



**A STUDY OF EFL TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS'
ATTITUDE TOWARD PRESCRIPTIVE AND
DESCRIPTIVE ENGLISH GRAMMAR TEACHING AND
LEARNING**

BY

ITTICHOTE SASOMSUB

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS IN CAREER ENGLISH FOR
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION
LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2021
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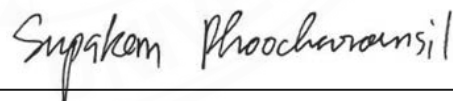
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A STUDY OF EFL TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD
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LEARNING

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the degree of Master of Arts in Career English for International Communication

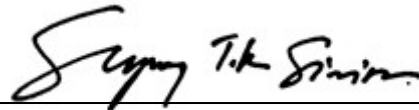
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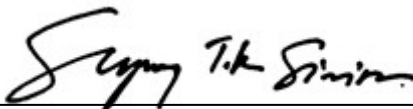
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ABSTRACT

English grammar is an important part of English language learning since it is required for learners to study and understand how the language works. While most classrooms are still using prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar has been gaining more attention recently due to the change in language learning trends. However, there were no studies on Thai teachers and students' attitudes toward different English grammar teaching and learning. If we can understand the attitude, we can design the proper grammar classroom methodology. This study then was conducted to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students toward prescriptive and descriptive English grammar teaching and learning by using the questionnaire and interviewing. The result shows that both teachers and students were aware of the change in language, and they were in support for descriptive grammar. The suggestions for future studies were then provided.

Keywords: Language attitudes, Grammar teaching, Prescriptive grammar, Descriptive grammar

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There is no doubt that English has become an important language for everyone since it is widely used in the communication. On the other hand, people also need to learn English grammar if they want to become good at English. There are several definitions of grammar, and the basic definition of grammar is that it is the structure of a language which exists in every language. Debata (2013) explained that grammar is an invisible force guiding learners to put words together into sentences. Debata then provided an illustration by Kohli (1984) who explained that people having knowledge of grammar is like a car driver knowing how the car's machine works and they can feel safe when there is a problem related to the engine.

This illustration then shows how it is necessary for learners of English to learn its grammar. For English learners, learning grammar is an important aspect of learning English because it helps learners producing meaningful, clear, and precise sentences or paragraphs. Crystal (2004) explained that by learning grammar, one can also gain awareness of how the language works and can help monitoring the meaning and effectiveness of how to use the language. For Thai students, the knowledge of English grammar is required for the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) which is the test required for elementary and lower and upper secondary students in their final years and can be used for admission into universities (Sritrakarn, 2021). Therefore, if Thai students have knowledge of English grammar, they can become successful in their further studies and professions as they become proficient in English.

Traditionally, English grammar that has been taught is known as prescriptive grammar which concerns how people should use the language. English grammar emerged from the standardization of English in the 16th and 17th century, but it was not until the 18th century that grammar writing saw a sharp rise in number. Locher (2008) explained that the prescriptive grammar at this time was provided to show examples of 'good' and 'bad' English, and materials for learning this grammar were written for schools and for foreigners so that everyone could learn the same grammar.

On the other hand, prescriptive grammar has also been criticized for several reasons. Kalati (2013) explained that modern scholars criticized English prescriptive grammar as it was based on personal interpretations of English language by 17th century writers. Another criticism is that prescriptive grammar has been perceived as an undesirable way to solve practical problems as it focuses on finding and fixing faults in the language. According to Larsen-Freeman (2014), even the proficient English users can make mistakes and caused prescriptive grammar to become responsible for a general unease in language learning. Lastly, as prescriptive grammar did not accept language change, it faced challenges as the language has been changing in the modern era (Al-Rushaidi, 2020).

With the criticisms of the ideology and methodology and the declining trend of Standard English, descriptive grammar has seen its rise in recent years. Unlike prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar describes the grammatical knowledge and system in terms of how people are actually using the language. The rising trend of descriptive grammar can be accredited to the development of technologies which also caused the development of corpus tools and corpus linguistics. Leech (2015) explained that since corpus linguistics observes the evidence of grammatical usage, descriptive grammar, which describes how language has been used, has also been combined into newer linguistic developments. In conclusion, descriptive grammar has become more favorable, and should be acknowledged by teachers today.

1.2 Research Objective

With the benefits of the descriptive grammar including its versatility and its benefit in helping students learn the language naturally, I believe that descriptive grammar will improve the quality of English grammar teaching in Thailand. If teachers and students have become aware of attitudes toward descriptive grammar, the change will become possible. However, there are few papers investigating the current attitudes towards prescriptive and descriptive English grammar. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate attitudes toward both types of grammar instruction on Thai teachers and students.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What are EFL teachers' attitudes towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar teaching?
- 2) What are English language students' attitudes towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar learning?

1.4 Definitions of Key Terms

The definitions of terms are provided to prevent confusions.

1) Attitudes towards prescriptive and descriptive English grammar means the feelings and opinions toward prescriptive and descriptive English grammar which will be defined by the Likert scale in this study.

2) Descriptive grammar means the grammar that focuses on how language has actually been used.

3) Non-standard English means the varieties of English from non-native English-speaking countries such as Thailand, India, the Philippines, or Japanese.

4) Prescriptive grammar means the grammar that focuses on how language should be used as in textbooks.

5) Standard English means the varieties of English from native English-speaking countries such as British English, American English, and Australian English.

6) EFL teachers refer to English language teachers teaching in public secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1 and 2, Bangkok area

7) EFL students refer to English language students studying in public secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1 and 2, Bangkok area

1.5 Scope of the Study

- 1) The scope of the study is the attitudes of EFL teachers and students towards prescriptive and descriptive English grammar.
- 2) The questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will be used to collect the data from two groups of participants including EFL teachers and Grade 12 students

3) The study focuses on the attitudes towards prescriptive and descriptive English grammar and the influences of the variables which are gender, age, education or working years, and the frequency of English learning.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study can be useful to understand the current situation of English grammar classrooms in Thailand. By understanding how teachers and students are thinking about how to improve the quality of grammar classroom, researchers may use this knowledge to design and improve teaching materials and methodologies.



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, literature related to the history and characteristics of prescriptive and descriptive English grammar are provided for better understanding of the context. The related studies will also be provided.

