

## The Most Common Grammar-focused Approaches Used by Jordanian EFL Teachers at Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the most common grammar- focused approaches used by Jordanian EFL teachers at secondary schools. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researchers prepared a questionnaire to measure the participants' point of views toward the most common grammar- focused approaches used by them while teaching grammar. The participants of the study were 30 EFL teachers (15 males and 15 females). They were purposefully chosen from the schools in Ajloun Directorate of Education for the academic year 2017/2018. To analyze the participants' responses in the questionnaires, different statistics analyses were used. The results of the study revealed that there is a high interest in differentiating grammar practices and approaches used at EFL classrooms. Furthermore, the results showed that Jordanian EFL teachers have a high awareness of the different trends and approaches that they should adopt in teaching grammar and the reasons behind using them in their classrooms. Besides, they have a good ability to use these approaches and strategies, for the given activities and tasks that suit their learners' levels and needs, while teaching English as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** grammar-focused approach, Jordanian EFL teachers, secondary schools

### INTRODUCTION

English language is a universal language that people all over the world should learn and master. English language, nowadays, is considered the main method of communication. Communication is a process that deals with the four language skills: Reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as speakers and learners of any language should master and learn these skills appropriately.

What is needed, in fact, to be an effective communicator and learner is to master the language grammar, as well as the four skills, as grammar is necessary in learning and producing the four language skills because learners could not write or speak properly without learning the basic necessary grammar rules. Those who are having a good knowledge in language grammar's components are expected to do better compare to

those who do not. Many definitions of grammar appear in the dictionaries. Crystal (2004, p. 7) defined grammar as "the business of taking a language to pieces, to see how it works". For example, Oxford dictionary defines grammar as "the whole system and structure of a language or of languages in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics".

Because of the importance of grammar, people started to learn grammar in the 16th century when English grammar is introduced to its learners (Peng, 2007). Linguists have found that learners could not use and present language accurately if they do not learn the grammar of this language in an excellent way.

The views on grammar have been changing since the last decades. Many teaching approaches have looked at grammar from different views. The Grammar-Translation Method, which was the most prominent teaching approach in the 19th century, looked at grammar from a secondary point of view as the concentration of that approach was on developing the learners' communicative abilities. Grammar in that approach was taught deductively (Simensen, 1998; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Simensen (1998) mentioned that The Direct Method or the Natural Method, as it was called, replaced The Grammar-Translation Method. In this approach, grammar was presented to be taught inductively. Moreover, it concentrated on teaching pronunciation and accuracy. Later on and during the 1960s, The Audio-lingual Method came to concentrate on good pronunciation as well as the grammar of the language. Reading and writing were given less concentration. In this approach, the role of the teacher in the teaching process was central.

Finally, the Communicative Competence and Communicative Language Teaching was introduced in the 1970s by Hymes (1972) and other linguists. In this approach, the focus changed from focusing on grammar and vocabulary into helping the learners to develop their linguistic skills that are needed for learners to have the effective communication.

Yue (2008) indicated that all linguists nowadays agree that language is a combination between sound, lexical and grammar. He added that these three language components interact with each other to present the content of any communicative method whether spoken or written. Hue (2001, p.115) supported Yue's point of view when he addressed that only through the use of correcting grammar both sound and grammar can form the meaningful language interactive system. Linguists believe that we cannot present successful acceptable language without knowing the basic and the important requirements of language grammar.

Bastone's opinion (1994, p.35) goes in complete harmony with both Hue (2001) and Yue's (2008) point of views when he said that "language without grammar would be chaotic; countless words without the indispensable guidelines for how they can be ordered and modified". Learners of English as a foreign language cannot produce language without knowing the correct grammar when they start speaking the language.

