

# UK Teacher Opinions of Grammar in EAP: Past and Present

Kaitlinn Flower

## Topics

1. Background Research
2. The Present Study
3. The Results
4. So what?

# Background Research

## MA TESOL at Edge Hill University

- Theories of Second Language Education
- Practical Knowledge of TESOL
- TESOL Syllabus and Material Development
- Educational Management of TESOL
- Researching TESOL

## What is grammar?

‘...the way words are put together to make *correct* sentences.’ (Ur, 2012, p. 76).

The entire system and structure of English language including syntax, lexis, morphology, and semantics (Ellis, 2016).

The language we use ‘to say things, do things and be things.’ (Gee, 2011, p. 3).

# Approaches to Teaching Grammar

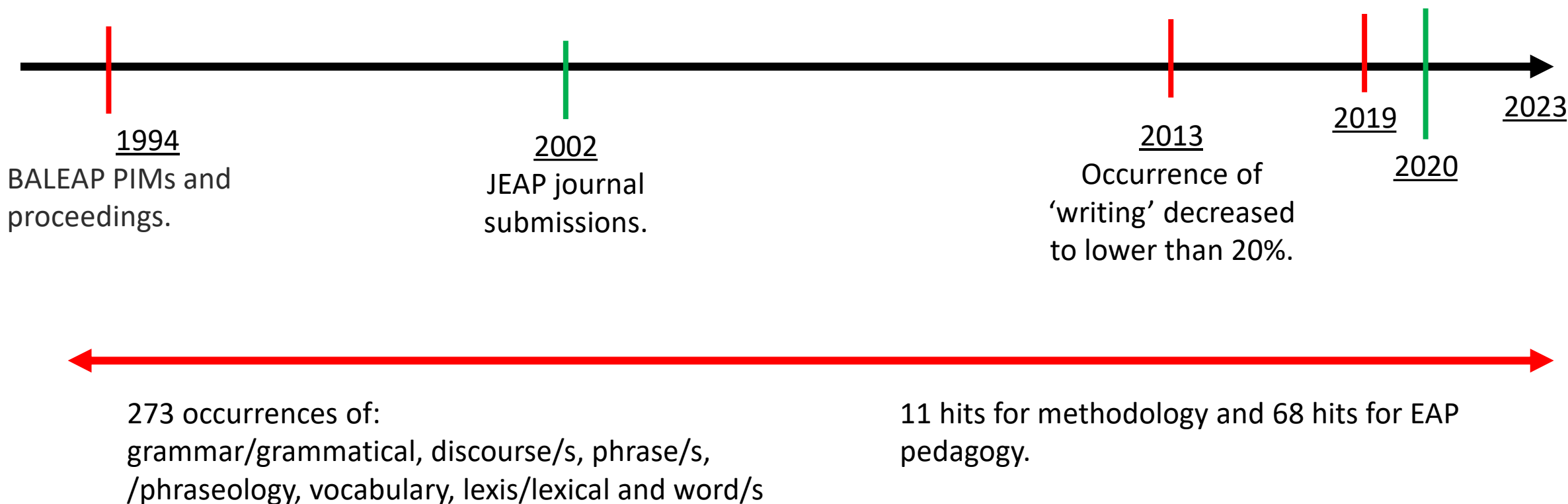
## Focus on Form (FonF)

- brief, and sometimes **spontaneous, attention** to linguistic forms.
- Primary focus is on **meaning**.
- assumes that acquisition occurs best when learners' **attention is drawn** to language items when they are needed for communication.
- input flood, input enhancement, and corrective feedback.

## Focus on Forms (FonFs)

- primary emphasis on linguistic structures, often presented as **discrete grammar rules** or other metalinguistic information.
- emphasizes the role of **explicit** knowledge in the acquisition process.
- present, practice, produce (**PPP**) and explicit language instruction

## Timeline of EAP pedagogy and EAP Grammar Research



# The Present Study



## Previous research into grammar and EAP teacher opinions.

- Burgess and Etherington (2002) *Focus on grammatical form: explicit or implicit?*
- Investigated teachers' attitudes to grammar and its teaching and learning within an EAP context.

### Results:

- Majority of teachers appreciate the value of grammar and that students possess a sophisticated understanding of the problems and issues involved.
- Evidence to support a favourable attitude to Focus on Form approaches.
- Student characteristics, needs and wishes have a strong influence on teachers' classroom actions in relation to grammar.

## Research Questions

1. Which beliefs about grammar and grammar teaching are most widely held by EAP teachers in the UK?
2. Do teachers hold a bias towards any single grammar teaching method?
3. Have beliefs about the place of grammar and grammar teaching changed over the last 20 years?

## The Survey

- Three sections.
- Approaches to the teaching of grammar.
- Student and teacher difficulties with grammar.
- Information about you and your teaching situation.

