this sentence into English. 人们通常认为孩子天生智力差别并不大。Can you? Pay attention to use subject clause in your sentence?

S: *It is generally accepted that all children are born with equal intelligence.*

T: Excellent.

In this episode, initially Yang asked students to recall the grammar point that this sentence embraced. When students hesitated to reply, he realized that students were not familiar with the grammar point included in the sentence. He then prompted the students by verbalizing them. *There is a clause in this sentence*. This time, with Yang's guidance, students pinpointed the grammar point. Yang then continued to adopt a deductive approach to illustrate this point further by clarifying why it was a subject clause. In this sentence, the clause was the real subject of this sentence, not it. According to the definition, this sentence included a subject clause. He proceeded to illuminate that *it is ....that...* was a typical sentence pattern of using the subject clause. Next, in order to assist students in recalling this grammar point, he gave an example to demonstrate how this grammar structure was used. Finally, he asked the students to do an exercise to practise this grammar point to deepen their understanding in a communicative context. Therefore, the deductive approach was employed by Yang in his grammar instruction.

The way that Yang taught grammar was also seen in Wei's classroom. He presented a grammar point in a similar way to Yang. Wei also began with asking students to recollect the grammar point included in the sentence. She went on to explain the grammar point used in the sentence and illustrate its structure. Finally, she asked students to practise this grammar point using the structure they had been offered, which

was a kind of deductive approach (Ur, 1996). Episode 4 demonstrated Wei's way of grammar instruction in her classroom.

#### Episode 4:

T: Look at this sentence, *not until we finished our work did he come back*, Line 3 in Paragraph 6. Can you find out the typical feature of this sentence?

S: 倒装 (in Chinese means inversion)

T: Yes, it is an inverted sentence. The normal order of this sentence is *he did not come back until we finished work*. Do you know why an inverted sentence come out there?

S: Because the sentence starts with a negative word *not*

T: Yes, according to the English grammar stipulation about the inversion, if a complex sentence begins with a negative word, its major clause has to be inverted between the subject and the auxiliary verb. As for this sentence, since the negative word "*not*" appears at its beginning position, the major clause has to be inverted, with *did he come back* replacing *he came back*. That is to say, when a sentence begins with *Not until*, its major clause have to be inverted as well, whose structure is *Not until+subordinate clause+auxiliary verb+the major clause (subject+predicate)*. Do you understand the grammar point here now?

S: Yes. (In chorus)

T: Alright. Let's look at more examples of the usage of this grammar point in the sentences. How do you translate these sentences?

- *Not until your graduation from a school did you realize how much you love it.*
- *Not until last week did I get a work permit.*
- *Not until the teacher came in did the students stop talking.*

S: ...

T: It is a piece of small cake, isn't it? Now, I would like to announce the answer to these examples.

- 直到毕业时才晓得自己有多么爱这个学校。
- 我直到上周才获得工作许可证。

- 直到老师进来学生们才停止讲话。

S: ....(say together with the teacher)

T: Next, let's do some exercises about this grammar point in the textbook. Please turn to the page 201 and do exercise 3. Please fill the gap of the sentence according to its Chinese meaning.

- Not until the train started to move *did Mary stop weeping*.

直到火车停止后玛丽才停止哭泣。

- Not until he failed the exam *did he know that working hard is important*.

到考试失败之后他才知道努力学习是很重要的。

In this episode, Wei adopted the deductive approach by asking students to recall the grammar point. When students pointed out the grammar point, *Inversion*, in the sentence, she continued to employ the deductive approach to reinforce students' impression. She presented the structures of the grammar point, *Inversion*, followed by an illustration of this grammar point. She ended with asking students to practice the grammar point in accordance with its structure and rule. Other teachers used the same way to teach grammar in classes.

### 5.4.3 Grammatical terminology

Two issues related to the use of grammatical terminology are mainly examined in this section. One was whether teachers used grammatical terminology in their grammar instruction. The other was what language(s) teachers used, Chinese, English or both, when they employed grammatical terminology in their grammar instruction.

As far as the first issue concerned, it was observed that all teachers used terminology in their grammar instruction. When teachers asked students to discover which grammar point was used in the text and its structure, they gave the name of the

grammar point. If students could not respond, teachers told them the grammar point they were discussing using technical terms. For example, in Episode 5,

Episode 5:

T: Read this sentence, as *is shown by the growth rate of GDP (gross domestic product) in the last two decades, China's reform and open policy is a great success*. Can you understand this sentence?

S: (silent)

T: This is a *compound sentence, with two clauses*. The second clause is *the major clause* which is easily understood. The first clause is a *non-restrictive attributive clause*. "As" here is a *pronoun*, which acts as the subject of the *subordinate clause*. There are many attributive sentences where "as" is used as the subject, object and predicative of the subordinate clause.

S: (students seem to have a little bit impression about the usage of "as" as a pronoun.)

T: Please notice that "as" can be not only a *pronoun* in the sentences, but can also be a *conjunction* in the sentences. For example,

Eg. Leave the monkeys as they were.

As they grow older, they begin to understand why their parents have to work hard.

In the above two sentences, "as" acts as a *conjunction* word to connect two clauses. Do you understand?

S: Yes (in chorus)

T: Great. Please bear in mind that "as" has more than one word categories.

In this instructional episode, Fang used a lot of grammatical terminology, such as *compound sentence, clauses, major clause, non-restrictive attributive clause, and pronoun*. These terms are the names of referents which were labelled as tags to tell what is what and who is who. Here, the grammar terminology acted as a label enabling people to know which grammar point was being discussed. Later, the technical terms

*subject, object, and conjunction* were used to clarify the grammar point. Therefore, teachers indeed used grammatical terminology in their grammar instruction.

Sometimes, grammatical terminology was used as a label. Teachers utilized grammatical terminology to nominate several grammar points in class and asked students to use them in their dialogues or group talks. Teachers tended to tell students what points they needed to use in their pair or group work using grammar terms. The following episode shows how Chen employed grammar terminology in her class.

#### Episode 6:

T: Today, our topic is music. When you hear this topic, can you speak out several words related to music?

S: Sure. "Instrument, piano, violin, guitar, rock, pop, folk, lyrics, song..."

T: All right. It seems that you have a lot to say about this topic. In the rest of this class, you will work in groups to discuss music. Please pay attention to *using reflexive pronouns, comparative degree and superlative degree, and the compound sentence, and note the time and tense* used in the sentences as well.

T: Please read this dialogue between Tom and Sam:

Tom: Do you enjoy listening to music?

Sam: Yes, I do.

Tom: What music do you like better, piano or violin?

Sam: Piano.

Tom: Can you play the piano?

Sam: Yes, I can.

Tom: Could you play it three years ago?

Sam: Yes, I could.

Tom: When did you begin to learn it?

Sam: I began to learn ...

Tom: Did you learn it by yourself?

Sam: No.

Tom: Can you tell me the name of music that you heard just now?

Sam: Yes, It's ...

Tom: Who composed it?

Sam: Beethoven did.

Tom: Who is Beethoven?

Sam: He is a musician and composer.

Tom: Can you name some of his music?

Sam: "No.5 Symphony" or "No.3 Symphony" ....

Tom: What piece of Beethoven's music do you like best?

Sam: I like The Moonlight Sonata best. I think it is very beautiful. Would you like to listen to it?

Please listen it silently. You'd better close your eyes and feel the music.

Tom: Oh, you listened to it silently and to my surprise, you lost yourselves in the music.

Tom: You enjoyed the Moonlight Sonata very much, didn't you?

Sam: Yes, I did.

Tom: Why did Beethoven compose the music?

Sam: Actually it was written for his love of Countess Gillette who refused to marry him.

T: Do you finish reading this dialogue with a topic of music? Please tell me which sentence use *reflexive pronouns*?

S: The sentence *Did you learn it by yourself?* (In chorus)

T: Nice. Which sentence use *the comparative degree and superlative degree*?

S: The comparative degree is used in the sentence *What music do you like better, piano or violin? Piano*. The Superlative degree is used in the sentence *What piece of Beethoven's music do you like best?*

T: Good. How about *compound sentences*?

S: There is an attributive clause in the dialogue *Actually it was written for his love of Countess Gillette who refused to marry him*.

T: Great. You can also consider using other types of compound sentences in your dialogue, such as adverbial clause, appositive clause, and object clause.

T: Next, please work in pairs or groups and use these sentences and grammar items in your own dialogue. Please give extra attention to the underlined sentences. They are good examples of applying these grammar points and you can incorporate them into your own dialogues.

S: (begin to discuss in pairs or groups)

In this episode, Chen divided her students into pairs or groups to discuss a topic using some sentence patterns. As the pre-determined teaching syllabus requirement, she asked students to integrate the prescribed grammar points, reflexive pronouns, comparative degree and superlative degree, and the compound sentence in their dialogues. Here this grammatical terminology acted as a label to enable students to understand the grammar points they were going to practice. The same approach is used by Hui and Liu. For example, Hui said “today we were going to learn how to use *imperative sentences* in English conversations”. Liu said “*practising the active voice and passive voice* is the major task of our class today”. In all, grammatical terminology is frequently used by teachers in their grammar instruction.

It was observed that most teachers not only used English but also Chinese to present grammatical terminology. Teachers usually started with presenting grammatical terminology in English, closely followed by its corresponding Chinese term. For example, Liu said “These sentences can also act as *Subjunctive mood*, 虚拟语气”, Chen

said “we have to bear in our mind that “not until” can also be seen *in the emphasis sentences*, 强调句” and Hui said “this sentence is a *non-restrictive attributive clause*, 非限制性定语从句”. Three teachers all repeated the grammatical terminology in Chinese after they spoke it in English.

In sharp contrast to others, Yan and Ping, used only first language-Chinese to refer to grammatical terminology in instructional episodes, For example,

Episode 7:

T: Please look at the sentence, *It was not until my third year in high school that the possibility took hold*, Line 4 and paragraph 7 in the text. This is a special sentence pattern.

What is it?

S: (silent)

T: Who can recall what sentence pattern it is? In Chinese, 强调句 (emphatic sentence), right? The structure of it is “It is (was) ... that...”.

Look at these examples:

It was not until Sunday morning that I heard the news.

It was not until dark that she realized it was too late to go home.

In this episode, Yan intended to draw students’ attention to a sentence pattern used in a text- the Emphatic sentence. She asked students whether they were able to recognize this sentence pattern. When students did not respond, she told them what sentence pattern was used here. However, she didn’t present grammatical terminology in English but only in Chinese, 强调句 (*emphatic sentence*).

Based on the above discussion, it was concluded that these teachers used grammatical terminology in their grammar instruction; most of them mixed English and



Chinese with only two teachers using only Chinese to name grammar terminology in their classes.

#### 5.4.4 Error correction

Two issues related to error correction are discussed in this section. The first is whether teachers corrected students' errors in grammar instruction; the second was who corrected students' errors in grammar instruction, teachers, or their classmates.

Classroom observations revealed that all teachers were inclined to correct students' mistakes in their writing but didn't correct them in their speaking. When teachers spotted that students made some grammatical errors in their writing, they usually corrected them. For example,

Episode 8:

T: *as* can also be a conjunction word. I can give you an example. Please translating this Chinese sentence into English with *as*.

如图所示, 报纸占学生阅读材料来源的 44%.

(He walked around the classroom and checked students' translation. He stopped at one student's seat and pointed out the translation of this student)

As graph show, the newspaper accounts for 44% of students' reading materials.

T: Ok, please tell me it is *show* or *shows*.

S1: oh, yes, sorry, shows, as the graph shows.

T: Awesome, please ensure the agreement between the subject and the predicate in the number, single or plural.

In this episode, in order to instruct students how to use *as* as a conjunction word, Yan asked students to translate a Chinese sentence into English with *as*. When she spotted an error in a student's English translation, she used a method similar to recast, to correct

it. Under her guidance, the student realized the error he made and corrected it. This episode demonstrated that Yan tended to correct students' grammar errors in students' writing. Another teacher, Chen, behaved in a similar way with students' grammatical errors. When she came across students' grammar mistakes in the class, she pointed them out without any hesitation. One of her instructional episode is an example.

Episode 9:

T: Look at Line 3 Para.6 Can you find out the typical feature of this sentence ?

Not until we finished our work did he come.

S: 倒装

T: Yes, it is an inverted sentence. Why? Because of “not”, when a compound sentence starts with a negative word, the major clause has to be inverted. Its structure is “Not until+ subordinate clause auxiliary word + subject+ predicate + others”. There are more examples:

- Not until your graduation from a school did you realize how much you love it.
- Not until last week did I get a work permit.

Please note that “not until” can also be used in the emphatic sentences, 强调句 and its structure is “It is (was) not until+ a major clause. Now please transfer the above two inversion sentences to emphatic sentences.

T: (Chen just walked around in the classroom and watched students transferring sentences. He stopped at the desk of one student and observing....) Read your first sentence, please.

S1: It is not until your graduation from a school did you realize you love it to a great extent.

T: Please notice the time and tense of your sentence.

S1: oh, I See. *It was*, not, *it is*

T: Yes, you need to achieve a consistency of the tense in two clauses.

Chen, in this instructional episode, drew her student's attention to his grammar mistake.

It was also observed that she walked around the classroom to look at students' answers

to this exercise. When she found any mistakes, such as grammar, spelling and other mistakes, she always pointed them out and asked students to correct them. Other teachers did the same as Yan and Chen; they invariably corrected students' grammatical errors once they were noticed.

In contrast, teachers seemed to ignore students' grammar errors in their speaking. Though students often made grammatical errors in their speaking, teachers seldom drew their attention to them. In the ten instructional episodes, no teachers were observed to correct students' grammar errors in their grammar instruction. Teachers did not correct students' grammar mistakes, even in the comments about students' performance on their peer work and group activities. For example, the episode below was a teacher, Hui, who commented on a group of students' performance in their discussion about a given topic.

#### Episode 10:

T: Thank you for your excellent performance. You have a good preparation and gave us an impressive performance. When you spoke you used a lot of gestures, actions and body languages. The sentences you used was simple but appropriate. Well done! However, I would like to list some points that you guys need to improve in the future.

Firstly, please use the simple sentences and compound sentences in turn to show that you master English sentences flexibly. Secondly, don't use so formal words in your spoken English and be mindful to the differences between written English and spoken English. Thirdly, please introduce group member roles to the audience before you make the performance. Next, pay attention to your manners. Please stand in the middle of the classroom and face up to the audience, do not give your back to the audience. Finally, everyone has to raise your voice and speak more loudly so that all the audience can hear you.

In this episode, in commenting on students' group work, Hui did not mention the grammatical errors that student made. She only commented on students' performance

from the perspective of language use, their manners on the platform and their voice volume. It seemed that she was not concerned about the accuracy of students' grammar errors. What she was concerned about was how students could communicate better with their audience.

Classroom observations revealed that all teachers corrected students' mistakes in their classes. First, teachers always corrected students' grammatical mistakes once they were noted. This point has been discussed in the previous paragraphs (see Episode 8 and 9). Several teachers, Yang, Fang and Ping, also tended to ask students to look at their assignments again and pay attention to their mistakes corrected. They said that if students had difficulty in understanding their correction, they should stand up and ask the teacher. For example, in Fang's class,

Episode 11:

(The bell was ringing. Ping and all her students were entering the classroom.)

T: Good morning, class. Today we have several tasks. First, please look at the assignments that you did last week. Please review it after they were revised by me. Please identify why you make the mistakes and try to keep them in mind and ensure not to avoid them again. Now look at your assignments. Please stand up if you have any questions about my revision.

(One student stands up and raise a question to Ping)

S1: Excuse me, Ping. I have a question on my assignment. I can't understand why I cannot use whom in my sentence.

T: Well, because the person is the subject in the subordinate clause, and you have to use who instead of whom. You might think that the person is the object in the main clause, so you use whom. This is not the case here.

As can be inferred from this episode, Ping had corrected her students' assignments before the class began. Students' grammatical mistakes and some other mistakes were corrected by her. This implies that these teachers indeed corrected students' grammatical mistakes in their teaching.