2.1 Grammar

Grammar has several definitions by different linguists and researchers and defining grammar has been a complex task since words can be used in different ways depending on the context. For instance, Saengboon (2017) defined grammar as a system of sounds, words, sentences, and meaning of a language. According to Hirai (2009), the purpose of grammar is to organize the sentence in order to produce good language. Furthermore, Ur (1991) explained that the purpose of the grammar is to describe the way the language works through the formation of meaning from the word combination, This definition is similar to the one provided by Debata (2013) who explained how grammar focuses on the study of words and how they work together. From these definitions, it can be said that grammar is the study of the system of a language so that the mechanism of the language may be understood, and meaningful sentences or paragraphs may be produced as a result. This shows how grammar is essential for every learner of language.

While grammar can be categorized into prescriptive and descriptive grammar, the definition of grammar would be assumed as traditional grammar or prescriptive grammar which remains dominant for centuries. The definition and background of different grammar types will be provided in the following sections.

2.1.1 Prescriptive Grammar

The ideology of Standard English and the need to standardize the language were then responsible for the creation of prescriptive grammar since sets of grammar must be prescribed so they can be the standard for the language over different varieties of the language. With the prescribed rules, prescriptive grammar then means the set of rules

of language defined to tell people what language should be right and what is correct or wrong (Jirawat, 2013). Prescriptive grammar is also known as traditional grammar due to their similar natures which are the concerns about the correctness and rules associated with the correctness (Williams, 2005). Williams then explained that school grammar, or grammars taught in schools, is also prescriptive or traditional grammar as can be seen by how traditional grammar instruction was preferred by public education institutions in the United States. Battistella (2005) then explained that prescriptive grammar had become a pedagogical norm in most schools and made schools responsible for promoting Standard English.

2.1.2 Descriptive Grammar

Celce-Murcia et al. (2014) provided the definition of descriptive grammar as a description of how people actually use the language regardless of the prescriptions. In other words, descriptive grammar's concern is observing how language has been used rather than correcting or telling how the language must be used. Bakka (2018) explained that descriptive grammar's goal is not determining what represents good or bad language, but it sees grammar as a result of socio-cultural manifestation. Therefore, forms that are incorrect in the prescriptive grammar such as double negatives as in "He knows nothing" or forms like "Him and me , we live in the same apartment." are completely acceptable in descriptive grammar.

Researchers provided reasons why descriptive grammar is becoming more popular than prescriptive grammar. According to Crystal (2006), while prescriptive grammar was claimed to help people use the language clearly and precisely, English prescriptive grammar has too many rules which was propounded with maximum authority and severity. This makes prescriptive grammar confusing for generations of schoolchildren. Furthermore, prescriptive grammar and Standard English were not effective in spoken English. Hudson (1992) explained that there were some sentences which might be correct in some dialects or non-standard dialect communities and students would use them in daily life. Hence, teachers in prescriptive grammar classrooms might upset students by telling them that they spoke incorrectly. As such Hudson and other studies regarding prescriptive grammar in spoken English classrooms such as Jirawat (2013) suggested that students should not be deprived of learning of the

existence of non-standard varieties, suggesting how the modern classroom is shifting toward the descriptive grammar.

While most English grammar taught in the classrooms today does not fully use descriptive grammar, linguists and researchers suggested how the trends are becoming more common such in Spain where universities are adapting guidelines established by the European Space in Higher Education (Pérez-Llantada, 2007). Moreover, researchers such as Larsen-Freeman (2003) also suggested ways to use descriptive grammar such as using linguistic corpora or psychologically authentic activities which can help students overcome knowledge problems. Therefore, I believe that descriptive grammar should be the new approach in Thai classroom.

2.1.3 Criticisms of Prescriptive Grammar

While prescriptive grammar supporters such as the prescriptivists who could be teachers or those responsible for making policies on education were convinced that prescriptivism is necessary and should not be questioned (Straaijer, 2015), there are criticisms of prescriptive grammar as well. Firstly, prescriptive grammar, which was based on the ideology of Standard English, was dependent on certain writers or influential societies rather than one institution. Widdowson (2018) explained that while other standard languages, such as French, have their national institutions for standardization, the standardization of English was instead done by language experts or writers who could be subjective. When other language experts created grammars in different varieties such as Standard American English or Australian English, there was a bias towards preferred standards and shows how prescriptive grammar is just a political tool (McArthur, 1992).

Secondly, the methodology and ideology of prescriptive grammar can discourage learners and language users. For instance, prescriptive grammar would focus on mistakes and with inappropriate methodology, students would feel disheartened while learning. Saengboon (2017) explained that since traditional English grammar instruction focuses on grammar forms, teachers might resort to grammar-translation or audio-lingualism and might promote rote-learning which prevent learners from learning to communicate meaningfully.

Lastly, prescriptive grammar, which deemed any deviants or changes from the standard undesirable, is incompatible with the inevitable changes in language. Al-Rushaidi (2020) explained that while prescriptive grammarians would maintain standards of the language, modern linguists have attitudes believing in language change and are interested in describing how language has been used. Language, on the other hand, is subject to change whether the change is desirable or not. These changes in trends, language, and attitudes play an important role in the introduction of descriptive grammar.

2.2 Standard English

To talk about the prescriptive English grammar, it is necessary to understand how Standard English had been formulated and became the prevalent trend during the last few centuries. Hogg et al. (1992-2001) explained that English language had been changed through different periods. The earliest English which was called Old English came to realization after the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain in 449 CE, then came the Norman conquest in the 1066 CE which started the Middle English period.

The attempts of modern standardization started in 1476 CE when printing had been introduced in England and marked the beginning of the early modern English. It was at this point where grammar writing has been published by different writers. Still, there were not many English publications during the 16th and 17th century because most scientific and scholarly texts were written in Latin, even English grammar books such as ‘Grammatica Anglicana’ by Paul Greaves or ‘Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae’ by John Wallis were titled in Latin. In fact, ‘Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae’ would remain highly influential for the next century (Locher, 2008).

