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## The effectiveness of English Grammar Teaching in Iraqi Intermediate Schools

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### Abstract

Grammar plays an essential role in language teaching. The present paper aims to clarify the role of Grammar in language teaching and the different approaches to teaching Grammar. It intends to illustrate the best approach which can be used in teaching grammar at schools. It describes, compares, and contrasts approaches and methods to teach Grammar by showing the main principles of each approach. It also aims to identify the grammatical difficulties that intermediate students face and the causes of these problems. Students' issues have been explained by identifying and analyzing the different types of mistakes they commit to specify the reasons behind committing them.

Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate the strategies and solutions to tackle this problem. The data in this research has been collected from 30 students in one of the Iraqi intermediate schools. By surveying the most common errors students may commit, we can tell what is the best approach to avoid these errors.

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### 1. Introduction

Teaching Grammar has witnessed essential changes. These changes occur as a result of theoretical and empirical developments. Grammar is seen in terms of three general approaches or methods, beginning with those who focus on Grammar only, continuing with those who focus on meaningful communication, and ending with those who focus on both grammar and meaning (Nassaji *et al.*, 2011:12) [20]. Methods of teaching grammar have changed many times; for example, we have Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio lingual Method .....,etc. We also have ways or approaches to teach Grammar. Each of them has its own principles and way of teaching. As a result, this research proposes to explore the methods, approaches, or ways of teaching grammar. However, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the methods or approaches to teaching grammar?
2. What's the importance of teaching grammar?
3. What are the uses of Grammar in teaching at schools?

### 2. Teaching Grammar at schools

The most common method in our schools is the traditional approach, which is based on the study of Latin centuries ago. In fact, this approach doesn't work (Williams, 2006:42) [28]. Grammar shouldn't be taught alone like traditional Grammar. It should be taught in context, for example, through reading and writing. We can link the study of Grammar with writing instead of giving students isolated grammar rules only (Robb, 2001:8) [24]. Grammar alone is ineffective for students. We must teach the students in writing, reading, or literature contexts. When the teacher reads aloud, students can recognize the correct sentences (<https://resilienteducator.com/classroom-resources/teaching-grammar- what-works-and-what-doesn't>).

Teaching Grammar in context means that:

1. Teaching grammar is included with other aspects of the curriculum, such as creative writing and analytical reading. (

Richard, 1998:12)<sup>[22]</sup>

- It will link the reader's feelings and responses with the structure of the grammatical patterns of the text. (Ruth *et al.*, 2019).
- It connects the grammatical patterns or the rules of the Grammar with the meaning of the text. For example, the teaching might begin with the students discussing their feelings and responses to the text, and they go back to the text to discover why the grammatical patterns make them feel like this. They should be able to explore the grammatical patterns. (Aarts *et al.*, 2012)<sup>[1]</sup>.

Most of the teachers don't know how to teach Grammar. They teach too much of Grammar (Richards *et al.*, 2002: 148-152)<sup>[23]</sup>. There are seven bad reasons to teach Grammar:

## 2.1 Because it's there

Some teachers teach Grammar just because it is found in textbooks, so they have to teach Grammar whether it's good or bad. It's important to choose Grammar that is relevant to the student's needs. It's important to select the correct Grammar (Cain, 2012)<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2.2 It is tidy

Grammar is tidy and teachable, which means it's easier than teaching language and easy for students to learn. They can apply it in the exercises (Abu Samra *et al.*, 2021)<sup>[2]</sup>.

## 2.3 It is testable

Grammar tests are simple. They show what the students have learned and whether the teachers teach properly. Tests can be used to make the students succeed, and they will create failures in their lives. Grammar tests can easily show students' progress and how much the teachers have taught, but they make many failures on other sides of the language (Verdyan, 2021).

## 2.4 Grammar as a Security Blanket

Students feel comfortable. They will feel it's easy to control the Grammar or the rules. They feel comfortable but fail in other language aspects (Loyola, 2016)<sup>[19]</sup>.