It was also observed that six teachers including Yang, Wei, Hai, Chen, Ping and Bing also encouraged peer review in their classes. They did not always correct students' assignments (usually students' writing) but brought them to the class and asked students to revise them mutually in groups. For example, Hai asked her students to correct their classmates' homework in groups in her classroom teaching.

Episode 12:

T: Have you done the homework that I assigned last week?

S: Yes.

T: OK, I will check your assignment today. How? I will divide you into several groups and each of you have to read other's assignments and make comments on them. Please do it right now.

S: (Begin to read group members' assignment)

T: If you have any problems about the vocabulary, grammar or the structure of your group members' writing, please stand up to consult me.

S1: I find this complex sentence is grammatically problematic but I am not sure. Could you please detect it for me? (One student stands up and says)

T: ....

In this episode, Hai did not correct students' assignments by herself but asked their students to correct them reciprocally. She divided all students into several groups and asked them to correct each other's writing. This indicated that using peer review was one of her ways of correcting students' writing including vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns and other errors.

Another way teachers used peer review was by writing down several grammatically problematic sentences on the blackboard or by displaying them on the projector screen and asking students to find grammar errors in class. For example, Bing listed several sentences with many kinds of grammatical errors in her class. She then asked students to look at these problematic sentences and identify errors in them. In most cases, students were able to identify some errors in the sentences but not all. Only when students failed to detect them did she point out them in a direct way.

On the basis of the above discussions, a conclusion was drawn that these teachers indeed corrected students' grammatical errors in their writing but not in their speaking. It was also revealed that the teachers all corrected students' grammatical mistakes by themselves and several of them asked their classmates to correct them mutually.

#### **5.4.5 Drilling**

It was observed that all teachers practised grammar points in grammar instruction. For them, practicing grammar points seems to be an indispensable part of their grammar instruction to assist students to grasp a specific grammar point. They asked students to do exercises attached at the end of the text when they finished presenting and clarifying grammar points. There were a series of exercises attached at the end of each lesson which was aimed to increase students' awareness on new vocabulary, sentence patterns, grammar points and writing. Teachers usually asked students to complete grammar exercises once they finished explaining grammar points in analysing texts. Additionally, some teachers, such as Yang, Yan and Chen, always asked students to do pre-controlled exercises designed by themselves after they explained points to students. For example, Hui approached his grammar instruction in this way.

Episode 13:

T: OK, now we have learned many sentence patterns in this text like so (such) ... that..., as.... .

Next, let's practise them in the sentences. Please turn to Page 101, and do Exercise 4.

S: (students do as what Hui tells)

T: Let's look at the answers to this exercise.

In this episode, Hui asked students to do the exercises behind the text on the textbook to complete the explicit instruction of these sentence patterns.

Most other teachers also worked in the same way as Hui when they presented grammar instruction to their students. They also demanded their students to practise grammar points by doing exercises on the textbook. For example, in Episode 4, Wei asked students to do some exercises about the grammar point, Inversion, in the textbook. He said that "please turn to the page 201 and do Exercise 3. Please fill the gap of the sentence according to its Chinese translation." In this episode, Wei asked students to practise the grammar point by doing the exercise at the end of Lesson 3 in the textbook. He took it for granted that doing the exercises in the textbook enhanced students' understanding of those grammar points.

Meanwhile, several teachers also asked students to practise grammar points which they pre-designed in their teaching syllabus. The controlled grammar practice activities usually took the form of translating several Chinese sentences to English or doing some gap filling exercise. Teachers usually began with presenting grammar rules or asking students to discover grammar rules, followed by several examples of using these grammar points in discrete decontextualized sentences, and they tended to finish by asking students to do some exercises to strengthen their knowledge of grammar points. For example, in Episode 3, when analysing a long sentence in a text, Yang asked students whether they could differentiate the sentence pattern to which this long sentence belonged. After students did it successfully, she proceeded to present more

detail about this sentence pattern, such as the rule and structure of the sentence pattern. Finally, in order to make students internalize this sentence pattern, she asked them to translate a sentence by using this sentence pattern to practise it. Likewise, in another episode, in order to deepen students' knowledge about *Inversion* and teach them how to use it in writing, Yan asked students to translate some Chinese sentences into English by using *inversion*. She believed that these practices drew students' attention to *inversion* and facilitated them to use it flexibly.

In all, teachers drilled grammar points during grammar instruction. They either asked their students to drill grammar points by doing the exercise at the end of textbook or to practise them in a prescribed way. They seemed to assume that practising grammar points should be an important step of their grammar instruction, through which, students would internalize their grammar knowledge.

#### **5.4.6 Summary**

In this section, teachers' actual practices for grammar instruction in terms of seven themes were illustrated and discussed at great length. The following practices were observed: all ten teachers adopted *focus on forms* instruction; all teachers usually used both the deductive approach and the inductive approach in English classes; teachers often used grammatical terminology in their English classes with most using English and Mandarin; all teachers tended to correct the grammatical mistakes in students' writing but not in their speaking; all teachers personally corrected students' grammar errors, while only three teachers also utilised peer review and all teachers drilled grammar points in grammar teaching.



## **5.5 The Relationship between Teachers' Cognitions and their Practices about Grammar Teaching**

This section explores the relationship between the ten teachers' cognitions elicited through their interviews and their actual practices observed about grammar instruction in terms of the seven themes. The previous sections have examined teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar instruction respectively and research findings about them are tabulated in the following tables (see Table 5.2 and 5.3). Generally, teachers' cognitions were consistent with their practices, but there were some discrepancies. Stimulated recall interviews were made to them for eliciting possible factors resulting in the discrepancy. Their remarks are labelled as SR interview.

### **5.5.1 The consistency between teachers' cognitions and their practices**

In most cases, cognitions were consistent with their practices. Yang and Liu for example, said that they supported *focus on forms* instruction in grammar teaching, and were also observed to implement *focus on forms* instruction in their classes. Similarly, in regard to the theme of inductive and deductive approaches, Yang and Liu reported that they used the deductive approach to present grammar points and were observed to adhere to this principle in subsequent classroom observations. Also, all teachers said that they supported using terminology in the grammar instruction and were observed to do so in their teaching. When using terminology, all the ten teachers except Yang, Wei, Yan and Ping acknowledged the necessity of using both Chinese and English to designate grammar terminology, and were observed to use both languages in grammar. When discussing error correction, all teachers replied that they tended to correct grammar errors in their writing but not in their speaking and the observations revealed that they indeed corrected students' grammar errors in their writing and neglected them in their speaking. With regard to the ways of error correction, most teachers except Wei,

Table 5.2 The Ten Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching in Terms of Seven Themes

Participants	Focus on forms or form instruction	The deductive or inductive approach	Terminology		Error correction		Drilling
			Use or not	Language used(English or Chinese)	Correct or not	Teacher review or peer review	
Yang	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	no
Wei	form	inductive	yes	English	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Liu	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Fang	both	both	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Yan	form	inductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	No
Hai	form	inductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Chen	form	inductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Hui	form	inductive	yes	English	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Ping	both	both	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Bing	form	inductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	no

Table 5.3 The Ten Teachers' Practices about Grammar Teaching in Terms of Seven Themes

Participants	Focus on forms or form instruction	The deductive Or inductive approach	Terminology		Error correction		Drilling
			Use or not	Language used (English or Chinese)	Correct or not	Teacher review or peer review	
Yang	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Wei	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Liu	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Fang	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Yan	forms	deductive	yes	Chinese	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Hai	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Chen	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Hui	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	teacher review	yes
Ping	forms	deductive	yes	Chinese	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes
Bing	forms	deductive	yes	both	yes in writing, no in speaking	both	yes

Chen and Ping stated that they supported both teacher correction and peer correction, and were observed to use both teacher review and peer review in their classrooms. For the last theme of drilling, all the teachers, except Yang, Yan and Bing, responded that they agreed with drilling grammar points in grammar instruction in their interviews, and were observed to drill grammar points during the follow-up observations.

### **5.5.2 Inconsistency between teachers' cognitions and practices and the reasons underlying them**

#### **5.5.2.1 Focus on forms or Focus on form instruction**

Eight of the teachers were observed to have some discrepancies between their espoused cognitions and their practices in the classroom. As noted previously, all the teachers, except Yang and Liu, said they preferred either a *focus on form* or both *focus on forms* and *focus on form* instruction in grammar teaching. However, all eight of them were observed to follow *focus on forms* instruction in classroom observations.

In the later stimulated recall interviews, teachers provided several reasons to justify their actual practices in grammar teaching. The first reason was that teachers taught students in a way that they were taught when they were students; their previous language learning experience appeared to outweigh their beliefs. Although being aware of the importance of teaching students to apply the grammar points into language use, they lacked the pedagogical content knowledge to design specific classroom activities for this purpose. Under this circumstance, they used the old and familiar *focus on forms* instruction like the grammar-translation method. For example, Hai in his interview said,

I know a lot about the grammar-translation method which focuses on the accuracy of language in use. I was taught by this method till my University graduation. I know this is not a good method especially for advanced English language learners. Developing university students' English competence of using grammar points is more important for them. However, I don't know how to

apply focus on form instruction into my classroom teaching. I only have theoretical knowledge about it but don't know how to integrate this theory into classroom activities. As a result, I have to follow my old teaching method which at least ensure students to notice the accuracy of grammar points (SR interview, Hai).

Bing also said that she lacked sufficient pedagogical skills of implementing the *focus on form* instruction, despite recognizing the importance of fostering students' skills in a practical context. Bing was a novice teacher with only four years teaching experience in a university. She began to work as a lecturer in this university after obtaining her master degree in a Chinese normal university. She was overwhelmed by heavy teaching load, with 20 hours teaching in classrooms per week, and felt she had no time to "recharge" herself by reading research articles or books. She felt that she had lagged behind her peers and failed to develop new teaching principles or theories. Therefore, she could not introduce new teaching principles in her classes, but employed old teaching methods like grammar-translation method, a *focus on forms* grammar approach in her classroom.

The second reason given by several teachers was that limited classroom time restricted them adopting *focus on form* instruction. They explained that *focus on form* instruction engaged students in classroom discussion that took much time. In order to make full use of the limited classroom time, they explained grammar rules directly and did not help students to learn these rules in meaningful language contexts. For example, one teacher said,

Implementing focus on form instruction definitely takes more time than taking focus on forms instruction like the traditional grammar translation method. For the latter case, teachers only need to present grammar rules to students explicitly and drill them. What I do is to present grammar rules and structures to them and ask them to do some exercises in class. In contrast, for the former

case, it takes me more time to ask students to learn them in the meaningful sentences in class if I adopt focus on form instruction (SR Interview, Wei).

Wei stated that adopting *focus on form* instruction takes more time than using *focus on forms* instruction. Other teachers also mentioned that limited classroom time prevented them from implementing *focus on form* instruction, and they were forced to use *focus on forms* instruction. Yan said that,

English language teaching in my university is textbook-oriented. I have to complete all ten units with 12 weeks. That means I have to complete one unit per week. In a unit, I not only need to explain grammar points to students but also need to teach vocabulary, reading skills, translation methods and writing skills to them. Therefore, given so many tasks, classroom time assigned me to teach reading is quite limited. I usually explain grammar points in a quick way when needed. That is, I introduce grammar rules to students and present several examples where these grammar points are used. Focus on forms instruction is rather easy to operate compared to focus on form instruction which accord much time to students for learning grammar points in specific language context (SR Interview, Yan).

Yan explained that her teaching was textbook-driven and she had little time to teach grammar systematically by using *focus on form* instruction. When explaining grammar points to students, she simply adopted a fast way by presenting grammar rules to students, rather than instructing students to learning grammar in specific language context.

Thirdly, English examinations were indicated to restrict them from adopting *focus on form* instruction. Several teachers stated that compared to *focus on form* instruction, *focus on forms* instruction was more effective for improving students' mark in the discrete-point exams such as CET 4 and CET 6. As all Chinese university students had to sit CET 4 at the end of their second year, teachers had to prepare students for their

tests. Understandably, they adopted *focus on forms* instruction due to its advantage in helping students achieve good results. For example, Hui said,

Undoubtedly, focus on forms grammar teaching instruction is more effective for exam-oriented students than focus on form. The accuracy of language is emphasized by focus on forms instruction, while the fluency of language is underscored by focus on form instruction. When CET 4 and CET 6 were first introduced to university students, it is an obligation that all undergraduates have to pass CET 4 before they get their bachelor degree certificate. If they failed, they were not accorded with bachelor degree certificate. Therefore, most students study English with a sole purpose of passing CET 4. One drawback of CET 4 is that speaking is not included in the exam items. Only listening, reading and writing are assessed. Listening only take up a small percentage of the whole marks. In order to prepare students for CET 4, I have to use focus on forms instruction (SR Interview, Hui).

Hui explained that *focus on forms* instruction was more suitable for students to pass mandated exams like CET 4. In the CET 4, students' speaking was not evaluated, while only listening, reading and writing were assessed. In order to help students prepare CET 4, she was forced to adopt *focus on forms* instruction. Hui's comments were echoed by other teachers who responded that *focus on forms* instruction, like the traditional grammar translation method, was able to promote students' performance in most English exams such as CET 4 and CET 6. If the evaluation form of these exams remained unchanged, they felt they could not alter their teaching methods, even though they knew it was not a premium method for English learners.

Finally, some teachers responded that they adopted *focus on forms* instruction on account of students' needs. Teachers all said that they gave primacy to students' needs in implementing their grammar teaching practices in the classroom. For example, Wei stated that,

I know learning English for communication is important for students. Communication should be the final purpose of learning a language for students. However, some students don't hold the same opinion with me. They told me that they wanted to learn more knowledge from the class. If teachers only ask students to do some pair work or group work or other classroom activities, they find that they achieve nothing from classroom teaching (SR Interview, Wei).

Wei reported that students believed that they learned nothing from English teaching if teachers adopted the *focus on form* instruction. Students preferred their teachers to teach them some specific English knowledge, such as new English words, phrases, sentences and new grammar points. They thought they got nothing from activities such as discussions or other group activities. Wei's remarks were reflected in other teachers' words. In the stimulated recall interview, Ping responded that many of her students had private talks with her, requesting her to teach grammatical knowledge, especially the rules and structures of difficult grammar points as they had to pass CET 4 to obtain their Bachelor degree certificates. Her students said that they knew they needed to learn how to use grammar in the communicative context, but they also had to sit English exams. Ping said students needed her to help them with these exams.

#### **5.5.2.2 The deductive and inductive approaches**

Eight teachers in the interviews, who said that they supported using either the inductive approach or both approaches in grammar instruction, actually adopted the deductive approach in grammar instruction. The stimulated recall interviews elicited underlying reasons contributing to the tension, which are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

First, the first reason they offered in the subsequent stimulated interviews was students' response. Two teachers, Wei and Hui, responded that their students' response was an important consideration to alter their practices. Liu supported the inductive approach in grammar teaching but adopted the deductive approaches in grammar



instruction. When he was asked the reason, he replied he asked students to discover the rules of the attributive clause; however, only a few students were able to identify them and most other students unable to respond. Therefore, he needed to present rules to them explicitly and assist them to memorize the rules of the attributive clause. Therefore, to respond to his students' needs, he adjusted his teaching ways from using the inductive approach solely to combining both approaches in his English classroom.

Likewise, Hui said most of her students asked her to present rules of grammar points causing students difficulty after she had asked them to discover the rules by themselves. She said her students felt secure after obtaining an explanation from her so she felt she had to try her best to satisfy their demands. In all, students' needs prompted two teachers to change their minds and adopt both approaches in their grammar instruction.

The second reason why these teachers adopted the deductive approach in their practices was due to limited class time. Six teachers, Wei, Yan, Hai, Chen, Hui and Bing, revealed that developing students' communicative competence was one of the main tasks for teachers in English classes, but in order to save more time to students for practicing their speaking and promoting their communicative competence, they usually adopted the deductive approach. For example, Wei said in a stimulated recall interview:

Well, I am aware of the importance of developing students' communicative competence in the spoken English class. Students should be given as much time as possible to speak freely. Meanwhile, grammar is not important any more in spoken English class. Hence, I plan a little bit time to present grammar with a purpose of saving more time to students' speaking. The approach is adopted by me is deductive approach. Compared with the inductive approach, the deductive approach presents grammar explicitly and takes less time in the class. In the deductive approach, I only need to tell them what kind of grammar points we are going to learn, while in the inductive

approach students have to be given chances of discovering grammar rules. By comparison, I think that the deductive approach takes less time (SR Interview, Wei).