The next period was called modern English period which began in the 18th century. In this century, several events such as British colonization and the Declaration of Independence of the United States made English spread into other parts of the world. Furthermore, this period saw a sharp increase in new English grammar writings. According to Michael (1997), there were up to 99 new English grammar writings published during the last three decades of the 18th century. Watts (2000) provided different reasons for the increasing need to standardize English which also resulted in grammar publications. Firstly, similar to the standardization in the previous period in

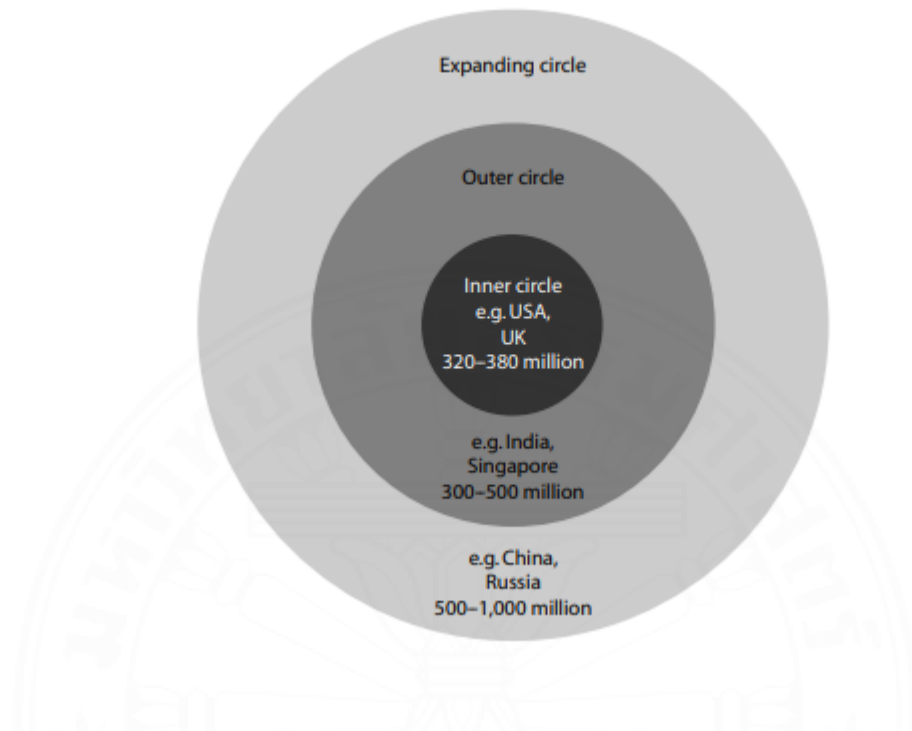
which London sought to unify England under London English, Britain now sought to unify its colonies under the English language. Next, there were two myths about the English language at that time which are ‘the myth of the perfect language’ and ‘the myth of the undesirability of change’. Watts explained that there was an idea that English language can reach the state of perfection, and any further changes would worsen the language. Lastly, as it can be seen how English may be different in the colonies, there was an idea that the certain varieties of English would remain superior and caused the attempt to create standard English through grammar writings.

While the idea of unifying a language under one standard might sound like a welcoming change, there needs to be a consideration that this idea would be beneficial for certain groups more than others. Milroy (2001) explained the standardization of the language has ideologies behind it. For instance, there are concepts of correctness and historicity which made native speakers of the standardized variety of the language believe that they are the owner of the language, and they could not be wrong.

2.3 The New Trends

With the criticisms against prescriptive grammar and unappealing classroom teaching prescriptives on grammar, there have been several changes which Al-Rushaidi called ‘The Fall of Prescriptivism’. Crystal (2017) explained that the earliest and shocking decision on the change was the removal of grammar from the school curriculum in the English-speaking world during the 1960s. This decision, however, had some drawbacks in which there was an indication of decreasing literacy skills. Therefore, grammar has returned as a part of the National Curriculum in the 1990s in the UK. This new grammar, on the other hand, was different from the traditional grammar teaching since the returned grammar now also puts emphasis on structure and use. This shows how the perception toward prescriptive grammar and Standard English has changed.

In addition, there is a new trend that challenges the status of Standard English and the ownership of English. This trend can be seen through The Three Circles of English model by Kachru (1985) as follows (cf. Figure 1, adopted from Crystal, 2007)

Figure 1*Kachru's Three Circles Model*

From the circle, it can be seen that the number of speakers in the Outer circle and Expanding circle who are non-native speakers is outgrowing the number of speakers in the Inner circle who are native speakers. Kohn (2011) explained that with the rising number of non-native speakers, researchers are now arguing that English no longer belongs to the native speakers. This challenge towards the ownership of the language and the increase in non-native English lecturers created the new use of English language known as English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

Unlike Standard English, ELF accepts all English varieties in their own right rather than the standard set by native English speakers (Jenkins, 2006). In addition, the purpose of ELF which focuses on communication rather than sounding like native speakers means that it has implications for several uses such as business, education, and tourism (Jenkins et al., 2011). Since the new trend shows that successful communication is more important than having correct forms, descriptive grammar has gained interest.

2.4 Grammar Teaching in Thailand

While English is a foreign language in Thailand, English has an important role today as in many other countries around the world since it can be used for better job opportunities, communication, and in the academic field. As such, the government supported English programs and English as a part of the Thai curriculum in every school and university so that Thai students would become proficient and interested in the English language and become more acquainted in using English in their daily lives (Lhorsumeth, 2017). In spite of the governments' attempt, Thai students still have problems using English.

One factor contributing to this issue is grammar learning. Cook (2008) explained that grammar learning plays a significant role in English language learning. Madden and Charumanee (2017) further explained that grammar ability has a consistent relationship with reading and writing skills. In other words, students with low English grammar ability scores would also have low reading and writing ability reflected in test scores. These explanations then suggest how English grammar is an important factor for improving the quality of Thai students' English skills.

Currently, most schools in Thailand favor prescriptive grammar for teaching English. Interestingly, this trend is contradictory to the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 which specified that the aim of learning and teaching foreign languages including English should be to enable Thai learners to communicate with others and take part in the global society. In reality, most classrooms still focus on correctness and achieving native like competency. The participants from the study by Saengboon (2017) stated that English grammar was poorly taught since teachers aimed to teach for taking examinations and required students to perfectly memorize grammar. Next, Thai students need to take the Ordinary National Educational Test or O-NET which has a strong washback, or effects from the test to the practice, since it was required for university admission (Lunrasri & Gajaseni, 2014). O-NET uses a multiple-choice format and measuring only reading ability and grammatical knowledge, causing Thai teachers to focus on helping students use correct forms rather than for communication as intended. In addition, the prominent standard English ideology in Thailand also caused Thai learners to believe that they need to use English like native speakers. This can be seen in the study by Jindapitak and Teo (2012) which shows that

standard English varieties which are British and American English were perceived more positively than other varieties.

These points then suggested that prescriptive grammar remains dominant in Thai classrooms. With the benefits of descriptive grammar mentioned, I believe that the quality of English skills of Thai students and the issues regarding Thais' low proficiency of English can be solved by including descriptive grammar in Thai classrooms. However, for this to become successful, there is a need to understand students and teachers' attitudes.

