

## Teaching English Grammar in Grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan

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### ABSTRACT

*Grammar plays a crucial role in supporting language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This study aims to explore the approaches used in teaching grammar in grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan through a qualitative reflective design. Data were collected through reflective journals, classroom observations, and thematic notes, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that two main approaches were employed: focus on forms and focus on form. The focus on forms approach was effective in improving students' grammatical accuracy through explicit instruction and structured exercises. In contrast, the focus on form approach enhanced students' communicative fluency by integrating grammar into meaningful and context-based tasks. The study further found that a combination of both approaches provided a more balanced development of accuracy and fluency, particularly in vocational contexts where language use is closely related to professional communication. These findings suggest that grammar instruction in should not rely on a single approach but rather integrate explicit teaching with contextualized practice. This study contributes to the field of English language teaching by highlighting the importance of context-sensitive grammar instruction that aligns with students' vocational needs.*

**Keywords:** *EFL grammar instruction, vocational education, focus on form, focus on forms, reflective practice*

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## INTRODUCTION

Grammar has long been recognized as a fundamental component of language learning, as it provides the structural framework necessary for effective communication (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). It enables learners to construct meaningful sentences and supports the development of the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, grammar instruction plays a particularly significant role because learners must navigate differences between their native language and the target language (Tarigan, 2021). Without adequate grammatical knowledge, learners may struggle to convey meaning accurately, leading to misunderstandings and ineffective communication (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021).

In addition to its role in linguistic accuracy, grammar contributes to learners' ability to organize ideas coherently and express them appropriately in various contexts (Tarigan, 2021). Effective grammar instruction allows learners to move beyond simple sentence construction toward more complex and nuanced language use, especially when grammar is taught communicatively (Tarigan, 2021). This is particularly important in academic and professional settings, where clarity, precision, and appropriateness are essential (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). As language learning increasingly emphasizes communicative competence, grammar must be understood not as an isolated component, but as an integral part of meaningful language use (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

Within the Indonesian education system, vocational high schools occupy a unique and strategic position. These institutions are designed to prepare students for specific career pathways by integrating academic knowledge with practical and technical skills (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). Unlike general secondary education, vocational education emphasizes workplace readiness and the development of competencies that are directly applicable to professional contexts (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). English, in this setting, is not only a subject to be learned but also a practical tool that supports communication in various industries such as hospitality, tourism, engineering, and business (Wahyuni & Nurdiyansyah, 2024). Students are expected to use English in real life situations, including interacting with customers, writing reports, and participating in professional correspondence (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025).

Given these demands, grammar instruction in grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan becomes particularly challenging. Students must be able to produce grammatically accurate language while also maintaining fluency and appropriateness in communication (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022). In professional contexts, grammatical errors may not only affect clarity but also influence perceptions of credibility and competence (Susanto & Hidayat, 2025). Therefore, grammar instruction in vocational education is closely linked to employability and workplace success, making it a critical component of the curriculum (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

Despite its importance, teaching grammar in grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan presents a number of challenges. One of the most significant challenges is the diversity of students' prior knowledge. Students entering vocational education often come from varied educational backgrounds, resulting in different levels of grammatical competence (Ratna, 2023). Some students may have a solid foundation in grammar, while others may struggle with basic structures (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). This heterogeneity makes it difficult for teachers to design instruction that meets the needs of all learners simultaneously (Ratna, 2023). As a result, teachers must adopt flexible and adaptive strategies to address these differences effectively (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

Another major challenge is related to student motivation. Vocational students tend to prioritize practical and technical subjects that are directly related to their future careers (Yulia & Prasetya, 2025). As a result, grammar is often perceived as abstract, theoretical, and less relevant to their immediate needs (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). This perception can lead to low engagement and limited participation in grammar lessons, particularly when instruction is delivered through traditional, rule based methods (Tarigan, 2021). When grammar is taught in isolation, without clear connections to real world applications, students may fail to see its value (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

To address these challenges, various approaches to grammar instruction have been proposed in the field of second language acquisition. Among the most widely discussed are focus on forms and focus on form. The focus on forms approach emphasizes explicit teaching of grammatical rules, typically through structured lessons and accuracy based exercises (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). This approach is often associated with deductive teaching, where learners are first introduced to rules and then asked to apply them in controlled practice (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021). While this method can be effective in developing grammatical accuracy, it may not always facilitate the transfer of knowledge to communicative situations (Tarigan, 2021).

