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Teaching English Grammar in an Indonesian Junior High School

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Article Info

Abstract

Keywords: English Grammar; Junior High School Students; Teaching English Grammar

English grammar has a pivotal position in language learning. It is also considered the basis of language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). However, although previous studies focused on teaching English grammar either from a traditional or functional view, where English as L1 and L2 across various educational levels, scarce studies have emphasized teaching English Grammar in the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in Junior High School. Hence, this study aimed at filling such a void, namely teaching English grammar in an Indonesian junior high school. In an attempt for collecting the data, this study interviewed a participant in one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study revealed that the teacher used focus on forms and focus on form in teaching English grammar. Those focus on forms involved (1) Deductive English Teaching Grammar, (2) Score-Oriented English Language Learning Activities, and (3) Accuracy-Oriented English Language Learning Activities. Another approach is focus on form include (1) Task-Based Sentence Making and (2) Contextual Teaching of English Grammar. By knowing these teaching techniques, the teachers are expected to be able to implement those teaching techniques of teaching English grammar to junior high school students more effectively.

Abstrak

Kata kunci: Tata Bahasa Inggris; Peserta Didik SMP; Pengajaran Tata Bahasa Inggris Tata bahasa Inggris memiliki posisi penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Tata bahasa Inggris juga dianggap sebagai dasar dari serangkaian keterampilan bahasa (menyimak, berbicara, membaca, dan menulis). Namun, meskipun studi sebelumnya berfokus pada pengajaran tata bahasa Inggris baik dari sudut pandang tradisional atau fungsional, di mana bahasa Inggris sebagai L1 dan L2 di berbagai tingkat pendidikan, studi yang menekankan pengajaran Tata Bahasa Inggris dalam konteks EFL Indonesia masih jarang, khususnya di tingkatan Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kekosongan tersebut, yaitu pengajaran tata bahasa Inggris di sekolah menengah pertama di Indonesia. Dalam upaya pengumpulan data, penelitian ini melakukan wawancara dengan peserta di salah satu SMP di Tasikmalaya, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa guru menggunakan fokus pada bentuk dan fokus pada bentuk dalam pengajaran tata bahasa Inggris. Fokus pada formulir tersebut meliputi: (1) Tata Bahasa Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris Deduktif, (2) Kegiatan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris

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Berorientasi Skor dan (3) Kegiatan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Berorientasi Akurasi. Pendekatan lain adalah fokus pada bentuk meliputi (1) Pembuatan Kalimat Berbasis Tugas dan (2) Pengajaran Kontekstual Tata Bahasa Inggris. Dengan mengetahui teknik-teknik pengajaran tersebut, para guru diharapkan dapat menerapkan teknik pengajaran tersebut dalam pengajaran tata bahasa Inggris kepada siswa sekolah menengah pertama.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the language components, grammar has a pivotal position in language learning. Chang (2011) maintains that grammar is central to the teaching and learning of languages, which is also the system of language rules. English grammar is considered an essential guide for learning English effectively. English grammar also plays an essential role in developing one's language knowledge and social skills in context (Lin, Hwang, Fu, and Cao, 2020; Amalia, Abdullah & Fatimah, 2021). Widodo (2006) also states that grammar is considered the basis of a series of language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, grammar plays an essential role in understanding and expressing spoken language on listening and speaking skills. Therefore, grammar is an essential component in teaching English.

Based on the preliminary interview results, the teacher used the Grammar Translation Method (hereafter GTM) in teaching English grammar since she has been working in that school. The teacher argued that she would continue to teach English grammar deductively if the students' condition was still not possible to teach English grammar inductively. The teacher concluded that most of the students had difficulties understanding the material when adapting to the new grammar teaching method. In teaching English grammar, the teacher occasionally uses technology media such as PowerPoint or with the help of applications such as YouTube. The teachers' goal in teaching English grammar is for students to speak and write texts according to the rules and regulations in English and can be easily understood. The problem that the teacher in teaching English grammar often encounters is that students have a lack of vocabulary so that the text is given for practice frequently cannot be understood by students or students have difficulty making a sentence due to lack of vocabulary (results of a preliminary interview on July 15th, 2020).