Teachers should give their utmost care in teaching grammar, as mastering grammar by the students would help them in forming appropriate suitable authentic language in their written as well as spoken forms. In this aspect, Chomsky (1965) explained that we must

look at grammar as a theory of language; therefore, for both foreign language teachers and learners, grammar is considered an effective factor in language teaching. In this field, Zhang (2009,p.184) asserted that English foreign language learners who have a lack in their grammar rules can neither use English language appropriately to succeed in using and producing complete sentences, nor speak English language fluently.

Because of the necessity of grammar in language teaching, teachers should care a lot and look for the most effective ways that help them to improve their learners' grammar. This can be achieved through providing them with the suitable knowledge that can help them in understanding grammar, as this will help them in using and producing the language correctly. In this context, Newby (2003) pointed out that teachers should take into account that grammar is a sub-system in a network of other linguistic sub-systems and sub-skills. To succeed in their work, as teachers of English as a foreign language, teachers should teach grammar within the four English skills, as these four skills require a correct grammar to be presented in a proper correct way.

Zhang (2009, p.186) asserted that grammar is important in teaching English. He looked at grammar as the base of English language. He also added that grammar can not be acquired naturally as it needs to be taught and instructed for the learners. Teaching grammar has been the issue of endless debate and discussion among the linguists all over the world since many years as it is a main part in teaching and learning English. Thornbury (1999, p.14) said:

"No other issue has so preoccupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate, and the history of language teaching is essentially the history of the claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar. Differences in attitude to the role of grammar underpin differences between methods, between teacher, and between learners".

He pointed out that teaching grammar differs according to the method of presenting it to the learners as learners differ in their learning styles as well as their linguistic competencies. Consequently, teachers should care a lot about these facts when stating teaching grammar.

Zhang (2009) believed that grammar is necessary to achieve the communicative goals of the learners who study English as a foreign language. The necessity of grammar stems from the following facts that were suggested by Zhang and asked the teachers to take them into consideration while teaching grammar to their learners:

1. Grammar teaching is essential
2. Grammar is not acquired naturally; it needs be taught
3. Grammar is a collection of meaningful forms
4. Grammar is not a collection of arbitrary rules

(Zhang *ibid*, pp.184-185).

Because of its importance, teachers should look for the most workable techniques and approaches that help them in teaching grammar. Teachers may start their grammar lessons by raising the following two questions:

1. When should I teach grammar?
2. How should I teach grammar?

It is advisable for teachers to teach grammar through the whole time of the class as it should be taught and presented to serve the four language skills. As an answer to the second question, it is suitable for teachers to follow both the deductive as well as the inductive approach where teachers present the example and ask the students to guess the rule. As for the deductive approach, teachers present the rule then they ask their students to give other similar examples.

Moreover, there are other four approaches that can be adopted by teachers to teach grammar in an accurate interesting way. The third approach is called "The functional-notional approach" which was presented by a British linguist whose name was Wilkins. He published a document in (1972) where he presented an important shift from using the traditional methods to teach vocabulary and grammar to another vivid method when he asked to consider the language as a communicative method where students could express themselves freely and effectively. He pointed out that language could be divided on the basis of certain criteria such as quantity, location and time, and functions such as requests, making offers and apologizing. As for the fourth approach, it was called "Teaching grammar in situational contexts". In this approach, teachers are asked to create what is called the generative situation. In this situation, the teacher presents a situation in the lesson in order to "generate" several example sentences of a structure by the learners. As for the fifth approach, it is known as "Teaching grammar through texts", where teachers are asked to provide their learners with authentic texts or classroom texts that are suitable to the title of the grammar lesson that he is going to present it for his learners. As for the sixth approach, it is well known as "Teaching grammar through stories". In this approach, teachers tend to teach grammar through stories as learners are fond of stories. The last approach is called "Teaching grammar through songs and rhymes" where teachers depend on songs and poems to teach grammar.

