

TEACHER BELIEFS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM

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Abstract: As one of the essential elements in mastering the English language, grammar teaching remains a subject of debate. While the *Merdeka Curriculum* encourages students to be more active in class and become independent learners, some teachers prefer to teach grammar in an isolated and explicit manner, while others believe in teaching grammar implicitly and within context. Given this issue, understanding teachers' beliefs about grammar is crucial to uncovering how they teach it in the classroom. This study aims to explore the teaching practices of two teachers at a reputable high school in Yogyakarta. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study used observation and open-ended interviews to gather data. In analyzing the data, the study applied the framework of Graus & Coppen (2016) to specify the grammar instruction strategies used by the teachers. The findings revealed that both teachers align with the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which aims to foster independent learning by implementing various grammar instruction methods, such as Meaning-Focused Instruction that emphasizes linguistic function rather than form, Focus on Form (FonF) technique that concentrate on correcting grammar errors through student reflection rather than direct error correction, Implicit instruction which integrates grammar learning in real-life contexts, and Inductive Teaching Strategies that encourage critical thinking by having students deduce grammar rules from examples in the text rather than being explicitly taught the rules. Therefore, this study demonstrates that both teachers' methods align with the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Keywords: Grammar, Grammar Instruction, Teacher Beliefs, *Merdeka Curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction plays a contentious role in the development of foreign language proficiency (Daloglu, 2020). It is considered as a fundamental element to mastering the structural rules of a language and its role in fostering communicative skills remains contested (Graus & Coppen, 2016; Şahinkaya, 2024). Scholars have long debated whether grammar should be taught explicitly or implicitly for language learners (AlAbri et al., 2022). In explicit grammar instruction, the teacher begins the learning process by concentrating on the grammar, providing explanations and potentially introducing grammatical terminology (Savage et al., 2010). Conversely, implicit grammar instruction in class means that teachers do not teach grammar directly but indirectly through the content and assignments. These divergent views reflect underlying tensions in second language acquisition (SLA) research, where grammar teaching is alternately viewed as a cognitive process or as one deeply embedded in communicative activities (Graus & Coppen, 2016).

In Indonesia, the English grammar instruction has changed continuously based on the applicable curriculum. In the present curriculum, *Merdeka Curriculum*, teachers are free to employ various learning strategies to achieve learning goals (Fatma et al., 2023). Moreover, this

curriculum follows a genre-based approach, which means that students learn grammar as part of understanding and producing different types of texts, rather than through rote memorization of grammar rules (Luhur et al., 2023). Hence, the teaching method appears to represent the theory of communicative teaching that emphasizes students' unconsciousness, abstractness, and automated learning of grammar (Guci et al., 2021).

There is no solid evidence whether explicit or implicit instruction works best to teach grammar in the classroom (Rahman & Rashid, 2017). In implicit grammar instruction, the students' speaking ability can enhance effectively (Moeen et al., 2019). Guci et al. (2021) also presented that implicit grammar teaching allows students to acquire language naturally within situational contexts, potentially enhancing their speaking skills. Meanwhile, in explicit grammar instruction, Altun & Dinçer (2020) found that students make less mistake in writing assignments, signing that they have enhanced the language structure awareness. Moreover, the study of Aprizani et al. (2018) found that explicit grammar instruction can increase students' reading ability.

As an eclectic teaching practitioner who are able to apply a suitable grammar instruction according to learners' needs, teacher beliefs are a critical factor in determining how grammar instruction is implemented in the classroom. Nurusus et al. (2015) stated that these beliefs influence teachers' instructional choices, from the types of activities and materials used to their broader pedagogical approaches. Even though some studies suggested that teachers' beliefs about grammar do not always align with their actual classroom practices (AlAbri et al., 2022; Shumiye, 2024), others argue that teachers' beliefs and instructional practices are largely congruent (Arifin, 2023; Ghalibafan et al., 2024).

Exploring teachers' beliefs about their grammar instruction choices in the classroom is essential for understanding the rationale behind their teaching practices. Many scholars and experts have investigated teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction. Prior research at the college level (Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016; Murniati & Riyandari, 2016; Murtisari et al., 2020; Rahman & Rashid, 2017; Roeder et al., 2020; Wesely et al., 2024; Wyatt & Dikilitaş, 2021) and in public secondary and high schools (Arifin, 2023; Fitriyani et al., 2020; Nurusus et al., 2015; Tarigan & Stevani, 2022) consistently indicates that instructional practices are strongly shaped by teachers' beliefs about the importance of grammar in language learning.

Although previous studies on the Merdeka Curriculum have primarily focused on its overall implementation in English teaching (Abduh et al., 2022; Fristiviona et al., 2024; Masyithah et al., 2024; Naipon & Anwar Korompot, 2024; Triskia et al., 2023), the present study specifically examines teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction under this curriculum by utilising Graus & Coppen (2016) as a foundational framework for data collection and analysis.

