

Investigating Grammar Instruction in the ESL Classroom: A Dual Perspective Analysis of Teachers and Students

Patricia George*, Nur Syafiqah Yacob

Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

In an ESL class, teaching grammar involves demonstrating and practicing the language's rules systematically, enabling learners to use the language correctly and communicate effectively as second-language speakers. This study aimed to explore ESL teachers' and students' perceptions of grammar instruction in an international school setting. The participants were six ESL teachers and 27 secondary students. A qualitative case study approach was used to examine how grammar is perceived, the strategies used to teach and learn it, and the challenges encountered in the classroom. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five integrated themes for both teachers and students: (1) grammar as a foundation for communication, (2) grammar teaching and learning strategies, (3) engagement, motivation, and emotional responses to grammar learning, (4) challenges in grammar instruction and learning, and (5) learner autonomy in grammar learning. Results suggest that both teachers and students regard grammar as essential for language proficiency, and that interactive, contextualised, and student-centred approaches foster motivation, engagement, and independent learning in grammar instruction.

Keywords: communicative approaches, ESL learners, grammar instruction, interactive lesson, teacher and student perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction plays a fundamental role in English as a Second Language (ESL) learning, providing learners with the structural foundation necessary for accurate and effective communication (Mohamad et al., 2023). Teachers often emphasise grammar to ensure linguistic accuracy and to guide learners in constructing correct sentences (Dominguez Arellano, 2025). However, many students perceive grammar as tedious, abstract, or disconnected from real-life communication, particularly when it is taught using explicit, rule-based approaches (Fernández, 2023). This divergence in perception can reduce learner motivation and hinder academic progress, highlighting the importance of examining how both teachers and students experience grammar instruction.

Grammar serves as a cornerstone of language acquisition, enabling learners to understand and produce grammatically correct language (Saeli & Cheng, 2019). Nevertheless, grammar classes often fall short in engagement, particularly when teaching relies heavily on repetitive drills and explicit instruction. In ESL contexts, teachers frequently face the dual challenge of balancing accuracy, ensuring correct grammatical forms, with fluency, which supports learners' communicative confidence. While fluency-focused activities promote natural language use, they may allow persistent errors to fossilize; conversely, accuracy-focused instruction can inhibit spontaneous communication (Dominguez Arellano, 2025). This tension underscores the need to explore how both teachers and students perceive grammar instruction in practice.

Recent research continues to support a dual-perspective approach to grammar teaching. Holandiyah et al. (2021) reported that both teachers and students view grammar as essential in communicative classrooms, advocating

for integrated teaching activities and considering error correction as part of the learning process. Similarly, Shaukat et al. (2025) argued that a hybrid approach, which combines explicit rule instruction with communicative practice, strengthens both fluency and grammatical retention. These findings align with the present study, where teachers and students expressed that rule-based instruction alone is insufficient without meaningful application. Moreover, Alenezi (2019) highlighted the gap between theoretical frameworks and classroom realities, suggesting that teachers require contextualized support to implement form-focused instruction effectively.

Furthermore, grammar is not merely a set of rules to memorize but is central to ESL learners' overall language competence (Abhishikta et al., 2025). Yet, studies continue to reveal a mismatch between teaching strategies and student preferences. Teachers often prioritise accuracy-focused, rule-based instruction, emphasising drills and corrective feedback, whereas students prefer contextualised, communicative approaches that connect grammar to real-life use (Afrizal et al., 2021; Holandyyah et al., 2021). This disconnect can reduce learner motivation, slow mastery, and make grammar appear irrelevant, reinforcing the need for teaching strategies that address both accuracy and meaningful communication.

Despite these insights, most research treats teacher and student perspectives separately, and few studies explore both viewpoints simultaneously within the same classroom environment (Afrizal et al., 2021; Damaiyanti, 2021). Additionally, balancing accuracy with fluency remains a persistent challenge, as traditional accuracy-first methods may inhibit spontaneous communication, while fluency-driven practices risk fossilizing errors (Domes, 2025). Therefore, to address the gaps, this study employs a qualitative case-study approach at Eagles Grammar International School to investigate the experiences of both teachers and students. Specifically, it aims to examine their perspectives on grammar instruction, the strategies employed, the challenges encountered, and potential improvements for fostering a more balanced, engaging, and effective grammar learning environment.

