

# Teachers' Perceptions of Grammar Teaching in EFL Classrooms in Southern Taiwan

廖津加<sup>1</sup> 潘怡靜<sup>2</sup> 潘怡君<sup>3</sup>

## 摘要

在台灣以英語為外國語言的環境中，語法被視為學習語言的重要基礎。在教學中，經常採用演繹及歸納的語法教學，以提升學生在語法方面的學習表現。由於這兩種方法對學習者在學習效率上的影響，長期以來一直是具爭議性的議題。因此，本研究目的在於探討(a)教師對語法教學的看法；(b)歸納及演繹語法教學的優勢和劣勢；(c)教師在語法教學中所面臨的困難。34位南台灣國中英文老師參與本研究，以28項為主軸的問卷作為調查工具，探討教師們對於上述問題的看法。主要的研究結果如下：(a)教師們表示，明確的語法教學對掌握英語是重要的；(b)教師們以其豐富的知識和技巧對於如何教授語法充滿信心；(c)教師們贊成演繹語法教學；(d)教師們認為學生應該多加練習句型結構以提高語法精確度；(e)在語法結構教學中，使用語言學術語是必要的，然而學生卻很難理解；(f)糾正學生書面作業中的語法錯誤比糾正其口說所產生的語法錯誤來得容易。最後，根據研究結果提出教學及未來研究之建議。

**關鍵詞：**文法教學，歸納教學，演繹教學，英語學習情境

<sup>1</sup> 高雄市杉林國民中學教師

<sup>2</sup> 屏東大學應英系副教授

<sup>3</sup> 屏東大學國貿系副教授(email:vacation@mail.nptu.edu.tw)

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Chin-Chia Liao<sup>1</sup> Yi-Ching Pan<sup>2</sup> Yi-Chun Pan<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

In the Taiwan EFL (English as a foreign language) context, grammar is seen as an important foundation for learning the language. Deductive and inductive grammar teaching methods are often used in class to facilitate students' grammar learning performance. Both methods have long been a controversial issue due to their efficiency impact upon learners. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate (a) teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching; (b) the advantages and disadvantages of inductive and deductive grammar teaching; and (c) the difficulties teachers face when teaching grammar. Thirty-four high school English teachers in southern Taiwan took part in this study, and we utilized a 28-item questionnaire as the instrument to explore their perceptions in regards to the aforementioned issues. The major findings are as follows: (a) teachers expressed the importance of explicit grammar teaching for mastering English; (b) teachers had confidence in how to teach grammar with their abundant knowledge and skills; (c) teachers were in favor of deductive grammar teaching; (d) teachers claimed that students should practice more sentence structures so that they could improve their grammatical accuracy; (e) using metalanguage in teaching grammatical structures is necessary, but it is hard for students to understand; and (f) identifying all grammatical errors in students' written work is easier than finding errors in students' oral work. Lastly, pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research are provided in this study.

**Keywords:** grammar teaching, inductive teaching, deductive teaching, EFL context

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<sup>1</sup> English Remedial Teaching Teacher, Kaohsiung Municipal Shanlin Junior High School

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, National Pingtung University

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, National Pingtung University (email: vacation@mail.nptu.edu.tw)

## Introduction

Grammar is seen as an important component of learning English (Canale & Swain, 1980), and in Taiwan, traditional grammar teaching in high schools has been widely applied by teachers. Ezzi (2012) pointed out that formal grammatical instructions are necessary in order to master the accuracy of grammar. This has brought about a rejuvenation of grammar teaching, which has clearly become the focal point of foreign language teaching. Ellis (2001) previously claimed that the knowledge of explicit grammar instruction simply enables learners to describe a rule of grammar, but rarely facilitates them to apply grammar rules for the use of communication. In general, in the field of foreign language teaching, how to present grammar appropriately in the EFL classrooms has always been a controversial issue for both practitioners and researchers (Çakır & Kafa, 2013, p.39). In order to probe further into efficient grammar teaching, this study focuses on three aspects: (a) high school teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching, (b) the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching, and (c) the difficulties high school teachers face when teaching grammar.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The two main approaches to grammar instructions include deductive and inductive teaching. However, it has not yet been decided which teaching method is more effective. Rahman and Rashid (2017) stated that the constant debate over whether to use explicit or implicit grammar teaching has caused a dilemma for educators.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to probe for insights into educators' beliefs towards grammar teaching. The three research questions explored in this study are as follows.

- (1) What are high school teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching?
- (2) What are high school teachers' perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching?
- (3) What are the difficulties high school teachers face when teaching grammar?