# The Results

## Qualitative Data.

- *I generally focus on highlighting grammatical structures specific to the texts my students will encounter or produce*
- *Explicit templates (and exceptions) can be helpful.*
- *All approaches may work, depending on the context.*
- *There is a place for explicit grammar teaching in EAP but possibly less so than in General English*
- *Giving student explicit grammar instruction can save a lot of time and frustration.*

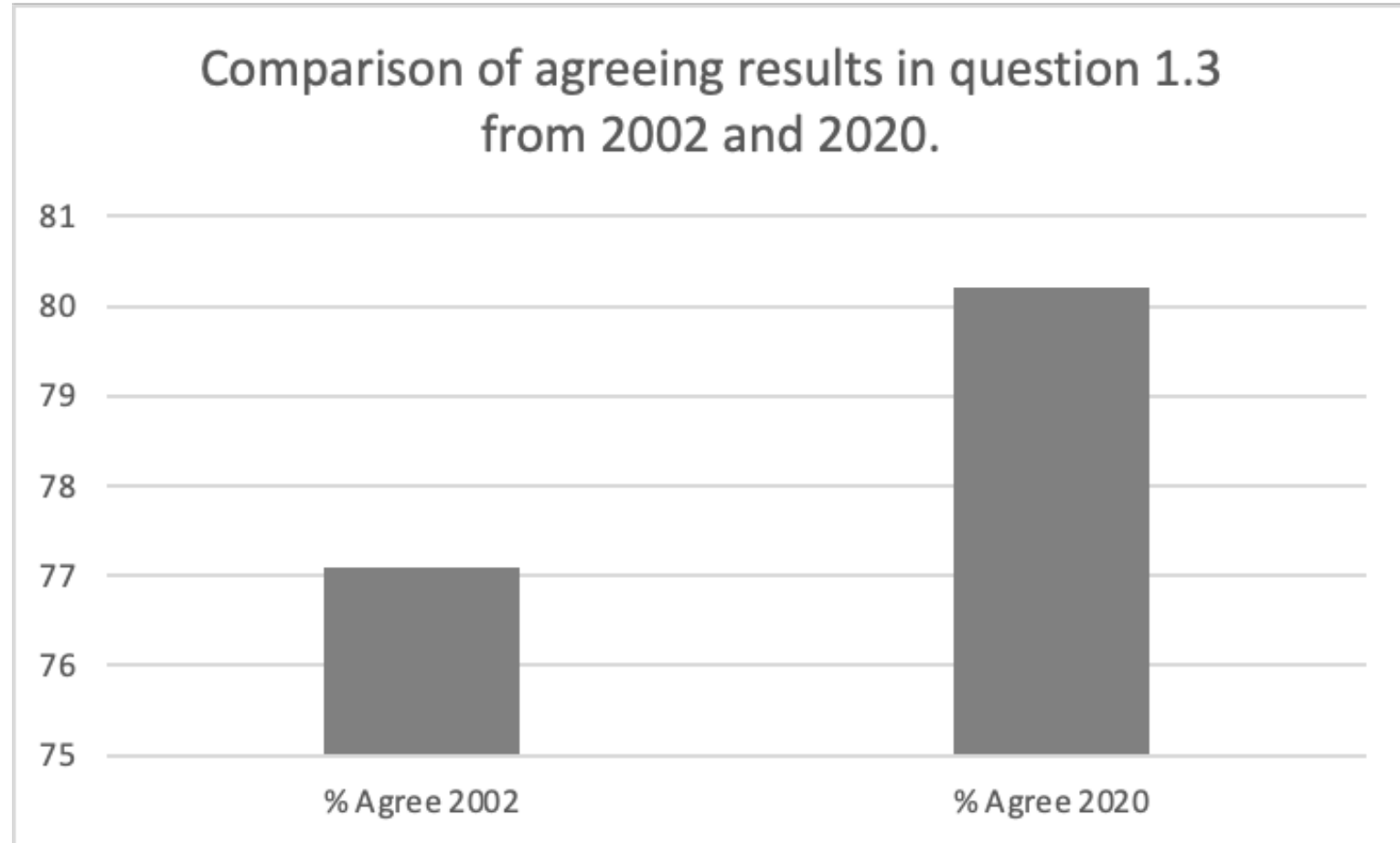
## Qualitative Data Cont.