Objectives

- i. To explore the perspectives of ESL teachers and students on the role of grammar in language proficiency.
- ii. To identify grammar instructional strategies used by ESL teachers and evaluate how students perceive their effectiveness.
- iii. To explore the opinion of teachers and students related to common challenges faced by both ESL teachers and students in grammar instruction and learning.

Research Questions

- i. How do ESL teachers and students perceive the role of grammar in language acquisition?
- ii. What grammar teaching strategies do teachers use, and how do students evaluate their usefulness?
- iii. What are the common challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning grammar?

Teacher Perception of Grammar Instruction

A substantial body of research indicates that ESL and EFL teachers continue to value explicit grammar instruction for ensuring accuracy, supporting academic writing, and meeting examination demands (Fernández, 2023; Tadege, 2024). Cross-national studies report widespread adoption of hybrid approaches that combine rule explanation with communicative tasks, commonly described as focus-on-form pedagogy (Schurz & Coumel, 2023). Large-scale survey research further confirms that teachers believe explicit grammar instruction is expected by learners and remains pedagogically necessary, particularly in exam-oriented systems (Ghalibafan & Jabbarpoor, 2025).

However, several studies highlight a recurring mismatch between teachers' stated beliefs and their classroom practices. Although many teachers express support for implicit or communicative grammar instruction, institutional constraints such as curriculum requirements, time pressure, and assessment demands often lead to predominantly rule-based lessons (Yusof et al., 2019; Mohammadi & Yousefi, 2019). These findings suggest that grammar instruction is shaped not only by pedagogical belief but also by contextual and systemic factors.

Student Perception of Grammar Learning

Students generally recognise grammar as important for effective communication, particularly in writing and formal language use, yet frequently describe grammar learning as challenging or disengaging when taught in isolation (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019; Afrizal et al., 2021). Traditional approaches based on memorisation and drills have been associated with reduced motivation and increased anxiety, especially among learners with lower proficiency levels (Ayuni, 2025).

In contrast, research consistently shows that students respond more positively to grammar instruction that is contextualised, interactive, and connected to real-life language use. Communicative tasks, collaborative activities, and technology-enhanced learning environments have been shown to increase engagement, comprehension, and confidence (Nurhayati & Sedubun, 2024; Idris et al., 2020). These findings suggest that students value grammar instruction that supports both understanding and meaningful application rather than accuracy alone.

Balancing Accuracy and Fluency in Instruction

Balancing grammatical accuracy with communicative fluency remains a central challenge in grammar pedagogy. Accuracy-focused instruction contributes to error reduction but may inhibit spontaneous language use when overemphasised (Schurz & Coumel, 2023). Conversely, fluency-oriented approaches promote confidence and interaction but risk fossilisation if learners receive insufficient form-focused feedback (Hojjat & Hasim, 2022).

Recent studies advocate for integrated approaches that address both dimensions simultaneously. Focus-on-form and task-based instruction allow learners to attend to grammatical features while engaging in meaningful communication, supporting both implicit and explicit knowledge development (Shaukat et al., 2025). Evidence from Malaysian ESL contexts further indicates that failure to balance these elements contributes to persistent grammatical inaccuracies in learners' written and spoken output (Raslee et al., 2022).

Gaps in the Literature

Despite extensive research on grammar instruction, several gaps remain. Many studies examine either teacher or student perspectives in isolation, limiting understanding of how instructional beliefs align with learner experiences within the same classroom context (Al-Khresheh & Demirkol Orak, 2021). In addition, much of the existing literature focuses on prescribed teaching methods rather than the lived realities of classroom practice, particularly within exam-driven and multilingual settings (Fernández, 2023).

Few studies adopt an integrated, dual-perspective approach that considers how institutional constraints, learner affect, and pedagogical strategies interact to shape grammar instruction. Addressing these gaps, the present study

investigates both teachers' and students' perspectives within the same ESL context, aiming to provide a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of grammar instruction and its challenges.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore teachers' and students' perceptions and practices of grammar instruction in an ESL classroom. A qualitative approach was appropriate for capturing participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes within a real-life educational context (Paré, 2024). In this context, the case study approach allows the researcher to gain a rich, holistic understanding of how grammar instruction is experienced by both teachers and students in an ESL classroom.

Besides, the qualitative paradigm aligns with the study's goal of uncovering subjective experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward grammar teaching and learning. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, which allowed participants to express their views in depth while providing flexibility to probe emerging ideas. Semi-structured interviews facilitated detailed exploration of individual experiences, whereas focus group discussions supported interaction and shared meaning-making among students. This design enabled systematic yet flexible data collection and thematic analysis, offering nuanced insights into grammar instruction that would be difficult to capture through qualitative measures.

