



## EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF ISOLATED AND INTEGRATED APPROACH IN HIGH SCHOOL

By

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### Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of high school EFL students regarding isolated and integrated approaches to grammar teaching in Depok, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research investigates how students view and evaluate the effectiveness of these approaches in grammar instruction. Data was collected through questionnaires completed by 113 students. The results show a strong preference for the integrated approach, with 98.3% of students favoring grammar instruction during communicative activities. Although there were some inconsistencies in student preferences, students recognized the benefits of integrating grammar with communicative tasks. However, challenges such as students' tendency to forget grammar rules and difficulties in implementation were noted. This study emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach, combining integrated grammar instruction with structured practice to optimize learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** EFL students, integrated approach, isolated approach, perception

### Abstrak:

Studi ini meneliti persepsi siswa EFL (English as a Foreign Language) sekolah menengah atas mengenai pendekatan pengajaran tata bahasa yang terisolasi dan terintegrasi di Depok, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana siswa memandang dan mengevaluasi efektivitas pendekatan-pendekatan tersebut dalam pengajaran tata bahasa. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang diisi oleh 113 siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan preferensi yang kuat terhadap pendekatan terintegrasi, dengan 98,3% siswa memilih pengajaran tata bahasa selama aktivitas komunikatif dan 100%. Namun, tantangan seperti kecenderungan siswa untuk lupa aturan tata bahasa dan kesulitan dalam penerapan juga dicatat. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan yang seimbang, menggabungkan pengajaran tata bahasa terintegrasi dengan latihan terstruktur untuk mengoptimalkan hasil belajar.

**Kata Kunci:** Siswa EFL, pendekatan terintegrasi, pendekatan terisolasi Persepsi.

## INTRODUCTION

Two pedagogical approaches are often used to teach English: integrative (integrated) and isolated (separated). Language teaching approaches are called Form-Focused Instruction

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(Spada & Lightbown, 2008) or abbreviated as FFI. Learning English as a second or foreign language requires more clues (Gass et al., 2020). One issue often debated is whether grammar instruction is better provided separately or integratively as part of teaching language skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. Isolated and integrated approaches have been widely used to draw students' attention to language forms. In the isolated approach, students should focus on meaning in the ongoing content of communicative-based instruction, and grammar should be taught explicitly. In contrast, grammar should be taught implicitly in the integrated approach (Valeo & Spada, 2016). These approaches are essential because views on the nature of language greatly influence language teaching, how language is taught and learned, and the learning environment and the motivation provided to students (Mwakapina, 2021).

Research by Üstünbaş (2016) in China found that teachers and students prefer the integrated approach in grammar teaching, although both are considered important. Although language proficiency was insignificant in students' choice, differences emerged between A2 and B2 levels. This study is also in line with the study by Mansouri dkk. (2019), which investigated students' and teachers' beliefs regarding two types of isolated and integrated approaches. Teachers favored the integrated approach, while students showed a more substantial interest in the isolated approach.

This research is of interest to readers because the topic of isolated or integrated grammar is a growing issue in teaching English as a Foreign Language. Previous research trends indicate a growing interest in the two approaches, with various studies having been conducted. However, while much research has been conducted, some aspects remain largely unexplored. Most previous research focuses on the teacher's perspective, while students' perspectives have received minimal attention. This suggests that there are gaps in the existing literatures. Some scholars believe that special attention to grammar is also necessary in specific contexts (Ellis, 2016). Isolated teaching is still widely practiced in Indonesia, where students are often taught in larger classrooms. Research by Li and Xu (2023) and Xu and Li (2022) explored the beliefs and practices of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The findings showed a general tendency of teachers to choose an isolated approach with emphasis on form and explicit teaching, with variations influenced by actors such as teaching experience and curriculum standards.

One of the studies conducted by Murtisari et al. (2020) in Indonesia focused on teachers' beliefs regarding isolated and integrated grammar teaching methods. The findings from Murtisari et al. (2020) showed variations in beliefs among the teachers, with the majority seeing the two as complementary. Teachers tend to favor the integrated approach, while isolated grammar is considered effective in helping students understand grammatical forms.

Hidayatulloh and Margana's (2022) research in Indonesia explored teachers' and prospective teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching. The findings show a uniform view on the importance of grammar elements, although there are differences of opinion in the teaching process. Both teachers and pre-service teachers supported an integrated approach to grammar teaching. Overall, this series of studies highlighted the complexity of teachers' and pre-service teachers' beliefs regarding grammar teaching in EFL contexts. Such differences are influenced by individual factors such as personality traits, teaching experience, and language proficiency level. The research contributes to understanding the dynamics of grammar teaching and learning in diverse EFL contexts.

