

# STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE TEACHING STRATEGY USED IN GRAMMAR CLASS

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## Abstract

*The present study aimed to capture the students' perceptions of their teachers' strategy in teaching grammar to children's classes. The research method conducted in the study was mixed methods. The number of participants was seven students studying at a junior level. The instruments used in the study were interviews and observation. The findings indicated that the students tended to perceive that the grammar lesson was a severe lesson for them. Hence, they preferred a more exciting and less complicated learning process. In sum, the students perceive that learning grammar should be done in a less severe matter but still encourages the students to learn effectively.*

**Keywords:** strategy, grammar, children

## Abstrak

*Kajian ini dimaksudkan untuk mengetahui persepsi para siswa/siswi atas penggunaan strategi mengajar yang digunakan oleh guru mereka dalam pengajaran tata-bahasa Inggris di kelas anak-anak (Junior Class). Metode yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah metode campuran. Jumlah peserta dalam kajian ini adalah tujuh orang yang merupakan siswa/siswi yang belajar di kelas Junior. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah wawancara dan observasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para pelajar tersebut cenderung menganggap bahwa pelajaran tata-bahasa merupakan pelajaran yang berat untuk mereka. Karena itu, mereka lebih suka cara belajar yang lebih menyenangkan dan tidak terlalu rumit. Intinya, para pelajar tersebut cenderung menganggap bahwa pembelajaran tata-bahasa dalam kelas bahasa Inggris seharusnya dilaksanakan dengan cara yang tidak terlalu rumit tetapi masih memungkinkan untuk mendorong para pembelajarnya untuk belajar lebih efektif.*

**Keywords:** strategi, grammar, anak-anak

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## INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an essential element in foreign language learning and teaching (Sato, & Oyanedel, 2019). Scholars believe learning or mastering a language will only be significant with good grammar mastery (Praise, & Meenakshi, 2015). Specifically, grammar is closely related to the accuracy of the language (McDonough, & Sato, 2019). Therefore, anyone who learns a foreign language should also learn the grammatical system in one language to allow him or her to construct the language accurately. Up to now, two grand concepts support language mastery. First, grammar is essential in terms of supporting the accuracy of language. With sufficient grammatical mastery, the learners can construct the language effectively and understandably. Secondly, fluency is essential to support communication more naturally.

Brown (2000) defines *grammar* as the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence. The use of language, commonly related to how people communicate in written means, will largely depend on the people's mastery of grammar, without which their communication will be futile as they may not be able to construct the meaning accurately. The present study focuses on the students' perceptions of their teachers' teaching strategies when teaching grammar. Highlighting the issue of teaching strategies in teaching grammar allows the readers, researchers, and other relevant English teaching stakeholders to have a more realistic picture of how their students view grammar teaching strategies. With the growing concern of learners-centered paradigms (Abu Bakar, et al., 2013; Khoury, 2022), the views of the students regarding grammar teaching will significantly help those conducting, managing, or administering the English learning process to figure out a much more effective way to teach grammar to the students.

### **Differences among approach, method, techniques, and strategies**

Before discussing strategies used by the teacher, the researcher discusses the broad concepts, which cover the concept strategy as the plan or the application of method and approach. Before discussing the concept of teaching strategies, the researcher presents the concept of approach, which encompasses the application of methods, techniques, and strategies. The concept adopted in the study refers to the concepts offered by Richards and Rodger (2002 as citing Anthony 1963). Richards and Rodgers (as citing Anthony 1963) define some related critical concepts as the followings:

- Approach

An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught.

- Method

A method is an overall plan for the sequential presentation of language material. It is expected to be in congruence with a selected approach as a method is generally a procedure, which is based on an approach. However, in some instances, one approach can possibly generate many methods.

- Techniques

A technique is closely related to implementation, which will occur in the classroom. It can be categorized as a way to accomplish an immediate objective. It should be consistent with the method and thus it must be harmonious with an approach.

## **Strategies in language teaching**

Davis (1997) perceives that the term "strategy" relates to a plan and "a series of activities used to facilitate a particular kind of learning." Dagarin (2005) states that teachers can help students develop interaction skills in a foreign language. There are certain types of strategies that the teacher can do to help students' interaction (Dagarin, 2005)

### **Asking questions**

It is easier for students to answer questions than initiate conversations or make independent statements. The teacher indicates with questions some of the words and language structures that will appear in the answer. The strategy can be used in retelling stories or descriptions. Nevertheless, this form of help should be thoroughly guided by the teacher. Therefore this activity does not lead to freedom of expression. Asking questions is commonly considered appropriate for beginners.