This study result highlight how these perspectives directly influence classroom practices in Indonesian schools.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method for investigation. This method typically involves analyzing texts transcribed from focus groups, ethnographic observations, and in-depth interviews (Hays & Daker-White, 2015). Qualitative method suits this study because the researcher conducted interview for data collection that enhance a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' viewpoints. Additionally, qualitative research allows for a detailed exploration of data obtained from selected individuals who are directly relevant to the research focus. This study data source is two English teachers from one of reputable high school in Yogyakarta who have implemented *Merdeka* Curriculum in their teaching process.

The data collection process consisted of three stages: observation, interviews, transcription, and documentation. In the first stage, the researcher conducted non-participant observation by simply sitting at the back of the class and recording student behavior and teaching methods without interacting directly with them. The researcher examined the teaching process from the beginning to the closing section. Then, the open-ended interview was conducted. It is employed to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' beliefs regarding selecting the best grammar instruction in the classroom. In the last stage of the data collection process, the researcher transcribed the interview results and categorized the observation results based on the theory of Graus & Coppen (2016).

This study analyzed the data collection results by breaking four constructs of English grammar teaching instruction based on Graus & Coppen (2016). These constructs include: (1) meaning-focused versus form-focused instruction, (2) focus on form (FonF) versus focus on forms (FonFs), (3) implicit versus explicit instruction, and (4) inductive versus deductive instruction. By categorizing and interpreting the data through these dimensions, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how teachers conceptualize and implement grammar instruction in the classroom. Moreover, these instructional constructs facilitate the researchers to identify the teachers' underlying convictions regarding grammar teaching and how these beliefs translate into classroom practices.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to describe how two English teachers (teacher A and teacher B) in a reputable high school in Yogyakarta taught English, specifically grammar, in the classroom. The findings of this study concerned four constructs of beliefs regarding grammar instruction proposed by the Graus & Coppen (2016) study. Graus & Coppen (2016) explained the differences in grammar instruction they proposed in their research to understand the four

constructs. First, the distinction between meaning-focused and form-focused instruction lies in whether teachers prioritize communicative competence and contextual meaning or emphasize the accuracy of grammatical structures. Second, the contrast between focus on form (FonF) and focus on forms (FonFs) pertains to whether teachers draw students' attention to grammar incidentally within meaningful communication (FonF) or teach grammatical rules in a systematic and isolated manner (FonFs). Third, the implicit versus explicit instruction dimension explores whether teachers introduce grammar through indirect exposure and inference or direct explanation and rule-based teaching. Lastly, the inductive versus deductive instruction approach examines whether teachers encourage learners to discover grammatical rules independently from examples (inductive) or provide explicit explanations before practice (deductive).

In the first construct, **meaning-focused versus form-focused instruction**, the two participants in this study primarily favored meaning-focused instruction in teaching grammar in their classes. Teacher A emphasized providing students with several authentic texts, such as explanatory and hortatory texts, and asked them to analyze the texts themselves. She also highlighted how meaning-focused instruction played a role in enhancing students' critical thinking when engaging with the given texts.

Teacher B similarly stressed the importance of students learning how to use English in real-life situations. He argued that they should not rely solely on theory. Instead of depending entirely on textbooks as learning materials, he explained that teachers should provide examples of how native speakers use the language. As part of this approach, he consistently tried to use English when interacting with his students, encouraging them to imitate his behavior.

For the second construct, **Focus on Forms (FonFs) and Focus on Form (FonF)**, Teacher A's responses reflected an approach of the two instructions, Focus on Forms (FonFs) and Focus on Form (FonF). She integrated grammar feedback in the reading and reflection assignments. She encouraged students to self-correct rather than explicitly pointing out every mistake. Her strategy of having students reread their work and find mistakes improves their metacognitive awareness, letting them understand and use linguistic structures helpfully. This fits with the FonF principles, which say that corrective feedback should happen naturally in a communication job. Moreover, her choice to fix mistakes in front of the class without naming specific students adds an element of FonFs because she clearly explained the error, which is suitable for the whole class. She uses an implicit method by ensuring that students are involved in the correction process rather than just being taught grammar directly.

Teacher B, on the other hand, employed a minimalist and autonomous method for error correction that firmly grounded in FonF principles. His approach emphasized student reflection

on writing, self-identification of errors, and independent correction of those mistakes. He promoted learner autonomy and self-regulation by evaluating students' work and encouraging revisions of their mistakes. Moreover, He emphasized that language accuracy is cultivated through practical application rather than explicit teaching. His approach is less explicit than Teacher A's, as he refrains from offering class-wide corrective explanations and instead promotes individualized self-correction during communicative tasks. This method supports FonF's focus on corrective feedback in meaningful communication, ensuring that grammar instruction is integrated into authentic language use rather than taught as isolated rules. Therefore, both teachers viewed grammar as not a separate entity but an integral part of language development within authentic contexts.