Participants and Sampling

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants who are most knowledgeable and relevant to the research topic (Memon et al., 2025). Participants were selected based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure their relevance to the study. Teachers were required to be actively teaching ESL grammar to Year 10 students, while student participants had to be currently enrolled in ESL classes and possess prior experience with grammar instruction.

The final sample comprised six ESL teachers directly involved in grammar instruction and 27 Year 10 ESL students from Eagles Grammar International School. While the sample size was limited, it allowed for rich, contextualised data and supported depth of analysis rather than generalisation. Credibility was strengthened through the use of multiple data sources and ongoing researcher reflexivity throughout the study.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and students to explore their perspectives on grammar instruction. This interview format allowed for a guided yet flexible exploration of participants' views, ensuring consistency across interviews while allowing space for unanticipated insights to emerge (Adeoye & Olenik, 2021). Teacher interviews focused on beliefs, instructional strategies, and challenges related to grammar teaching, whereas student interviews examined learning experiences, perceived difficulties, and views on the effectiveness of grammar instruction. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with students, each comprising six to eight participants. Focus groups were used to promote interaction and to allow participants to build on one another's responses, thereby revealing shared experiences and collective perspectives on grammar learning (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). The discussions explored students' grammar learning preferences, levels of engagement, and perceptions of teaching effectiveness. Each focus group session lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to assess the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the interview questions prior to

the main data collection. The pilot involved a small group of participants and aimed to ensure that the instruments were aligned with the study's objectives (Khanal & Chhetri, 2024). Feedback from the pilot indicated that the interview protocols were generally clear and appropriate. Based on this feedback, several refinements were made to strengthen the instruments. Additional questions were included to explore the relationship between grammar knowledge and examination preparation, as well as to distinguish between teaching grammar in isolation and integrating grammar with reading, writing, and speaking tasks. Reflection-based questions were also added to encourage metacognitive responses from participants. Furthermore, prompts related to the use of digital tools such as Kahoot, Padlet, and Grammarly were incorporated. The final interview and focus group data were analysed thematically to support systematic coding and theme development.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection procedures for this study began with obtaining permission from the school authorities and securing ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was gathered from all participants, including parental or guardian consent for students under the age of 18. Interviews and focus group discussions were scheduled at times that are convenient for both teachers and students to ensure minimal disruption. With participants' consent, all interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded to accurately capture responses.

The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for its rigour in qualitative research (Naeem et al., 2023). Following the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher began by familiarizing themselves with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and focus group discussions. Next, initial codes were generated to highlight key ideas related to teacher and student perspectives on grammar instruction. These codes were then organized into broader themes that capture recurring patterns and concepts, such as teaching strategies, student engagement, perceived effectiveness, and instructional challenges. The themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions. Representative quotes were used to support the findings and provide rich, contextual insights. This analytical process allows for a systematic and in-depth interpretation of the participants' experiences and perceptions, offering meaningful contributions to the understanding of grammar instruction in ESL classrooms.

Ethics

This study strictly followed ethical research guidelines to protect participants' rights and privacy. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental consent secured for students under 18. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was ensured by removing personal identifiers and using pseudonyms in all reports. Data, including recordings and transcripts, were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board and the school administration before data collection.

FINDINGS

The data gained from the interviews were analysed by using thematic analysis. The descriptions of findings were explained as follows:

Table 1: Integrated Summary of Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on Grammar Instruction

No	Integrated Themes	Codes		
		Teacher Perspectives	Student Perspectives	Interpretive Focus
1.	Grammar as a foundation for communication	Emphasis on accuracy, clarity, and	Grammar linked to confidence and fear of mistakes	Grammar functions as both linguistic support and emotional pressure

		assessment requirements		
2.	Grammar teaching and learning strategies	Preference for explicit instruction combined with communicative tasks	Higher engagement with contextualized, interactive activities	Effectiveness increases when rules are applied meaningfully
3.	Engagement, motivation, and emotional responses to grammar learning	Concern about student motivation and participation	Anxiety reduced through games, technology, and supportive feedback	Emotional climate shapes grammar learning outcomes
4.	Challenges in grammar instruction and learning	Time constraints, mixed proficiency levels, curriculum pressure	Difficulty transferring rules to speaking and writing	Structural constraints limit pedagogical flexibility
5.	Learner autonomy in grammar learning	Encouraging self-monitoring and independent practice	Use of digital tools and peer support	Autonomy extends learn

The themes and codes described in Table 1 were fully explained as follow:

Grammar as a Foundation for Communication

The findings show that both teachers and students view grammar as a foundational component of English language learning that supports clear, accurate, and confident communication. Across teacher interviews, grammar was repeatedly described using structural metaphors such as “*backbone*,” “*foundation*,” and “*structure*,” indicating a shared professional belief in its central role in language proficiency. Teachers emphasised that grammatical knowledge enables learners to express meaning accurately and prevents misunderstanding in both spoken and written communication.