Viewed from the aspect of the current trend of language teaching is not oriented to how it is structured and communicated, but how the language is seen as a communication tool. Larsen-Freeman (2000) stated that teaching English grammar explicitly is a significant part of teaching grammar. It can be simpler if students already understand how their first language works. Regarding the Core Competence, Basic Competence, and syllabus made by English teacher association as well as teaching material provided by the government in Indonesia, the teaching of English is oriented to the function of language as a means of communication not only for grammatical sources. However, grammar is taught there but not explicitly. Although teaching and learning English grammar in junior high schools in Indonesia has experienced significant changes over the last few decades, current grammar teaching in Indonesia is still characterized by adopting traditional teaching methods or known as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) (Milawati, 2019). The researcher discovered a phenomenon of teaching English grammar that is still traditional. Widodo (2006) added that "in the context of EFL, teaching grammar has traditionally been dominated by a GTM where the use of mother tongue is important to elicit the meaning of target language by translating the target language into native language" (p. 123). The teacher still uses a deductive teaching approach. The purpose of deductive here is that the teacher gives grammatical patterns and formulas given directly to the children and then follows the training after that evaluation. This refers to teaching structuralism or can also be called GTM. Bade (2008) stated that the most traditional description of grammar is who presented it as the structure of a language, a set of rules that shows changes in words and how they connect to form new units.

Relevant studies concerning the issue of teaching grammar have been conducted across diverse countries and areas. Derewianka and Jones (2010) investigated the experience of using systemic functional linguistics to teach English in Australia, and the results of the research show how aspects

of traditional grammar remain relevant. However, SFG offers teachers and students much more to understand how meanings are made in the various contexts that students need to use English. In the Indonesian context, Widodo (2006) introduces a five-step procedure for teaching grammar that combines practice and awareness-raising, explicit and implicit knowledge, and a deductive and inductive approach to teaching grammar. Furthermore, Milawati (2019) investigated the recent trend of EFL teaching practice in Indonesian and found out that GTM has still dominated the EFL classes. In the EFL context, Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres & Vargas-Saritama (2019) investigated the difference in effectiveness between the inductive and deductive approaches to teach grammar in the EFL classroom. Previous studies concern teaching English grammar in general. None of the studies focuses on teaching grammar specifically. Therefore, this present study sheds light on a deep investigation of a single participant teaching grammar in junior school to provide more detailed information on how Indonesian teacher teaches English grammar.

Although previous studies have focused on teaching English grammar either from a traditional or functional view, where English is L1 and L2, the current study attempts to explore teaching English grammar in an EFL context, namely Indonesia. Even it emphasizes on Junior High School Level. Scarce studies have emphasized teaching English Grammar in the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in Junior High School. Therefore, this study focuses on investigating how the teacher teaches English grammar to Junior High School students.

METHODS

Grounded in a descriptive case study, the current study presents a detailed, contextualized picture of a particular phenomenon. Descriptive case studies describe phenomena and the real-life context in which they occur (Yin, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008). This research design was chosen because this study describes and focused on how the teacher teaches English grammar to junior high school students. In this case, the descriptive theory was used to investigate the depth of the case. In this study, the researcher focuses on how the teacher teaches English grammar in the classroom.

The participant in this study was an English teacher from one Junior High School in Tasikmalaya, West Java, Indonesia. She was about forty-four years old, graduating from the major of English education. She is one of the senior English teachers who has taught at the school for 11 years. She also often talks Indonesian more in her class. It can be seen from the way she teaches her class. She explained more of the materials and very often gave tutorials to students. Sundanese is her L1 (first language), Indonesian is her L2 (second language), and English is her FL (foreign language).

The data collection of this study used semi-structured interviews. It was carried out through voice recording used a cell phone to investigate how the teacher teaches English grammar. In conducting the interview, the researcher interviewed a participant. Furthermore, the interview guide is designed with several topics to ask questions. A semi-structured interview is used to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The topics in interviewing the participant are related to teaching grammar, method and techniques, instructional media, purposes of teaching English grammar, corrective feedback, challenges of teaching English grammar and solutions, tasks, the role of grammar in teaching English, belief, opinions about GTM and SFG, and grammar teaching require context. In the semi-structured interview, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered. However, semi-structured interviews require more than one answer word (Creswell, 2012).

The data were analyzed through Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They contended that "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 6). The steps are familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching the themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aims at describing how the teacher taught English grammar to junior high school students. The findings of this study consist of two main themes, namely (1) focus on forms and (2) focus on form. More specifically, the first theme is divided into several sub-themes, namely deductive English teaching grammar, accuracy-oriented English language learning activities, score-oriented English language learning activities. The second themes include contextual teaching of English grammar and task-based sentence making.