## Literature Review

This section contains three parts: (a) teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching, (b) the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching, and (c) the difficulties teachers face when teaching grammar. By reviewing the aforementioned parts, this study aims to take these perspectives so as to establish a theoretical basis of this study.

2.1 Teachers' Perceptions of Grammar Teaching Ezzi (2012) detected the perceptions

of on-the-job English teachers and their actual practices in the class regarding grammar teaching. That study analyzed a total of 80 on-the-job teachers, with 35 teachers in Grades 7-9 of primary schools and 45 teachers in Grades 10-12 of secondary schools in the three main districts under the governorate of Hodeidah, a seaport in Yemen. Only 5 teachers had experience of teaching English below 5 years, whereas the others all had been teaching for many years.

Thu (2009) explored teachers' views on grammar teaching in the ESL context of the U.S.A. The research probed present ESL teachers' views toward grammar teaching overall. The subjects in this study were 11 ESL teachers at an English language school in San Diego, California. As for gender, 5 of the subjects were females and 6 were males. Their ages ranged from 26 to 69. According to both researchers, the participants had similar views on grammar teaching. Their views are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

A Comparison of Ezzi's and Thu's Perceptions of Grammar Teaching

Ezzi (2012)	Thu (2009)
Grammar is best learnt formally.	Teachers broadly favored teaching grammar explicitly.
Grammar can be taught incidentally.	Teachers preferred grammar in real-life communication.
Correcting all oral errors that students make might hinder their communication and reduce their production of new sentences.	When students make mistakes while talking, teachers should not stop their students.

## 2.2 The Advantages and Disadvantages of Deductive and Inductive Grammar Teaching

Widodo (2006) pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching, and we present them in Table 2.

Table 2

A Comparison of the Advantages and Disadvantages of Deductive and Inductive Grammar Teaching of Widodo

Method	Deductive Method	Inductive Method
	Instructors were given rules directly, so that they could shorten the time of instruction.	Learners were trained to find the rules themselves.
	The grammar form can be more simply and clearly explained.	It raised learners' cognitive competence in the learning process.
Advantages	Examples were immediately given to learners.	Learners got more opportunities to practice structures via their cooperation.
	It could be more appropriate to adult learners.	Learners having pattern-recognition and problem-solving abilities favored the challenge
	It met the expectations of analytical learners.	Learners were more active in the learning process.
	Younger learners might feel bored.	This approach was time-consuming.
Disadvantages	Young learners were unable to understand the grammar terminology given.	Learners might be frustrated if they preferred simply to passively accept the rules taught.
	It reduced learners' participation and interaction.	Teachers had to focus more intensely on their lesson plans.
	The demonstration of grammar rules was unmemorable versus other forms of presentation.	Learners were easy to get the wrong grammatical rule.
	Learners might misunderstand that learning the target language was simply learning the rules.	Teachers had to design materials systematically.

### 2.3 The Difficulties Teachers Face when Teaching Grammar

Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) explored teachers' perceptions toward the difficulties they faced when teaching grammar and what their students faced when learning it. Their study aimed to figure out significant differences in teachers' perceptions of difficulties concerning gender, teaching experience, qualification, and

the grade they taught at school. The subjects in their study were 90 teachers chosen from Oman. The instrument was the questionnaire, which was made up of 20 statements employed by Burgess and Etherington (2002). The important findings are as follows: (a) teachers viewed the process of transferring one kind of knowledge into another as difficult for the majority of the students; (b) teachers discovered that although the students found metalanguage useful, they considered it difficult to employ; (c) teachers experienced more difficulties in correcting the students' oral communication than their written work.

## 2.4 Summary

To sum up, this section reviews teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching and explores the difficulties teachers face when teaching grammar. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching are also probed in this study. In general, the aforementioned studies discussed one of the three views individually, but few of them focused on the three topics at the same time in one study. In order to bridge the research gap, this study explores the three topics for a comprehensive picture of grammar teaching, thus facilitating grammar teaching in the EFL context.

## Methodology

To explore the 3 research questions, a questionnaire was used as the instrument to collect teachers' perceptions in regard to their grammar awareness and grammar teaching. It was made up of quantitative data. The researcher created 28 close-ended items that required teachers to respond to the statements on a five-point Likert-type attitude scale ranging from 5 for strongly agree to 1 for strongly disagree in order to collect data about teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching.

### 3.1 Participants

The participants in the study were a total of 34 on-the-job English teachers from language schools and high schools in southern Taiwan. Among them, 26 participants were females, and 8 participants were males.