- *It always depends on the student.*
- *A lot of these answers depend on the students.*
- *... it very much depends on context.*
- *... what is "best" would change depending on the students in front of me and their needs*
- *Context and purpose for language learning is always important.*
- *Context is everything.*
- *It also depends on the students*

### Q1.3

**Formal instruction helps learners to produce grammatically correct language.**

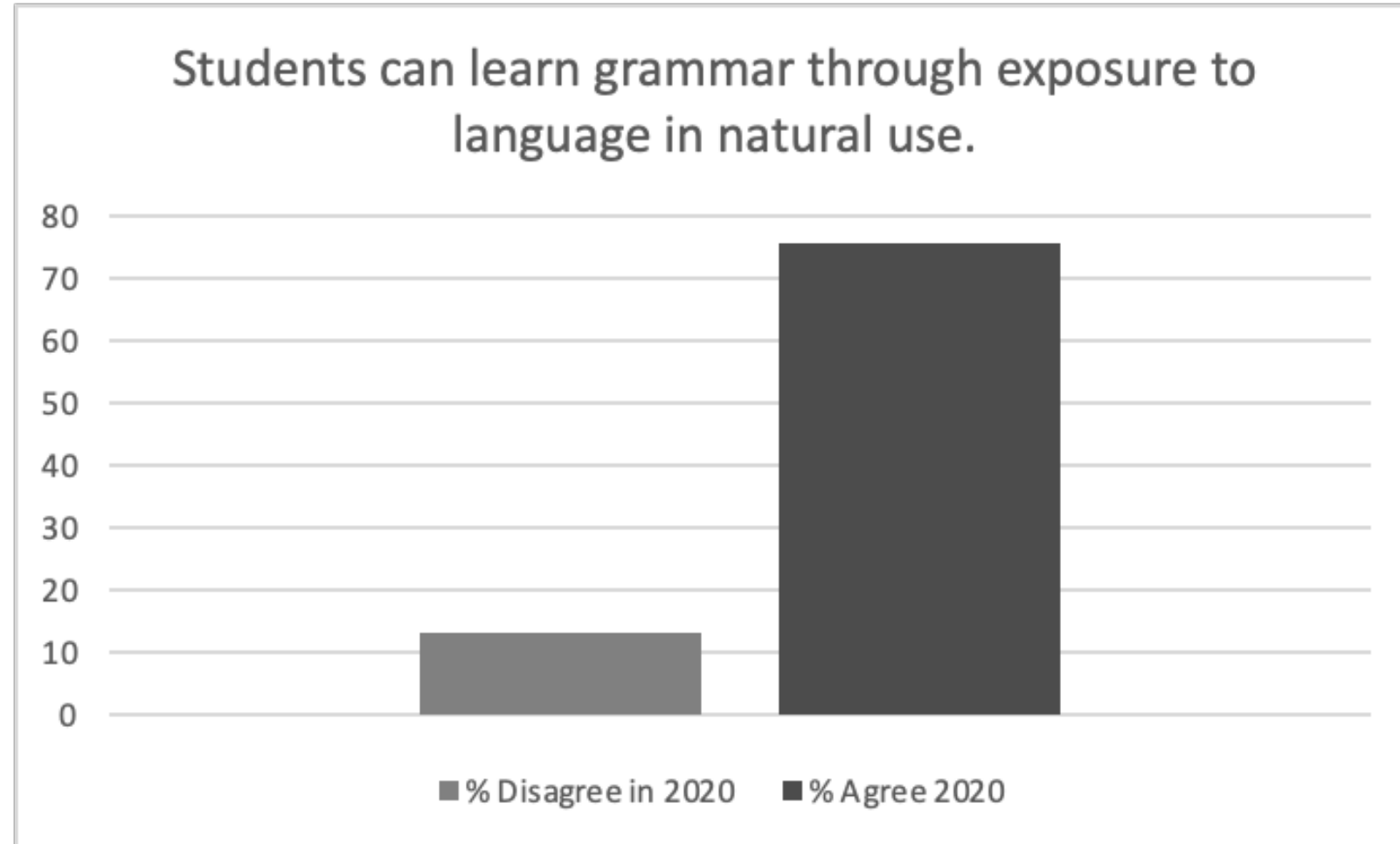
80% of all teachers surveyed agree that formal grammar instruction helps students produce grammatically correct language.