### **Using body language**

Students can obtain much information from the teacher's gestures and mime. The teacher can help students to express themselves with body language. Students sometimes do not know how to continue speaking, and the teacher prompts them by acting out body movements.

### **Choosing appropriate topics**

Teachers can stimulate students' intersection by choosing appropriate topics. Young students prefer talking about sports, computers, music, dinosaurs, or spaceships. Students can say many topics of their interest than something they need to learn better. Besides, building trust in the classroom is essential, and it has to be done by all teachers to develop students' character.

## **Grammar in English**

Grammar constitutes an essential part of language learning. Grammar is considered a structure that supports language construction to make it more meaningful. Ur (2012) suggests grammar is how words are put together to make correct sentences. Larsen-Freeman (2001) further adds on that " Grammar is about form, and one way to teach form is to give the students rule; however, grammar is much more than forms, and its teaching is ill-served if the students are simply given rules " (p. 251). Nurbianta, Rahmat, and Shollina (2019) suggest that grammar is usually considered one of the language components besides vocabulary and sound systems in the educational context, especially in learning and teaching a foreign language, which students should acquire.

## **Motivation to learn English**

There are numerous definitions concerning motivation. The research only selects certain definitions, which can be of relevance to the study. Ames and Ames (1989 as cited in Qashoa, 2006) defines motivation as a desire to achieve a goal combined with the energy to work toward that goal. Gardner (1985) elaborates that there are four aspects, which are closely connected to motivation, such as a goal, an effort, a desire to attain the goal, and a favorable attitudes toward the activity. Specifically, Ur (2012) proposes two grand factors of motivation in learning English: a) Instrumental and b) integrative motivation.

### **Instrumental motivation**

Instrumentally, humans are driven to do something because they are motivated to accomplish their objectives. For instance, a person tends to be motivated to learn a foreign language because he or she wishes to get better job. Some studies indicate that there are cases in which the learners were identified to have stronger motivation to study English because they wished to go abroad for better employment.

### **Integrative motivation**

Unlike instrumental motivation, integrative or integrated motivation is related to someone's motivation to participate in a specific society for various reasons. For instance, someone who wishes to live abroad or marry someone from a particular society will usually try to equip himself with a particular language enabling them to participate within a specific society actively. In this case, someone's motivation to integrate with a particular English society or wishes to become a permanent resident abroad will usually learn English for integrated purposes.

### **Intrinsic motivation**

The term 'intrinsic motivation' usually refers to internally driven motivation. This motivation is usually perceived to be stronger than extrinsic motivation. Brown (2000, p. 59) considers intrinsic motivation more potent as it does not need an administration of externally motivated drive. For instance, a student, who is internally motivated, will usually study without considering the other factors which may affect his motivation, such as teachers, books, teaching media, or friends (Ur, 2012).

### **Extrinsic motivation**

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is the outer aspect that may affect the students' motivation, which comes from outside the learners. Some commonly considered factors are extrinsic factors, such as teachers, friends or classmates, and learning media (Ur, 2012).

## Teacher's role in teaching English

Scholars suggest that the role of teachers is very essential for supporting the teaching and learning process. Likewise, Murtiningsih (2014) confirms that teacher is one of the most essential factors affecting teaching and learning process (p. 19). Chou (2006) reinforces that “teacher's positive energy” corroborates the students' belief in that they could possibly experience a more comfortable atmosphere in their learning process, thus leading to a more successful learning environment (p. 30). Specifically to Harmer (2001), identifies that there are some factors which must be done by the teacher concerning his or her duty in teaching English. Some of the factors are explained below:

- Teacher as model

The first factor is the teacher as a model. Being a model means that the teacher should be able to provide standardized acts in learning English. For instance, the teacher must be able to pronounce a relatively standard pronunciation to be adopted by the students. In a much broader spectrum, the teacher must also provide relatively natural expressions of English when communicating with others in English.

- Teacher as a facilitator

Being a facilitator means that the teacher should be able to solve the problem or provide a relatively effective solution for the student's learning problem. For instance, the students can need help with learning English. In this case, the teacher should be able to identify their learning problem and provide some solutions for the students later. The ability to solve the problem or being able to facilitate learning problems is essential to help students succeed in their learning process.

- Teacher as a source

The teacher also constitutes a walking source. Therefore, an English teacher must also be able to provide sufficient information pertaining to his or her subject to be taught to the students. This factor is essential to support smooth learning. For instance, when the students have problems identifying certain words, the teacher should be able to act as the learning source for the students. Indeed, the teacher can also equip him or herself with sufficient learning media to help provide more accurate and current information on the language he or she teaches, as there will be possibly numerous questions directed to the teacher regarding English to him or her.