Filiz (2005) investigated the ways in which some language learners make conscious efforts to learn English grammar more efficiently, which strategies they use in language learning, whether a particular learning strategies favors certain strategies or not. He also tried to know those strategies and the relationships between strategy use and learner achievement in grammar learning. Moreover, the relationship between students' choice of learning strategies in grammar and foreign language achievement was also investigated. The results revealed that the use of grammar learning strategies have a positive effect on the students' achievement.

Heather Zaharias (2012), and through an action research project, explored the most effective strategies for grammar instruction to middle school students, specifically at the sixth grade level. The participants were 27 students (19 female and 8 male). After analyzing the results of the surveys taken by both teachers and students, the results revealed that there is a high interest in differentiating grammar instruction at the middle school level. Moreover, the desire for differentiated grammar instruction becomes clear.

Krista Uibu and Liver (2015) found out the main causes of grammar mistakes, were the practices that teachers use to correct students' mistakes and the most effective strategies to prevent students' mistakes. Twenty-five Estonian language teachers were asked to describe their teaching and prevention strategies. The data was gathered within the framework of the project where teachers filled out the electronic form of an open-ended questionnaire via the internet. Through quantitative content analysis, three types of teachers were indicated. Teachers with a deductive profile. Those were considered to be the most efficient in supporting students' remembering and recalling skills. Teachers with inductive teaching profiles used more examples and diverse strategies. The results revealed that all types of mistakes were caused by the lack of students' cognitive skills.

Becker and Westman (2016) determined the effects of sentence combining strategies and practice on the understanding of grammatical rules related to conjunctions and the efficacy and clarity of student writing. This study took place in two middle school classes. The participants of this study were a single sixth grade class of 29 students and a single seventh grade class of 29 students. Teaching strategies which were investigated included the use of pre-assessments, application, classroom practice, check points and post-assessments, and the ability to distinguish between a correct and incorrect clause and idea combinations. Informal data was also collected through teacher observations and teacher student conversations. The results revealed that teaching sentence combining strategies is more effective at increasing student understanding of conjunction rules.

Zhaojun Chen (2016) determined the grammar learning strategies which applied to ESP teaching. In this study, ESP grammar learning strategies (EGLS) refer to all strategies that make ESP grammar learning more effective, which include not only micro-strategies but also macro-strategies that learners take to plan, regulate, and evaluate the aims, processes and results of ESP grammar learning. ESP grammar learning strategies can be classified into cognitive strategies for learning grammar (CSLG), metacognitive strategies for learning grammar (MSLG), affective strategies for learning grammar (ASLG), and social strategies for learning grammar (SSLG). Because of the importance of learning grammar, the results revealed that there are difficulties in learning ESP because of the characteristics of ESP and learners' low grammatical competence. Moreover, there is the connection between grammar and learning strategies.

To explore the instructional strategies that were used at 7 schools to teach grammar and writing skills to Grade 5 students, Cara Lisa (2016) conducted simple review of background data on the district's writing curriculum guide to outline instructional strategies. A test data to document scores of the fifth grade students at the 9 elementary schools was also conducted. The main source of data came from semi-structured interviews of 6 teaching and learning specialist assistant principals and a fifth grade teacher. Participants' perceptions were elicited through the interview questions about current writing instructional strategies and resources used with Grade 5 students. Through data analysis, the results revealed 5 themes of collaboration of teachers, test format, vocabulary, vertical teaming, and writing across the curriculum. Lisa G. Bentsen. (2017) tried to combine a descriptive analysis of 32 videotaped English lessons. Those lessons were taught by seven teachers in seven classrooms at different lower secondary