### 3.2 Instruments

The instrument of the study included one questionnaire booklet, presented below: Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire booklet contains two parts. First, teachers' demographic data were composed of gender, and three questions went as follows. (a) How long have you taught English? (b) What school or cram school are you serving now? (c) What grade of students are you teaching? Second, a 28-item questionnaire was developed to collect the intended data. All the items were adapted from the questionnaires in the studies of Ezzi (2012, p.183) and Thu (2009, pp.40-41). The five-point Likert scale

(strongly agree=5, agree=4, unsure=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1) was used to solicit teachers' perceptions of English grammar teaching. In addition, these items were grouped into three categories to meet the structural requirements of the research questions: (a) teachers' perceptions in grammar teaching (statements 1 to 10); (b) the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching (statements 11 to 19); and (c) the difficulties teachers face when teaching grammar (statements 20 to 28). Samples of the three types of teachers' perceptions of English grammar teaching are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Sample Items for the Three Types of Teachers' Perceptions of English Grammar Teaching

(Ezzi, 2012, p.183 & Thu, 2009, pp.40-41)

Types	Teachers' perceptions of English grammar teaching
Teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching.	'As an English teacher, I have been well prepared to teach grammar 'Teaching English grammar is important for teaching English. 'Explicit teaching of grammatical rules is important for the mastery of English.
The advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching	'Grammar is best taught incidentally. 'Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how separate structures work. 'The main role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the new grammar rule.
The difficulties teachers face when teaching grammar.	'It is necessary to use metalanguage when teaching students grammar, but it's hard for students to understand. 'It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work. 'Most students have difficulty learning English grammar. They cannot use the grammar they have learned to communicate with each other.

This survey utilized Cronbach's alpha coefficient to detect the reliability of the questionnaire in regard to teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching. The internal-

consistency reliability of the whole questionnaire produced a standard Cronbach of .88. For each category and value listed in Table 4, teachers' perceptions were .87 (items 1 to 10), the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive methods were .72 (items 11 to 19), and the difficulties teachers faced were .72 (items 20 to 28). These statistics suggest that the questionnaires were reliable for investigating teachers' perceptions in grammar teaching.

Table 4  
Reliabilities of the Questionnaire

Category	Item	Cronbach's Value	Alpha
Teachers' perceptions	1-10	.87	
The advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive methods	11-19	.72	
The difficulties teachers face	20-28	.72	
All the categories	1-28	.88	

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

A questionnaire was distributed to collect the data. The study recruited 34 on-the-job English teachers from language schools and high schools in southern Taiwan. Before the survey questionnaire was administered, the main researcher contacted the manager of each language school to obtain consent. During the survey procedure, all the teachers participating in the research were informed of the study's purpose and the appropriate way to fill out the questionnaire. In addition, they were ensured that the responses would be kept secret in order to feel at ease when completing the questionnaire. When the questionnaires were collected, the main researcher immediately checked if the teachers had given a tick-mark for each item. Finally, a set of special stationery was given to each participant as a reward to appreciate their help in the study. The whole survey procedure took about 20 minutes to complete for each teacher. In addition, the main researcher also collected the questionnaires from the high school teachers in person. Table 5 outlines the data collection procedures.

Table 5  
Data Collection Procedures

Step Time	Data Collection
1	Recruit on-the-job English teachers from language schools in southern Taiwan.
2	Contact the manager of the language schools to obtain consent.
3	Conduct a survey study with each teacher.
3.1	Tell about the purpose of the study. 5 minutes
3.2	Administer the questionnaire booklets 20
3.3	Collect the questionnaire booklets on the spot and check for any missing items. 10 minutes

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The main quantitative technique was employed for the purpose of analyzing the data. The quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data involved descriptive statistics to compute the effect of teachers' perceptions of English grammar teaching. Furthermore, the data were filtered into three categories. If the mean scores of an item were over 3, then it was inferred that the participants generally agreed with the item. On the contrary, if the mean scores were below 3, it was concluded that the teachers generally disagreed with the item.

## Results and Discussions

We present the major findings to the three research questions and the discussions below:

### Research Question 1:

#### What are high school English teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching?

According to Table 6, the highest means were found in the items of (1) As an English teacher, I have been well prepared to teach grammar ( $M=4.35$ ) and (2) Teaching English grammar is important in teaching English ( $M=4.26$ ). The lowest means were detected in the item of (1) It is challenging for me to teach English grammar ( $M=3.71$ ) and (2) Explicit/Direct teaching of grammatical rules is important for the mastery of English ( $M = 3.91$ ). (See Table 6.)