Students similarly perceived grammar as essential for making their ideas understandable. Many associated grammatical accuracies with sounding “*clear*,” “*proper*,” or “*correct*,” particularly in writing and formal speaking contexts. At the same time, students reported that grammar mastery contributed to confidence, allowing them to participate more actively in class discussions and writing tasks. However, this perceived importance was often accompanied by anxiety, as students feared making grammatical mistakes.

While both groups valued grammar highly, a subtle difference emerged in emphasis. Teachers framed grammar primarily as a professional and academic necessity linked to accuracy and assessment demands, whereas students experienced grammar as both a support for confidence and a source of pressure. Taken together, these findings suggest that grammar instruction functions not only as a linguistic foundation but also as an affective influence shaping learner confidence and classroom participation.

Grammar Teaching and Learning Strategies

The findings indicate that grammar instruction is characterised by a hybrid approach that combines explicit explanation with contextualised and interactive activities. Teachers reported using rule explanation, examples, and controlled practice to introduce grammatical forms, particularly to support exam preparation and syllabus requirements. At the same time, they described integrating grammar into communicative tasks such as writing activities, discussions, role-plays, and real-life examples to promote understanding and application.

Students confirmed this instructional pattern, noting that grammar lessons often began with direct teaching before moving to practice activities. While this approach was familiar and reassuring, students expressed stronger engagement when grammar was embedded in meaningful contexts, such as storytelling, writing about

personal experiences, or analysing real-world texts. Visual aids, colour-coded notes, timelines, and teacher-generated examples were frequently mentioned as helpful in making abstract rules easier to understand.

Technology-supported strategies further enhanced learning experiences. Both teachers and students highlighted the use of digital tools such as Kahoot, Quizizz, videos, and online grammar resources as motivating and accessible. Collaborative learning through pair and group work also emerged as an important strategy, enabling students to clarify their understanding through peer explanations.

Overall, the findings show alignment between teacher practices and student preferences in favouring a blended approach. While explicit instruction remains important, its perceived effectiveness increases when followed by interactive, contextualised, and student-centred activities that allow learners to apply grammar meaningfully.

Engagement, Motivation, and Emotional Responses to Grammar Learning

Student engagement in grammar learning was strongly influenced by how grammar was presented and experienced in the classroom. The findings reveal that lessons incorporating games, humour, real-life examples, and technology were perceived as enjoyable and motivating, leading to higher participation and attention. Students reported that such activities reduced boredom and made grammar feel less intimidating.

Teachers were aware of this relationship between engagement and instructional design, noting that students responded more positively when grammar was connected to familiar contexts, interests, or daily communication. Personalised examples and creative tasks were viewed as effective in sustaining motivation and encouraging participation.

Despite these positive experiences, emotional challenges were also evident. Students described feelings of anxiety, fear of public correction, and pressure to perform accurately, particularly during rule-focused or test-oriented lessons. Some students hesitated to participate orally due to fear of making mistakes, which affected fluency development. Teachers acknowledged these emotional barriers and expressed concern that excessive emphasis on accuracy could discourage risk-taking in language use.

These findings suggest that grammar engagement is shaped not only by instructional methods but also by learners' emotional experiences. Grammar instruction that balances accuracy with encouragement and emotional support appears more likely to sustain motivation and participation.

Challenges in Grammar Instruction and Learning

Both teachers and students identified several shared challenges that hinder effective grammar teaching and learning. One major challenge was mixed proficiency levels within the same classroom. Teachers reported difficulty in addressing diverse learner needs simultaneously, particularly when advanced and struggling students were taught together. Students likewise noted that grammar lessons sometimes moved too quickly or were too complex for their level of understanding.