The third reason was most teachers reported that they had to teach English in accordance with the new syllabus and to fulfil the goals of the new syllabus. The new syllabus states clearly that the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions, they will be able to communicate effectively (MoE, 2007). Teachers, therefore, have to encourage students to speak as much as possible in the class to foster their communicative competence, and spend less time on grammar issues. However, teachers drew students' attention to the usage of these grammar points in the examples; students were then asked to integrate these grammar points into their own dialogue or group talks. They did not ask their students to discover the rules of grammar. For example, Yan said in the stimulated recall interview,

I always think that it is better to spare several time to students for considering the rules and structures of grammar points. In this way, their attention to these grammar points can be aroused, and they will look at the usage of grammar points as well. However, the new College English curriculum requirement stipulates that College English teaching should develop students' ability of using English in a comprehensive way, particularly improving students' listening and speaking. Therefore, in my English classes, I have to comply with this principle and confer more time to students to speak English. Even in my presentation grammar to students, I have to complete it with a short time. I just ask them to observe how grammar points in the discussion are used in the model dialogue and then make their own dialogues using these grammar points (SR Interview, Yan).

The last reason was that their teaching was still textbook-driven and they had to explain all texts to students. It seemed that they assumed that students could improve

their English level after learning all the texts in the textbook. If teachers did not complete the books, they would incur severe criticism from their department dean and dissatisfaction from their students. Therefore, teachers had to explain all the modules in the textbook including a grammar module in the textbook which is usually presented in *the deductive approach*. Specifically, a concept and its relevant rule of a grammar point were given at first, followed by several examples with requirements to practising these grammar points at the end of grammar lessons. Teachers followed the textbook explaining the grammar points in a deductive way. Take Wei as an example,

English teaching in my university is textbook-centred. In the textbook, grammar presentation is approached like this. Grammar rules of grammar points are introduced at the very beginning, followed by some examples and exercises. I have to go through the whole textbook including the grammar section module. I have to adopt the way that the textbook uses. I know it is better to teach grammar in a communicative context; however, I have to obey the policy of the school, i.e., I have to teach English based on the textbook. Otherwise, I will be blamed by my dean and students are also not satisfactory with me. (SR Interview, Wei).

Wei ascribed her way of teaching grammar in the classroom to the textbook she used, in which grammar points were presented deductively. Her remarks had resonance with another teacher, Ping explained that she had to involve textbook in her teaching because the term end test such as the translation test and multiple choice test, which included vocabulary, sentences and grammar, appeared in the text of the textbook. If she did not cover the grammar module of the textbook, students may not obtain good marks and even fail the exam. Hence, she had to incorporate the textbook approach into her classroom teaching.

In sum, when teachers explained why at times there was inconsistency between their beliefs and their use of the deductive approach or the inductive approach and their

practices, several factors were mentioned: students' response, limited classroom time, the new syllabus requirement and the textbook they used.

### **5.5.2.3 Grammatical terminology**

When teachers were asked whether they support the use of terminology or not in grammar teaching and if so, what languages they used, inconsistency was noticed between the languages they used in explaining grammatical terminology in practice and in the beliefs expressed in the interviews. For example, two teachers, Yan and Ping, said they supported using both English and Chinese to refer to grammar terminology, but were observed using only Chinese for grammar terminology in the classroom. In the subsequent stimulated recall interviews, they presented several reasons.

In explaining why their classroom practice differed from their espoused beliefs Yan and Ping said they were influenced by their students who said that if they used English terminology it was difficult and distracting to memorize the difficult and long grammatical terms in English. As Yan said,

At the beginning of my grammar teaching, I always used both English and Chinese to refer to grammar terminology. Unfortunately, my way of using two languages to mention grammar terminology is not welcomed by my students. After the class, some of them talked to me that they did not wish to remember the difficult English terms. They explained that if I used English terminology, which tended to draw their attention from understanding grammar points to memorize the long and abstract English terms (SR Interview, Yan).

Another teacher, Ping gave the same reason as to why she used Chinese. She said that English terminology was usually long and abstract, making it difficult for students to memorize. To ease the burden for students' of memorizing terms, she presented them in Chinese directly.

Apart from this, the teachers said they lacked confidence in using terminology in English. Both Yan and Ping said that they had been aware the importance of using both Chinese and English with grammatical terminology, but in reality, at times they forgot how to say them in English. Therefore, they chose to use Chinese only for grammatical terminology. For example, Ping said in the stimulated recall interview:

I only use Chinese to speak out the grammar terminology because sometimes I cannot remember how to say them in English. Some grammatical terms are long and hard to be remembered, such as, 反身代词 (reflexive pronoun), 不定代词 (indefinite pronoun), 基数词 (cardinal number), 序数词 (ordinal number). When I need to use them to explain the grammar rules, I only use Chinese to speak them out (SR Interview, Ping).

Ping's words were echoed by another teacher, Yan, who claimed that since she was taught grammar knowledge in Chinese by her teacher, she knew the terms only in Chinese with the exception of several simple English expression of them. This led to her usage of solely Chinese when using grammar terminology in her classroom, although she realized the benefit of using English grammar terms for students to develop their communicative competency. She used Chinese because of a lack of confidence in using both.

There was also an inconsistency with Yang and Wei who likewise expressed a belief in using English terminology, but were observed to use both English and Chinese grammar terminology. They also said that students' response led to their decisions. When they used English for grammar terminology, students did not respond. They thought students might not know the meaning of English terminology, and they used their familiar language- Mandarin. As Yang put it,

I think students might know the meaning of *Inversion*, but when I saw their puzzled faces, I was aware that they did not hold that knowledge. In order to let them know, what I was going to talk,

I used Chinese to repeat it again. This time, I saw most students nodded their heads. I knew they understood the meaning of the term. Though I think students may know the meaning of this terminology if I use the term many times, I cannot control myself but say it in Mandarin again. Students' response prompted me to say it in both English and Chinese (SR Interview, Wei).

Wei agreed that students' response was important for them because if his students were not satisfied with him, they might evaluate him negatively. Negative evaluations by students' could impact on his salary and academic promotion. For example, he said,

I don't want to use Chinese to refer to grammatical terminology. But if I use English to refer to the grammatical terminology, many students become dumbfounded. I have to repeat the terminology in Chinese so that they can understand what I am saying. Take this class as an example, when I said *determiner*, students have a puzzled look. I knew they possibly did not know the meaning of this term. I had to say it in Chinese, 限定词, again. If I did not do like this, students considered that I overestimate their ability and ignored their needs or. They might think that I was not an excellent teacher who made wise and appropriate decisions according to students' response. Therefore, they might evaluate me negatively on the evaluation form filled at the end of the semester. Therefore, in order to cater to their demand and avoid their misunderstanding about me, I gave up my original thinking and adopted both English and Chinese to refer this terminology (SR Interview, Chen).

In sum, for several teachers there was evidence of an inconsistency between their espoused beliefs about what language to use when referring to grammatical terminology. In later stimulated recall interviews they reported that students' needs and their lack of confidence in using English terminology contributed to their final decision-making.

#### **5.5.2.4 Error correction**

All teachers said they believed in error correction and were observed to do so in their classroom teaching. However, there were discrepancies as to whether error correction should be by teachers or peer feedback with several teachers observed to behave

differently in the classrooms to what they had stated in the interviews. Three teachers, Wei, Chen, and Ping, responded in the interview that teachers should solely take responsibility for correcting students' grammar mistakes; however, they were observed in the classroom to not only correct students' mistakes themselves, but also used peer review for correcting students' mistakes. In the subsequent stimulated recall interviews, they offered several reasons to explain why they also adopted peer review.

The first reason was due to the large size of class they said. Three teachers mentioned that the huge number of students in their classes restricted them from correcting all students' grammatical mistakes by themselves. They did not have adequate time to complete this task but turned to their students to mutually check grammatical mistakes. By doing this, they claimed students also learned from each other and improved their writing cumulatively. As Wei said,

I do believe that it is teachers who should be responsible for correcting students' mistakes. However, I cannot correct all of my students' writing by myself since there are more than 50 students in my class and I have three classes like this. That means I need to correct 150 writings per week. This is an unaccomplished task for me. Therefore, I need to consider an alternative way of correcting students' mistakes. The way I take is to divide students into several groups and asked them to read others' writings and correct any mistakes, especially grammatical mistakes (SR Interview, Wei).

Chen expressed the same belief that a large number of students in the class forced her to change her original belief of correcting students' grammatical mistakes by herself solely. She had read a research article about how to give students' feedback and found that peer review was also a good substitute. She said that she believed students also benefited from evaluating their peers writing. After weighing the advantages of both peer review and teacher review, given the large size classroom situation, she had decided to use both ways in her classrooms to correct students' grammar mistakes.

Another reason was the requirement of the new syllabus. Two teachers, Chen and Ping, said that the expectations of the new *College English Curriculum Requirement* often resulted in mismatches between their cognitions and their practices. They said that one of the goals in the new curriculum requirement was for university English teachers to enhance students' autonomous learning ability. In order to achieve this goal, teachers encouraged students' involvement in classroom teaching when chances permitted, including peer correction of grammatical mistakes. Although they insisted that teachers should take responsibility for correcting students' grammar errors in their writing, they still gave chances to students to read their group members' writing. They aimed to cultivate students' autonomous and peer learning to satisfy the requirement of the new curriculum. Statements from two of the teachers provide an example:

In order to comply with the requirement of the new *College English Curriculum Requirement* (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2007), I implement classroom practices which mismatched with her cognitions. I think it is better for teachers to give corrective feedback to students. However, the new syllabus emphasizes that students should be encouraged to join the classroom teaching and students. In order to meet this demand to the greatest extent, I always take every chance of involving students in classroom teaching. Peer review was one of my successful attempts (SR Interview, Chen).

One of the reasons that I integrate peer review in my classroom teaching is that I have to teach grammar in accordance with the new *College English Curriculum Requirement* which specifies that 'one of the objectives of the reform of the teaching model is to promote the development of individualized study methods and the autonomous learning ability on the part of students' (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2007). Teachers cannot dominate the classroom teaching, changing their role from 'an actor' to 'a conductor'. I divide my students into several groups and ask them to correct their group member's writings reciprocally. Students can reflect on their own writing by discovering his classmates' grammar mistakes and avoid making the same mistakes.



Meanwhile, they can replace me to find out the mistakes for their classmates mistakes (SR Interview, Ping).

Meanwhile, they also indicated that shifting a teacher-centre classroom teaching model to a learner-centre one should be taken as a priority in Chinese university English curriculum reform. To comply with this requirement in their classroom teaching, they tried not to be 'a dictator', but gave 'democracy' to their students even though personally they believed teachers should correct the students. They required their students to engage in every step of classroom teaching. This led to their classroom teaching which was likely to be incongruent with their cognitions. That is, despite being convinced of the importance of grammar correction by teachers, they were unable to correct all students' mistakes so got students to correct each other's' mistakes.

The final reason they offered was they wanted to enliven the classroom teaching and grab students' attention, to their learning outcomes in classroom teaching. Wei and Ping said that if teachers always corrected students' mistakes, many students felt bored and lost interest. Ping remarked, for example,

My students always complained that a unique and unchangeable method easily bored them and made them lose interest in the classroom teaching. They demanded that I adopt a wide range of classroom activities to stimulate their interest. Though I have a strong belief that teachers should be responsible for correcting students' grammar mistakes, I am afraid that if it is always I who correct their mistakes, they may lose interest of this way. In order to attract their interest, I encourage their involvement in correcting students' grammar mistakes. For example, I asked them to swap reading writing with their partners in pair. By this means, students not only helped their partners to correct grammar mistakes, but also learned from each other. Besides, they show their interest of this way (SR Interview, Ping).

Wei expressed the same belief in using variable ways of error correction to grab students' attention. He said that students became fed up with the way that teachers

dominated classroom teaching and corrected their mistakes. In order to engage his students in classroom teaching, he had to change this situation and adopted different ways of teaching grammar. A particular case of this was to get students involved in correcting students' errors in their writing.

Additionally, an apparent discrepancy occurred with Liu, Fang, Yan and Hui who reported in their interviews that they adopted both teacher review and peer review in their classroom teaching, but in their classroom observations, only teacher review was found and peer review did not take place. In the stimulated recall interviews, they all explained that they usually implemented both in classroom teaching, but not in this class. They claimed that if I attended their next week's class, I would see how they use peer review in their classes.

In sum, there were three reasons justifying why they adopted both teacher review and peer review in their English teaching. Large size classrooms, the requirement of new curriculum and their motive of engaging students' involvement explained why they combined both teacher and peer correction into their English teaching.

#### **5.5.2.5 Drilling**

Yang, Yan and Bing, responded in the interviews that they didn't support drilling grammar points in class, but were observed to drill grammar points in their practical classroom teaching. Their practices in classroom teaching were not consistent with their cognitions reflected in the interview in relation to drilling grammar. The subsequent stimulated recall interviews unveiled the reasons why they didn't follow their cognitions in their practices.

This discrepancy was justified by all teachers who claimed that they had to deal with the grammar exercises in the textbook to meet the syllabus requirement. They

stated that they did not want to drill those grammar points; however, they had to handle all exercises attached at the end of each lesson as prescribed by their English teaching syllabus. Therefore, after presenting grammar points, they tended to ask their students to do the exercises associated with those grammar points attached at the end of each lesson. This might create an impression that they supported drilling grammar points in their grammar instruction. They went on to say they drilled grammar points because the syllabus required them to complete the whole of the textbook. Yang said:

I do not support drilling grammar points. I think it is wasting time of doing any exercise. During my teaching, I have to do some exercises because those exercises are important components of the textbook. I have to cover all the contents and knowledge in the textbook. Chinese English language teaching is characterized by a textbook-driven. Some textbook knowledge such as the sentences in the text and exercises behind the text probably appears in the semester end exam. Therefore, if I do not go through the whole textbook, students and my leaders will complain me (SR Interview, Yang).

Yang claimed he had to deal with the grammar exercise at the end of each lesson creating an impression that he supported drilling grammar points, but if he did not complete them, his leader would blame him for not covering the textbook fully.

Another reason the teachers put forward was that they were concerned with students' needs. They did not plan to drill grammar points before the class, but when some students asked, for examples, they would practise these grammar points. For example,

I think you may notice that after I finish presenting the grammar point about subject clause, I want to go back to the text in the textbook. One girl student raised her hand and asked me whether I could give an example to her so that she was able to know how to use it in the language context. This was why I came back to this grammar point and gave several examples of practising this grammar point (SR Interview, Yan).

As Yan said, she did not plan to ask students to practice the subject clause. However, one student asked her to give more examples and practice them to deepen their understanding about *the subject clause* and the *usage of subject clause* in the context. In order to meet this student's demand, she drilled this grammar point in class.

The final reason revealed given by teachers was that they turned to practise grammar points due to the presence of a supervision team member in her class. Bing replied that in her university all teachers had to be observed by one or two supervision team members who were usually aging and retired teachers for each semester. After observing, they marked teachers in evaluation forms and pointed out the shortcomings of teachers they observed. In order not to be evaluated by them negatively, she and her fellow colleagues always did their utmost to satisfy those aging teachers. Most of these veteran teachers were keen on the traditional grammar translation method, with an expectation that English teachers had to adhere to the Present-Practice-Produce principle. If teachers did not practise grammar points in grammar teaching, they were bound to be questioned by those veteran teachers and evaluated badly. As she did not want to be criticised for a lack of practice in her classroom teaching, she added a practice step into her grammar instruction.

To sum up, three reasons were revealed by three teachers why they did not implement their grammar teaching in line with their cognitions in relation to the theme of drilling grammar points. Textbook-oriented teaching method, students' needs and institutional factor like the observation of supervision team member prompted them to drill grammar points and contributed to the mismatch.