2.5 Attitudes towards Grammar Teaching

In order to find out ways to improve grammar teaching in Thailand, it is necessary that we understand the current attitudes of teachers and students towards grammar teaching. Cohen (1966) defined the term attitude as the humans' dispositions to view things in certain ways and act accordingly. This definition is similar to the one provided by Triandis (1971) who suggested that attitudes are made up of cognitive, affective, and conative components. In other words, attitudes are what people think, feels, and tend to behave toward an object. Furthermore, Gardner (1982) suggested that by understanding a person's attitudes toward language learning, we will be able to predict their behaviors toward language learning more precisely as well.

In addition to predicting behaviors toward language learning, Gardner (1985) explained that it is important to understand learners' favorable attitudes toward language learning since attitudes will maintain levels of motivation and help learners actively involved in learning. This can be seen in the study by Lhorsumeth (2017) who explained that Thai students' problems in English grammar came from the negative attitudes toward grammar learning which caused them to lack the intention to learn and cause failure in English learning. Eickhoff (2016) who also studied the attitudes toward prescriptive grammar of students explained that by studying attitudes, we can understand language students' goal for learning and using the language.

In conclusion, studying the current attitudes toward descriptive and prescriptive grammar can be beneficial for several reasons. For instance, we will be able to predict the behaviors toward grammar learning and current trends in Thai classrooms. By doing

so, we will understand the attitudes and design appropriate English grammar teaching for students.

2.6 Related Studies

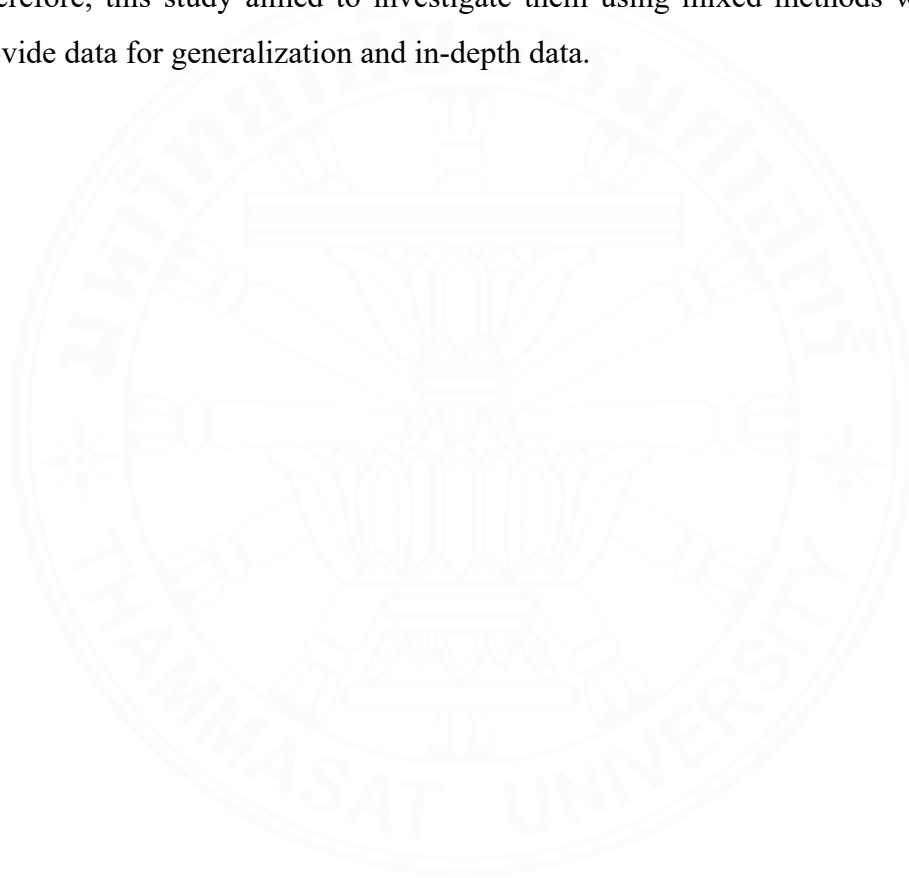
Eickhoff (2016) studied attitudes toward prescriptive grammar of ESL and EFL teachers and students by using the questionnaires. In Eickhoff's study, there are two parts of the questionnaire. In Part A, students were asked to rate different sentences if they sound wrong or good to them. After that, students were asked to provide opinions about English speaking and grammar. The result shows that students have a higher preference for prescriptive grammar in writing than in speaking and suggest that methods using descriptive grammar, such as corpora, requires attention since it would be useful for teaching spoken English. On the other hand, this study has a limitation in which it relies solely on the quantitative analysis which was also suggested by Eickhoff that classroom observation would help determining the alignment between the attitudes and habits.

Saengboon (2017) studied the English grammar knowledge of Thai university students by using grammar tests to evaluate grammar production and recognition skills. In addition, the interview was conducted to collect data concerning opinions about the participant's English proficiency and English education in Thailand. While the result shows that the average test scores were relatively low, the participants think that English grammar is important and should emphasize the communicative use of grammar. Therefore, this suggested that descriptive grammar should be stressed in the future since traditional grammar teaching was obsolete according to the prescribed curricula.

Cheevasart (2005) studied the perception towards grammar teaching in the communicative approach of 32 Thai teachers of English. In this study, the participants were given the questionnaire to investigate what teachers think about grammar in teaching communication, how the learners feel about grammar, how the school curriculum supports teaching grammar, and how their roles are in the classroom. The findings show that teachers viewed grammar to be important in learning language, but it is not the most important factor. The participants also believed that the current curriculum encourages students to communicate, and they are satisfied with the

curriculum. However, the researcher also noted that the further studies should investigate the students' perceptions as well.

These related studies show that descriptive grammar has been gaining attention in recent years. They also show how questionnaires and interviews are appropriate for data collection and analysis. However, these studies have limitations concerning the sample size and methods of analysis. Furthermore, there are few studies on both Thai teachers and students' attitudes toward prescriptive and descriptive grammar. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate them using mixed methods which would provide data for generalization and in-depth data.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is driven by research questions concerning the attitudes of teachers and students towards prescriptive and descriptive grammar. In this chapter, the methodology, sample, instruments, and the procedures for data collection and analysis in the study are provided.