Table 6  
High School English Teachers' Perceptions in Grammar Teaching  
(Ezzi, 2012, p.183 & Thu, 2009, pp.40-41)

Item Description	M	SD	Rank
1. As an English teacher, I have well prepared to teach grammar.	4.35	.646	1
2. Teaching English grammar is important in teaching English.	4.26	.710	2
3. I have required knowledge and skills to teach English grammar.	4.26	.864	2
4. Students rarely become error-free because English grammar is very complex.	4.18	.716	4
5. I am confident in teaching English grammar.	4.15	.821	5
6. Grammar should be the main component of a language teaching course.	4.06	.814	6
7. Grammar should be taught to all levels of students (i.e. beginner, intermediate, and advanced).	4.03	.870	7
8. It is important to focus on grammar in teaching English courses.	3.97	.834	8
9. Explicit/Direct teaching of grammatical rules is important for the mastery of English.	3.91	.900	9
10. It is challenging for me to teach English grammar.	3.71	.970	10

Most of the teachers considered that they had well prepared to teach grammar (M=4.35). Indeed, a good teacher should make lesson plans in advance to help students to learn grammar better. In addition, teachers thought highly of the importance of grammar teaching (M=4.26). Meanwhile, teachers contended that explicit teaching of grammatical rules was important for the mastery of English (M=3.91). This was consistent with the results studied by Ezzi (2012). It showed that grammar was best learned formally in the classroom setting. Definitely, in the EFL contexts, it is necessary for teachers to appropriately explain grammatical rules to their students. A possible reason for this is that students who are unfamiliar with

the foreign language tend to develop a sense of dependence and anxiety when learning grammar.

### Research Question 2:

#### What are high school teachers' perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching?

According to Table 7, the highest means were found in the items of (1) Teachers should involve students in practicing more grammar structures in the major part of a grammar lesson (M=4.09) and (2) Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how separate structures work (M=4.06). The lowest mean was detected in the item of (1) Students can learn English well without teaching grammar (M=3.15). (See Table 7.)

Table 7

Deductive and Inductive Grammar Teaching (Ezzi, 2012, p.183)

Item Description	M	SD	Rank
11. Teachers should involve students in practicing more grammar structures in the major part of a grammar lesson.	4.09	.621	1
12. Students can improve their grammatical accuracy through regular practice of structures.	4.06	.776	2
13. Teachers should begin a grammar lesson by explaining how separate structures work.	4.06	.886	2
14. Drills are very helpful to learn English grammar.	3.91	.996	4
15. Grammar is best learned naturally through trying to communicate.	3.82	1.114	5
16. Grammar is best taught incidentally.	3.79	.978	6
17. The main role of the teacher in a grammar lesson is to explain the new grammar rule.	3.74	.898	7
18. Practice of structures must always be within a full communicative context.	3.68	1.007	8
19. Students can learn English well without teaching grammar.	3.15	1.105	9

According to these results, teachers thought that students should practice more sentence structures ( $M=4.09$ ). Chiang (2011) stated that the accuracy of the sentence structures was based on the mastery of grammar. Hence, practicing more can obviously help students create a higher number of correct sentences. Also, teachers believed that they should begin a grammar lesson by explaining explicit structures ( $M=4.06$ ). In the result of Widodo's (2006) study, it indicated that directly giving students structures could shorten the time of instruction, and the form could be more clearly explained. In general, when students encounter a new grammar structure, most of them are always under a lot of stress. If teachers can give students appropriate structure guidance, teachers can not only conduct their courses smoothly but also reduce students' learning anxiety and improve their language ability. In contrast, teachers' attitude toward the concept that students could learn English well without teaching grammar ( $M=3.15$ ) was moderate. This result was consistent with the results of Widodo's (2006) study in which learners were more likely to get wrong grammatical rules via inductive grammar teaching. In terms of grammar teaching, most teachers still consider explicit teaching to be necessary.

### Research Question 3:

#### What are the difficulties high school teachers face when teaching grammar?

According to Table 8, the highest means were found in the items of (1) It is necessary to use metalanguage when teaching students grammar, but it's hard for students to understand ( $M=4.18$ ) and (2) It is easier to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work than those in students' oral work ( $M=4.06$ ). The lowest mean was detected in the item of (1) Many students make grammar mistakes because of their native language ( $M=3.38$ ). (See Table 8.)