For the next construct, **explicit and implicit instruction**, Ellis (2014) suggested that teaching grammar has two objectives. In explicit instruction, the goal of teaching grammar is for immediate communicative use, replacing it with a more modest goal in helping learners develop a metalinguistic understanding of grammatical structures. Whereas, in implicit instruction, the objective is to integrate grammar instruction into a task-based approach, where attention to grammatical forms naturally emerges from efforts to engage in meaning-focused communication. Teacher A and B believed that their students could use English effectively if they were exposed to real-life situations, without the need for explicit explanations of tense rules. This aligns with the principles of implicit teaching, where students acquire grammatical structures naturally through meaningful communication, without direct instruction.

Teacher B's approach, while also implicit in its day-to-day execution, incorporated elements of explicit teaching through direct explanations when necessary. His practice of walking around, observing, and asking probing questions encourages students to reflect on their language use. When providing group explanations, He engaged in explicit instruction by clarifying linguistic points, thus blending implicit exposure with explicit intervention when students need support. Both teachers exemplified a balanced approach, primarily favoring implicit instruction but recognizing the value of explicit teaching moments to enhance students' understanding and competence in grammar. The findings are aligned with the study of Guci et al. (2021) study that emphasized the implicit teaching instruction by directly asked the students to practice instead of gave them the tense rules.

The last constructs used to explore teachers' grammar teaching in this study is **inductive vs deductive instruction**. This instruction inserted on how teachers taught the grammatical rules. In deductive instruction, a grammatical feature and its rule are introduced first, followed by practice in various ways. In contrast, inductive teaching involves learners drawing generalizations from examples on their own (Graus & Coppen, 2016).

Teacher A emphasized that students had already encountered language structures through reading and practice. This suggested that grammar understanding was constructed through exposure and usage rather than direct instruction. In teaching process, teacher A used examples from the internet and guiding students to follow these examples. This process further reinforced the inductive approach by allowing students to observe patterns and derive grammatical rules independently. Teacher A asserted that she did not directly write and show the grammar rules. She gave an example to the students and asked them to follow the examples. Shukhratovna (2023) stated that Inductive teaching requires learners to derive generalizations from examples on their own.

Moreover, Teacher B also utilized inductive teaching by fostering communication and practice in the classroom. However, he incorporated more deductive elements than teacher A by providing explicit grammar explanations when addressing specific student questions or during group discussions. Thus, while teacher B’s primary method was communicative and practice-based, the use of direct rule explanation indicates a blend of inductive and deductive instruction.

Table 1. Teachers’ beliefs on grammar instruction in the class

Kinds of Instruction	Teacher A	Teacher B
Meaning-focused vs Form-focused Instruction	Uses a discussion-based approach where students analyze texts without explicit explanation and encourages them to interpret meaning independently	Prioritizes practice and student involvement in activities and believes that learning should not be just about delivering information
Focus on Forms (FonFs) vs Focus on Form (FonF)	Addresses grammar errors when necessary but does not always highlight them, preferring students to reflect on their own work	Observes student writing and encourages them to reflect on their mistakes rather than explicitly pointing them out
Explicit vs Implicit Instruction	Believes that content should include direct practice, as teachers are responsible for ensuring students learn deeply	Uses a personal and mobile approach, interacting directly with students rather than relying on traditional lecture-style teaching
Inductive vs Deductive instruction	Encourages exploration and discovery by allowing students to see patterns and examples on their own rather than explicitly explaining rules	Encourages students to ask questions and discover rules on their own rather than explaining grammar explicitly

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that teachers A and B adopted distinct approaches to grammar instruction in their EFL classrooms by reflecting the constructs of Graus & Coppen (2016). Both primarily employed meaning-focused instruction that emphasizes communicative language use

over theoretical frameworks and generally provided grammatical feedback within authentic tasks (FonF). Notably, Teacher A occasionally offered class-wide corrective feedback (FonFs). Both teachers preferred implicit instruction by embedding grammar in content-based tasks, though Teacher B also provided explicit explanations when necessary. Moreover, Teacher A mainly used an inductive approach, encouraging rule inference from examples, while Teacher B blended inductive and deductive methods. Overall, both educators considered grammar essential to authentic language learning, aligning with contemporary communicative language teaching that values practice, interaction, and learner autonomy.

In conclusion, the instruction employed by both educators is consistent with the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum* implemented in Indonesia. The *Merdeka Curriculum* prioritized student-centered learning, facilitating active, independent, and contextual learning experiences for students. The communicative activity-based teaching utilized by these educators facilitates student interaction and real-time error correction, aligning with the principles of contextual learning and competency enhancement within the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The curriculum promotes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills through teaching methods that encourage independent thought and action, exemplified by educators providing students with opportunities to discover and apply grammar rules autonomously. Consequently, these educators apply the principles of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in the grammar learning process to emphasize the enhancement of student's language skills in authentic and independent contexts.

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