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study are high school students and English teachers in public secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1 and 2, Bangkok area. For quantitative analysis, 50 Grade 12 students and 50 teachers from 5 schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1 and 2 are selected by random sampling. For qualitative data, 6 teachers and students are purposively selected from the participants who have responded to the questionnaires.

3.2 Methods

This study uses mixed method approach which employs quantitative and qualitative methods. Shorten and Smith (2017) explained that the mixed method helps understanding the connections between the qualitative and quantitative data, helps facilitating interaction to understand different perspectives, and provide opportunities for participants to voice and share their experiences. As such, the mixed methods would be useful in this study since the data would be able to generalize Thai students, and the in-depth information may be gathered. In addition, mixed methods would also be useful for the triangulation of the results so that the research findings would gain more significance when sets of data lead to the same results (Rothbauer, 2008).

3.3 Research Instruments

Different instruments are used for quantitative and qualitative analysis. For the quantitative analysis, the questionnaires are used to collect the quantitative data. For the qualitative analysis, the semi-structured interviews are used.

3.4 Research Procedures

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The items of questionnaire in this study are adapted from Eickhoff (2016) who used the questionnaire to collect the data related to the attitudes about prescriptive grammar in ESL and EFL teachers and students in China and the United States. In addition to the general information part which is used to elicit demographic details of the participants, there are two major parts consisting of 25 statements.

In Part A, there are 16 statements consisting of eight prescriptively correct sentences while other sentences that are commonly uttered by native speakers during oral communication. The non-prescriptively correct sentences are similar to the eight prescriptively correct sentences while the content words are changed, and the sentences are presented in a pseudorandom order in which no two consecutive sentences represent the same grammar point. Participants are asked to rate each sentence from 1 (The sentence sounds wrong to me) to 6 (The sentence sounds good to me).

In Part B, there are 20 statements which are questions asking participants to share their opinions on their attitudes toward prescriptive and descriptive grammar. In this part, a five-point Likert scale is used.

Questionnaire items in this study are adopted and adapted from the study of Eickhoff since the statements in Part A were checked against two corpora which are the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC) and native English speakers. Therefore, the samples of prescriptive and descriptive grammars in these statements are verified to be prevalent in American and British English as well as being applicable. However, items in Part B are changed since Eickhoff's study solely relied on the survey, open-ended questions were included. In this study, open-ended questions would be used during the interview to save time while collecting the quantitative data. Furthermore, Part B of Eickhoff's study focused on the aspects of speaking English like a native speaker and speaking English grammatically correct and might not cover other aspects. As such, items are changed and added to fit the context in this study which are attitudes toward descriptive and prescriptive grammar.

In the last part of the questionnaire, the participants will be informed that the data will be kept confidential and will be exclusively used for this study. Participants

will also be asked to choose if they would like to provide additional information in the interview.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interview

After using the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview was used to make follow-up questions and more in-depth study. In this study, the objective of the interview is to investigate attitudes toward prescriptive and descriptive English grammar, the awareness of the global trends, and the current issues in Thailand. To avoid confusion, the interview questions will be conducted in Thai. Each interview will last 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded.

3.4.3 Data Collection

The data collection will be conducted in public secondary schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 1 and 2, Bangkok area between March to April 2022. Relevant schools will be contacted for the cooperation.

50 English teachers and 50 students will be asked to complete the consent forms prior to data collection. After that, the questionnaire will be distributed. Lastly, the semi-structured interviews will be conducted later and the participants willing to provide information will be contacted and appointed for the date of interview. For the interview, 3 teachers and 3 students will be selected.

3.5 Data Analysis

After data collection, the researcher analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data as follows:

3.5.1 Quantitative analysis

In order to analyze the questionnaire data, the mean of the responses to 16 six-point Likert scale questions and 20 five-point Likert scale questions were calculated to reveal general information and teachers' and students' attitudes toward prescriptive and descriptive grammar.

3.5.2 Qualitative analysis

This study uses thematic analysis which was a method used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Vaismoradi et al. (2013) explained that thematic analysis is useful for identification of common threads across the set of interviews. In this study, the procedure of the thematic analysis includes the extraction of themes from the qualitative data which are from the semi-structured interview. After that, the researcher uses the six steps approach to thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke which are familiarizing the data, generating for codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. After the findings from both qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed, both data will be triangulated to confirm the findings.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are EFL students' beliefs towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar learning?
- 2) What are English language teachers' beliefs towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar teaching?

4.1 Perception towards Prescriptive and Descriptive Forms

To answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the students and teachers' perceptions of the forms first. As such, Part A of the survey which serves as the acceptability judgment test could help us investigate how teachers and students perceived both prescriptive and descriptive forms. The means of the sentences rated by teachers and students are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 shows the prescriptively correct means in acceptability judgment test while Table 2 shows the prescriptively incorrect means in acceptability judgment test.

Table 4.1.1

Prescriptively Correct Means in Acceptability Judgment Test

Prescriptive	Teachers	Students
1 3 rd p. prn.	4.63	4.62
4 sub. prn.	5.02	3.74
5 who/whom	3.10	3.38
7 pr. cond.	5.20	4.28
12 adv./adj.	4.47	3.57
14 count n.	3.57	3.40
15 obj. prn.	3.80	4.34
16 pst. cond.	4.06	3.72
Average	4.23	3.88

Table 4.1.2*Prescriptively Incorrect Means in Acceptability Judgment Test*

Descriptive	Teachers	Students
2 <i>pst. cond.</i>	3.27	3.51
3 <i>adv./adj.</i>	2.90	3.26
6 <i>sub. prn.</i>	2.24	3.13
8 <i>count n.</i>	3.57	3.57
9 <i>who/whom</i>	2.73	3.23
10 <i>pr. cond.</i>	2.12	3.62
11 <i>obj. prn.</i>	2.88	2.83
13 <i>3rd p. prn.</i>	3.82	4.47
Average	2.94	3.45

Prescriptive forms: As seen in Table 1, overall sentences were highly rated by teachers and has the average rating higher than the rating of students which is almost at the middle of the Likert Scale (3.5). For teachers, some of the items with the highest rating are Sentence 7 (*If I were you, I would not go to the party.*) which was rated 5.20. For students, this sentence is also among the highest rated sentences with the rating of 4.28. Another highly rated sentence for teachers is the Sentence 4 (*John and I are going to the store.*) with the rating of 5.02. However, this sentence is not as highly rated for students with the rating of 3.74. The sentence with the lowest rating for teachers is the Sentence 5 (*I want to know whom the story was about.*) and is consistent with the students' rating which was also rated the lowest.