## Q1.2

**Students can learn grammar through exposure to language in natural use.**

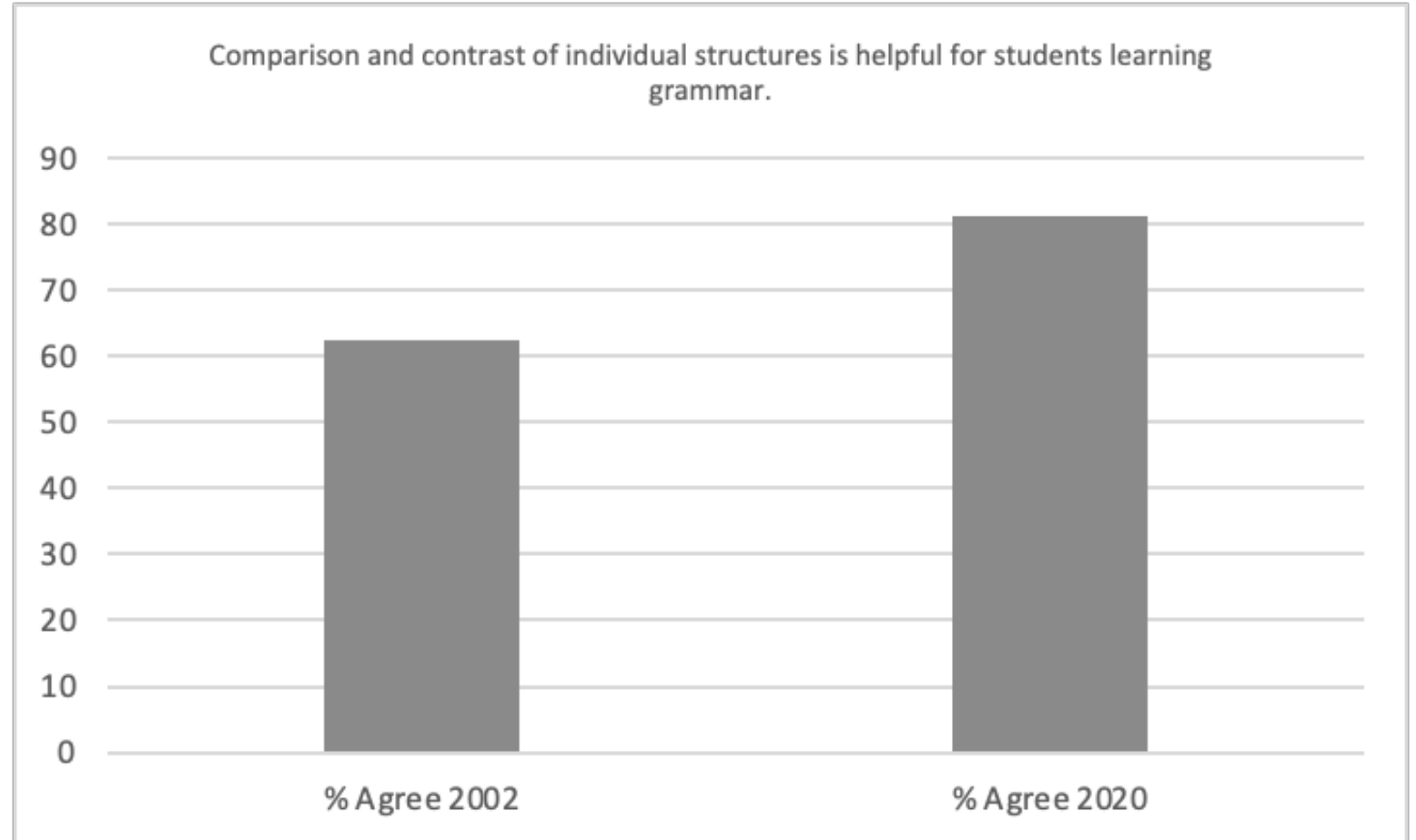
76% of teachers surveyed agreed that students can learn grammar through exposure to language in natural use.





## Q1.17 Comparison and contrast of individual structures is helpful for students learning grammar.

In 2002, 4% of teachers disagreed that comparing and contrasting individual structures is helpful for students learning grammar.