### **5.5.3 Summary**

This section examined the relationship between ten teachers' cognitions reflected in the interviews and their classroom practices observed in their classroom observations. The comparison indicated that to great extent teachers' cognitions were consistent with their classroom practices, however, mismatches were also noticed. The stimulated recall interviews explored reasons influencing the consistency of their cognitions and practices. The result revealed that teachers' personal grammatical knowledge, language learning experience, institutional factors, such as new curriculum requirement, teaching documents, exams and supervision system, and students' factors such as students' needs, levels and responses, contributed to the mismatches between teachers' cognitions and their practices.

### **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the ten teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching and their relationship to what observed in their classroom practice. The research findings revealed that teachers held a set of cognitions about grammar teaching and showed how teachers implement their grammar teaching in their accrual classroom teaching. A comparison made between them demonstrated that teachers' practices were generally consistent with their preconceived cognitions but discrepancies also existed. The further study revealed that teachers' lack of expertise and contextual factors contributed to the discrepancies. The quantitative and qualitative research findings will be synthesized and discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 6.1 Chapter Overview

The preceding two chapters (Chapter 4 and 5) reported the research findings related to the research questions. Chapter 4 mainly presented quantitative research findings to answer research question 1, 2, 3, while Chapter 5 provided qualitative research findings related to research question 1,3,4,5. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of research findings with reference to each of the five research questions. The results of the study are also discussed in relation to previous research studies. To be specific, in each of the following five sections of this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings are firstly synthesized and briefly reported, followed by an interpretation of the results, with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapter two. Finally, a brief summary of this chapter is made.

#### 6.2 Chinese University English Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching

The first research question is to explore Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching in terms of several themes: *focus on forms or focus on form instruction*, the deductive or inductive approach, the use of grammatical terminology, error correction and drilling. In the following subsections, the research findings are presented in an order of these themes.

##### 6.2.1 Focus on forms or focus on form instruction

In exploring teachers' cognitions about *focus on forms* or *focus on form* instruction, the questionnaire study found that most College English teachers in one province of China

supported the *focus on form* instruction. They believed that developing students' communicative competence at the tertiary level should be prioritized in grammar instruction. Similarly, in the in-depth study, most teachers, six out of ten teachers also expressed the view that grammar instruction was best accomplished through developing students' communicative competence. The result is consistent with a number of previous studies stating that English teachers prefer the *focus on form* instruction and contributes to a general agreement that the *focus on form* instruction is effective in grammar teaching (Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Fotos, 1998; Shintani, 2013).

The outcome that teachers have preference over *focus on form* is not surprising considering teachers' previous learning experience, and context factors such as the implementation of the new curriculum and students' language knowledge. The justifications of teachers' strong beliefs about favouring the *focus on form* instruction are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, in order to comply with the new *College English Curriculum requirement*, teachers tended to accept that the *focus on form* instruction should be adopted in grammar instruction. The new curriculum stipulated that the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively (MoE, 2007). In order to meet this requirement, teachers had to adopt the *focus on form* instruction with an emphasis on cultivating students' communicative ability in practical situations. Chen, for example, said that the new *College English Curriculum Requirement* specified College English teachers should help students to have a solid fundamental knowledge in English language and cultivate their ability to use English, especially the ability to listen and

speak in English. In response to this requirement, the *focus on form* instruction was espoused by her and most of the other teachers.

Secondly, teachers in the study found that students' current grammar knowledge restricted them from speaking fluently with other speakers. In their view, students usually considered grammatical rules underlying the sentences when speaking because they had learned English by the traditional grammar-translation teaching method. Focusing on grammatical rules appeared to hinder students from speaking freely and confidently. In view of this limitation, most teachers thought that grammatical knowledge should be learned in a communicative context which could facilitate interaction. For example, Hui said she believed that learning grammatical structures in communicative contexts was more important than learning grammar in discrete sentences advocated by the conventional ways, and that memorizing grammatical rules sometimes affected students' communication in English. Hui concluded that it was not conducive to students' free flow of speaking if they always fixed their attention on the accuracy of grammar taught by the traditional grammar-translation method. Similarly, many teachers remarked that they were taught by a method similar to the traditional grammar-translation method before commencing their university English study and still felt constrained in speaking appropriately. Therefore, they thought that the *focus on form* instruction might be a better choice for them to cultivate students' comprehensive English abilities including speaking properly.

In brief, on the basis of both the questionnaire study and in-depth study, most teachers held a strong belief that the *focus on form* instruction is the most appropriate instructional approach, in accordance with the new *College English Curriculum Requirement*. This suggests that teachers upheld the new reform policy.



Although self-reported practices in Section 3 of the questionnaire for grammar teaching were generally consistent with their cognitions identified in Section 2 of the questionnaire, actually all teachers were observed to use the *focus on forms* instruction in grammar instruction in classroom practice, contrary to their reported cognitions.

The inconsistency between the findings about teachers' practices from the questionnaire and the classroom observations reflects a drawback of questionnaires for collecting data. Using a questionnaire solely to examine teachers' practices is inadequate as it usually elicit teachers' ideal beliefs not their actual practices (Dörnyei, 2010). Other methods, such as classroom observation should be used to triangulate data and complement a questionnaire (Borg, 2015).

The inconsistency between teachers utilizing *focus on forms* instruction in classroom observations and their cognitions reported in the interviews is established. The reasons contributing to the inconsistency could therefore be explored. It appeared that these include lack of teachers' expertise in implementing a *focus on form* instruction, insufficient classroom time, high stakes exam-oriented educational system, and students' need justify the mismatch. These reasons have been discussed in 5.5.2.1 and are not examined further here.

### **6.2.2 The deductive and inductive approaches**

The questionnaire seems to show that teachers had no apparent preference for either of the two approaches, and said they believed that both deductive and inductive approaches should be incorporated into their grammar teaching. In the interviews, although two teachers reported that both approaches should be used, six teachers indicated that only the inductive approach should be involved in grammar instruction.

Teachers who advocated the inductive approach justified their comments with two reasons: one is that university students had learned grammar systematically using a deductive approach prior to their entry into university, and so there was no necessity to teach them using the same method. They likened English learning to a continuum with beginning English learners who should be taught some basic knowledge about English at one end and advanced learners who should learn how to construct fluent language texts using the grammatical rules at the other end. Between beginning learners and advanced ones were intermediate learners who had to learn both grammatical rules and language structures and how to use them in producing language fluently in writing and speaking. University students, as advanced English learners, were supposed to be able to produce fluent language that was also accurate and appropriate grammatically, rather than learning grammatical rules again, as at the beginning stage of their English learning. Therefore, in grammar teaching in university classrooms, they should be encouraged to discover previously learned grammar rules, that is, through an inductive approach; the other is that these teachers strictly have to follow the guidance of the new *College English Curriculum Requirement*. The new curriculum states that university English teaching should be shifting from a teacher-centred pattern, where knowledge of the language and skills were imparted by the teacher in class only, to a student-centred pattern, where the ability to use the language and the ability to learn independently are cultivated.

This result is consistent with Shaffer's study (1989) of high school students which compared the effect of the inductive approach and deductive approach and found an inductive approach was more supportive. The current study reinforces an argument for using an inductive approach in grammar teaching with varied English levels as Shaffer's study was with high school learners and the current study is with university

students. This contrasts with Tammenga-Helmantel, Arends, and Canrinus's (2014) argument that various approaches of grammar instruction should be adopted in teachers' practices. In a quasi-experimental study to compare the effectiveness of deductive, inductive, implicit and incidental grammar instruction, they showed that all four kinds of grammar instruction were effective. As it was difficult to determine which the best was, they suggested integrating various forms of instruction in classroom teaching. Although whether using an inductive approach is the most effective is still inconclusive, the participants in the current study expressed a belief in its efficacy.

It is worth to note that a conflict existed between the finding in the questionnaire and in the in-depth study. In the questionnaire it seems that teachers supported both the inductive and deductive approaches in grammar instruction, whereas in the in-depth study, most teachers, six out of ten, highlighted that only inductive approach should be adopted in grammar teaching. This might reflect one drawback of the questionnaire in collecting the data (Dörnyei, 2010). The questionnaire usually elicits teachers' ideal beliefs not their actual beliefs they hold. Therefore, using questionnaire alone is far from exploring teachers' cognitions thoroughly and a triangulation method should be used to investigate teachers' cognitions (Borg, 2015).

As far as teachers' practices about the deductive and inductive approaches, the inconsistency between the questionnaire findings and the interview findings take place again. The questionnaire study suggests that teachers tend to use both the deductive and inductive approaches in their grammar instruction, while classroom observations find that all teachers employed the deductive approach. Several factors, such as students' needs, time constraint, instructional material and new English syllabus (See 5.5.2.2) were indicated by teachers to explain why teachers adopted the deductive approach in grammar teaching.

This research finding suggests that Chinese English teachers accepted the tenet of the new curriculum such as shifting from teacher-centred teaching to student-centred teaching and fostering students' learning autonomy. However, they cannot implement their cognitions in their actual classroom practices for multiple reasons such as students' needs, time constraint, and instructional material.

### **6.2.3 Grammatical terminology**

The questionnaire showed that most teachers agreed with the importance of using grammatical terminology. Similarly, the qualitative in-depth study indicates that all teachers supported using terminology in grammar instruction. They explained that terminology provided a 'label' for grammar points and helped students make distinctions among an array of grammar points. In their view, terminology was just like the name of a person and assisted language learners in distinguishing grammar points. Moreover, they agreed that students who knew grammar terminology learned more effectively than those who did not. Observation of teachers' practices found that teachers in this study indeed used terminology in grammar teaching to explain grammatical knowledge to students. They believed using grammatical terminology facilitated the acquisition of students' grammatical knowledge. This finding is consistent with many previous studies (Berman, 1979; Berry, 2009; Halliwell, 1993; Hutchinson, 1987; Roshan and Elhami, 2016; Schleppegrell, 2013).

Teachers' support of using grammar terminology in grammar instruction in this study endorses the view that metalanguage should be used in grammar instruction even though the new syllabus focuses on fostering students' communicative competence. This is echoed by Hu's (2011) comment that metalanguage deserves a place in the L2 classroom. Hu claimed that even in a CLT-oriented classroom, it was desirable to explicitly discuss the structural and functional features of highly complex structures

and argued that it was difficult to see how the discussion can be conducted without using grammatical terminology.

In all, although the research on using terminology is still inclusive, this study provides further support to an argument for a role that grammatical terminology plays in facilitating students' language proficiency.

With regard to the issue of which language should be used for grammatical terminology in language instruction, L1, L2 or both, this study revealed that most teachers, eight out of ten, thought that using both Chinese and English was optimal. When teachers' practices were observed, however, most of the time they used grammatical terminology in English to communicate with students and to present grammar instruction to students but it was also observed that they usually repeated grammatical terminology in Chinese. They explained that as most students had difficulty recognizing complicated and unfrequently-seen grammatical terms, they had to repeat grammatical terminology in Chinese to ensure students to understand what was being talking about during grammar instruction.

This research finding confirms many previous studies examining the role of L1 and L2 in L2 classrooms. For example, Cook (2001) once stated that both L1 and L2 languages could be used in foreign classroom teaching, and L1 was a useful element in creating authentic L2 users. Similarly, Storch & Wigglesworth (2003) suggested that the use of L1 in L2 setting was useful for pair work and communicative language teaching because L1 could extend learners' understanding about the task. More recently, by investigating the use of L1, discourse markers and metalanguage in individual task performance, Gánem-Gutiérrez and Roehr (2011) found the use of L1 enabled L2 learners to explore form-meaning relationships and overcome specific language

difficulties during task performance. To sum up, the use of both L1 and L2 in EFL in this study is consistent with other research in the field.

#### **6.2.4 Error correction**

Teachers' cognitions of the role of error correction in grammar instruction were sharply contrasted in regard to students' writing and speaking. Teachers acknowledged the value of correcting grammatical errors in students' writing, but not in their speaking. The ten teachers' views expressed in the interviews were consistent with their questionnaire responses, and were evident in observation of their classroom practices.

Teachers' attitudes toward error correction reflect that their cognitions about grammar teaching are generally consistent with the newly enacted syllabus. The new syllabus set the goal of English teaching in China is to cultivate students' all-round abilities of using English in particular their listening and speaking abilities. In order to encourage students to speak as much as possible, teachers usually did not correct students' mistakes, neither when they were speaking, nor after students had spoken. In the interview, teachers responded that Chinese students set store on 'saving face'. They were reserved because they worried that they might 'lose face' in front of other students and teachers if they made mistakes in their speaking. Therefore, in order to preserve students' dignity, teachers avoided correcting students' speaking mistakes. In contrast, teachers' attitudes differed toward grammar mistakes in students' writing. They espoused the belief that they should correct students' writing mistakes which undermined the comprehension and readability of their writing. Teachers' differing attitudes toward students' mistakes in their speaking and writing indicated that the accuracy of students' speaking was not as important as accuracy in their writing.

The finding of this study that error correction plays a crucial role in grammar instruction corroborates many previous studies (DeKeyser, 1993; Ferris, 1999; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, 2006; Jean & Simard, 2011; Moini, 2009; Schulz, 1996; 2001). Although the current study did not aim to solve this contentious topic, the finding is consistent with many previous studies supporting error correction in grammar instruction.

In relation to the implementation of feedback to their students in their classes, most teachers responded that they used both teacher feedback and peer feedback. More teacher feedback than peer feedback was reported. More than 80% of participants indicated that they used teacher feedback, while about 60% of them reported that peer feedback was also used when error correction was needed. Teachers' responses toward the two items seemed to show that both teacher feedback and peer feedback were used to cope with students' errors in the classroom teaching, although the use of teacher feedback was supported more than peer feedback. The responses in the questionnaire were almost the same as the results from the interviews with most teachers saying teacher correction and peer correction should be integrated into their English teaching practice.

The research result is consistent with numerous previous studies examining the efficacy of teacher feedback and peer feedback in the field of language learning and teaching (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Liu & Sadler, 2003; M. Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006; Rollinson, 2005; Sato, 2013; Zhao, 2010). The findings suggest that both teacher review and peer review should be implemented to improve their writing skills. Peer review is an alternative to teacher review in correcting students' errors. Before implementation peer review, however, some authors have suggested that students should be formally trained (Borg, 1999).

### 6.2.5 Drilling

Drilling was affirmed as important by participants in both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study. Teachers explained that students could not master these grammar points without practising them; that is, students not only needed to know about rules and structures of grammar points but also knew how to apply them in practical situations, such as exams and free communication with others. This research finding confirms several previous studies supporting drilling in grammar instruction (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Teik, 2011).

It is important to note that in the interviews, three teachers had reservations about drilling grammar points because it took too much time, which led to a lack of time to work on other content including vocabulary, reading, writing and speaking. These teachers suggested that students could practise grammar points by themselves after the class, instead of in class. These three teachers seemed to have considered the implementation of their grammar instruction in their classrooms, whereas other seven teachers just reported their ideal cognitions about grammar instruction without reference to the practicality of their teaching.

It is also noted that most teachers drilled grammar points in a mechanical way not practised them in meaningful and communicative contexts. This explains that why most Chinese teachers still relied on *focus on forms* instruction in their classroom teaching. Teachers should be encouraged to practice grammar points in communicative contexts to improve students' communicative competence, which is also the requirement of the new curriculum requirement.



### **6.3 Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching Influenced by Their Demographic Information**

Are there significant differences in teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in terms of age, gender, academic qualification, teaching experience, overseas study experience, professional training and previous English learning regions? This question is answered by the quantitative data from the questionnaire study. The subsequent independent *t*-test and one-way ANOVA in the questionnaire study showed that there were no significant differences in teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching across teachers' age, gender, teaching experience, and previous English learning regions, but there were significant differences in terms of their academic qualification, professional training and overseas study experience. The research findings are discussed here in relation to similar previous studies.

On one hand, as noted above, this study reported that there were no significant differences in the seven themes of teachers' cognitions according to age, gender, teaching experience and their English learning regions. The result might be interpreted as the influence of the central educational system of China where school policies, textbooks, curriculum requirements, teachers' professional training, students' evaluation and other aspects of language learning and teaching are determined by one decision-making body (Hu, 2005a). Teachers may have their distinctive ideas about grammar instruction and language teaching, but feel they are unable to implement them due to the limitation of a unified educational system where all teachers have to follow the same teaching approaches.