## 2.5 It made me who I am

It is related to the tradition that we take from our previous teacher. We do all the traditions as our teachers, so this thing makes me who I am (Flowers *et al.*, 2021)<sup>[12]</sup>.

## 2.6 You have to teach the whole system

It's a bad reason to teach the whole system or the whole Grammar. Grammar isn't like a car engine, so teachers should teach selected subsystems or consider these points (Hinkel, 2016: 69)<sup>[14]</sup>.

- How much of this do the students know already from their native language? (A German, unlike a Japanese, knows the main facts about English article use before his or her first lesson.).
- How much of the rest is important?
- How much of that do we have time for? (Richards *et al.*, 2002:150)<sup>[23]</sup>.

## 2.7 Power

You can face the students whom they are very good at language. For example, if a student lives in America, the

teacher will be more powerful than him. Because the student doesn't know the Grammar, he only knows how to speak English well. He doesn't see the structure of the sentence. The teacher here will be more powerful than the students, and this is a bad reason because which one is perfect or who is good at expressing themselves or ones who are good at obeying rules? (Richards *et al.*, 2002:150)<sup>[23]</sup>.

As a result, students don't learn the English language, but they learn Grammar. They know the main rules of Grammar, and they know how to pass the tests. They discover that they lack communication skills, vocabulary, and fluency when they speak. We should teach Grammar depending on the circumstances or the learners' aims instead of just teaching Grammar (Frederick, n.d.).

## 3. There are also good reasons to teach Grammar:

### 3.1 Comprehensibility

Grammar makes our speech comprehensible and understandable. If you know how to use structures of the sentence, it's possible to make comprehensible sentences. Without knowing the structure of the sentence, it is difficult to make your sentence comprehensible (Julie, 2021).

### 3.2 Acceptability

Grammar makes your speech acceptable. A person who speaks badly won't be taken seriously or can be taken into consideration as uneducated or stupid. Students, on occasion, want a better degree of grammatical correctness than comprehensibility. If our students' English needs to be acceptable, they should consider this (Nordquist, 2020)<sup>[21]</sup>.

## 4. Methodology and Analysis

The English language is very important in the Iraqi school's ministerial. Learning the language means learning how to communicate or express our feelings. They must know how to put words together to help the students express their feelings through language. Through Grammar, students can communicate effectively. Grammar is taught in schools in the wrong way. For this reason, students make many mistakes in Grammar.

This research is a qualitative analysis (descriptive research). This section presents the practical part of our study. It consists of a test given to the third intermediate students at Al-Waqia secondary school. The purpose of applying this test is to discover how many mistakes they commit and why they make such errors. The present paper also aims to diagnose and explain the different types of mistakes that students commit. The test is divided into two levels (the recognition level and the production level). The students are asked to answer different types of questions related to Grammar. Students' knowledge of Grammar has been tested to diagnose their problems.

The test will help to answer the research questions. This section includes the data analysis and results.

### 4.1 The Population and the Test

Grammar is a form of communication whereby students express their ideas and feelings by the rules. Teaching grammar is an important part of learning English, as students have to express what they want carefully and correctly. After a considerable period of learning the rules of Grammar, they are supposed to express themselves well, but teachers are usually shocked by terrible errors.

The following samples have been chosen to clarify the main

areas where students err more. This test is given to 30 third intermediate students at Al-Waqia secondary school. The test uses two levels (Recognition Level and Production level). Each level contains 10 questions. The students have to answer the whole question.

#### 4.2 The research takes the following steps

1. The research shared a test that included questions for 30 students.
2. The students are asked to answer two levels of questions (Recognition level and production level). Each level has 10 points.
3. The results are analyzed to find the problems behind these errors and determine the solution.