schools (Year 9). The researcher collected data as part of the Linking Instruction and Student Experiences (LISE) project. This project led by Professor Kirsti Klette and with associate professor Lisbeth M. Brevik as coordinator. In order to identify grammar instruction in the English classroom, and to characterize the students' oral grammar mistakes in the observed classrooms and the teacher's correction of these, the data were analyzed. After that, the researcher integrate these analyses with teacher interviews to examine English grammar instruction from different perspectives. The results revealed that the students in the observed lessons seldom made oral grammar mistakes and that the teachers' corrections of these were rare.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Diane Larsen-Freeman (1991) pointed that grammar is one of the main three dimensions of language that are interconnected- semantics, pragmatic and grammar. Grammar gives us a clear picture about the structure of the language. In other words, grammar tells us about the construction of a sentence (verbs and nouns, word order, phrases, clauses... etc.). The main question is whether to teach grammar in language classes and how to teach it. This question tells us about what kind of instruction should be offered to our learners in language classes. Should grammar be taught inductively or deductively, should teachers emphasis on grammatical explanations in the mother tongue, should grammar be explained in separate " grammar only" classes, and then if teachers have to correct grammatical errors directly. The researchers try to answer all these questions in order to explore the current practices in teaching grammar.

### **THE STUDY**

In light of what has been mentioned above, the researchers of this study tried to shed the light on exploring the Jordanian EFL teachers' most common appropriate grammar - focusing practices and approaches in language classes.

More specifically, the study aimed at answering the following main question:

- 1- What are the most appropriate grammar focusing practices and approaches used by Jordanian EFL teachers in language classes?
- 2- Are there any significant differences between male and female due to the grammar practices and approaches used in EFL classrooms?

The results of this study could be helpful to the EFL teachers as it presents clear picture on the place of grammar in English language pedagogy. It also shed the light on the importance of using appropriate grammar focusing approaches to develop and improve the students' language proficiency as well as to increase their interaction in the classroom. By knowing this significance, teachers will do their best to follow the best techniques and approaches to improve their students' language proficiency.

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

The participants of the study were 30 EFL teachers (15 males and 15 females). They were purposefully chosen from the schools in Ajloun Directorate of Education for the academic year 2017/2018.

## Instruments

In order to achieve the main purpose of our study and because the researchers found that there is no validated and reliable questionnaire which can be used to explore the EFL teachers' appropriate grammar –focusing practices in language classes, a suitable questionnaire was developed and adapted through reviewing the related literature. It consists of items concerning the demographic information of the participants and items concerning those teachers' approaches to grammar teaching.

The researchers used a four point liker-scale and asked the participants indicate their levels of agreement with statements in such a way that (4) reflected strongly agree (SA), 3 - agree (A), 2 - disagree (D) and 1 - strongly disagree (SD).

## Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

To measure the validity of the questionnaire, a jury of four TEFL specialists in the curriculum and instruction, linguistics and applied linguistics that hold a PH.D from the Department of English language and Literature at Ajloun National University as well as Yarmouk University, were asked politely to examine it. The researchers took all their suggestions into consideration when producing the final form of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was computed on a pilot study of 10 teachers using the test-retest method. Then, the reliability coefficient was computed using Cronbach's Alpha formula. Then, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated and found to equal 81.7% which is an acceptable percentage to apply the questionnaire in the current study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings related to the first research question

The first question of the study was: what are the most appropriate grammar focusing practices and approaches used by Jordanian EFL teachers in language classes?

In order to answer this question, means and standard deviations were measured.

**Table 1.** Percentages, means standard deviations and rank of the most appropriate grammar focusing practices and approaches used by EFL teachers

	Gender	N	Mean	Average	SD	Std. Error Mean
I think that learners benefit from an inductive approach.	Male	15	3.2000	3.33335	.41404	.10690
	Female	15	3.4667		.51640	.13333
I give a grammar rule to the students depend on an inductive approach.	Male	15	3.6000		.50709	.13093
	Female	15	3.2000	3.4	.86189	.22254
I give students enough time to discover the grammar rules for themselves.	Male	15	3.5333	3.3	.51640	.13333
	Female	15	3.0667		.70373	.18170
I always keep the grammatical explanation simple and brief in classroom.	Male	15	3.6667	3.5333	.48795	.12599
	Female	15	3.4667		.51640	.13333
I build more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules.	Male	15	3.5333	3.5333	.51640	.13333
	Female	15	3.5333		.51640	.13333
I tell students to research about a grammar point If I don't know how to it.	Male	15	2.9333	2.9	.88372	.22817
	Female	15	2.8667		.83381	.21529
	Male	15	3.3333	3.4	.48795	.12599