It is understandable that gender and teachers' English learning regions did not make significant differences in teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching. Male and female teachers would have been exposed to the similar language learning classrooms,

teacher education programmes, and teaching environments, which would influence the development of similar cognitions about grammar teaching and other curriculum teaching methods. When investigating non-native EFL teachers' beliefs about grammar and teaching grammar in Iran, Moini (2009) also found male and female teachers had similar thinking about grammar and grammar teaching, and that any observed differences in their practices were minor. The influence of teachers' English learning regions, from my point of view, is not surprising. Few research studies have compared the influence of teachers' English learning regions on their cognitions. Their English language learning experience prior to the entry of university did not seem to influence their cognitions about grammar teaching. Other factors such as their university English learning experience and their teaching experience also play a critical role in the formation of teachers' cognitions, possibly contributing more to their cognitions about grammar teaching than their English learning experiences in primary school and secondary school.

It is worth noting that age and teaching experience did not make any significant difference in teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, which is in contrast with some previous studies (for example, Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Gatbonton, 2008; Tsui, 2003). Studies have shown that experienced teachers (with more than 5 years teaching experience) usually had different cognitions to novice teachers (with less than 5 years teaching experience), for example, a case study, Farrell and Bennis (2013) suggested that an experienced teacher's beliefs were more likely to converge with their classroom practices while a novice teacher's beliefs are easily subject to change. Experienced teachers' beliefs were more practical and stable. Gatbonton (2008) likewise advised that teacher development was considered as a continuum, where novice teachers were situated at the start and experienced teachers were positioned at the end stage with those

in between undergoing transitional points from novice teachers to experienced teachers. Experienced teachers' thinking and classroom performances were more likely to be stable and less variable whereas novice teachers, at the beginning stage, were quite likely to be in a process of establishing and forming their pedagogical knowledge. Their thinking had more variable than stable elements. This study, however, revealed that novice teachers, developing teachers and experienced teachers shared the similar cognitions about grammar instruction. This may be due to the exam-oriented language teaching in China (Zhang & Liu, 2014). Although the new curriculum emphasizes developing students' communicative competence, high-stakes exam system has not changed at all. Furthermore, a large number of students are oblivious to the real purpose of learning English and persist in learning English for passing tests. A test-driven system in language teaching and students' needs, it seems, has led to all College English teachers with different teaching experiences and taught grammar in a similar way developing similar cognitions about grammar instruction and language teaching.

The current study seems to demonstrate that Chinese experienced teachers' cognitions did not undergo notable changes, remaining the same as for novice teachers. Despite receiving professional education and completing several years' classroom teaching, their cognitions did not change substantially. This phenomenon warrants teachers and university administrators' attention. It might suggest that teachers' professional education is not effective and does not influence teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching notably. One explanation for this may be because teachers are not fully engaged in teaching and do not update their teaching methods regularly. For example, in the interviews several teachers stated that they knew the importance and necessity of incorporating *focus on form* instruction in their teaching; however, they did not have the expertise to implement *focus on form* in their grammar instruction. Some

teachers responded that they allocated much time to research with little attention to teaching. Therefore, it would seem that teachers need to focus more on teaching and on improving both their declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge about English teaching, especially grammar teaching. Another reason may be that the content of teachers' profession education is not designed appropriately. Some teachers complained that most teacher education courses were associated with doing research, not concerned with learning how to teach in the classrooms. Consequently, they made progress in research practice but little in the ways of teaching. These outcomes suggest that more teacher education courses relevant to teaching should be offered to cater to the needs of teachers.

On the other hand, the results of this study showed that academic qualifications, professional training and overseas study experience appeared to impact on several themes of teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching. The most noticeable differences were between teachers with bachelor degree and those with higher degrees including master degree and doctoral degree. There were no significant differences between teachers with Master degree and those with doctoral degree. Teachers with bachelor degrees were more in favour of a *focus on forms*, the deductive approach and error correction, whereas teachers with postgraduate degree had preference on *focus on form*, as noted by Moini (2009). Moini concluded that teachers' educational levels were likely to influence teachers' beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching. Teachers with bachelor degrees in Moini's study had a more structural view of grammar while master degree teachers favoured a more balanced view of grammar as both form and meaning (*focus on form*).

It is understandable that teachers in China, with bachelor degrees, were in favour of *focus on forms* while postgraduate degree teachers were more supportive of *focus on*

*form*. Postgraduate degrees focus on research, while bachelor degrees emphasize teaching more. Therefore, postgraduate degree teachers have greater access to new language teaching methods compared with their bachelor degree counterparts. In the field of SLA, relatively new *focus on form* teaching approaches such as CLT and TBLT which highlight developing fluency in language has gained popularity (Ellis, 2001; Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998). However, these methods have not been widely adopted in Chinese EFL classrooms, despite an increasing need to implement such methods to foster communicative skills of English learners (Liao, 2004; Littlewood, 2007; Yu, 2001; Zhang, 2015). Compared with teachers with postgraduate degrees, teachers with bachelor degrees have less knowledge about the new theory and how to implement them in their teaching (Butler, 2011). Hence, they are more likely to favour the traditional grammar teaching methods, while holders of postgraduate degree are likely to integrate these new theories into their grammar teaching, developing new cognitions about grammar teaching.

The result also revealed that teachers with different academic qualifications had significant differences in their cognitions about the deductive approach and error correction. This is anticipated. Teachers with bachelor degree holders, who tended to *focus on forms*, usually supported a deductive approach and error corrections, thus tending to focus on traditional grammar teaching methods. They started by explaining grammar rules to students, assuming that memorizing grammar rules is basic for language learners. Students, without solid grammar rules, were then unable to produce language accurately and fluently and made grammatical errors. Teachers then tended to correct errors for students.

For teachers in this study, professional training made a significant difference in their cognitions about grammar teaching. The explanation could be that during teachers'

professional training in their universities, they had more chances of receiving new pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of new approaches. Furthermore, they would have been able to implement those pedagogical theories during their practicum, integrating theories and practices. A deductive approach is usually regarded as a teacher-centred approach, whereas an inductive approach is considered as a student-centred approach. Classroom teaching is shifting from teacher-centred approach, where teachers dominate the class and students only watch and listen, to a more student-centred approach where students are presented with questions or challenges and learn the course material in the context of resolving questions or challenges (Prince & Felder, 2006). Although it is still controversial as to which approach enhances students' learning outcomes, studies have generally shown that student-centred methods are superior to the traditional teacher-centred approach in engaging students in the classroom teaching (Prince & Felder, 2006).

This study also showed there were significant differences in teachers' cognitions in regard to *focus on form* instruction related to overseas study experience in English speaking countries. Teachers with overseas study experience were more in favour of *focus on form* than those who without. This result is not surprising. Teachers with overseas study experience will have gradually developed their awareness of highlighting the importance of communicative English. Before going abroad, they will have learned English for many years at home and they think that they are able to use English flexibly in either a casual conversation with native speakers, or in formal study. However, on arriving at their destination countries they may have realized that they were wrong and found there was still a language barrier for them when to living and studying in English speaking countries. They may have found that their way of learning English was not effective for learners who wanted to work or study in English speaking

countries. The traditional teaching methods often equipped students with solid grammatical rules and structures, but students were still unable to speak English freely and express themselves successfully. Given this problem, overseas experienced teachers realised the importance of cultivating students' communicative competence. Gradually, their teaching theories evolved from using solely traditional grammar teaching method to employing more communicative activities in the classroom. Similarly, Li and Edward's study (2013) reported that English teachers in western China altered their English teaching methods after receiving a UK-based professional development programme in UK (Li & Edward, 2013).

Overall, it is concluded that there were no significant differences among teachers of different ages, genders, teaching experiences and their English learning regions, but there were among teachers of different academic qualifications, overseas study experience and professional training.

#### **6.4 Sources of Teachers' Cognitions about Grammar Teaching**

In order to understand better Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching, the sources of their cognitions about grammar teaching were also explored in this study.

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate which items contributed to the formation of their cognitions about grammar teaching. The two most frequently mentioned contributing sources were teachers' previous English learning experience and their students' needs. About half of participants also nominated teachers' practicum and research articles as leading to the construct of their cognitions about grammar teaching. In addition, a small number of participants also said that their cognitions about grammar teaching were derived from teacher training seminars, peering learning, overseas study experience and administrators' advice.

Similarly, during the interview, when teachers were asked to reflect on factors contributing to their cognitions about grammar teaching, all teachers agreed their prior English learning experience and students' needs were two important sources of their cognitions about grammar teaching. More than half stated that their classroom experience, their peers' feedback and research articles also resulted in their cognitions about grammar teaching. Furthermore, several teachers also replied that their overseas study experience, practicum and training seminars influenced the evolution of their cognitions.

It is surprising to note that only a few participants identified practicum as one source of their cognitions. When asked why they did not mention practicum experience, they explained that they did not graduate from teachers' institutions, so no teaching practicum was arranged for them. It is equally astonishing to find that only four teachers reported that training seminars held by their universities and schools were among the sources of their cognitions about grammar teaching. Their explanation was that those seminars were not relevant to their teaching and research interest, or that they were quite general and not specific about how to implement teaching in reality.

### **6.5 The Relationship between Teachers' Cognitions and Their Practices**

The relationship between teachers' cognitions and their practices was investigated both in the questionnaire and through the in-depth study. The questionnaire indicated that teachers' self-reported cognitions were generally consistent with their self-reported practices about grammar teaching in terms of seven themes. In the in-depth study, the extent to which teachers' cognitions correlated with their actual practices in classroom teaching was examined. Teachers' cognitions elicited through their interviews and their actual practices observed in their classroom teaching revealed that to great extent



teachers' practices were consistent with their cognitions. There were, however, a few mismatches.

Analysis of the data on the relationship between teachers' cognitions and their practices confirm a widespread opinion that their relationship is complex (Basturkmen, 2012; Fang, 1996; H. Zheng, 2013). It is generally accepted that teachers' cognitions play an important role in their practices and guide their classroom instruction (Borg, 2015; Borg, 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015; L. Li, 2013; Min, 2013). It has also been noted that teachers' stated cognitions are not always reliable as a basis for their actions (Borg, 2006; Pajares, 1992). A mismatch between teachers' cognitions and practices has been detected in some empirical studies (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Lee, 2009; Mak, 2011; Pajares, 1992; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Roothoof, 2014). These issues are elaborated in the following paragraphs.

Overall, teachers' cognitions were consistent with their practices, thus corroborating a number of previous studies which have concluded that generally language teachers' stated beliefs are congruent with their practices (Borg, 2006; Borg, 2011; Farrell & Ives, 2015; L. Li, 2013; Min, 2013). In these studies, language teachers carried out their classroom teaching in accordance with their stated beliefs and their beliefs provided guidance to their language teaching. For example, Farrell and Ives (2015), using a case study to explore the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of one second language reading teacher in a Canadian university language school, showed this teacher's professed beliefs mainly converged with his classroom practices. The congruence between his stated beliefs and practices was related to his previous language learning experience. For instance, the teacher said that he was aware of the importance of active learning for students in the classroom, thus creating an interactive environment to facilitate students to carry out active

learning in the classroom. He expounded that his belief was derived from his past experiences as a language learner at which time he was treated by his teacher in a similar way. Likewise, Min (2013), reporting on an EFL teacher's self-examination of her beliefs and practices about how to provide written feedback, indicated a congruity between her beliefs and practices at the beginning and the end of the semester. The findings suggested that this writing teacher's beliefs changed over time due to several reasons such as the context of the classroom and students' special needs. However, her constant reflection, along with the explicit articulation and demonstration of her beliefs in the form of peer review training appeared to help her to align her feedback practices with her beliefs. Apart from these, when reviewing a series of studies exploring the correspondence between language teachers' espoused beliefs and practices, Basturkmen (2012) concluded that correspondences were mainly in situations involving experienced teachers and planned aspects of teaching. In general, the congruity of teachers' cognitions and their practices has been reported widely and discussed substantially in language teaching research.

On the other hand, in this study, some mismatches between these Chinese teachers' cognitions and practices in relation to grammar teaching were observed. Other studies have also found that language teachers' cognitions were occasionally inconsistent with their practices in some aspects, for a range of reasons (Basturkmen et al., 2004; Lee, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Roothoof, 2014). Language teachers usually have a set of established beliefs on how to teach language in the classroom. However, at times they are unable to implement their existing beliefs due to a large number of contextual reasons, such as students and institutional factors. Roothoof (2014), for example, conducted a study to examine ten adult EFL teachers' stated beliefs and their practices about oral feedback. Discrepancies between teachers' beliefs

and their feedback practices were found for both less experienced teachers and experienced teachers. One of the reasons underlying the discrepancies appeared to be that teachers changed their original feedback ways in order to cater to students' special needs. In the same vein, Phipps and Borg (2009) examined tensions in the grammar teaching beliefs and practices of three practising EFL teachers in Turkey. They (2009) found that at one level teachers' practices in teaching grammar were at odds with their espoused specific beliefs about language learning, whereas at another level the same practices were congruent with a more generic set of beliefs about learning. It appeared that students' expectations and motivation constrained teachers from implementing their ideal teaching method. Similarly, when Lee (2009) investigated Hong Kong secondary English teachers' beliefs about written feedback and the extent to which they influenced teachers' practices, she found that constraints imposed by institutional factors such as the exam pressure and school policy led to the mismatches.

It is interesting to note that in some studies contextual factors were not mentioned to explain the discrepancies between teachers' cognitions and practices. However, in noting the limitations of their studies, they tended to state that contextual factors would have been pointed out to explain the discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices if the ways of exploring teachers' beliefs and practices had led research participants to think of contextual factors. For example, Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis (2004) carried out a case study to probe the relationship of teachers' stated beliefs about, and practices of the *focus on form* in intermediate level ESL communicative lessons. The results indicated that despite teachers' management of the *focus on form* in the teaching tasks reflected their stated beliefs to some extent, there were clear examples of mismatches between their beliefs and practices. When explaining the discrepancies between behaviours and beliefs, Basturkmen et al. (2004) said that participants didn't

refer to any situational constraints hindering them from behaving according to their ideal thinking. This might be caused by the way participants were interviewed; the use of prompts in the interviews didn't encourage them to consider whether contextual factors influenced their actual decision-making. They added that if stimulated recall episodes had been recorded on video instead of audio tape, teachers may have been more likely to point out contextual factors in the discrepancies between their beliefs and practices.

In summary, it is revealed that to a great extent teachers' cognitions were consistent with their practices through the questionnaire study and the in-depth study. However, the mismatches between them were also noted. The factors contributing to the mismatches are reported in the following section.

### **6.6 Factors Resulting in the Discrepancies of Teachers' Cognitions and Practices**

In order to investigate the discrepancies between teachers' cognitions and practices, stimulated recall interviews were conducted on participants. The results indicated that participants in this study ascribed the incongruences between teachers' cognitions and practices to factors ranging from their own teachers, students to institutions. The following paragraphs elaborate these points further.

First of all, teachers reported that they thought their own language learning experience and limited language knowledge contributed to the mismatch between their cognitions and practices. Specifically, teachers' language learning experience prompts teachers to adopt their most familiar teaching methods especially when lacking sufficient knowledge to implement other methods in the classroom teaching. In this study, some teachers such as Chen, Hui and Bing had difficulty applying their beliefs into their actual practices because they lacked adequate knowledge to achieve this

purpose. Under this circumstance, they turned to recall their own language learning experience and used the way that they have been taught into their own language learning classrooms. For example, when teachers were asked why they supported *focus on form* instruction in the interview but implemented *focus on forms* instruction in their actual practices, they explained that they didn't have the pedagogical content knowledge to implement *focus on form* instruction in their teaching, and were forced to revert to the old traditional language teaching methods used by their own teachers to teach them. Therefore, teachers' language learning experience resulted in the mismatches between their cognitions and practices. This point is echoed by Nishino's (2012) study on Japanese high school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching, where several participants reported that their English learning experiences, both in and out of Japanese secondary schools, affected their classroom practices.