Several lexical errors are made by students, like the following, which show how students have chosen the incorrect use of tense. Note the following:

1. Do you listen to me now?
2. This time, I try to tell you the truth.

#### 4.3 Identifying and Analyzing Students' Errors

Results show that the major grammatical errors are mainly in the following categories: tenses, plurality, articles, verb form, pronouns, conjunction, prepositions, word order, adverbs, adjectives, negative, and missing verbs. A total number of 217 grammatical errors are faced by students in Iraq intermediate schools. In this paper, identifying and analyzing students' errors has revealed that most of them fall within the syntactic level of analysis. Students tend to delete certain important elements, add other unnecessary ones, choose some incorrect elements, or use the wrong word order. This study aims to help students avoid making them in the future.

**4.3.1 In the tense category**, 30 students made the error of incorrectly using verbs in creating sentences, as shown in the examples below:

- Do you listen to me now?
- You were playing cards.
- This time, I try to tell you the truth.
- For example, number 1 has added (ed) to the verb(listen). We should add *in* because we have the word *now* at the end of the sentence. The word now refers to the present continuous. The sentence should be (Are you listening to me now).

Example number 2 shows the error of mixing two incorrect verbs. *You were playing cards* instead of *You were playing cards*. Here, we have past continuous because we have been, and after was, the verb should follow by ing.

Example number 3 shows the error of using the incorrect verb with the subject. *This time, I try to tell you the truth*. We should not add S to the verb if we have the pronoun I. This time, *I try to tell you the truth*.

This finding shows that intermediate students, even if they have a good level of grammar, still have problems with tenses.

Plurality errors, 28 students who make the errors. The students have a problem putting plural inflection in plural nouns, as shown in the examples below.

- I don't have many friends.
- She has a lot of fish.
- The students fail to recognize the plural form of the object of the sentence. The students do not understand the rule of plural inflection. They should write friends

instead of friend and fish instead of fishes.

Another error category in the data is prepositions, with 27 students making the same errors. The most common errors are errors in choosing an appropriate preposition, as shown in the examples below:

- Set the dishes on the table.
- I will visit you on Wednesday.

Some learners have difficulties using prepositions simply because there are no rules or guidelines. They should say on the table instead of in the table and on Wednesday instead of Wednesday. This is the problem here.

Article 25 students make the errors. To use an article correctly, the students must be able to differentiate between definite, indefinite, and even no articles. Failure to differentiate them will result in the errors as the following:

- Yesterday, I bought a dress and a skirt. The skirt was very cheap.
- That is an excellent pencil.

The skirt was cheap because we had mentioned it twice, and it was excellent instead of excellent. Because we have e (vowel letter).

In conjunction, 22 students make the errors. Students don't know which conjunction is appropriate to use as the following:

- School is starting, but I need to buy new shoes.
- Grandma makes tasty food, but tasty snacks.

They should say so I need to buy instead of but and tasty snacks instead of tasty snacks.

**Missing verb:** 19 students made the errors. Students here don't know that after 'He,' we should use the verb is as shown in the examples below:

- I study English because it is beautiful.
- He is a good driver

In word order, 16 students make errors. English has the default word order, which is "subject" + "verb" + "object" or "complement". However, such word order in written English sentences is incorrect because the subject must always come before the verb, as shown in the examples below:

- Some were their flats
- Her homework is to her.

Pronouns, 15 students make the errors. Students can't recognize where we should use the pronoun. For example, they use the and you in the object. This is incorrect because we should say she gave it to him, and I will visit you.

- She gave him some money.
- I will visit you.

Negation, 13 students make the errors. Students can't recognize where they should use doesn't and don't in the sentence, as shown in the examples below:

- I don't go to the swimming pool.
- She doesn't write her homework.

Adverbs, 20 students make the errors as the following:

- I go to the school usually.
- She sings beautifully.

Students don't know how we should add adverbs in the sentence. I usually go instead of I go to the school, and she

sings beautifully instead of She sings beautifully.