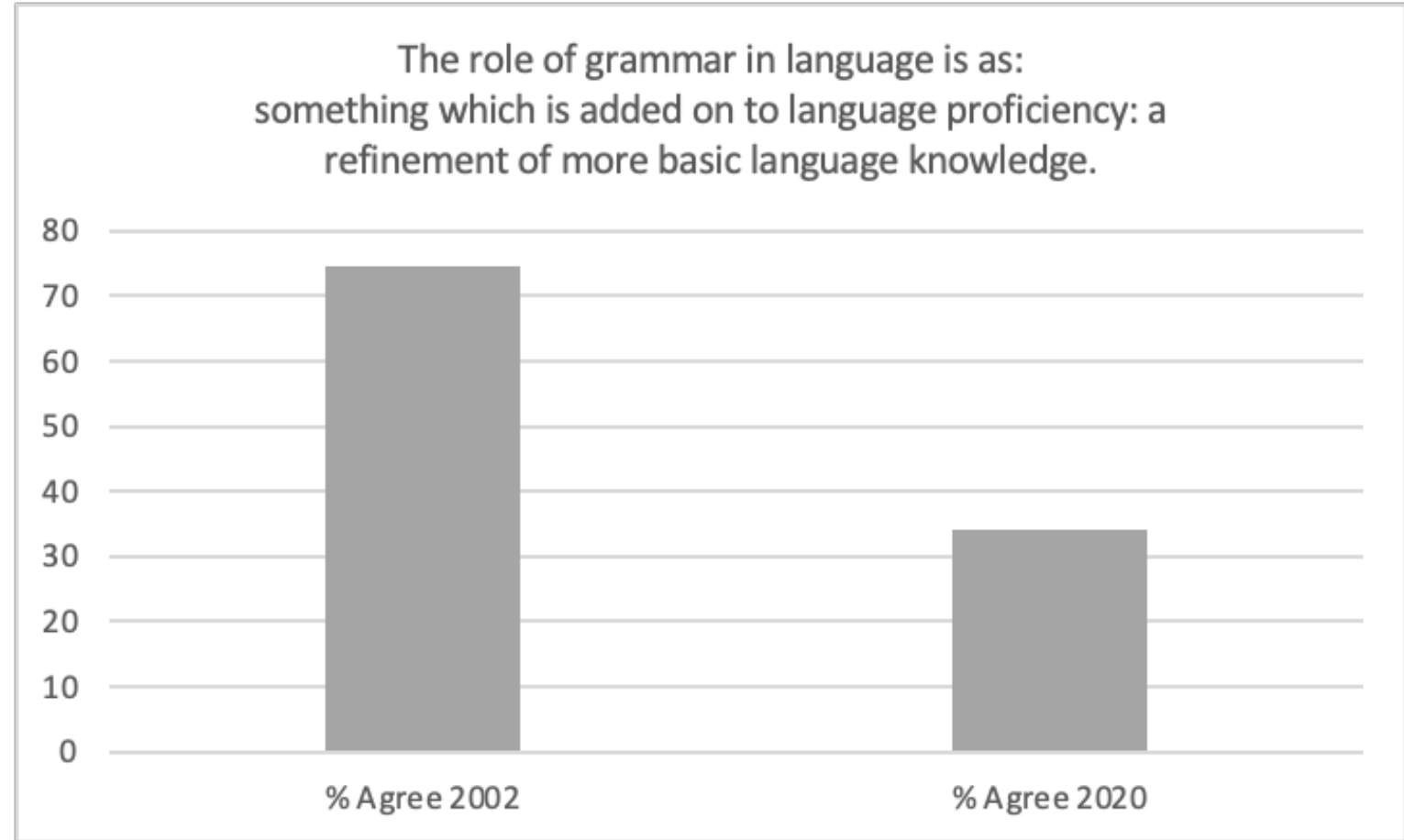


## Q1C

**The role of grammar in language is as:  
something which is added on to language proficiency: a  
refinement of more basic language knowledge.**

In 2002, 75% of teachers agreed.

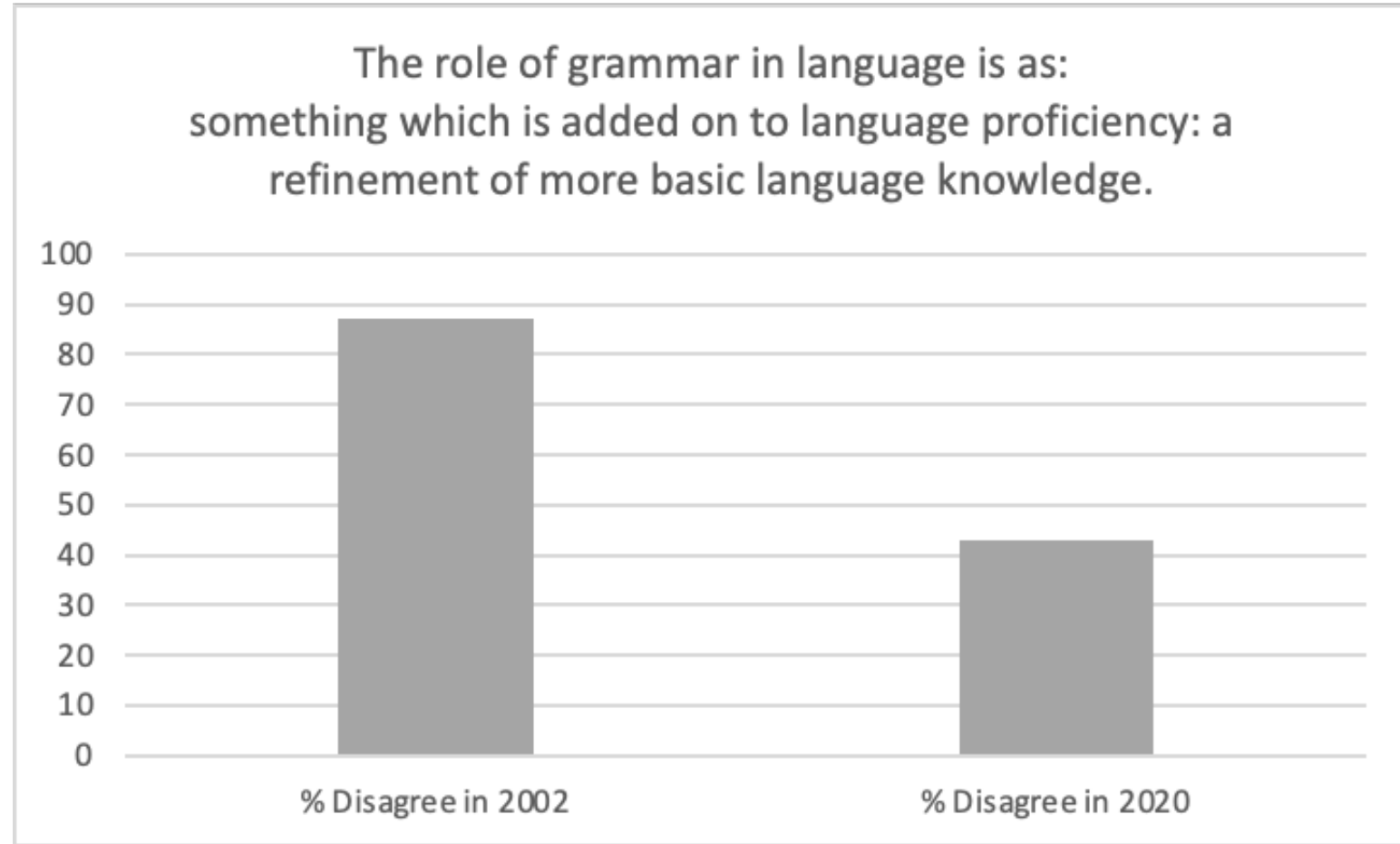
41% less teachers agreed in  
2020 compared with 2002.