Furthermore, teachers' insufficient grammar knowledge also constrained them in applying their ideal method in their teaching. Teachers said they were aware they needed to strengthen their own grammar knowledge in order to put their beliefs into their actual practices. For example, when Yan and Ping explained why they only used Chinese to refer to grammatical terminology in their practices, they said that they forgot how to express them in English. Therefore, teachers' insufficient grammar knowledge might limit the actualisation of their beliefs.

Next, student factors, such as their English levels, expectation and the number of students in the classroom were identified by teachers in this study impacting the match between their cognitions and practices. For example, when Yang and Wei were asked why they used both Chinese and English to refer to grammatical terminology, they explained that they were sceptical of students' proficiency of understanding English terminology; therefore, they used Chinese to repeat the terminology so that students

knew what they were talking about. In the same vein, when asked why they used *focus on forms* instruction not their self-reported *focus on form* instruction, teachers explained that students wanted them to explain grammar points and associative rules explicitly and elaborately, so that they could manage the items in English tests. In order to satisfy this need, they implemented grammar teaching in this way. Moreover, the large number of students in the classroom influenced whether teachers' cognitions match their practices. For example, Wei, Chen, and Ping were asked to explain why they adopted both teacher review and peer review in their English teaching instead of using only teacher review as reflected in the interview. They said that the large number of students in the class was beyond their ability to correct all students' grammar errors, therefore they used peer review to complement their own error correction practices.

This research finding is consistent with many previous studies which emphasized that the students' role was often identified by teachers as a factor leading to a change in decision making in the classroom teaching. For example, in Nishino's (2012) study investigating teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching, students' English proficiency and willingness to engage in communication appeared to impact on the implementation of communicative language teaching activities in their classroom teaching. Teachers said that if students had low motivation to converse in English, they would not force them to do. Therefore, they used traditional grammar teaching method and communicative language teaching method alternatively, though they had a preference for the communicative language teaching method. Likewise, Phipps and Borg (2009) analysed tensions between the grammar teaching beliefs and their practices of three teachers of English working in Turkey, pointing out that students' expectations tended to outweigh teachers' existing beliefs about how best to teach grammar. For instance, one teacher said they believed that grammar should be

presented in context rather than in isolation, but he was observed to use a rule-based presentation and isolated gapped sentences to revise articles and nouns. When he was interviewed after the classroom observation to explain the discrepancy, he explained that most of his students did not respond positively to his context-based teaching. He changed his practice to meet students' expectation by using rule-based presentation and isolated gapped sentences to explain grammar points. In brief, student factors contributed to the mismatches between teachers' cognitions and their practices.

Finally, institutional factors such as exam pressure, university management, and limited classroom time are also reported as explanations by teachers to rationalize tensions between their cognitions and their actual practices. Many teachers mentioned that institutional contexts led to the mismatches between their cognitions and their actual practices. While they wanted to implement their beliefs in their classroom teaching, they often found that they were unable to put their cognitions into their actual practices due to institutional factors such as exam pressure, university management and limited classroom time. For example, when Yang and Liu were asked why they adopted *focus on forms* instruction in their English teaching while supported using *focus on form* instruction in English teaching classrooms, they said that they needed to prepare students for numerous English tests like CET 4 and CET 6. They had to use *focus on forms* instruction because they were convinced that it was more effective than *focus on form* instruction when preparing students for English tests. Lee (2009) also found that Hong Kong secondary school teachers' attributed gaps between espoused beliefs and practices to the constraints imposed by institutional factors such as exam pressure and a school policy emphasizing error feedback. Likewise, in an inquiry into the relationship among Japanese high school teachers' beliefs and their practices regarding communicative language teaching, Nishino (2012) reported that teachers tended to

focus on grammar and reading in order to prepare students for upcoming university entrance examination, which inhibited their implementation of communicative language teaching in English classes.

Meanwhile, they also reported that classroom management was a big concern for them; implementation of *focus on form* instruction usually involved organizing a variety of classroom activities creating great challenge for them in classroom management. Students showed great enthusiasm for creative and novel classroom activities but tended to forget to obey classroom rules, posing a big challenge for the managing departments of their universities. Therefore, in order to avoid ruining the coherent and obedient classroom atmosphere, teachers usually adopted teaching methods which were least likely to cause disorder in classrooms. *Focus on forms* instruction catered to this purpose better than the *focus on form* instruction and was readily accepted by teachers.

Additionally, most teachers said that limited classroom time also resulted in a mismatch between their beliefs and practices. There are many examples demonstrating this point in this study. For example, when teachers were asked why they adopted *focus on forms* instruction rather than their preferred *focus on form* instruction, they said that because of limited classroom time, they preferred to present rules of grammar points to students rather than using *focus on form* instruction. Similarly, when teachers were asked why they employed a deductive approach instead of the inductive approach they preferred, they clarified that it was time consuming to ask students to discover the rules. Farrell and Ives's (2015) participant also reported that time constraints and limitations of classroom equipment prompted him to modify his classroom teaching activities, resulting in incongruence between his preliminary beliefs and actual classroom teaching. In a word, institutional contexts usually limited teachers to actualize their cognitions into their actual practices.



To sum up, teacher factors, student factors and institutional factors jointly contributed to the mismatches between teachers' cognitions and practices. It is these factors which result in the 'tenuous' relationship between teachers' cognitions and practices (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004, p. 243). These findings lend support to the literature review that contextual factors impede the congruence of teachers' practices and their beliefs (Basturkmen, 2012; Borg, 2003a; Fang, 1996; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Gilliland, 2015; Lee, 2009; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

## **6.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the study from three aspects: knowledge about the what, why and how regarding teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching and examined the factors influencing the relationship between them based on the evidence and previous research. The purpose of this study was to explore Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching and the interaction of them with contextual factors after a new curriculum reform was implemented in China. The study contributes to and extends previous research into language teachers' cognitions and practices through a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative research findings. It demonstrates that Chinese university English teachers' beliefs and perceptions in relation to grammar teaching were generally consistent with the requirement of the new curriculum and they indeed implemented their grammar teaching in the classroom corresponding to their cognitions and the requirements of the new curriculum. However, the study also revealed that teachers' practices about grammar teaching in the classroom were not always consistent with their cognitions. The factors contributing to the inconsistency between teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching were explored which ranged from teachers' factor to

institutional factors. To further enrich an understanding of these Chinese English teachers' cognitions and practices, the sources of teachers' cognitions were also elicited. In the next chapter, conclusions, implications and limitations of the study will be stated and the further research will be suggested as well.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### 7.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study and implications derived from the research findings. It also draws attention to the limitations of the current study and makes several suggestions for further research in relation to teachers' cognitions and practices.

#### 7.2 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide insights into Chinese University EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching after a new curriculum requirement was issued by the MoE in China. The research yielded a substantial amount of information on teachers' cognitions, practices and the interconnections between them. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that

- 1) Teachers held a set of beliefs about grammar teaching which were generally consistent with the requirements of the new curriculum. That is, teachers realised the importance of developing students' communicative competence and believed that grammar instruction should be carried out in a way which is advantageous to achieve this goal. For example, teachers had a preference for *focus on form* instruction and believed grammar teaching at the Chinese tertiary level should be delivered communicatively to cultivate students' abilities of using grammar knowledge in meaningful contexts. In order to engage students in classroom teaching, the teachers said an inductive

approach, requiring students to discover grammar rules, should be adopted by teachers, rather than teachers directly delivering grammar rules to students.

- 2) The research also revealed that teachers, in most instances, were able to actualize their cognitions regarding grammar instruction in their classroom teaching. However, they had difficulty embodying some of their cognitions in their practices due to contextual constraints. The findings in this study are consistent with many of earlier studies that teachers' cognitions and practices are not always consistent, and incongruence between them also exists.
- 3) There were no significant differences in teachers' cognitions across teachers of different ages, gender, teaching experience and previous English learning regions; however, there were significant differences among teachers with different academic qualifications, professional training and overseas study experience. The result suggests that teachers' professional development, such as study for postgraduate degrees and overseas study or visiting experience in English speaking countries, play more important roles than age, gender and teaching experience in the formation and evolution of their cognitions.
- 4) The sources of Chinese university EFL teachers' cognitions included their language learning experiences, classroom teaching experiences, peer feedback, research articles, overseas study experience, students' needs, practicum experience and training seminars.

### **7.3 Implications**

A number of implications are drawn from this research, which are presented in terms of its contributions to existing theory and research, its contributions to research methods in the field of teachers' cognitions and practices and its provision of suggestions for Chinese university English teaching.

### **7.3.1 Theoretical implications**

This study confirms and extends our understanding about what factors influence teachers' cognitions (Borg, 2015), the relationship of teachers' cognitions and practices (Farrell & Ives, 2015) and what factors mediate the consistency between teachers' cognitions and practices (Barnard & Viet, 2010). The study suggests that Borg's (2015, p. 25) model is an appropriate framework for research on teachers' cognitions and practices. The data generated from this PhD research have provided further evidence for the usefulness of Borg's theorisation of language teachers' cognitions and practices.

### **7.3.2 Methodological implications**

The study explored Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching, which extends the understanding of L2 teachers' cognitions and practices in different contexts. Though language teachers' cognitions and practices have been well documented in multiple contexts, little is known about Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching, particularly since the new College English Curriculum Requirement has been made a legal requirement. By using a triangulation of research methods, the present study contributes to a thorough understanding of Chinese EFL teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching, and helps to fill this gap.

Importantly, the mixed methods used in this study to investigate teachers' cognitions and practices enabled complementary quantitative and qualitative methods to elicit data on a broad scale and in depth. A great advantage of a quantitative method, such as a questionnaire, is it can explore teachers' cognitions on a large scale and in a short time. The disadvantage of questionnaire is that it is unable to explore how teachers as human beings in the social world, interact with social environment to form their

cognitions. In contrast, qualitative methods such as open questions in a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations can elicit deeper understandings about teachers' cognitions in relation to their language teaching. They can also elicit a direct and clear image of how teachers interact with social entities such as students, classrooms, administrators and make a final classroom decision. A shortcoming of a qualitative study is that it cannot survey a large number of people's cognitions. Therefore, combining them into one study can be complementary to each other. Given that teacher cognition research into Chinese EFL teachers was scarce and more significantly with regard to the limited studies that have been reviewed so far, either a qualitative or a quantitative method was used for data collection. This PhD research has managed to fill this research gap.

### **7.3.3 Practical implications**

#### **7.3.3.1 Implications for research into teachers' cognitions**

The study provides empirical evidence that it is necessary to access teachers' cognitions in order to understand properly how teachers think about their grammar teaching, how they actualize their thinking, partly, all or none, and why teachers teach in ways that they do (Borg & Burns, 2008; Borg, 2009; Farrell & Lim, 2005). It also reveals that contextual factors such as students' needs and institution factors play a critical role in influencing their cognitions and practices. Being aware of their cognitions and contextual factors that influence their teaching is essential for L2 teachers to know what shapes their practices. Not all teachers are aware of the interrelationship between teachers' cognitions, practices, and contextual factors. In this study, when teachers were asked for a rationale for their grammar teaching and language teaching in the classroom, they found it hard to articulate the reasons for their grammar teaching approaches. Most of them just said they taught by following textbooks in accordance with university's

teaching requirement. Some of them said they taught in ways that they had been taught. None of them effectively reported a rationale for their classroom teaching. This suggests that their Chinese university English teachers had not equipped them with advanced and current pedagogical theories and may have been unaware of theories in the field of language teaching education and foreign language education. Therefore, this study should arouse attention to the teaching principles behind their specific language teaching methods by re-examining their cognitions and practices, especially in contexts which are similar to China.

### **7.3.3.2 Implications for English teaching in Chinese Universities**

This study has implications for Chinese university English teaching, particularly for policy-makers (e.g., MoE), teaching institutions, and teachers.

#### ***Implications for policy-makers***

This study is significant for MoE, which initiates College English curriculum reform. The research findings demonstrate that Chinese EFL teachers generally held cognitions about English grammar teaching consistent with the requirement of the new syllabus, however, they could not actualize some of their cognitions in their practical classroom teaching constrained by for contextual factors such as large size classrooms and high-stakes exams. MoE should allow institutions to employ more staff, forming a reasonable ratio of English teachers and students. MoE should also evaluate students appropriately, guiding and motivating students and teachers properly. For example, though the new curriculum stipulates that students' listening and speaking should be prioritized in EFL teaching, students' communicative competence is not assessed properly by CET 4 organized by MoE. A flexible and effective test is needed to move EFL teaching forward.

### *Implications for institutions of higher education*

One of the research findings is that institutional factors constrained the congruence between teachers' cognitions and practices. So the study provides implications for institutions including teachers' education, teachers' management and the implementation of classroom teaching and research.

Firstly, institutions should ensure ongoing relevant teacher professional development to benefit teachers and strengthen their classroom teaching activities, with the ultimate aim of enhancing students' language competence. In this study, several teachers reported that universities and schools indeed held courses for teachers' professional development regularly; however, most courses were concerned with general educational policy or with application for research projects and doing research, and few courses were pertinent to classroom language teaching (Interview, Yang, Liu and Hui).

Secondly, institutions should have a greater emphasis on learning to teach rather than prioritising research. As research derives from teaching, and teaching contributes to research, they are closely intertwined. University administrators should be careful not to overemphasize one at the expense of the other. University administrators need to take a leading role in guiding and supporting teachers to teach as the new policy states.

Finally, institutions should lessen teachers' workload so that teachers have sufficient time to reflect on their own teaching, so as to identify their own strengths and needs in pedagogy. In this study, several of the teachers complained that they were too busy for teaching, without time to reflect on their own teaching and to update their teaching approaches (Interview, Wei, Liu, Hai, and Ping). It is evident that Chinese EFL teachers have a heavy workload and lack adequate time to reflect on their own



teaching, which impacts on their professional development. University administration departments therefore should consider reducing teachers' workload and giving more free time to teachers, so that they are able to reflect on their own teaching, build on their positive experiences and learn from negative teaching experiences. With adequate time to review their practices, they are likely to improve their teaching, leading to more positive students' learning outcomes.

### *Implications for teachers*

In view of the importance of their previous language learning experience, professional education, and teaching experience in influencing their cognitions about grammar teaching, teachers need to be proactive in engaging themselves in updating their pedagogical skills by furthering their degree study, pursuing appointments as visiting scholars with overseas and domestic counterparts, attending teacher education programmes, such as seminars and workshops, and international conferences. They also need appropriate their time to read theorized books about how to teach, attempting to implement the theorized knowledge in their classroom teaching. In this study, many teachers, in the interviews, responded that they did not have sufficient time to read theorized books and update their declarative knowledge. Some teachers replied that although they had updated their declarative knowledge, they still had difficulty in implementing it practically. Therefore, they needed to learn how to convert their declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge.

### **7.4 Limitations of the Research**

Although the present study investigated Chinese university English teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in mainland, China, the participants were Chinese English teachers in only one province. A larger sample would be more representative and

generalizable: replication of the questionnaire used in this study in other districts of China, ideally at a national level.

Another limitation is that research has shown that teachers' cognitions are not static but dynamic, but this study presents the teachers' cognitions and practices at only one point in time. Exploring teachers' cognitions and practices at a particular period constrains understanding of teachers' evolving cognitions. Therefore, a longitudinal study is advisable to investigate possible changes of teachers' cognitions over time. Tracking teachers' professional development may elicit how teachers develop, as they progress in their professional career, and the factors which affect their professional development. Knowledge of the factors determining the changes of teachers' cognition and professional development can help teachers and institutions know how best to improve teaching methods, and thus enhance students' learning outcomes.

A further limitation of this study was that students' outcomes were not examined to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' cognitions. Due to the limitations of research timeframe, only teachers' cognitions and practices were investigated. Therefore, research which integrates the study of students' cognitions into the examination of teachers' cognitions is required.

### **7.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

This study investigated Chinese university English teachers' cognitions and practices about grammar teaching in one province of China over a period of six months. As noted above, there are limitations which lead to several recommendations for further research into Chinese teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching.