Deductive English Teaching Grammar

Based on the interview, the researcher found that the teaching method used by the teacher in teaching English grammar was using a pattern (formula) which is commonly called deductive English teaching grammar. About the steps of teaching grammar, at the outset, the teacher introduced what to learn to the students, e.g., "today, we will learn about the simple present tense." Moreover, the teacher would explain the definition and use of the simple present tense. Eventually, she gave and explained the formula, and at the end of the lesson, the students practiced the rules, as shown by the participant as follows:

Extract

In my opinion, grammar is a structure or a pattern. So, I teach English grammar using formulas or patterns, and I teach grammar from the basic grammar at the begining by introducing formulas because, if it is not explained first the students will be confused. For example, the first is introducing the grammar name, then the formula, my method is that I always have to look at the formula, but in the end, the students is expected to implement that in everyday life. For example, I explained the simple present tense, then explained the definition, the context of the grammar, explain the function of the formula, give the example in sentences, then the students follows to make sentences like the example I gave.

(Interview transcript, October 17th, 2020, translated by the author)

Excerpt 1 indicates that the teacher taught English grammar by introducing the formula (e.g., subject + verb 1 + s/es) complemented with examples. Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres, and Vargas-Saritama (2019) suggest that teaching the grammar of rules includes a deductive or rule-based approach, beginning with an introduction to the rules accompanied by examples of where the rules are applied. The teacher provided clear definitions and explanations of specific grammar. Next step, the teacher gave sentences as an example to present students with the most frequent use of rules in a particular context. At the end of the lesson, the students practiced the rules by making sentences, as in the example given by the teacher. Thornbury (1999) adds three basic principles in deductive English teaching grammar is to provide students with a clear definition of grammar accompanied by examples of where it is applied. Therefore, the finding above portrayed deductive English grammar teaching.

The teacher gave examples based on the explained grammatical teaching materials (e.g., He works in the Bank). She also made sentences that have the same pattern as the example sentences given by the teacher. Teaching English grammar deductively has three basic principles stated in Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres, and Vargas-Saritama (2019), including modeling English grammatical patterns. Nešić and Hamidović (2015) stated that the deductive approach boosts students' confidence through many examples, implying clearly what students are expected to learn.

Accuracy-Oriented English Language Learning Activities

The following finding is an accuracy-oriented English language learning activity. The teacher teaches English grammar with the aim that the students could communicate accurately according to the structure. Thus, grammar was taught to improve students' speaking ability informal situations. Although the aim of the teacher was for communication, the teacher prioritized accuracy in the objectives of teaching English grammar, as shown in the transcript below:

My goal in teaching English grammar is that the students are able to communicate according to the rules. Therefore, the students do not speak English carelessly so that there are no misunderstandings when communicating in English.

As a result, the teacher teaches English grammar by paying attention to the accuracy of forms or focusing on forms. Besides that, the teacher also applies these forms to the context in everyday life through assignments given to the student. Lee and Vanpatten (1995) stated that structured input activities are one way to present grammar communicatively. Thus, the teacher's goal of teaching English grammar is to communicate in a structured manner. Mart (2013) stated that accurate teaching of grammar guides learners on using the language correctly. Krashen and Terrell (1983) claim that there is a difference between acquisition and learning. They believe that acquisition occurs naturally provided students receive sufficient and understandable input, and only acquired knowledge can lead to fluent communication. In other words, students will communicate fluently if they get sufficient understanding and understandable learning.

When I taught English grammar to my students. I tended to lead them to use it accurately. To illustrate, I explained about Simple Past Tense when they desired to write a narrative or recount text. I emphasized them to understand the formula, patterns, and verbs use. Sometimes, I did it strictly. In this case, I cannot tolerate students committing mistakes because mastering grammar enables them to have a strong underpinning for their language skills development. However, I realized that what I have done remains contradictory to the spirit of encouraging them to communicate actively in the classroom since I merely focused on accuracy not fluency.

The teacher tended to emphasize the accuracy of teaching English instead of fluency. For example, when she taught Simple Past Tense, she emphasized how to understand and apply the formula, patterns, and verbs precisely. Even, she acknowledged that she taught grammar strictly to her students. To illustrate, she did not tolerate her students who made a mistake because of her firm belief in teaching English, namely mastering grammar before mastering other language skills. Conversely, although she performed strict teaching practices of English grammar, she realized that what she did only focused on accuracy-oriented goals rather than fluency-oriented goals.

Score-Oriented English Language Learning Activities

The teacher taught English grammar, intending to get a final result that exceeds the minimum completeness criteria (KKM) and oriented towards the value achieved by the students. For example, when the teacher took exams, some of the students scored below the minimum completeness criteria (KKM). The students had to do the remedial to get a score above the minimum completeness criteria (KKM).