I teach Grammar through the integration into the other English skills.	Female	15	3.4667		.63994	.16523
I contextualize grammar in meaningful language use.	Male	15	3.8000	3.6	.41404	.10690
	Female	15	3.4000		.63246	.16330
I correct grammatical errors directly in the class.	Male	15	3.4000		.50709	.13093
	Female	15	3.4000	3.4000	.63246	.16330
I always provide appropriate feedback and corrections for my students.	Male	15	3.6667	3.6	.48795	.12599
	Female	15	3.5333		.51640	.13333
I use charts and other visuals whenever possible to depict grammatical relationship.	Male	15	3.5333		.63994	.16523
	Female	15	2.9333	3.2333	.59362	.15327
I illustrate grammar with clear and unambiguous examples.	Male	15	3.6000		.50709	.13093
	Female	15	3.2667	3.43335	.70373	.18170
I avoid using direct rule approach.	Male	15	3.4000	3.33335	.63246	.16330
	Female	15	3.2667		.70373	.18170
I use songs in teaching grammar as they encourage students to take an active part in the classroom's activities.	Male	15	3.2000		.77460	.20000
	Female	15	2.7333	2.96665	.88372	.22817
I give the Students the enough opportunities at classroom to practice the aspects of grammar in meaningful methods.	Male	15	3.4000		.63246	.16330
	Female	15	3.4000	3.4000	.50709	.13093
I prepare activities that require both discrete (one answer) and open-ended (personal opinion) answers	Male	15	5.2667		7.68548	1.98438
	Female	15	3.2000	4.23335	.56061	.14475
I use oral as well as written input when teaching grammar	Male	15	3.1333	3.2	.63994	.16523
	Female	15	3.2667		.70373	.18170
I focus on meaning before presenting the form of the grammar points.	Male	15	3.2000	3.13335	.77460	.20000
	Female	15	3.0667		.59362	.15327
I ask students to present some of the grammar notes by themselves.	Male	15	3.4667		.63994	.16523
	Female	15	3.0667	3.2667	.70373	.18170
I ask my students to form and use the grammar notes immediately after explaining the grammar notes.	Male	15	3.5333		.63994	.16523
	Female	15	3.1333	3.3333	.74322	.19190
Total		30	3.3783		0.79639	0.20562
			35		425	65

The results of the first question showed that the overall degree of the most appropriate grammar focusing practices and approaches used by EFL teachers in language classes was high with a mean of 3.37.

After analyzing the results of the questionnaire taken by teachers, one can observed that there is a high interest in differentiating grammar practices and approaches used at EFL classrooms. Teachers show a consensus toward 'agree and 'strongly agree' Therefore, it can be concluded that the EFL teachers do the necessity of differentiated grammar approaches and practices. This indicates that the majority of EFL teachers who hold the responsibilities of teaching grammar in secondary schools have enough qualifications and training. They have theoretical background in teaching English language teaching methods in general and grammar in particular. Moreover, they have a high awareness of the various trends in teaching grammar. They keep the grammatical explanation simple and brief in classroom.



They also build more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules, contextualize grammar in meaningful language use, provide appropriate feedback and corrections for their students and prepare activities that require both discrete (one answer) and open-ended (personal opinion) answers. This indicates that most of the teachers of grammar had various methods and approaches of teaching grammar and they are qualified to teach grammar to our students. Most of the teachers try to use inductive and deductive approaches. They notice that these two approaches have great influences on teaching grammar effectively and efficiently. Other teachers try to present grammar by funny and interesting ways. They use the most popular aids such as videos, songs, games, etc. In fact, the result of this question agrees with the result arrived at by Filiz YALÇIN (2005), who investigates the ways in which some language learners make conscious efforts to learn English grammar more efficiently, which strategies they use in language learning, whether a particular learning strategy favors certain strategies or not, revealed that the use of grammar learning strategies has a positive effect on the student achievement.