Time constraints and curriculum pressure were also highlighted. Teachers explained that grammar instruction often competes with other language components and examination preparation, limiting opportunities for extended practice and recycling of grammatical structures. As a result, students were often able to complete grammar exercises correctly but struggled to transfer this knowledge to speaking and writing tasks.

First-language (L1) interference emerged as another challenge. Students reported confusion when English grammatical patterns differed from those of their first language, particularly in areas such as tense usage, sentence structure, and prepositions. Teachers recognised the need to address these difficulties while carefully managing the use of L1 as a support rather than a dependency.

Taken together, these challenges highlight the tension between pedagogical intentions and classroom realities, suggesting that effective grammar instruction requires flexibility, scaffolding, and sufficient opportunities for meaningful practice.

Learner Autonomy in Grammar Learning

The findings reveal growing awareness among both teachers and students of the importance of learner autonomy in grammar development. Teachers described encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning through strategies such as grammar journals, self-checklists, reflection activities, and the use of digital tools for self-correction.

Students reported adopting independent learning strategies, including reviewing feedback, keeping records of common errors, re-reading written work, and using online tools such as Grammarly and instructional videos. Peer feedback was also viewed as beneficial, as explaining grammar to classmates helped reinforce understanding and reduce fear of mistakes.

While teachers recognised that students still required guidance and scaffolding, they viewed autonomy as a gradual process rather than an immediate outcome. These findings suggest that fostering learner autonomy can help address time limitations and individual differences by extending grammar learning beyond the classroom.

Cross-Theme Synthesis

Overall, the findings demonstrate strong alignment between teachers' and students' perceptions of grammar as essential to language learning and effective communication. Both groups value interactive, contextualised instruction and recognise the limitations of isolated rule memorisation. However, institutional pressures, emotional factors, and learner diversity often disrupt ideal instructional practices. By integrating teacher and student perspectives across themes, the findings highlight grammar instruction as a complex process shaped by pedagogical beliefs, learner experiences, and structural constraints within the ESL classroom.

DISCUSSION

RQ1: How do ESL teachers and students perceive the role of grammar in language acquisition?

The findings indicate strong alignment between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the importance of grammar in language learning. Both groups conceptualised grammar as the structural foundation of English that enables clarity, accuracy, and confidence in communication. This shared view reinforces longstanding theoretical positions that grammar forms a core component of communicative competence rather than a peripheral skill (Saeli & Cheng, 2019; Abubakari, 2020). Importantly, grammar was not perceived merely as a set of prescriptive rules but as a resource for meaning-making in both spoken and written communication.

However, the findings also reveal an affective tension surrounding grammar learning. While teachers acknowledged grammar's importance, they expressed concern that excessive focus on accuracy could suppress students' willingness to communicate. Students similarly reported anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and pressure during grammar-focused lessons. This convergence suggests that grammar instruction operates not only as a cognitive process but also as an emotional experience, supporting Sato and Oyanedel's (2019) argument that learners' affective responses significantly influence engagement and uptake. The present study extends this insight by showing that teachers are aware of these emotional consequences, even when institutional demands push them toward accuracy-oriented practices.

A further interpretive insight lies in the gap between teachers' stated beliefs and classroom realities. Although teachers expressed support for communicative and integrated grammar teaching, students reported frequent exposure to rule-based explanations and worksheet-driven practice. This finding aligns with Yusof et al. (2019) and highlights the mediating role of institutional constraints, such as syllabus coverage and examination pressure.

Thus, grammar instruction emerges as a negotiated practice shaped by pedagogical ideals, learner needs, and systemic expectations rather than teacher belief alone.

RQ2: What grammar teaching strategies do teachers use, and how do students evaluate their usefulness?

The findings demonstrate that teachers employed a wide range of instructional strategies, including contextualised examples, visual representations, technology-based tools, collaborative activities, and discovery-oriented approaches. Students evaluated these strategies positively when they enhanced relevance, interaction, and enjoyment. This suggests that the effectiveness of grammar instruction is closely tied to how grammatical forms are embedded within meaningful communicative contexts, supporting communicative language teaching and focus-on-form principles (Holandiah et al., 2021; Schurz & Coumel, 2023).

Both teachers and students highlighted the value of multimodal and technology-enhanced instruction. Digital platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, and video-based examples increased motivation and reduced anxiety, echoing international findings on gamification and learner engagement (Idris et al., 2020). Visual tools, colour-coded notes, and timelines also supported conceptual understanding, particularly for complex grammatical structures. These findings extend prior research by illustrating how multimodality functions not merely as a motivational tool but as a cognitive scaffold that supports noticing and retention.