Overall, this can be interpreted as the teachers found the prescriptively correct sentences to be acceptable or have a favorable opinion of prescriptive grammar rules. Students, while not finding the prescriptive grammar rules as favorable as teachers did, found certain rules to be acceptable such as Sentence 1 (*If a student has a question, he or she should ask the teacher.*) or Sentence 15 (*Please remember to call Mary and me.*) which was rated higher than teachers' rating. This shows that while grammar points are not valued equally, prescriptively correct sentences remain favorable for Thai students and teachers.

Non-prescriptively correct forms: Table 2 illustrates the mean ratings of the prescriptively incorrect sentences. But were considered acceptable by a set of native speakers and references against corpora. According to the table, the overall rating for both teachers and students was lower than the prescriptively correct forms while the average rating of teachers was found to be lower than the rating by students. For students, while the overall rating of the prescriptively incorrect forms was rated lower than the prescriptively correct forms, there were exceptions in which some are highly rated such as Sentence 11 (*Please return the book to John and I.*) or Sentence 8 (*There are less people here today than yesterday.*) which was surprisingly rated higher than the prescriptively correct counterpart.

The results from Part A then show that for Thai students and teachers, prescriptively correct sentences are rated higher than those prescriptively incorrect sentences. This is clear for the case of teachers who are able to perceive sentences as correct and incorrect according to the prescription and are able to judge the acceptability. On the other hand, the ability to perceive and judge for students was not as clear since the means of both prescriptively correct and incorrect forms were close to the middle of the Likert scale. As such, further investigation was conducted in Part B so that the attitudes toward prescriptive and descriptive grammar could be understood better.

4.2 Opinions towards Prescriptive and Descriptive Grammar

While the results from Part A of the questionnaire show teachers and students' ability to perceive and judge the sentences indirectly, Part B plays an important role by gathering the direct opinions towards descriptive and prescriptive grammar teaching and learning. The means and interpretation of teachers and students are provided in Table 3 and Table 4 in the following section.

Table 4.2.1*Teacher's Opinion towards Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar*

Statements	Average (Teachers)	Interpretation (Teachers)
1. My main goal of teaching English is to use English grammatically correctly	3.75	Agree
2. My main goal in teaching English is to successfully communicate with people from different cultures.	4.75	Strongly agree
3. Native English speakers always speak grammatically correctly.	2.78	Neutral
4. Other varieties of English should not be used in classroom.	2.22	Disagree
5. There are too many English grammar rules and can be confusing.	3.18	Neutral
6. Language change is acceptable if it is widely used.	4.12	Agree
7. I am satisfied with the current English grammar classroom.	2.98	Neutral
8. I am nervous to make mistakes while using English.	3.41	Agree
9. People do not care about speaking English grammatically correctly or like a native speaker anymore.	3.33	Neutral
10. I think that the change of language is inevitable.	4.53	Strongly agree
11. It is necessary that the incorrect usages of English must be fixed.	3.84	Agree
12. Correcting the language can be negative to the language learners.	2.06	Disagree
13. Students should be exposed to real life examples of language usages.	4.90	Strongly agree
14. Only samples from the English textbooks should be used to teach.	1.73	Strongly disagree

15. Schools should enforce norms against grammatical issues.	3.73	Agree
16. Schools should be descriptive and without expressing judgments against grammatical issues.	4.49	Strongly agree
17. Every English-speaking people should aim for the standard variety.	2.86	Neutral
18. Every English-speaking people should speak and write as they like.	3.53	Agree
19. It is necessary that English classes are taught by native speakers.	2.80	Neutral
20. Native speakers always have better language intuition.	3.37	Neutral

According to Table 3, there are several interesting insights about how grammar should be taught. The Statements 11 and 12 show that teachers believed that there were incorrect usages of English which should be fixed, and they believed that correcting the language would not be negative to the language learners. This can be further seen in Statement 1 as teachers claimed that they taught English to use grammar correctly and in Statement 8 in which teachers explained how they are nervous of making mistakes, although they were not sure about how people care about speaking English grammatically correctly or like a native speaker as seen in Statement 9.

However, while teachers agreed that main goal of teaching English is to use English grammatically correctly, they also strongly agreed that their main goal in teaching English is to successfully communicate with people from different cultures as seen in Statement 2. Moreover, teachers strongly agreed that students should be exposed to real life examples of language usage rather than exclusively resorting to the textbooks as seen in Statements 13 and 14. Another point suggesting teachers support descriptivism can be seen in Statements 10 and 6 as teachers strongly agreed that the language change is inevitable, and the change is acceptable if it is widely used. Lastly, the conflict with how teachers believed in correcting and having norms about grammatical issues can be seen in Statement 16 since teachers strongly agreed that

schools should be descriptive and without expressing judgments against grammatical issues.

Regarding beliefs about native speakers, teachers' responses are mostly neutral such as how standard English variety should be the aim, how English classes should be taught by native speakers, and how native English speakers always speak grammatically correctly. This shows that it is possible that teachers might not be sure about current trends concerning English language classes.

Table 4.2.2

Student's Opinion towards Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar

Statements	Average (Students)	Interpretation (Students)
1. My main goal of learning English is to use English grammatically correctly	3.94	Agree
2. My main goal in learning English is to successfully communicate with people from different cultures.	4.49	Strongly agree
3. Native English speakers always speak grammatically correctly.	3.04	Neutral
4. Other varieties of English should not be used in classroom.	1.98	Disagree
5. There are too many English grammar rules and can be confusing.	2.89	Neutral
6. Language change is acceptable if it is widely used.	3.85	Agree
7. I am satisfied with the current English grammar classroom.	3.19	Neutral
8. I am nervous to make mistakes while using English.	3.91	Agree
9. People do not care about speaking English grammatically correctly or like a native speaker anymore.	3.19	Neutral
10. I think that the change of language is inevitable.	4.28	Strongly agree

11. It is necessary that the incorrect usages of English must be fixed.	3.72	Agree
12. Correcting the language can be negative to the language learners.	1.92	Disagree
13. Students should be exposed to real life examples of language usages.	4.70	Strongly agree
14. Only samples from the English textbooks should be used to teach.	1.75	Strongly disagree
15. Schools should enforce norms against grammatical issues.	3.87	Agree
16. Schools should be descriptive and without expressing judgments against grammatical issues.	4.17	Agree
17. Every English-speaking people should aim for the standard variety.	3.21	Neutral
18. Every English-speaking people should speak and write as they like.	3.45	Agree
19. It is necessary that English classes are taught by native speakers.	3.17	Neutral
20. Native speakers always have better language intuition.	3.49	Agree

Table 4 shows students' opinion towards prescriptive and descriptive grammar. According to the table, there are several similarities between teachers' and students' opinions. For instance, they agreed that the change of language is inevitable, students should also be exposed to the real-life examples of language usage, and the goal of learning English should be to use grammar correctly and be able to successfully communicate with people from different cultures. The conflicts between thinking how schools should be descriptive, and the necessity of rules and corrections also present in the same way as the teachers' opinions. The notable difference in the students' opinions from teachers' can be seen in Statement 20 in which students agreed that native speakers always have better language intuition.