**Table 1:** The table below demonstrates these errors in number according to their frequency.

No.	Type of Error	Example	Frequently
1.	Tense	My brother drank a glass of milk 4 hours ago	30
2.	Plurality	She has a lot of fishes	28
3.	Articles	That is an excellent pencil	25
4.	Pronouns	She gave him some money	15
5.	Conjunction	Grandma makes tasty food but tasty snacks	22
6.	Preposition	I will visit you on Wednesday	27
7.	Word Order	Some were their flats	16
8.	Adverbs	She sings beautiful	12
9.	Negation	I don't go to the swimming pool	13
10.	Missing Verb	I study English because it is beautiful	19

Frequency of Grammatical Error

## 5. Findings and recommendations

The findings above might affect language learners' pronunciation or writing. Students with high levels of English Grammar still have problems and difficulties in some categories of grammatical errors. A description and examination of the participants' production indicate that even though they have a high level of Grammar, they still have problems with Grammar.

Although they have been taught about it before, they still make errors when making grammatically correct or pronouncing sentences. It could be because the teachers here don't choose an appropriate way to teach the students grammar. They just teach a lot of Grammar, and they don't know if the students can use these rules in their daily lives or writing. Grammar is important because it makes our speech comprehensible and understandable, so we must know how to teach it. When we ask students to make an intelligible sentence, they keep making errors. We should teach Grammar depending on the circumstances or the learners' aims instead of just teaching Grammar.

Moreover, the basic solution is that Grammar shouldn't be taught alone. It should teach by context, for example, through reading and writing. We can link the study of Grammar with reading or writing instead of giving them isolated Grammar. For example, the teacher might ask the students to discuss their feelings and responses to the written text, then go back to the text to discover why the grammatical patterns make them feel like this.

The students will not forget the sentence pattern when they follow this method because they will not forget what they have discussed. When we just teach isolated rules, they will forget everything. They memorize the rules, so they will forget everything. Most of the teachers don't know how to teach Grammar. They depend on the traditional approach or Grammar Translation Method (GTM).

## 6. Conclusion

This research reveals that grammar is very important, and teachers should select the most useful method for students. Grammar is so important in writing, reading, and many other aspects of language. We can't neglect Grammar because, in this way, we can't write a comprehensible sentence. We have many teachers who say that we should neglect Grammar and others who teach a lot of Grammar. Our speech would be incomprehensible and unacceptable without grammar. Teachers should choose the method according to students' needs or the circumstances.

We have many teachers who don't know how to teach grammar correctly. A successful teacher who chooses the way according to the circumstances. It is wrong to memorize the rules without understanding what they are. There are many ways or methods (Grammar Translation Method, Total Physical Response, Audio-lingual Method, and Communicative language learning). Each one of them has its own principles. We have a method that neglects Grammar, another method that depends on only rules, and another that teaches Grammar through repetition. The role of the teacher is to choose a successful method and to teach the students. The best method or way to teach grammar is to depend on the circumstances or the learners' aim instead of just teaching grammar. We can also teach Grammar according to the context. It makes a connection between the grammatical patterns and the meaning of the text.

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## Appendix

### The test used in the survey of this study

#### Recognition Level

1. My brother ..... a glass of milk 4 hours ago. (drink)
2. , drank, drunk).
3. Do you listen to me now? (Correct the sentence).
4. I don't have many friends. (Find the mistake and correct it).
5. I will visit you (on) Wednesday. (choose one).
6. That is .....Excellent pencil. (an, a, the).
7. She gave me some money. (Correct the sentence).
8. This time, I tried to tell you the truth. (Find the mistake and correct it).
9. Grandma makes tasty food .....tasty snacks. (but, and, or).
10. She sings ..... (Beautiful, beautifully).
11. I study English because it is beautiful. (correct the sentence).

#### Production Level

- Were some there flats. (Rearrange the words to make a sentence).
- Writes her homework. (Make the sentence question).
- Use " a lot of "in a sentence.
- Set the dishes .....the table. (Fill in the blank with a suitable preposition).
- Use " usually " in a sentence.