According to Akmal et al. (2020), the integrated approach is considered adequate because it involves the development of all language skills simultaneously with various activities to place students in real communication situations. The study aimed to determine how teachers perceive problems and how they deal with them when implementing the integrated approach in their schools. The results showed that most teachers (of 6) saw the integrated approach favorably, but teachers also faced problems with it. In addition, other problems include students' poor vocabulary, poor school environment and facilities, and teachers' difficulties in implementing the integrated skills approach in the classroom.

In brief, Indonesian research on grammar teaching in EFL contexts shows variations in teacher beliefs. The findings highlight that most teachers prefer an integrated approach, while isolated grammar effectively understands grammatical forms. A uniformity of views on the importance of grammatical elements was seen, although there were differences of opinion in the teaching process. Individual factors such as personality traits, teaching experience, and language proficiency level influence these differences in beliefs.

The results of the previous research showed that the research only looked at the teacher's perspective and recommended further research by considering the student's perspective. According to the researcher and previous research recommendations, students' perspectives can provide a more comprehensive picture of integrated and isolated approaches. Mardhatillah and Suharyadi (2023) stated that teachers must know individual needs, interests, skills, English proficiency levels, and students' preferred learning approaches. In addition, students' perspectives help teachers recognize the needs, challenges, and problems that students face when learning. By understanding this, teachers can choose learning approaches that are more effective and suited to students' individual needs. This study reviewed students' perspectives on learning with integrated or isolated approaches as input that teachers can consider when teaching.

A preliminary study shows that integrated and isolated grammar teaching has been implemented, but students have difficulty understanding the grammar part when learning the four skills. Grades X and XI in this school implement teaching with an integrated approach, and to be beaten after grade XII, the students will be taught with an isolated and integrated approach. This allows the grade XII students to experience learning and being taught with two different approaches. The observation shows that students have difficulty understanding English grammar, especially when learning the four skills. They consider grammar to be a tricky part to understand. A review of the grammar teaching approach is needed to improve students' grammar comprehension.

Both previous and preliminary studies above are the basis for the selection of this research topic, which is to gain an understanding of how students and teachers perceive and assess isolated or integrated grammar teaching approaches in secondary schools, evaluating students' understanding of the two approaches, find out teachers' beliefs about how practical the two approaches are in grammar learning at this level, and find out students' preferences and reactions to grammar teaching through the following questions. Upon all arguments and rationale, this study implies contribution of the researchers to the knowledge in the framework of publication in Industrial revolution 4.0 or above (Turmudi, 2020) and thus the research questions is **“what do high school EFL students perceive as isolated and integrated grammar learning?”**

## METHOD

### *Design*

This research used a qualitative descriptive research method since it provides a deep and complex understanding of phenomena through narrative analysis, interpretation, and contextual description (Creswell, 2015). This research aims to identify students' views regarding isolated and integrated grammar learning because teachers' and students' perspectives are important to learn more about the needs of applied second or foreign language practice (Lightbown, 2008).

### *Participant*

This research was conducted at a private high school in Depok that implemented integrated and isolated learning approaches. The respondents were 113 learners who had studied English grammar using either an isolated or integrated approach. These students were all in the twelfth grade and purposively taken as samples.

### *Instrument*

Students were given a 24-question online questionnaire regarding their perspectives on learning grammar through isolation or integration. The questionnaires employed in Valeo and Spada's (2015) study were utilized to gather data. To do this, Spada and Lightbown's (2008) isolated or integrated approach 5-point Likert scale items were incorporated into the surveys. Learners' questionnaire had 24 items on integrated FFI (12 items) and isolated FFI (12 items), and it was given to the learners in Indonesian.

First, the questionnaires were examined to see if they were appropriate for the study's setting, considering the methods used in Valeo and Spada's (2015) investigation. The evaluation revealed that all of the topics were relevant. The questionnaires were created for the current study by following the adaption methods and assessing the findings of factor analyses and reliability assessments of the questionnaires provided by Valeo and Spada (2015). The learners' questionnaire was translated into Indonesian since it had to be in the learners' native language. Finally, the instrument resulted in a set of numeric data for further statistic calculation. However, it is limited to non-parametric statistics since the design is descriptive study.

**Data collection**

This study collected data through online questionnaires. Students were given an online questionnaire of 24 questions regarding their perspectives on learning grammar through isolated (isolated) or integrated (integrated) approaches. This questionnaire was adapted from Valeo and Spada's research (2016). Students were asked to express their opinions by selecting one of four options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The questionnaire was completed using the students' gadgets.