- Teacher as the leader in the learning process

The factor of the teacher as a leader is sometimes termed as 'conductor'; it means that the teacher should act as the one responsible for the smooth learning process, starting from the introduction, the learning process in the middle, and the conclusion. Being a conductor means being responsible or in charge to ensure that the learning process is conducted well and effectively.

## METHOD

The present study employed a mixed method. The method will usually require the researchers to elicit the data using more than one instrument. The instrument is to elicit the data on the focus of the study. Multiple instruments help vary the findings of the study (Creswell, & Plano Clark, 2018). Regarding the above concept, some instruments were used to analyze the data: 1) Interview and 2) Observation. Employing several instruments was primarily aimed at allowing the researcher to access more detailed data, resulting in more valid and reliable findings.

### Participants of the study

The participants of the study were the students of an English course. The number of students recruited for the study was seven students. The students were recruited from two different classes, and two teachers taught these classes. Junior class was a class which is relatively similar to a junior level in the formal education context and belongs to children class in the English institution. The students were recruited purposefully (Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The students were treated as the participants who were selected to give the important responses and were the ones expected to give the information to the researcher. On the other hand, the teachers were the ones who accompanied the interview process. The table was the students' and their teacher's pseudonym to protect their real identities.

Table 1 Profile of Participant

Initial	Age	Level of English	Teacher
A	10	Junior	Mr A
B	12	Junior	Mr B
C	11	Junior	Mr A
D	10	Junior	Mr A

E	11	Junior	Mr B
F	12	Junior	Mr A
G	10	Junior	Mr A

### Sources and research data

The data sources constitute verbal responses elicited from the participants' responses. The research data is primarily from the relevant verbal responses indicating the students' motivation to learn grammar. It is important to note that not all data sources will be taken as essential data. The research data constitutes only specific data indicating the relevant verbal responses concerning the students' perceptions toward the above topics.

### Data analysis

Since the data taken were verbal responses, thus the researcher elicited the data from the codes of the verbal responses indicated in the interview. The codes are relatively short meanings consisting of words or expressions. The codes can be further developed into sentences leading into themes.

### Data collection procedure

- The researcher reported his study to the manager of the English institution about his research.
- The researcher also presented his study plan, including his potential plan, time, method, and number of participants.
- The researcher met the teacher who would help the researcher during the research.
- The research was conducted only for one day.
- The researcher divided the interview sessions into two parts: firstly, the researcher interviewed the interviewed the students about their opinion on the strategy used by the teacher when teaching grammar. Secondly, the researcher interviewed the teacher accompanying the students to crosscheck the finding. The students' interview was conducted in group discussion to help the students have more courage to speak up about the strategy used by the teacher.
- Each interview (i.e., students) lasted for thirty minutes. The researcher jotted down the critical codes and themes related to the findings, particularly those related to

grammar teaching and learning. The interview was conducted in Indonesian language and further translated into English.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Table 2 The students' perceptions of the teaching strategy used in grammar learning

Initial	Student's verbal responses	Themes
A	The grammar teaching is not very suitable for me because we are still in junior high school. However, sometimes school teachers require me to understand grammar, such as the simple present, past, etc.	The teaching of grammar is important for the students at school.
B	I hope the English class will be fully communicative so we can speak much faster. My parents sent me here because they do not feel satisfied with how I speak, but this course teaches me grammar, which is not very important as I want to learn how to speak English better.	The teaching of grammar is not important.
C	I do not know; sometimes, the lesson is complicated; of course, the teacher needs to fully explain the grammar as we also learn how to communicate here. However, when explaining the grammar, the teacher should only partially explain it in English as it is difficult to understand.	Do not use the grammar explanation given in English.
D	Studying English at the moment is not wholly for communication as we are living in Indonesia. We partially learn English for school lessons too. So, the explanation of grammar is essential for me.	Grammar is essential for a school lesson.
E	The lesson is not very important as I also learn grammar at school. The teacher can speak more often and make us speak, but he teaches me grammar, which is long enough for us to learn. We study only for one hour and thirty minutes per session.	The grammar explanation should not be too long

F	The grammar explanation is interesting. The teacher focuses on our assignment, and for me as I like grammar, I can be the best one.	The grammar teaching is engaging.
G	As always at school, grammar is always complicated especially when we talk about passive voice. Nevertheless, the grammar in our program is more straightforward.	The grammar teaching is not very complicated.