**Q1C**  
**The role of grammar in language is as:  
something which is added on to language proficiency: a  
refinement of more basic language knowledge.**

In 2002, 87% of teachers  
disagreed.

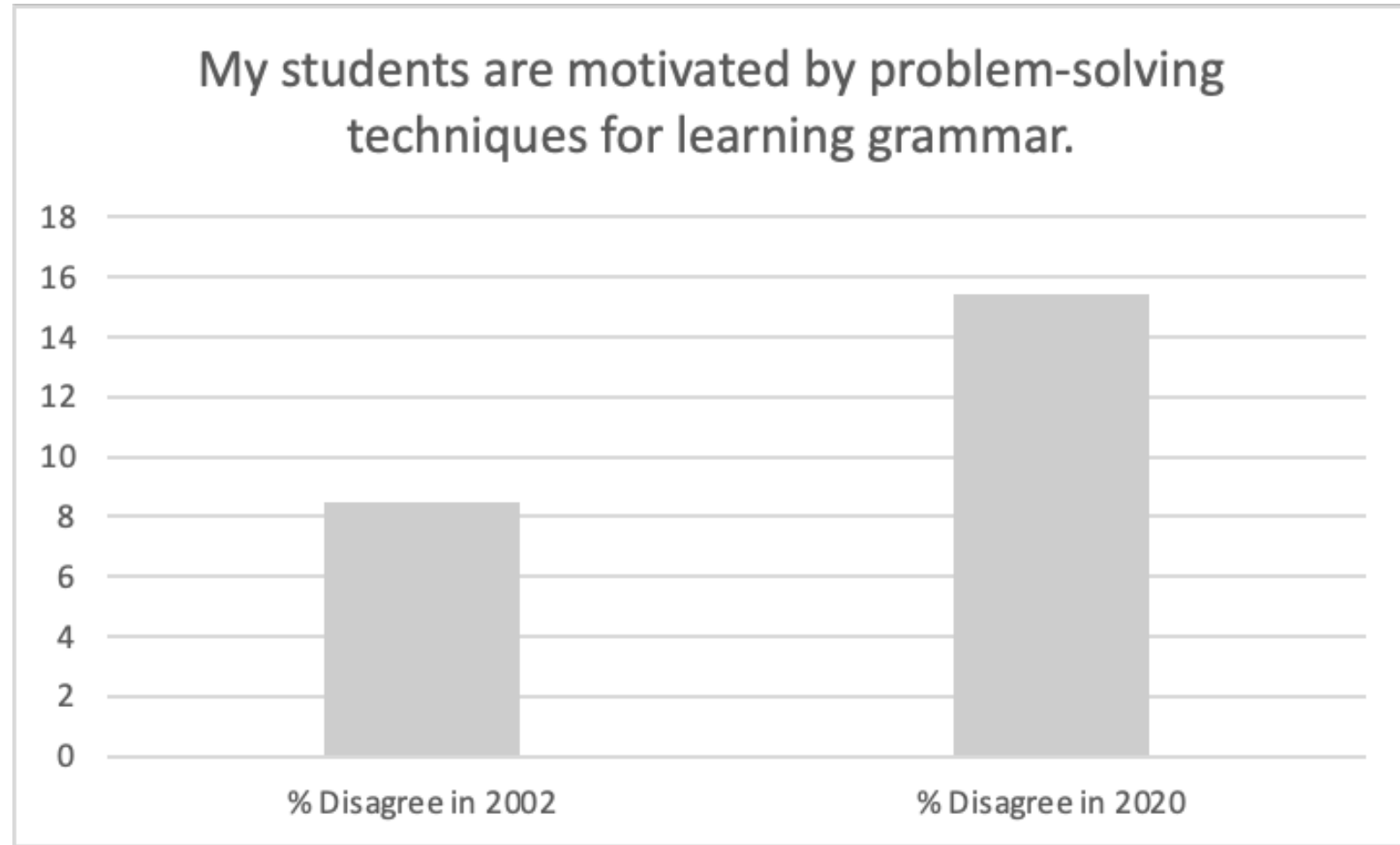
Only 43% of teachers disagreed  
with this statement in 2020.