**Data analysis**

The data from the questionnaire was converted into a table showing the frequency of each item and the percentage of validity. The questionnaires filled out by the students were calculated to find out the percentage by descriptive analysis. The whole process of citing references employs offline automatic model called ‘Mendeley desktop’ to make the in-text citation and the reference list synchronic (Turmudi, 2020).

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

**Finding**

The current study tries to answer a question “What do high school EFL students perceive as isolated and integrated grammar learning?”

**Table 2. The result of the students' questionnaire (n=113)**

No.	Statements	Frequency	Agree %	Frequency	Disagree (%)
1.	<i>Grammar should be taught during communicative activities.</i>	111	98.3	2	1.8
2.	<i>I like to study grammar before I use it.</i>	105	93.0	8	7.1
3.	<i>I like learning grammar by communicating.</i>	106	94.3	7	6.2
4.	<i>I can learn grammar during reading or speaking activities.</i>	107	94.7	6	5.3
5.	<i>My grammar improves when I do communicative activities.</i>	99	92.1	14	8.0
6.	<i>I like activities that focus on grammar and communication at the same time.</i>	56	83.2	57	16.8
7.	<i>I find it helpful when the instructor teaches grammar while we read a text.</i>	103	91.2	10	9.0
8.	<i>I like the teacher correcting my mistakes while doing communicative activities.</i>	103	91.1	10	9.0
9.	<i>Doing grammar exercises is the best way to use English accurately.</i>	108	95.5	5	4.4
10.	<i>I like communicative activities that include grammar instruction.</i>	101	89.4	12	10.8

It shows the author assigned ten questions and divided the responses to the surveys from students into two categories: agree and disagree. The survey results strongly endorse the integration of grammar instruction within communicative activities, with an overwhelming 98.3% of students agreeing that grammar should be taught during these interactions. This data underscores a clear preference for contextualized grammar learning, where grammar is embedded within real-world language use rather than treated as an abstract set of rules. A significant portion of students (93.0%) also prefer studying grammar before applying it in practice, while 94.3% enjoy learning grammar through communicative exercises. Moreover, 94.7% believe they can effectively learn grammar during reading or speaking activities, and 92.1% report that their grammar improves through communicative practice.

The dual preference for both communicative activities and traditional grammar exercises is noteworthy. While students appreciate the dynamic and practical nature of learning grammar through communication, they also value a foundational understanding of grammatical rules before applying them. This is evidenced by the 95.5% who believe grammar exercises are essential for accurately using English. This dual approach suggests that a balanced instructional strategy—combining explicit grammar teaching with opportunities for practical application is most effective.

Instructors' role in providing grammar instruction during communicative activities is also highly valued. 91.2% of students find it helpful when instructors teach grammar while reading a text, and 91.1% appreciate teachers correcting their mistakes during communicative activities. These responses indicate that students recognize the importance of immediate, contextualized feedback in helping them apply grammatical rules correctly.

However, it is important to note that 16.8% of students do not favor activities that focus on grammar and communication simultaneously. This minority may prefer a more traditional approach where grammar and communication are taught separately or may find it challenging to focus on both aspects simultaneously. This highlights the need for differentiated instruction to accommodate learners' diverse preferences.

### ***Discussion***

The survey data provide compelling evidence in favor of integrating grammar instruction within communicative activities. The overwhelming consensus among students

(98.3%) that grammar should be taught in conjunction with communication reflects a growing understanding that language acquisition is most effective when grammar is learned in context. This supports the idea that engaging in verbal interactions naturally requires the use of appropriate grammatical structures, which helps students convey messages more clearly and effectively.

The preference for learning grammar through communication, as indicated by 94.3% of respondents, further emphasizes the value of practical language use. This finding aligns with research suggesting that students understand grammar better when they apply it in real-life situations. Students naturally integrate grammar into meaningful contexts by participating in dialogue, conversation, or discussion, enhancing their comprehension and retention of grammatical concepts.

Interestingly, while many students prefer learning grammar through communication, a significant portion (93.0%) also values studying grammar before practicing it. This highlights a nuanced understanding of grammar instruction, where students appreciate the benefits of explicit grammar teaching and communicative practice. This dual preference suggests that students see the value in a blended approach that combines the strengths of traditional grammar exercises with the benefits of contextualized learning. Navidinia et al. (2017) explored the relationship between students' personality traits and beliefs regarding isolated or integrated grammar teaching. The findings showed that personality traits such as extroversion, kindness, and openness to experience were positively associated with students' preference for the integrated approach. This means knowing the students before applying the approaches is essential.