While both teachers and students' opinions suggested that they believed that there is a change in language and descriptive grammar and its practices should be taught in school, there were conflicts concerning beliefs about the correctness of grammars. There is also a need to understand their beliefs about the current trends of English language teaching, the characteristics of their classrooms and environments and how they could affect their attitudes, and possible suggestions for the change. These points will be elaborated on in the qualitative analysis which is an interview in this study.

4.3 Attitudes towards Prescriptive and Descriptive Grammar

The first point elaborated during the interview was how teachers and students think about prescriptive and descriptive English grammar as well as the reasons why they had such attitudes. The results from the interview show that the respondents found descriptive grammar to be more practical and interesting such as in the Excerpt 1 and 2 as follows:

EXCERPT 1:

“Prescriptive grammar is easy and not complicate to learn since we can revise in the textbook, but it is boring and makes us not paying attention. Descriptive grammar actually made me alert and interested to learn.”

(Student A)

EXCERPT 2:

“For correct usage of English, we need to base on prescriptive grammar, but if we are talking about daily usages, descriptive grammar is what helping us being practical while speaking. Therefore, it depends on the purpose and context of English language learning. Personally, I want to teach descriptive grammar since it is applicable for real life.”

(Teacher B)

Some of the criticisms concerning prescriptive grammar are related to the approach which focuses on correction as seen in Excerpts 3 and 4. In addition, respondents who had an opportunity to use the language in real-life situations also

explained that prescriptive grammar was not as applicable as the descriptive grammar as in the Excerpt 5.

EXCERPT 3:

“I think it is because of my classroom. Mistakes were not allowed. You did a mistake in the test, you lost a point. Maybe things can be different elsewhere, but what am I facing today is mostly prescriptive thing.”

(Student C)

EXCERPT 4:

“Personally, I think that prescriptive grammar has an unappealing approach. While it is true that learners can benefit from being able to use written language in an acceptable way in prescriptive grammar classroom, the methods concerning prescriptive grammar might also discourage learners as the methods

(Teacher C)

EXCERPT 5:

“I was taught only prescriptive grammar during my childhood. It wasn't until I was older that I had a chance to use descriptive English grammar with my foreigner friends. At first, I did not know that I was using descriptive grammar, but I noticed that actual spoken language was different from what I learnt in classroom. That made me wonder why Thai schools don't teach what are really applicable.”

(Teacher B)

However, there are respondents who felt skeptical towards the methodology of descriptive grammar as they believed that even though descriptive grammar had no sets of rules determining what was right or wrong, they felt that there were lines to be drawn as in Excerpt 6 as follows:

EXCERPT 6:

“I think that while descriptive grammar sounds interesting, it has a flaw in which it is practically impossible. You still need to draw the line, and when you do so, then you are promoting prescriptive grammar.”

(Student C)

4.4 The Awareness of Global Trends

Apart from understanding the attitudes of the respondents, the interviewing also investigated how respondents were aware of the global trends in English grammar classrooms and their opinions on the trends. According to the respondents, there are new trends involving different types of teaching and purposes of learning such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English classes for communication or taking tests like IELTS or TOEIC as seen in Excerpts 7 and 8:

EXCERPT 7:

“I think people are learning English everywhere today. You browse the internet, and you can see lots of advertisements for English learning for the test like IELTS or TOEIC. There are also many online teachers teaching words and grammar rules.”

(Student C)

EXCERPT 8:

“There are many types of teaching today such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), bilingual education, focusing on communication, or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).”

(Teacher B)

Most respondents had positive opinions for these changes. For instance, the respondent from Excerpt 9 explained that newer methodologies such as English for Specific Purposes did not put rules of English which could be frustrating to learn as a main priority. Moreover, the respondent from Excerpt 10 provided similar opinion that the newer methodologies could be alternative ways of language learning.

EXCERPT 9:

“It is an interesting change in a good way. I always find too many grammar rules to be frustrating for learners. It is also not like you are using perfect grammar while you are talking anyway. Anyway, I think that this change has another implication which is that learning every rule of English is not the priority for everyone.”

(Teacher C)

EXCERPT 10:

“I think it is a good thing. At least we have alternative ways to learn the language.”

(Teacher A)

4.5 Current Issues in Thailand

Lastly, the respondents were asked to explain problems concerning grammar teaching and English education in Thailand as well as suggestions for the issues. The results showed different factors contributing to the issues.

First, the respondents described the characteristics of the English grammar classroom they taught or learnt at. The results showed that the current classrooms in Thailand are still being taught in prescriptive grammar as textbooks are the primary source of learning as seen in Excerpt 11.

EXCERPT 11:

“Like I said, it is mostly prescriptive. We mostly learnt about grammatical rules and are expected to write and speak correctly.”

(Student C)

However, there are also respondents who rejected traditional classrooms. For instance, the respondent in Excerpt 12 explained that their classroom put emphasis on fluency for speaking and incorporated tools such as corpus tools in their classroom for teaching.

EXCERPT 12:

“My classroom when I was a student was prescriptive, and the punishment was harsh. That kind of classroom made me feel sick of learning English. Therefore, I tried to avoid making similar mistakes while teaching. For example, I would promote fluency than accuracy for speaking, and I would use corpus tools to help students and ask them what words or structures should be used for something.”

(Teacher C)

Next, the respondents provided their opinions about how problems of English education of Thai students were related to the overemphasis of grammar teaching. Unsurprisingly, respondents agreed that grammar was overemphasized in classrooms which caused students to rely on rote-memorization rather than practicing English skills and caused students to become nervous of making mistakes.

EXCERPT 13:

“Of course, Thai education put too much emphasis on grammars and promoted rote-memorization rather than understanding. There wasn’t enough time for learners to practice as well.”