## Q2.2

### My students are motivated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar.

In 2020, 20% less teachers believed that students are motivated by problem-solving techniques for learning grammar.

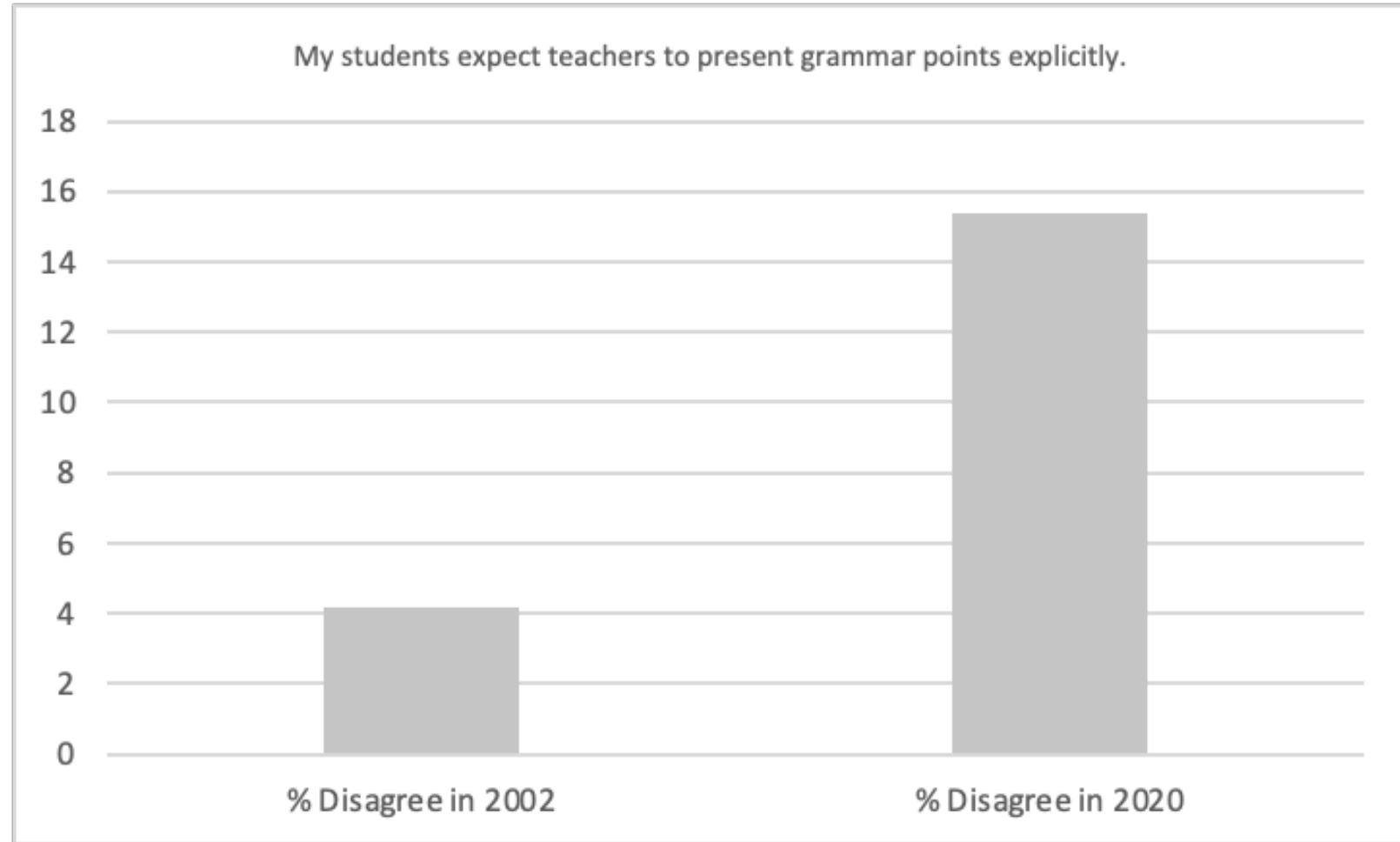


## Q2.3

### My students expect teachers to present grammar points explicitly.

In 2002, 92% of teachers agreed that **students expect teachers to present grammar points explicitly.**

In 2020, this total dropped by 31%.