Firstly, to increase the generalisability of studies such as this current one, the research sample should not be limited to one province. China is a huge country where

educational levels are not evenly distributed. There are marked differences, for example, between the developed eastern coastal provinces and undeveloped western mountainous areas. If teachers from other provinces or geographical locations can be included, the research result will be more representative.

Secondly, a longitudinal study should be conducted to investigate the evolution of teachers' cognitions over a longer period of time. Previous research has suggested that teachers' cognitions might change as they receive teacher education programmes, or the sociocultural environment in which they live changes. A longitudinal study enable us to track changes of teachers' cognitions in a particular period of time.

Finally, students' cognitions could also be examined in relation to teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching. Understanding the relationship between teachers' cognitions and students' cognitions may provide insights into influences on students' learning outcomes, especially in relation to the consistencies between teachers' cognitions and their practice. If teachers' cognitions are in a conflict with students' cognitions, students' outcomes may not be optimised. Research that investigates students' cognitions in relation to teachers' cognitions may be useful.

## **7.6 Final Remarks**

This study was conducted in a Chinese EFL context where the educational system and social environments are different from other contexts. According to Borg's framework (Borg, 2015), teachers' cognitions are mediated not only by teachers' own language learning experience, professional development and classroom teaching experience but also by a range of different social contexts. Therefore, although teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching have been documented widely, they should be explored in other multiple contexts which have their own unique features. In the future, teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching could be explored in other EFL or ESL countries.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Teachers' Cognitions Questionnaire**

Dear Teachers,

I am seeking your help to fill in this questionnaire, which takes about half an hour to complete. The purpose of this questionnaire is to solicit your views about English grammar teaching in Chinese university classrooms. I am interested in knowing: How do you teach grammatical points when you confront grammar problems in your current English teaching, either in the Reading and Writing course or in Listening and Speaking course? Teachers who are qualified to answer this questionnaire are regular university and College English teachers, who don't need to specialize in grammar teaching. This is NOT an evaluation of you as a teacher and this is NOT a test, either. There are no right or wrong answers. All your responses are confidential.

#### **Section One: Background information**

Please choose the appropriate choice and provide the necessary information below.

1. Age Range:    A. 26-30    B. 31-35    C. 36-40    D. 41-45    E. 45+
2. Gender:        A. Male        B. Female
3. Academic qualifications:  
    A. Bachelor's degree    B. Master's degree    C. Doctor's degree    D. others  
(specify).....
4. Professional training:  
  
    Indicate if you hold a Bachelor Degree from a teachers' university or a teachers' college?  
  
    A. Yes            B. No            C. Others (specify).....
5. Years of teaching experience:  
  
    A. 1-5 years        B. 6-10 years    C. 11-15 years    D. 16 years more
6. Time spent in an English-speaking country:

A. no time spent    B. less than 6 months    C. 6-12 months (including 6 months and 12 months)    D. more than one year

7. Before college, where did you learn English?

A. rural area    B. urban area    C. both    D. others (specify).....

8. Languages used in teaching grammar:

A. mainly Chinese    B. mainly English    C. Chinese and English mixed    D. others (specify).....

9. Please indicate if you use any of the following resources or documents? (More than 1 answer allowed)

A. The Ministry of Education Curriculum Framework for University Teaching

B. College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 Guidelines

C. the Scheme of Work provided by the university

D. Textbooks

E. others (specify).....

**Section two: Teachers' cognitions about grammar teaching in Chinese universities**

The following are a number of statements that introduce grammar teaching methods with which you may agree or disagree according to your current English teaching experiences. I would like you to indicate your opinion by ticking ( ✓ ) the appropriate box next to each statement that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with it. If you **agree** strongly mark a **5** on the scale, if you strongly **disagree** mark a **1** on the scale. Please feel free to add any comments you wish to make. **Respond to each statement as quickly as possible.**

**1= strongly disagree    2= disagree    3=undecided    4=agree    5=strongly agree**

**L1=** first language or mother tongue    **L2=**second language or foreign language

**Teachers=** university teachers    **Students=** university students

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Grammar is the study of the rules governing the use of a language.					
2	Grammar teaching should focus on the meaning of structures and their use in context.					
3	Students learn grammar best through exposure to language in natural context.					
4	Grammar should be taught in an explicit or direct way.					
5	If students memorise rules and facts about grammar, it will help them to produce correct language in spontaneous situations.					
6	Teachers should teach simple grammatical structures before more complex ones.					
7	Students should be encouraged to speak/write accurately from the beginning.					
8	Having students figure out grammatical rules can help them increase their awareness of L2.					
9	Focusing students' attention on forms is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the acquisition of grammar.					
10	Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate.					
11	In oral practice, teachers do not need to correct students' grammatical errors in order to encourage students to speak fluently.					
12	Grammar rules should be discovered by students rather than explicitly taught.					

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
13	Students' grammar mistakes should always be corrected as soon as possible to prevent the formation of bad habits.					
14	It is better for students to figure out for themselves why they have made errors and correct them.					
15	The knowledge of terminology of grammar and direct instruction in the rules is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.					
16	Practicing and memorisation are essential to the successful learning of new grammatical structures.					
17	Teachers should begin teaching a new grammar point by giving examples.					
18	Teaching grammar in different units leads to language knowledge which students can use in natural contexts later.					
19	Students learn best when teachers tell them their grammatical mistakes.					
20	Students need to be consciously aware of a structure's form and its function before they can use it proficiently.					
21	When using a L2 language to communicate, it is more important to be grammatically accurate than socially appropriate.					
22	Students will learn grammar better if they understand grammatical terminology.					
23	Teachers should use Chinese when they use grammatical terminology to explain grammar rules.					



No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
24	Thinking about the grammar rules while talking prevents students from communicating fluently.					
25	It is difficult for students to transfer their grammatical knowledge into communicative language use.					
26	Students should be able to use the common grammatical terms in the L2 correctly when discussing grammar.					
27	Accuracy, or correctness in linguistic form, is a primary aim in grammar teaching.					
28	New grammatical points should be presented and practised in situations.					
29	Teachers should begin teaching a new grammar point by explaining the rule.					
30	Teachers should focus on the structure and form, rather than meaning in grammar teaching.					
31	Teachers should help students to work out grammar rules for themselves.					
32	Grammar is best acquired unconsciously through meaningful communication.					
33	Teachers should ask students to practice new grammatical structures in a series of meaning-focused activities.					
34	Grammar explanations should be avoided by the teacher.					
35	Grammar can be successfully taught without extensive use of grammatical terminology.					
36	It is better for teachers to correct and explain students' grammar errors in written form rather than in oral way.					

No.	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
37	It is not a must for students to be familiar with grammatical terminology in English.					
38	The primary role of the teacher when teaching grammar is to explain the grammar points.					
39	Teachers should always ask students to practise new and difficult grammatical structures.					
40	Students should be given the opportunity to work out grammar rules from examples.					
41	Regular practice ensures that grammar is quickly and successfully acquired.					
42	It is important to identify the grammatical errors in students' written work.					
43	Correcting grammatical errors in students' oral work is important.					
44	Students should be encouraged to create language by a process of trial and error.					
45	Teachers should use grammatical terms to explain grammar rules to learners.					

### **Section three: Close-ended questions**

Please tick ( ✓ ) the appropriate choices to answer the following questions according to your own experience.

1. Please tell me how you teach English grammar in your class. (More than 1 answer allowed; however, please be noted that some items are opposite in meaning and you cannot choose both of them.)

A. I teach the rules first and then give some activities for practice.

- B. I encourage students to discover the rules of a new grammatical structure for themselves.
- C. I provide students with a lot of opportunities to use grammar in context.
- D. Since terminology is difficult for students, I use students' L1 to explain grammar.
- E. I don't correct students' grammatical errors in their oral practice, but correct them in their written work.
- F. I emphasize students' language accuracy more than their communicative competency.
- G. I ask students to drill grammar points when explaining grammar explicitly.
- H. Others (specify).....

2. What does your grammar teaching method base on? (More than 1 answer allowed)

- A. English learning experience at the primary or secondary school
- B. English learning experience at the university or college
- C. Experience at the practicum of university or college
- D. Peer learning
- E. Overseas study experience
- F. Administrators' advice (such as from University Teaching Supervision Committee's suggestion)
- G. Teachers training seminar held by university or college
- H. Students' feedback
- I. Reading research articles or research reports
- J. Others (specify).....

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire ☺

## **Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions to teachers**

A list of basic questions (additional questions might be raised in relation to the teachers' answers to the basic questions)

1. Could you please describe your own experience of English learning? In particular, describe the way that your teachers taught you grammar at the school and university?
2. Could you introduce your university and your teaching? What do you think about the role of grammar in English language teaching?
3. What kind of grammar is needed nowadays by learners? Or what do you focus on in grammar teaching, form or function or meaning?
4. How do you teach grammar in the class?
5. Do what factors contribute to your grammar teaching, such as language teaching theories, personal experiences, students' needs, high-stake exams or other factors?
6. Do you use grammatical terminology when you teach grammar? Do you use them in English or Chinese?
7. Do you correct your students' grammatical errors in the class? When and how?
8. Do you ask your students to practise grammar in the class? Why and how?
9. Could you tell me your ideal way of grammar teaching?

## Appendix C: Initial letter to Deans



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Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92601, Symonds Street  
Auckland 1150, New Zealand

Dear Dean of English Department,

I am a PhD candidate in the school of curriculum and pedagogy, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. I am writing to you to invite English teachers and students of your department to participate in my research project. The purpose of the research is to explore Chinese English teachers' beliefs and practices about grammar teaching at the tertiary level.

The project has two phases. In Phase One, all English teachers in the universities or colleges of your Province will be asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete for each participant. More potential participants' involvement will ensure the representativeness and comprehensiveness of this research. In Phase Two, an in-depth study will be conducted to fourteen teachers randomly selected from volunteer respondents to the Phase One questionnaire by making interviews and classroom observations. If teachers are interested in continuing to participate into Phase Two and hope to be among the fourteen teachers randomly selected, they will tick it on the questionnaire. I will contact them later.

The enclosed Participant Information Sheet details the aims and procedures of the entire project.

The purpose of this letter is to seek your approval for English teachers in your department to be asked to participate in my research project. If your permission is granted, please sign the attached Consent Form and return it in the enclosed address.

If you have any questions or queries about my research or you need to know more about this letter, please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors by phone or email.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Best regards,

Qiang Sun

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 373-7599 ext. 87830.

Enclosed address: Room117, Zhonghuahanyuan Flat 3, 2001 Shiji Road, Shanyang District, Jiaozuo City, Henan Province, China. 454003

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5 December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809.

## Appendix D: Initial letter to teachers



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The University of Auckland  
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Auckland 1150, New Zealand

Dear teachers,

I am a PhD candidate in the school of curriculum and pedagogy, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in my research project. The purpose of the research is to explore Chinese English teachers' beliefs and practices about grammar teaching at the tertiary level.

The project has two phases. In Phase One, all English teachers in the universities or colleges of your Province will be asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete for each participant. More potential participants' involvement will ensure the representativeness and comprehensiveness of this research. Returning your completed questionnaire indicates you agree to participate in my research. In Phase Two, an in-depth study will be conducted to only fourteen teachers randomly selected from volunteer respondents to the Phase One questionnaire by making interviews and classroom observations. If you are interested in continuing to participate in Phase Two and hope to be among the fourteen teachers randomly selected, please tick it on the attached consent form. I will contact you later.

Following my university's regulations I am also enclosing a Participant Information Sheet which details the aims and procedures of the entire project. I invite you to read through the information and consider participating my research. If your permission is granted, please sign the attached Consent Form and return it in the public box of your department.

If you have any questions or queries about my research or you need to know more about this letter, please feel free to contact me or either of my supervisors by phone or email.

I appreciate your involvement of this study.

Best regards,

Qiang Sun

If you have any concerns of an ethical nature you can contact the Chair of The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee at 373-7599 ext. 87830.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5 December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809.

## Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet (Deans)



Te Kura Akoranga o Tāmaki Makaurau  
Incorporating the Auckland College of Education

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The University of Auckland  
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Auckland 1150, New Zealand

**Project Title:** Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching: A Study of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) in Chinese Universities

### Researcher Introduction

My name is Qiang Sun, a PhD candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. I am conducting school based research as part of my doctoral thesis.

### Project Description and Invitation

The objective of my research is to gather information about English teachers of Chinese universities, their beliefs and their practices. Knowledge about what teachers believe and how they teach is possibly to better inform foreign language education in China. As qualified research subjects, your universities' EFL teachers will be kindly invited to participate in this research. Their approval and cooperation are the prerequisite of conducting this research. In order to provide the reference for your consideration, a detailed description of the research will be elucidated in the following.

My project has two phases. In Phase One, all English teachers in the universities or colleges of your province will be asked to answer a questionnaire. I will seek your department administrator's help to email my invitation to all EFL teachers in your department. The questionnaire will take them approximately 30 minutes to complete. Returning teachers' completed questionnaire indicates they agree to participate in my research. They may complete the questionnaire via Online Surveys. Their answers to the questionnaire will be confidential and the responses will be anonymised to ensure they will not be identified.

In Phase Two, I will conduct an in-depth study of fourteen teachers randomly selected from volunteer respondents to the Phase One questionnaire by making interviews and classroom observations. If they are interested in continuing to participate Phase Two and hope to be among the fourteen teachers randomly selected, they will tick it on the questionnaire. I will contact them later.

Once the teachers are selected and ready to participate in Phase Two, they will be asked to meet me at a time and place approved by us for about a one-hour interview. After this, the teachers will be asked to nominate two classes for individual observation. Each class will be observed once lasting 50 minutes or

so. The purpose of the observations is to record teachers' actual practices. Particularly, the focus will be the way of formal grammar instruction in the classroom in terms of seven themes mentioned in the questionnaire. In order to keep all the details of their instruction in the classroom, I will audiotape their classroom instruction which serves two purposes. One is to collect the whole information of their instruction in the classroom and not miss any information when I am busy for the fieldwork notes. The other is to use it for my next step of study-stimulated recall. That is to say, they will be stimulated recall interviewed immediately by me after each classroom observations. Teachers will be stimulated recall interviewed with the assistance of audiotapes recorded in the classroom observations, which may last one hour or so.

### **Participants' Rights**

Participants in the study is purely voluntary and are entitled to withdraw information provided without giving any reason at any time before 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2014 when data collection will end and data analysis will start. Interviews and observations will be audiotaped with their permission and they may have the audio recorder turned off at any time. They have the right to refuse to answer any specific questions at any phases. Besides, participants are entitled to edit the transcripts if they think researcher misunderstands them or fails to document. The data collected from this study will only serve for educational purposes. Information obtained from this research may have important implications for the practice of teachers and researchers who show interest in improving the quality of language education in China.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

In this study, information of the university and teachers' name will be disguised. If the information provided by them is reported or published, pseudonyms will be used to protect their identities. No identifying information and data collected from the research will be revealed to a third party. The confidentiality of the data will be preserved throughout the time it is required to be stored. In a word, anonymity and confidentiality will be protected as much as possible throughout the entire project.

### **Data Management**

Hard copy data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and electronic data will be stored confidentially on the researcher's computer. After six years, all hard copy data will be shredded and the digital information will be deleted. The data may be maintained for a longer period under the circumstance if the study is still on-going after six years. The data collected will be primarily presented in the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for future academic publications or conference presentations. If you would like to have a copy of the final research findings, please indicate this on the consent form.

Thank you for sparing your time to read this information sheet. If you have any inquiries or questions, please feel free to contact anyone in the following contact list.



Researcher	Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
Qiang Sun <a href="mailto:qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz">qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 09 373 7599 ext. 46382	Associate Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang <a href="mailto:lj.zhang@auckland.ac.nz">lj.zhang@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 623 8899 ext. 48750	Dr Constanza Tolosa <a href="mailto:c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz">c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 373 7599 ext. 48692

You may also contact the head of the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Professor Judy Parr at [jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz) or +64 09 623 8899 ext. 88998.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, 1142. Telephone: 09 373-7599 ext. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5 December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809.

## Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet to Teachers in Phase One



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**Project Title:** Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching: A Study of English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) in Chinese Universities

### Researcher Introduction

My name is Qiang Sun, a PhD candidate in the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. I am conducting school based research as part of my doctoral thesis.