### Findings related to the second research question

The second question of the study was: Are there any significant differences between male and female due to the grammar practices and approaches used in EFL classrooms?

**Table 2.** Test Table Independent Samples

Variable	Type	Num.	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> value	Sig
Gender	Male	15	3.420	0.578	0.943	0.354
	Female	15	3.237	0.653		

As shown in Table 2, the results of T-test show that there were no significant differences between the two groups (male and female)  $t = (0.943)$ ,  $sig = (0.354)$  in terms of using various grammar approaches by EFL teachers in language classes. These two groups of participants might have employed similar grammar approaches and practices, which led to comparable teaching grammar performance.

Teachers either male or female, in this research use different approaches and methods of grammar teaching presentation. However, the researchers found several common features between them as they try to present grammar by a funny and interesting way, they work with different textbooks and aids and bring a lot of materials to their lessons, they use popular inductive and deductive methods. These methods have an influence on the satisfaction of learners with grammar presentation and grammar learning. All of them realize that funny and interesting activities and materials should be a part of grammar presentation and practicing.

The results of this study go in harmony with other studies that were conducted by Filiz 2005, Becker and Western 2016, and Lisa G. Bentsen (2017) who agree that when teachers have a good experience and knowledge in the strategies of teaching grammar; this will certainly have a positive effect on the students' achievement.

## CONCLUSION

Nassaji and Fotos (2011, p.1) indicate that “*Without grammar, language does not exist*”. Teaching grammar has been considered as crucial to the ability to use language effectively. Therefore, the main aim of the present study was to provide an opportunity to focus on teachers’ actual teaching grammar approaches and practices. In other words, the researchers of this study tried to shed the light on exploring the Jordanian EFL teachers' appropriate grammar –focusing practices and approaches in language classes. The results revealed that there is a high interest in differentiating grammar practices and approaches used at EFL classrooms. They have a high awareness of the various trends and approaches in teaching grammar and why they use them in their classroom. They are capable of using these approaches and strategies for the given activities and tasks and for the learners' levels and needs, while teaching English as a foreign language.

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## APPENDIX

### The Questionnaire

No.	Statements	Totally Agree	Agree	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1-	I think that learners benefit from an inductive approach.				
2-	I give a grammar rule to the students depends on an inductive approach.				
3-	I give students enough time to discover the grammar rules for themselves.				
4-	I always keep the grammatical explanation simple and brief in classroom.				
5-	I build more intrinsic motivation by allowing students to discover rules.				
6-	I tell students to research about it, If I don't know how to explain a point of grammar				
7-	I teach grammar through the integration into the other English skills.				
8-	I contextualize grammar in meaningful language use.				
9-	I correct grammatical errors directly in the class.				
10-	I always provide appropriate feedback and corrections for my students.				
11-	I use charts and other visuals whenever possible to depict grammatical relationship.				
12-	I illustrate grammar with clear and unambiguous examples.				
13-	I avoid using Direct rule approach				
14-	I use songs in teaching grammar as they encourage students to take an active part in the classroom's activities.				
15-	I give students the enough opportunities at classroom to practice the aspects of grammar in meaningful methods.				
16-	I prepare activities that require both discrete (one answer) and open-ended (personal opinion) answers.				
17-	I use oral as well as written input. When teaching grammar,				
18-	I focus on meaning before presenting the form of the grammar points.				
19-	I ask students to present some of the grammar notes by themselves.				
20-	I ask my students to form and use the grammar notes immediately after explaining the grammar notes.				