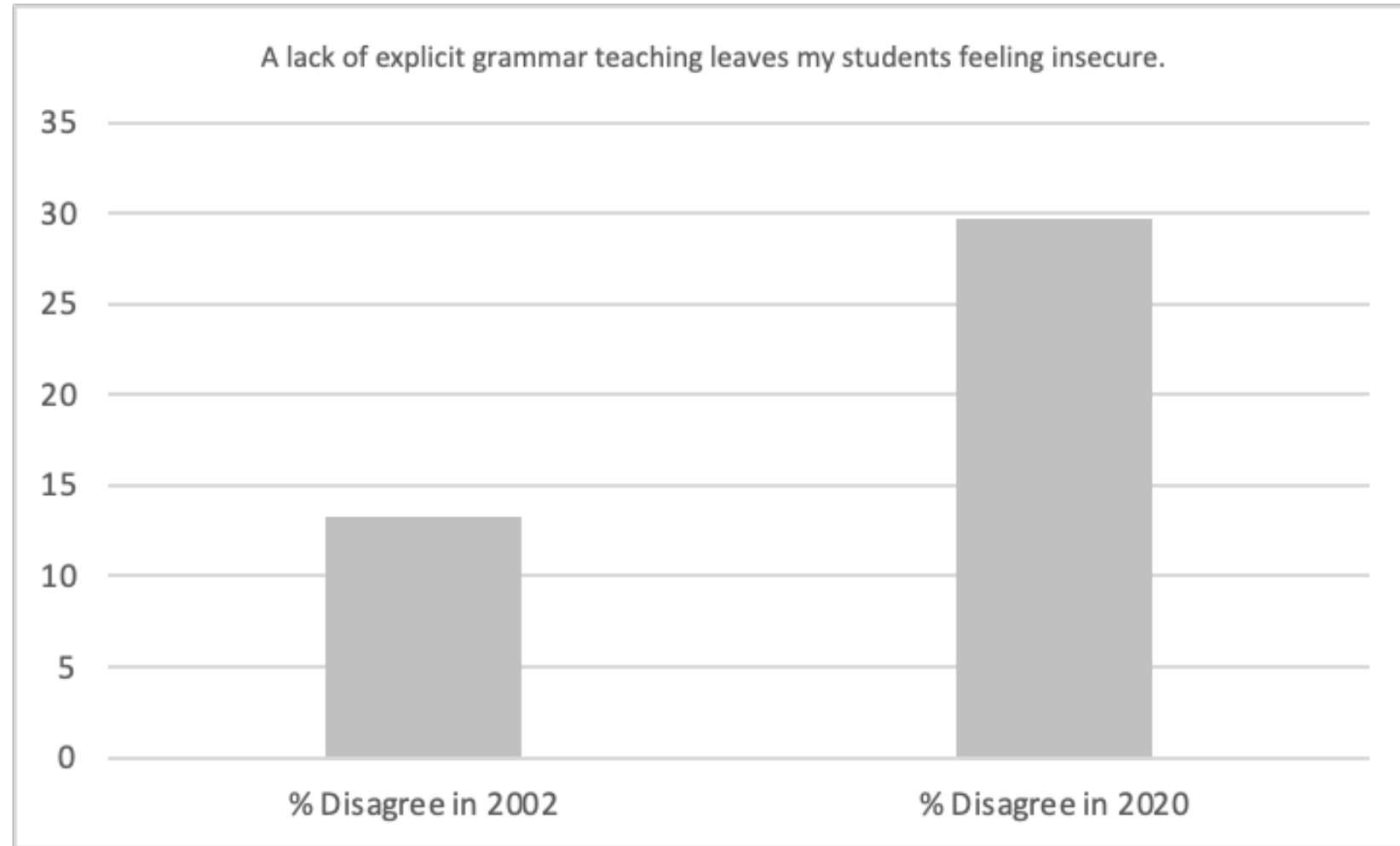


## Q2.13

## A lack of explicit grammar teaching leaves my students feeling insecure.

In 2002, 69% of teachers believed that **lack of explicit grammar teaching leaves students feeling insecure.**

This has dropped by 35%.



## Research Questions

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**So what?**



Approaches  
to teaching  
grammar  
have shifted.

Grammar  
teaching – is  
it necessary?

Less students  
are expecting  
explicit  
grammar  
instruction.

Student  
opinions on  
Grammar

To what  
extent is  
grammar  
valuable?

Are courses  
which  
include a  
grammar  
component  
seen as more  
valuable?

What  
motivates  
students to  
learn during  
an EAP  
course?

Kaitlinn Flower

[kaitlinnflower@gmail.com](mailto:kaitlinnflower@gmail.com)