Table 8

The Difficulties High School English Teachers Faced in Grammar Teaching (Thu, 2009, pp.40-41)

Item Description	M	SD	Rank
20. It is necessary to use metalanguage (technical or grammatical terms such as nouns, verbs, preposition, relative clauses, subjunctive, objects, etc.) when teaching students grammar, but it's hard for students to understand.	4.18	.673	1
21. It is easier to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work than those in students' oral work.	4.06	.886	2

22. Most students have difficulty learning English grammar. They can't use the grammar they have learned to communicate with each other.	3.76	.890	3
23. Metalanguage should be introduced and used in grammar class for learners of all proficiency levels so that grammar lessons can be taught and learned more quickly.	3.71	.906	4
24. It is important to correct all grammatical errors in students' oral work.	3.71	.938	4
25. Metalanguage (terms used to describe language such as pronouns, prepositions, or relative clauses) should only be used with advanced English language learners.	3.56	1.021	6
26. Students' native languages significantly influence their ability to learn English grammar.	3.56	1.078	6
27. Many students learn grammar well because their native language grammar is similar to that of English.	3.47	1.134	8
28. Many students make grammar mistakes because of their native language.	3.38	1.101	9

In the study, the result showed that teachers agreed it was necessary to use metalanguage when teaching students grammar, but it was hard for them to understand ( $M=4.18$ ). This was consistent with the result of Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam's (2011) study in which students saw metalanguage as useful but difficult to use. It is no doubt that students need to memorize additional language terms while learning sentence structures. For example, different parts of speech belong to different positions in a sentence pattern. If students have no concept of metalanguage, it is definitely hard for them to master grammar. Furthermore, teachers thought it was easier to identify all grammatical errors in students' written work than those in students' oral work ( $M=4.06$ ). In Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam's (2011) study, the result showed teachers experienced more difficulties in correcting students' oral communication than written work. The reason might be that students' communication will be interrupted during the process of correction. On the contrary, teachers' belief that many students made mistakes because of their native language ( $M=3.38$ ) was moderate. The result was not consistent with Thu's (2009) study. In Thu's study, ESL teachers believed that students' mother tongue had a significant impact on their ability to learn English grammar.

## Conclusions

The purpose of the study is to explore teachers' perceptions of English grammar teaching. There are three parts in this section. Based on the results, first, it presents the major findings of the data with regard to high school teachers' perceptions of grammar teaching. Second, some pedagogical implications for grammar teaching are provided in this section. Finally, limitations and some suggestions for future research are presented.

### 5.1 Summary of major findings

Here are the six major findings in regard to three aspects: (a) teachers' perceptions in grammar teaching, (b) the advantages and disadvantages of deductive and inductive grammar teaching, and (c) the difficulties teachers faced in grammar teaching. The major findings included (1) teachers expressed the importance of explicit grammar teaching for mastering English; (2) teachers had confidence in how to teach grammar with their abundant knowledge and skills; (3) teachers were in favor of deductive grammar teaching; (4) teachers claimed that students should practice more sentence structures so that they could improve their grammatical accuracy; (5) using metalanguage in teaching grammatical structures was necessary, but it was hard for students to understand; and (6) identifying all grammatical errors in students' written work was easier than in students' oral work.

### 5.2 Pedagogical implications

Grammatical competence is a very essential component of effective language learning (Canale & Swain, 1980), and how to teach grammar in the EFL classroom has become a hot topic that is a worthwhile investigation. In this study, when teaching grammar, teachers tended to maintain a neutral attitude regarding the inductive teaching method. Most teachers expressed that the explicit teaching approach was important to master grammar. Moreover, in the process of learning, it was often easy for students to make mistakes due to the complexity of grammar structures. As a result, in order to be familiar with the sentence structures, it was relatively essential for students to practice grammar rules regularly. In addition, using metalanguage in teaching grammar is necessary as well because it is easier for students to understand grammatical structures. Teachers are suggested to teach students the knowledge of technical or grammatical terms, such as nouns, verbs, objects, etc. Once students have the concept of metalanguage, their learning in grammar courses will be easier. Finally, when teaching the concept of metaanguage, it is believed that the appropriate use of native language in grammar instruction could assist learners to better understand grammatical rules and terminology and therefore help them to comprehend the structure of the target language more effectively

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(Atkinson, 1987; Cook, 1997, 2001; Husain, 1995, and Pan & Pan, 2010).

### 5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Here are two limitations and suggestions for future research. First, the majority of participants were females. Therefore, further research should recruit more males to achieve more comprehensive findings. Second, the scope of the study was limited to southern Taiwan. More participants should be recruited from different areas such as central or north Taiwan in order to contribute to the further development of research.

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