I usually tell them to do the exercises, the important thing is to finish the exercises because if they are explained or given repeated feedback, it will take a lot of time. For example, some students take an exam but the score of the exam result is below the minimum completeness criteria, the student will automatically remedy to improve the score. For most of the students, even though doing a remedial several times, the result will be the same. The remedial function is to improve the score, yes for both the process and the score.

From the interview transcript above, the teacher stated that students were encouraged to get good grades or exceed the minimum completeness criteria (KKM). The most usual type of feedback that students receive in a typical classroom is grades, more often than not, a letter grade or a numeric score by itself (Oosterhof, 2001). Grades give a precise summary of students' performance and inform all of the students' achievements. If students do not reach the minimum completeness criteria on the exam, the students are required to do the remedial. The purpose of the remedial is for students to achieve the minimum completeness criteria. Airasian (1994) listed five primary grades' functions: administrative, guidance, instructional planning, feedback, and motivation. Indirectly, the teacher motivates students to learn English grammar through score-oriented language learning activities. Hong and Ganapathy (2017) said that motivation describes a process that cannot be observed directly but can be concluded through attitudes, such as effort, existence, and verbalization. Therefore, the teacher builds student motivation by involving goals that encourage direction and action, physical or mental guidance to achieve goals to see students' efforts, existence, and verbalization.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) stated two important motivational constructs; integrative and instrumental motivational. Integrative motivation is the willingness to learn a language to communicate with native speakers. In contrast, instrumental motivation leads to a willingness to learn a language because it fulfills specific practical reasons, such as getting a job, passing an exam, etc. Ahmadi (2011) said that instrumental motivation is learning a language to achieve practical goals. Integrative motivation is learning a language because of an interest or desire to identify with the target culture. The teacher has encouraged students to have instrumental motivation in teaching English grammar with the score-oriented English language learning method.

Based on the description above, the teacher teaches English grammar intended to build students' instrumental motivation. Learners of the instrumental motivation type learn another language for practical use, rather than social implications with the target language. Gardner (2010) stated that those types of learners with instrumental motivation learn another language with the purpose of career-oriented and more educational, rather than social implications with the target language to the target language community.

In form-focus instruction, the grammar rules are explicitly described as isolated, sequential units. Immediate feedback was given which errors were corrected immediately. The focus on form instruction is studied in order to present grammatical structures, its practice in controlled exercises, and the provision of opportunities for production (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2002; Abdullah, Tandiana & Amelia, 2020). The significant characteristics of focus on forms instruction are depicted in table 1

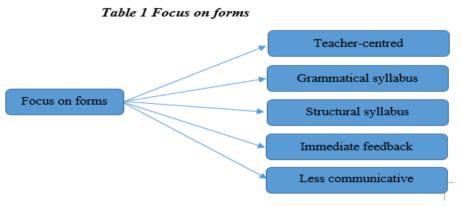


Figure 1. Focus on Forms Instruction

Based on the major characteristics above, the researchers stated that the teacher taught English grammar focused on forms. In other words, the learner's role in focus on forms is to combine pieces of learning material for use in communication. The pedagogical material and accompanying classroom procedures are designed to present and practice a series of linguistic items or forms. Grammar rules are presented to students in a systematic manner with a focus on forms. The focus on forms emphasizes pre-selected language structures that are contextualized or not.

Contextual Teaching

The next technique used by the teacher in teaching English grammar to junior high school students is contextual teaching. After the teacher taught English grammar with a basic approach, i.e., deductive English teaching grammar, modeling English grammatical patterns, score-oriented English language learning activities, in this part the teacher combines the basic approach as stated before in Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres, and Vargas-Saritama (2019) involving the presentation of grammatical structure, controlled exercises, and the opportunity to produce it freely with contextual language teaching. According to the teacher, teaching English grammar not only requires teaching about grammar rules, but the rules also need to apply to the context in everyday life, as shown in the transcript below:

For me, teaching grammar requires context. An example is when I give example sentences, I have to relate them to everyday life so that they are easier to understand. Another example, when I teach grammar, which functions to tell the past, I will automatically give examples and assignments in the form of stories from the past.