Notably, students did not reject explicit grammar instruction outright. Instead, they perceived direct explanation as useful when followed by opportunities for application, particularly for examination preparation. This nuanced evaluation supports international evidence favouring hybrid or blended approaches to grammar instruction (Shaukat et al., 2025; Ghalibafan & Jabbarpoor, 2025). The present study contributes to this body of research by demonstrating that the perceived effectiveness of explicit instruction depends less on its presence and more on its pedagogical sequencing and integration with communicative practice.

RQ3: What are the common challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning grammar?

Teachers and students reported overlapping challenges that highlight structural and pedagogical tensions in grammar instruction. Mixed proficiency levels were identified as a major obstacle, limiting teachers' ability to differentiate instruction effectively. This challenge mirrors findings from Malaysian and international ESL contexts, where heterogeneous classrooms complicate the pacing and depth of grammar instruction (Salleh et al., 2020; Mohamad et al., 2023). Students similarly reported difficulty keeping pace with grammar lessons, particularly when new structures were introduced rapidly.

Time constraints and curriculum pressure further restricted opportunities for recycling and meaningful practice. Teachers described grammar as being 'squeezed' between examination preparation and other language components, a pattern widely reported in exam-oriented educational systems (Tadegew, 2024; Mohammadi & Yousefi, 2019). As a result, students often demonstrated surface-level mastery in exercises but struggled to transfer grammatical knowledge to authentic speaking and writing tasks. This transfer problem aligns with Fernández (2023) and underscores the limitation of isolated practice for developing implicit grammatical competence.

Emotional barriers also emerged as a significant challenge. Fear of public correction and anxiety about making mistakes discouraged participation, particularly in speaking activities. These affective factors suggest that grammar accuracy, when overemphasised, may undermine fluency development. In response, both teachers and students emphasised the importance of learner autonomy. Strategies such as grammar journals, self-checklists, peer feedback, and digital tools supported self-regulation and reflective learning. This finding aligns with metacognitive perspectives on grammar development and highlights learner autonomy as a practical response to instructional constraints rather than an optional extension.

Integrative Interpretation

Taken together, the findings show that effective grammar teaching works best when teachers' beliefs, classroom

practices, and school expectations are aligned. Both teachers and students agree that grammar is important and that interactive, meaningful activities make learning more effective. However, school systems and exam demand often interfere with this alignment, leading teachers to make compromises in how grammar is taught. This is consistent with Rahman et al.'s (2018) study, which found that Malaysian ESL teachers often value communicative language teaching but struggle to implement it due to institutional pressures toward exam-oriented teaching. Their findings indicate that even when teachers possess strong pedagogical beliefs, systemic expectations frequently override classroom innovation and meaningful learning.

By combining teacher and student perspectives, this study shows that grammar instruction is influenced not only by teachers and learners, but also by institutional factors. This tension underscores a broader issue that while communicative, meaningful grammar practices are pedagogically desirable, they remain vulnerable to systemic constraints. These findings highlight the need for grammar teaching that is flexible, supportive, and context-sensitive, while balancing accuracy and communication in different ESL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Malaysian ESL teachers' and students' perspectives on grammar teaching, learning strategies, and classroom challenges. The findings showed that both teachers and students view grammar as essential for language proficiency, with teachers emphasising its role in accuracy and coherence, and students linking grammar mastery to confidence and clarity in speaking and writing. Both groups preferred interactive, contextualised, and meaningful instruction, such as writing tasks, discussions, visual aids, and digital tools, which were more engaging and effective than traditional rule memorisation. While explicit teaching remains useful for exams, a balanced approach that combines different methods supports both accuracy and fluency.

Despite positive perceptions, challenges were identified, including mixed proficiency levels, limited practice time, difficulty applying grammar in real communication, first-language interference, and emotional barriers such as anxiety and fear of mistakes. These findings highlight the need for flexible, student-centred pedagogy and supportive learning environments.

In practice, these results suggest that providing teacher training, practical resources, and strategies to foster learner autonomy are key to effective grammar instruction. Limitations include a small sample from a single private school, which may restrict generalisability. Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights for improving grammar teaching practices in Malaysian ESL classrooms and supporting both teachers and learners in achieving better outcomes. Future research may adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to examine how grammar perceptions evolve over time and across institutional contexts, including public schools and tertiary settings.

Disclosure statement

There was no conflict of interest reported by the authors.

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