Table 3. The student's description of their preferred teaching strategies when learning grammar

Initial	Student's verbal responses	Themes
A	I prefer to communicate in English without thinking about mistakes; this could be more interesting.	The student prefers to communicate more than learn grammar.
B	The teacher sometimes focuses more on grammar, and even though he keeps on speaking, he speaks not naturally.	Grammar teaching is not very natural to communicate
C	Learning grammar differs from communication, so we must have an explanation and not communication practice.	Grammar is an explanation.
D	We must communicate easier using grammar; if this happens, it may be good.	Practicing communicating using particular grammar patterns is good.
E	Grammar is serious, so learning takes more prolonged or more time.	Grammar needs to be learned longer.
F	I think grammar is not very important, so I prefer to communicate. Nevertheless, my school has grammar, so I plan to learn it more easily.	Learning in less complicated is easier.

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G	Wherever it is, grammar is always severe and complicated, so the way to make it easier is good.	How to make the grammar lesson easier is interesting.
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## Discussion

### The importance of motivation for students in learning grammar

The students indicated that grammar is serious, so the teacher should have an extra trick to make the lesson more attractive to students. Therefore, it is essential to help the students learn better by providing more tricks or activities that make learning easier. Convincing and motivating students to learn using specific strategies can also help improve the students' conviction that grammar is inseparable in supporting the student's success in learning a foreign language.

In terms of the teaching process, Affandi (2019), who observed a novice teacher in teaching grammar, found that there are three general parts of activities: 1) Pre-teaching, 2) Whilst-teaching, and 3) Post-teaching. In the phase of pre-teaching, the teacher did some introduction or inputting the structure to the students. Further, the teacher also encouraged the students to produce specific patterns in English. The teacher controlled the students to practice simple English. In the last phase, or post-teaching, the teacher did some corrective feedback using indirect answers. Admittedly, the teaching process of teaching grammar in the school will be relatively different as there are differences in the learning objective, curriculum to adapt, and student numbers. The teaching of grammar in the English course that the researcher identified was relatively different as the teacher did only one topic, followed by the accompanying grammar. The teacher incorporated grammar into a subject during the English class. In this case, the teacher focused more on the students' attention which could probably lead to the student's motivation to learn as the students commonly perceived that learning grammar was hard enough. Further studies should be done in formal and non-formal institutions to identify the process of teaching grammar.

### The role of the teacher as a facilitator to help resolve difficulties in grammar concept

It is also important to note that the role of the teacher as a facilitator (Harmer, 2001) is always good to remember. The teacher should therefore understand that not all students can learn independently. So, helping the students who have difficulties and making them able to do it correctly is a must thing to do. In contrast with Afandi's finding (2019), which was conducted chiefly in a formal context, it can be found that the teaching process at school is more structured than the teaching of grammar in an English course. However, in the course, a teacher who teaches an English course tends to be more flexible as they teach only a few

students, and they are mostly expected to encourage them to speak, so they depend on the topic given to the students while introducing the grammar to the students. In this case, the teaching strategy offered by Dagarin (2005), known as ‘choosing appropriate topic’, is helpful to the students as they focus more on the topic rather than the rigid structure of the grammar itself.

### **Avoiding tedious grammar learning process**

As grammar is a profound lesson, as stated by many students, the teacher should be very cautious in providing the lesson. The teacher should involve more students in a less severe or complicated learning process but enables the students to communicate their ideas on their understanding of the grammar during the class. Again, making all the students understand particular grammar takes hard work. Having a classroom discussion, group work, or a project allows the students to share their ideas about what is inside their minds. It is undoubtedly essential to appreciate what a noted linguist has stated that, despite being necessary, the teaching of grammar should not overlook the other aspect, e.g., vocabulary, as without vocabulary, the students will never communicate at all (Inal & Cakir, 2014).

### **CONCLUSION**

Grammar is inevitably inseparable in communication nowadays. It is, in fact, an essential aspect as people will probably communicate more in written means than oral means. The growing importance of the internet and other social media will likely encourage people to share more extensively than before. With this fact, people will depend on their international language and written skills to communicate effectively. The use of grammar should be learned and taught well by the teacher to erase the students' perceptions that grammar is a burdening communication aspect. The teacher should provide more projects allowing the students to practice with others in simple yet cooperative and meaningful ways. The facts show that the students prefer a project allowing them to practice their grammar meaningfully, step by step. This study was conducted in an English course, which teaches grammar as an inseparable aspect of the student English skills. Further analysis can be performed at school, as formal education is where proper communication and grammar are more appreciated.

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