### Project Description and Invitation

The objective of my research is to gather information about English teachers of Chinese universities, their beliefs and their practices. Knowledge about what teachers believe and how they teach is possibly to better inform foreign language education in China. As qualified research subjects, you are kindly invited to participate in this research. Your approval and cooperation are the prerequisite of conducting this research. In order to provide the reference for your consideration, a detailed description of the research will be elucidated in the following.

My project has two phases. In Phase One, all English teachers in the universities or colleges of your Province will be asked to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Returning your completed questionnaire indicates you agree to participate in my research. You may complete the questionnaire via Online Surveys. Your answers to the questionnaire will be confidential and the responses will be anonymised to ensure you will not be identified.

In Phase Two, I will conduct an in-depth study of fourteen teachers randomly selected from volunteer respondents to the Phase One questionnaire by making interviews and classroom observations. If you are interested in continuing to participate in Phase Two and hope to be among the fourteen teachers randomly selected, please tick it on the questionnaire and you will be redirected to a separate site where you can provide your name and email address. I will contact you later according to the contact information provided.

### Participants' Rights

Participants in the study are purely voluntary and are entitled to withdraw information up to the point you submit the questionnaire online. The data collected from this study will only serve for educational

purposes. Information obtained from this research may have important implications for the practice of teachers and researchers who show interest in improving the quality of language education in China.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

In this study, the survey is anonymous. No identifying information and data collected from the research will be revealed to a third party. The confidentiality of the data will be preserved throughout the time it is required to be stored. In a word, confidentiality will be protected as much as possible.

### **Data Management**

Hard copy data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and electronic data will be stored confidentially on the researcher's computer. After six years, all hard copy data will be shredded and the digital information will be deleted. The data may be maintained for a longer period under the circumstance if the study is still on-going after six years. The data collected will be primarily presented in the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for future academic publications or conference presentations. If you would like to have a copy of the final research findings, please indicate this on the consent form.

Thank you for sparing your time to read this information sheet. If you have any inquiries or questions, please feel free to contact anyone in the following contact list.

Researcher	Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
Qiang Sun <a href="mailto:qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz">qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 09 373 7599 ext. 46382	Associate Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang <a href="mailto:l.j.zhang@auckland.ac.nz">l.j.zhang@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 623 8899 ext. 48750	Dr Constanza Tolosa <a href="mailto:c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz">c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 373 7599 ext. 48692

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## Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet to Teachers in Phase Two



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Since you have provided your name and information in the questionnaire, I would like to invite you to participate Phase Two of my study. In Phase Two, you will be asked to meet me at a time and place approved by us for about a one hour interview in Mandarin. The interview will be made in Mandarin. After this, you will be asked to nominate two classes for individual observation. Each class will be observed once lasting 50 minutes or so. The purpose of the observations is to record teachers' actual practices. Particularly, the focus will be the way of formal grammar instruction in the classroom in terms of seven themes mentioned in the questionnaire. In order to keep all the details of your instruction in the classroom, I will audiotape your classroom instruction which serves two purposes. One is to collect the whole information of your instruction in the classroom and not miss any information when I am busy for the fieldwork notes. The other is to use it for my next step of study-stimulated recall. That is to say, you will be stimulated recall interviewed immediately by me after each classroom observation. The simulated recalls are done immediately to avoid that some ideas or explanations have slipped your mind. You will be stimulated recall interviewed under the assistance of audiotapes, and each classroom observation may last one hour or so.

Please take the above into consideration and decide whether you are willing to participate Phase Two of my study or not. Please tick it in the consent form if you are agreed.

### Participants' Rights

Participants in the study is purely voluntary and are entitled to withdraw information provided without giving any reason at any time before 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2014 when data collection will end and data analysis will start. Interviews and observations will be audiotaped with your permission and you may have the audio recorder turned off at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any specific questions at any phases. Besides, participants are entitled to edit the transcripts if you think researcher misunderstands you or fails to document. The data collected from this study will only serve for educational purposes. Information obtained from this research may have important implications for the practice of teachers and researchers who show interest in improving the quality of language education in China.

### Anonymity and Confidentiality

In this study, information of the university and your name will be disguised. If the information provided by you is reported or published, pseudonyms will be used to protect their identities. No identifying information and data collected from the research will be revealed to a third party. The confidentiality of the data will be preserved throughout the time it is required to be stored. In a word, anonymity and confidentiality will be protected as much as possible throughout the entire project.

### Data Management

Hard copy data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Auckland, and electronic data will be stored confidentially on the researcher's computer. After six years, all hard copy data will be shredded and the digital information will be deleted. The data may be maintained for a longer period under the circumstance if the study is still on-going after six years. The data collected will be primarily presented in the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for future academic publications or conference presentations. If you would like to have a copy of the final research findings, please indicate this on the consent form.

Thank you for sparing your time to read this information sheet. If you have any inquiries or questions, please feel free to contact anyone in the following contact list.

Researcher	Main supervisor	Co-supervisor
Qiang Sun <a href="mailto:qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz">qsun910@aucklanduni.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 09 373 7599 ext. 46382	Associate Professor Lawrence Jun Zhang <a href="mailto:l.j.zhang@auckland.ac.nz">lj.zhang@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 623 8899 ext. 48750	Dr Constanza Tolosa <a href="mailto:c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz">c.tolosa@auckland.ac.nz</a> Ph: +64 0 9 373 7599 ext. 48692

You may also contact the head of the School of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Professor Judy Parr at [jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:jm.parr@auckland.ac.nz) or +64 09 623 8899 ext. 88998.

For any queries regarding ethical concerns, you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, 1142. Telephone: 09 373-7599 ext. 83711.

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5 December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809.

## Appendix H: Consent form Deans



Faculty of Education  
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Telephone 64 9 623 8899  
Facsimile 64 9 623 8898  
www.education.auckland.ac.nz

The University of Auckland  
Private Bag 92601, Symonds Street  
Auckland 1150, New Zealand

**Project Title:** Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching- A Study of English-as-a- Foreign-Language in Chinese Universities

**Researcher:** Qiang Sun

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I agree to assist this study and understand that my participation is voluntary.

- I agree to allow College English teachers and their students to join this research.
- I agree to allow the department administrator to help contact with English teachers.
- I give my assurance that participation, non-participation or withdrawal of my staff or students will not affect their employment status or grades or relationships with the university.
- I understand that teachers and students will be observed and audio-recorded in the classroom.
- I understand that hard copy and digital data will be stored separately and securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
- I understand that the data collected from the research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for academic publications, and conference presentations.
- I understand that if the information provided by me is reported or published, confidentiality is assured and pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity.
- I understand that the information about the university will be disguised.
- I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or the public.
- I wish to receive a copy of the research findings by email \_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5  
December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809 .

## Appendix I: Consent form Teachers in Phase One



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**Project Title:** Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching- A Study of English-as- a- Foreign- Language in Chinese Universities

**Researcher:** Qiang Sun

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I agree to assist this study and understand that my participation is voluntary.

- I agree to answer the questionnaire in this research.
- I understand that I will answer the questionnaire compiled in English.
- I understand that I am entitled to withdraw this research at any time without any reasons.
- I understand that non-participation will not affect my employment status and my relationship with the university.
- I understand that digital data will be stored separately and securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
- I understand that the data collected from the research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for academic publications, and conference presentations.
- I understand that if the information provided by me is reported or published, confidentiality is assured.
- I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or the public.
- I wish to receive a copy of the research findings by email \_\_\_\_\_.

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## Appendix J: Consent form Teachers in Phase Two



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**Project Title:** Teachers' Cognitions and Practices about Grammar Teaching- A Study of English-as-a- Foreign- Language in Chinese Universities

**Researcher:** Qiang Sun

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I agree to assist this study and understand that my participation is voluntary.

- I agree to be interviewed and observed in my classroom in this research.
- I agree to be audio-recorded when I am interviewed and observed in the class.
- I agree that I will be interviewed in Mandarin.
- I understand that I am entitled to withdraw this research at any time without any reasons.
- I understand that non-participation will not affect my employment status and my relationship with the university.
- I understand that hard copy and digital data will be stored separately and securely for a period of six years and then destroyed.
- I understand that the data collected from the research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, and may be used for academic publications, and conference presentations.
- I understand that if the information provided by me is reported or published, confidentiality is assured and pseudonyms will be used to protect my identities.
- I understand that my name will be kept confidential.
- I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed to a third party or the public.
- I wish to receive a copy of the research findings by email \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am willing to participate in Phase Two of this research project (yes or no)\_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 5 December FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS. REFERENCE NUMBER 9809.

**Appendix K: Examples of coding a semi-structured interview-an excerpt from interviewing Liu**

Transcriptions	Coding
Interviewer (hereafter I): Do you correct your students' grammar errors?	Teacher cognition about grammar error correction
Teacher (hereafter Liu): I think it is necessary to correct students' grammar mistakes in students' writing. It is a good way for me to help students with learning English.	Agree with error correction in writing
I: That's all? Can you give me an example to explain your point?	
Liu: Sure. For example, when students made sentences with time and tense problems, I corrected them immediately. Last week, a student of mine made a sentence <i>I eat three mooncakes yesterday</i> . This is a problematic sentence in the tense. I asked her to be mindful to the time and tense of the sentence. She noticed the error she made and corrected it quickly.	Liu extends his point by giving an example
I: Can you clarify why you correct students' grammar errors in their writing?	
Liu: I am afraid that if I don't correct them, they may continue to make the same mistakes continuously. Chinese English learners are easily unaware of time and tense because of the negative influence of their mother tongue-Chinese. There are no changes in Chinese characters with regard to time and tense. If they are not cautious, they tend to make mistakes in the tense when they are asked to make sentences.	Justify his point
I: Do you also correct students' grammar errors in oral English class?	Teacher cognition about error correction in speaking
Liu: No, I rarely correct students' oral grammatical errors. In speaking class, I seldom correct students' any mistakes including grammar, vocabulary and other mistakes. Students should be encouraged to open their mouths and say something. Chinese students tend to keep silent in the classroom, unwilling to say anything unless their teachers force them to do. They are also sensitive in their hearts and feel insulted if	Disagree with correcting errors in speaking  Two reasons of his disagreement Reason 1

<p>their mistakes are corrected by teachers in front of other students and teachers. The embarrassment and disgracefulness will hinder their enthusiasm of speaking English or leading them to make more grammatical mistakes. In order to save students' face and induce them to speak more, I seldom correct their mistakes.</p> <p>Meanwhile, it is normal for them to make some simple grammatical mistakes in their spoken English. For example, Chinese students use too many "the" in their utterances. In most cases, using an excess of "the" before nouns doesn't influence listeners' understanding. If students are careful about this, they can avoid making the mistakes like these.</p>	Reason 2
<p>I: Do you think who should correct students' grammar errors?</p>	Teacher cognition-who should correct students' errors
<p>Liu: Teachers should take the responsibility of correcting students' mistakes. Students wish that teachers are able to read their writing and comment them. In order to meet their needs, I often read their writing and correct their grammar mistakes.</p> <p>However, sometimes I also ask students to correct their students' mistakes by dividing them in different groups. There are usually more than 60 students in my class. Reading their assignments and correcting all students' errors by myself is impossible. In order to deal with this dilemma, they usually adopted peer review in their classrooms.</p>	<p>Teacher review is adopted Reason</p> <p>Peer review is also applicable Reason</p>

**Appendix L: Examples of coding a classroom observation-an extract from Hai's class**

Transcriptions	Coding
Teacher (hereafter T): Good morning, class. Let's begin our class today. Please look at these pictures and guess what they are and where they are located. Please look at the first picture. What is it?	Warm up activities
Students (hereafter S): Eiffel Tower	
T: where is it located?	
S: France	
T: Yes, it is located in France. How about the second picture?	
S: pyramids	
T: Where are they located?	
S: Egypt.	
<p>T: Yes, it is the symbol of Egypt.</p> <p>Next, let's come to new words. Look at Page 1, <i>Enlighten</i>, a new word. <i>Enlighten</i> is formed like this "en+light+en", <i>En</i> is used to form verbs, <i>en</i> 是动词的前缀或后缀, <i>En-</i> is used as a suffix to form a verb, and <i>lighten</i> is a verb, meaning make light to sb, here it means to make ignorant people get access to a certain of knowledge. In Chinese, 启蒙或者启迪.</p> <p>What the difference is between <i>inspire</i> and <i>enlighten</i>?</p>	grammar terminology both English and Chinese
S: 前者是写作或其他灵感, 后者是思想和教育的启蒙	
T: <i>Enlighten</i> means provide more information so that he knows more about it. <i>Inspire</i> means provide more information with some new original ideas so that he creates some new ideas, such as in music, novel, article and so on.	
S: (listen)	

<p>T: Next word, Approve, If you approve sth, it means you accept a proposal officially. In Chinese, 授权, 认可。</p> <p>Here is a video about how to use this word. Play a video...</p> <p>Please pay attention to the usage of this word in the dialogue.</p>	<p>Inductive</p>
<p>S: (take notes )</p>	
<p>T: next one, Assemble 组装 Please make at the following sentence and try to translate it into Chinese.</p> <p>Eg. iPhone is designed in California but assembled in China.</p>	
<p>S: 苹果手机是在加州设计, 但是在中国组装的。</p>	
<p>T: Next, Turn to page 98 and look at the third sentence of paragraph 3, <i>The three-dimensional model for Barbie was a German doll — a joke gift for adults described as having the appearance of “a woman who sold sex”.</i></p> <p>Pay attention to <i>described</i> 过去分词作后置定语, Past participle acts as an attributive. it should be, <i>a joke gift for adults, which was described as ...</i></p> <p>Do you follow this?</p>	
<p>S: yes (in chorus)</p>	
<p>T: Look at another sentence. <i>Mattel refashioned the doll into a decent, all-American — although with an exaggerated breast size — version and named it after Barbara, who was then a teenager.</i> We have an important language point here.</p> <p>Conjunction + prep Phrase, 连词加介词短语, 这是一个很重要的语法点, this structure can make sentence concise and succinct.</p> <p>There are many sentences using this grammar structure.</p> <p>For example,</p> <p>Even though with the same educational background, he was better paid than his wife.</p>	<p>Deductive</p> <p><i>Focus on forms</i></p>

How to translate it?	
S: 尽管有着相同教育背景，但是男人还是比女人的工资高。	
T: Another example, Even though with the same ability, men are better paid than women. How to translate it?	
S: 尽管有着相同能力，但是男人还是比女人的工资高。	
T: Good. Let's do some exercise to practice this grammar point. Please turn to page 101.	Drilling
S: ....	

**Appendix M: Examples of coding a stimulated recall interview-an excerpt from stimulated recall interview Hai**

Transcriptions	coding
<p>Interviewer (hereafter I): You said focus on form instruction was your ideal teaching approach in grammar instruction. However, you implemented focus on forms instruction in your practice. Why?</p>	<p>Tension about <i>focus on forms</i> instruction and <i>focus on form</i> instruction</p>
<p>Teacher (hereafter Hai): Well, there are many reasons why I cannot use CLT in my classroom teaching.</p> <p>First of all, I think my students lack sufficient English abilities to engage in the communicative approach in the class. Students are not confident and are unwilling to participate in the classroom and have free talk with me. Meanwhile, they also don't want to engage themselves in the classroom teaching because they are afraid of losing face in front of their classmates. As you can see from this class, no students volunteered to stand up and talk with me. They always sit at their desks and keep silent, only listening to me. They have got used to a teacher-centred classroom teaching. What they can do in the classroom seems to be the knowledge recipient and they are not the knowledge constructors.</p> <p>Another reason is there are a large number of students in the classroom. It is hard to organize classroom activities and I don't know how to organize activities under such a context.</p> <p>A final reason is it is wasting time for students to have a group discussion or pair dialogue in the classroom teaching. Time is limited for us and we have to complete the whole texts in the textbook. I usually dominate the classroom teaching. Students are required to memorize them after class, not in class.</p>	<p>Four reasons for tensions</p> <p>Students factor</p> <p>Large size class</p> <p>Time constraint</p>