(Teacher A)

EXCERPT 14:

“It is horrible, isn’t it? And yes, I do think that overemphasis on grammar is one key contribution to the problem. I want to say that there are both direct and indirect problems. For direct problems, focusing on grammar means that students will not have enough time to develop other skills like speaking or listening. And there are indirect problems such as students might feel afraid to use English because they don’t want to make mistakes, or they might become as judgmental as the teacher.”

(Teacher C)

Furthermore, the respondents also explained that the reason for overemphasis of grammar came from the fact that teachers were not motivated or not familiar with different methodologies as they were taught in traditional grammar classroom.

EXCERPT 15:

“There are factors worsen the quality of English teaching in Thailand such as teachers’ quality who might be familiar with grammar learning, a few opportunities for students to use English outside the classroom, and teachers’ salary.”

(Teacher B)

Lastly, the respondents were asked to suggest solutions for the issues if they were allowed to pass the policies. There are two perspectives which came from teachers and students. For teachers, they believed that by improving quality of teachers’ knowledge about methodologies and welfare can help improving the quality of education as well. Other suggestions by teachers were promotion of activities using English, changing attitudes, and reducing standardized tests which could limit teachers from being creative in teaching.

EXCERPT 16:

“Let’s start with the overall picture by making people realize the importance of English, improving teachers’ quality and their welfare, promoting the uses of English outside the classroom, and improving Thais’ attitudes to make them avoid shaming how people speak English.”

(Teacher B)

EXCERPT 17:

“Starts with the teacher. I saw people blaming students that they might not want to learn or just incapable of learning. I say that teachers should become knowledgeable on how to teach effectively and enjoyable as well as teach different skills. We can do this by make sure teachers are trained to be able to teach different pedagogies and reduce their workloads which are unnecessary

things. Another thing is that I would try to make standardized tests like O-NET or other tests for admissions of schools and universities less important since it limits teachers from teaching in different ways.”

(Teacher C)

For students, the suggestions were related to the teaching contents and activities since they believed that the contents and activities used in real life could be useful and more interesting.

EXCERPT 18:

“Teach something that can be actually used in real life, not something to memorize.”

(Student B)

EXCERPT 19:

“More activities can be great. I read that people studying in developed countries do not study as hard as us, but they actually have fun learning. We can learn from them and copy them.”

(Student C)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the summary of the findings, discussion of the findings, implication of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendation for further studies are provided.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the beliefs of EFL students and English language teachers towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar learning and teaching. Therefore, the findings were divided into two parts as follows:

5.1.1 English language teachers' beliefs towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar teaching

The findings show several interesting pieces of information. Firstly, there was an implication that teachers found prescriptive grammar to be more favorable as the acceptability judgment test suggested. Another implication came from the questionnaire of teachers' opinions towards descriptive and prescriptive grammar in which teachers believed that rules and corrections are necessary in English grammar classrooms. However, the questionnaire also suggested that teachers found descriptive grammar interesting. The further investigation through the interviews then revealed that the preference of the prescriptively correct sentences might come from their experiences since they were taught in prescriptive grammar classrooms. In addition, limitations such as high-stakes tests or lack of motivation and knowledge can prevent teachers from changing their pedagogies since they would not know how to teach in different ways apart from focusing solely on grammar. The interviewing also revealed that teachers found current global trends in English language teaching methodologies to become more oriented to descriptive grammar and they found the change to be good and interesting. Teachers then finally suggested that if teachers were equipped with knowledge and motivated with better welfare, they could improve the quality of teaching.

5.1.2 EFL students' beliefs towards descriptive and prescriptive English grammar learning

There are a few differences in students' beliefs in comparison with teachers' beliefs. For instance, their means on the acceptability judgment test were close to the middle which might be due to lack of grammatical knowledge or different attitudes. Part B of the questionnaire and the interview then helped understanding that classrooms should be changed to focus more on activities and contents that are applicable to real life. Students also expressed their interest in the descriptive grammar as they found it to be more interesting and not as harsh as prescriptive grammar classrooms.

Overall, teachers and students found that while rules and corrections were useful in grammar classroom, there were more important things such as how interesting and practical in real life the contents and methods were. This shows that while prescriptive grammar remained prevalent in the classrooms, they would also like to change things in their classrooms if they had a chance.

5.2 Discussion of the findings

The findings in this study are in accordance with previous studies in different aspects. Firstly, this study showed that teachers believed that grammar is important for learning, but there are also other factors that are more important than being able to use the language correctly. Moreover, this study found that learners prefer learning communication to learning grammar. These findings are similar to the findings by Cheevasart (2005) who explained that it was normal for learners to learn communication since it helped motivating learners to acquire grammar accuracy later when they were experienced.

Secondly, this study found that teachers and students believed that the language change is inevitable, and there are current trends supporting descriptive grammars such as how methodologies and purposes of learning are shifting. These understandings were explained in several studies such as the study by Eickhoff (2016) who explained that language is constantly changing and evolving.

Lastly, this study suggested that teachers and students were content with the current trends, and they would like to improve or revamp education policies to improve attitudes of Thais, quality of teachers, and methods and contents in the classroom to be

applicable in daily life. This was also suggested in the study by Saengboon (2017) who promoted descriptive grammar to help improve communication.

5.3 Implication of the findings

In this study, there are implications for the policymakers and teachers. For the policymakers, the findings suggested that traditional English classrooms in Thailand which used prescriptive grammar can be demotivating and impractical for some purposes such as communication in daily life. If the purpose of English education is to equip Thais with ability to communicate in English with people from different cultures, the policymakers then should consider changing the curriculum guidelines to promote descriptive grammar, train teachers to become knowledgeable in teaching for communication, and improve the quality of learning materials instead of relying only on textbooks.

For teachers, the implications from this study suggested that while textbooks could help learners learn prescriptive grammar, not having a variety of activities or materials would result in depriving students of necessary English skills and making students dislike learning English. Therefore, teachers should be able to provide students with interesting activities and learning materials.

5.4 Limitations of the study

This study did not use inferential statistics, therefore, the findings from this study could not generalize larger groups. Furthermore, the qualitative data from this study could be more detailed with more respondents.

5.5 Recommendation for further studies

While this study used mixed-method approach to triangulate the results, further studies might consider using classroom observation to study how English grammar had been taught in the classroom. In addition, as the participants reported that they were interested in descriptive grammar, further studies might also test methodologies to teach descriptive grammar to determine the effectiveness and issues of the new approaches.

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