The survey also reveals that students place high importance on grammar exercises, with 95.5% agreeing that these exercises are the best way to achieve grammatical accuracy. This indicates that while students enjoy communicative activities, they also recognize the need for structured practice to reinforce their understanding of grammar rules. This balanced view reflects an understanding that traditional exercises and communicative practice are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

In the context of grammar instruction, feedback from teachers is crucial. The high approval for teacher correction during communicative activities (91.1%) and grammar

instruction during text reading (91.2%) underscores the importance of immediate, contextualized feedback. This feedback helps students internalize grammatical rules and apply them correctly in future communication. However, the finding that 16.8% of students do not favor activities that combine grammar and communication suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be practical. Differentiated instruction, which caters to students' diverse preferences and learning styles, is essential. Some students may benefit more from a traditional, isolated approach to grammar instruction, while others may thrive in a more integrated, communicative learning environment. Ellis (2016) states that special attention to grammar is also necessary in specific learning contexts. This shows that grammar practice is something that teachers should pay attention to.

The preferences expressed by students in this survey align closely with recent trends in language teaching research from 2020 to 2024. There has been a growing emphasis on integrating grammar instruction within communicative activities, supported by research demonstrating that this approach promotes fluency and accuracy in language learning. Grammar instruction within communicative activities emphasizes using tasks that require meaningful communication, within which grammar instruction is naturally embedded. Research by Ellis (2016) suggests that grammar should be taught as part of communicative tasks rather than in isolation, as this leads to better retention and application of grammatical knowledge. The strong student preference for learning grammar through communication and during reading or speaking activities aligns well with this research, suggesting that grammar instruction within communicative activities could effectively meet these needs.

In addition, focus-on-form (FonF) approaches have gained traction to balance the need for explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice. According to Azizpour and Alavinia (2021), FonF involves drawing students' attention to grammatical forms in meaningful communication. This approach is effective in helping students notice and correct their errors, leading to improved grammatical accuracy. The high percentage of students who value teacher corrections during communicative activities suggests that FonF could be a particularly effective strategy for language instructors.

Moreover, the data suggests that while communicative activities are highly valued, traditional grammar exercises remain essential for achieving accuracy. This is supported by

recent research indicating that explicit grammar instruction is a crucial component of language learning, particularly for achieving high levels of accuracy. A study by Sh Badereddeen (2022) found that students who received explicit grammar instruction and communicative practice outperformed those who only engaged in communicative activities. This supports the idea that a blended approach will likely be the most effective, combining explicit instruction with communicative tasks

Recent studies on corrective feedback also support the appreciation for instructor feedback during communicative activities. Research by Nikouee (2021) has shown that immediate, contextualized feedback during communicative tasks helps students internalize grammatical rules more effectively. This aligns with the student preference for teacher correction during communicative activities, suggesting that instructors should actively provide real-time feedback to support grammar learning.

Finally, the fact that a significant minority of students prefer not to combine grammar and communication in the same activities highlights the need for differentiated instruction. Recent research by Diananseri and Yaslina (2024) emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. For some students, separating grammar instruction from communicative practice might be more effective, while others may benefit from an integrated approach. Language educators should consider offering a variety of instructional methods to accommodate different learning styles and preferences.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

### *Conclusion*

The study highlights a strong preference among Indonesian secondary school EFL students for integrating grammar instruction with communicative activities. Students perceive this approach as more effective for comprehending and retaining grammatical concepts because it places grammar within meaningful, real-world contexts. At the same time, many students still value traditional grammar exercises for achieving grammatical accuracy, and teacher involvement, particularly in providing immediate and contextualized feedback, is seen as crucial. A minority of students prefer a traditional, isolated approach to grammar

instruction, suggesting a need for differentiated instructional strategies that cater to individual learning preferences.

### ***Limitation***

The study's findings are based on a specific context—secondary schools in Indonesia—limiting generalizations to other EFL contexts. Additionally, the study did not delve deeply into the reasons behind students' preferences for integrated or isolated grammar instruction or explore how these approaches affect different aspects of language proficiency, such as fluency or long-term retention.

### ***Implication***

Future research should explore the reasons behind students' instructional preferences through qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into their learning experiences. It also needs to investigate the impact of integrated and isolated grammar instruction on various aspects of language proficiency, such as fluency, accuracy, and long-term retention of grammatical knowledge. These insights could help educators design more effective and personalized instructional strategies for EFL learners.

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