The teacher indicated that teaching English grammar requires context. The teacher taught English grammar with a focus on forms. Besides that, the teacher also applied the use of grammar through the contexts. Therefore, it could be easily understood by the students. From the interview result above, the teacher gave examples to the students according to the grammar function being taught and connected these sentences to everyday events. Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012) said that students pay more attention to the formula, and the formula becomes easier to remember if students learn them in context. The teacher taught English grammar with a type of teaching that directed the students to pay attention to the target language through the arrangement of input from teaching. The purpose of this activity was to raise students' awareness of the target structure with meaning. The basis of this activity is how students convert grammatical forms through meaningful contexts.

Task-Based Sentence Making

The next finding is that the teacher teaches English grammar to junior high school students using task-based sentence making. It means that the teacher directed the students' attention to grammar in tasks. The teacher taught English grammar with a deductive method, modeling English grammatical patterns or gave an example to students according to the context. At the end of the lesson, the teacher gave assignments to students in stages. The tasks given by the teacher are usually in the form of text, namely making sentences or making short stories.

At the end of the lesson, students are usually given the task (making sentences). The tasks I give are gradually making simple sentences, completing gaps in a text, then making simple text or paragraphs at home.

As a result of the interview above, the teacher taught English grammar using task-based sentence making. Every meeting, the teacher gave assignments to the students in the form of text or sentence making. Wong & Barrea-Marlys (2012) stated that teachers believe that grammar instruction and providing grammar exercises for students are necessary. The assignment given by the teacher was in stages, from making simple sentences, completing gaps in a text, to making short

stories. Task-based learning like this is often associated with teaching English grammar by a focus on forms because the focus on the form indicates students' attention to grammar in activities and tasks. Long (1991) defines a focus on form to attract learners' attention to grammar in activities and tasks.

Therefore, the teacher taught English grammar to junior high school students through taskbased sentence making because the teachers' goal was to make the students communicate in a structured manner. The teacher also considered that grammar learning followed by assignments was the best method to understand and remember the grammar structure easily. As stated earlier, these activities lead students' attention to grammar in activities and tasks. It means that the students communicatively learn grammar structure.

Focus on form consists of the occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by teachers and students caused by perceived problems with understanding (Celik, 2015). Focus on form pays attention to linguistic forms, and it is implemented to develop communicative competencies which automatically require grammar, discourse, and strategic competencies. The main characteristics focus on form by Ellis et al. (2001, p.41-42) in table 2

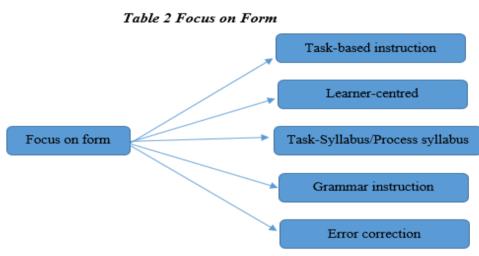


Figure 2. The main characteristics focus on form by Ellis (2001)

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher found that students engaged with the meaning of a structure before paying attention to its shape through the tasks that ensure that the target form is essential for completing the task successfully. That teaching in a particular form occurs as a result of a student needs analysis. The contribution of the findings of this study is to verify existing theories of focus on forms and focus on form (Long, 1991) regarding teaching English grammar at the junior high school level, to complement more detailed information on how Indonesian teacher teaches English grammar to Junior High School students previous research concern on the teaching English grammar in general (Widodo, 2006; Derewianka and Jones, 2010; Tandiana, Abdullah & Komara, 2017; Milawati, 2019; Benitez-Correa, Gonzalez-Torres & Vargas-Saritama, 2019), and contribute technically to the teacher by providing information on teaching English grammar techniques at the junior high school level.

CONCLUSION

This present study aims to identify how the teacher teaches English grammar to junior high school students. Based on these findings, there are two grammar teaching techniques used by the teacher. These techniques are form-focus and form-focus. In focus-on-forms, the teacher teaches English grammar by 1) Deductive English Teaching Grammar, 2) Score-Oriented English Language Learning Activities, and 3) Accuracy-Oriented English Language Learning Activities. Focusing on the form, the teacher teaches English grammar by 1) Task-Based Sentence Making and 2) Contextual Teaching of English Grammar.

Although the present study offers valuable contributions to teaching English grammar in the Indonesian EFL context, notably at the junior high school level, it has some limitations. First, the present study only employed one participant. For future research, it is best to use more representative participants. Second, this study merely focused on the teacher's perspective on how grammar is taught. Future studies should focus on student research on how grammar is learned. Lastly, this study only utilized a single data collection technique, namely interviews. Future studies should use triangulation data collection such as observation, document analysis, or administration to obtain more justification data.

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