In contrast, the focus on form approach integrates grammar instruction into meaningful communication (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021). Rather than teaching grammar in isolation, this approach draws learners' attention to grammatical features as they arise in context (Tarigan, 2021). Through tasks such as role plays, discussions, and problem solving activities, learners are encouraged to notice and use grammar in authentic situations (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). This approach aligns with communicative language teaching principles and is generally considered more effective in promoting fluency and functional language use (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

Given the strengths and limitations of both approaches, many researchers and practitioners advocate for a balanced or blended approach to grammar instruction (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021). Such an approach combines explicit instruction with communicative practice, allowing learners to develop both accuracy and fluency (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). In vocational contexts, this balance is particularly important because students must be able to use language effectively in real world situations while maintaining grammatical correctness (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

Although extensive research has been conducted on grammar teaching approaches in general EFL contexts, relatively limited attention has been given to vocational education settings (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). This represents a significant gap in the literature, as vocational students have distinct learning needs and goals that differ from those of general academic learners (Ratna, 2023). In vocational education, language learning is closely tied to specific professional domains, requiring instruction that is both context sensitive and application oriented (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). Understanding how grammar teaching approaches are implemented in such contexts is therefore essential for improving instructional practices (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

Furthermore, the role of reflective practice in grammar instruction remains underexplored in vocational settings (Yulia & Prasetya, 2025). Reflection allows teachers to evaluate their instructional strategies, identify challenges, and make informed adjustments based on classroom experiences (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). By engaging in reflective practice, teachers can develop a deeper understanding of how different approaches impact student learning and adapt their methods accordingly

(Ratna, 2023). In dynamic classroom environments, particularly those characterized by diverse student needs, reflective practice becomes a valuable tool for continuous improvement (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the approaches used in teaching grammar in an Indonesian vocational high school through a qualitative reflective perspective. Specifically, it investigates how focus on forms and focus on form are implemented in classroom practice (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021; Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021), how students respond to these approaches (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022), and how teachers adapt their strategies to address contextual challenges (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022). By examining grammar instruction within a vocational context, this study seeks to contribute to the development of more effective and relevant teaching practices that align with students' academic and professional needs (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022; Surya & Mustaji, 2024).

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative reflective design to explore grammar instruction practices in an Indonesian vocational high school (Nasution, 2023). This approach was selected to capture in depth insights into classroom realities, teacher strategies, and student responses, with a particular emphasis on reflective analysis of teaching practices (Bajang & Mustari, 2024).

The participants consisted of grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan and teachers involved in English language instruction. Teachers were selected based on their active role in teaching grammar and their willingness to engage in reflective documentation (Hasan, 2024). The students represented various vocational programs, including hospitality, engineering, and business, ensuring that the data reflected diverse professional contexts.

Data were collected through multiple sources to enhance the richness and credibility of the findings (Hasan, 2024). First, teachers maintained reflective journals documenting their instructional approaches, challenges encountered, and student responses. Second, classroom observations were conducted to capture actual teaching practices and student engagement during grammar instruction (Suryana & Putri, 2025). Third, thematic notes were compiled to organize key observations and reflections related to teaching approaches, student motivation, and contextual integration.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes (Bajang & Mustari, 2024). The analysis focused on three main aspects: (1) the approaches used in grammar instruction, (2) the challenges experienced by teachers and students, and (3) the integration of grammar into vocational contexts (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). The process involved systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of the data to generate meaningful insights.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied several criteria. Credibility was achieved through data triangulation across reflective journals, classroom observations, and thematic notes (Hasan, 2024). Dependability was maintained by following consistent data collection and analysis procedures (Suryana & Putri, 2025). Confirmability was addressed by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the data and minimizing researcher bias (Nasution, 2023). Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context (Suryana & Putri, 2025).

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their participation was voluntary (Bajang & Mustari, 2024). Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all identifying information in the data (Hasan, 2024).

This study is limited to grammar instruction in vocational high schools in Indonesia; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other educational contexts. In addition, the reliance on reflective data may introduce subjectivity, although this limitation was mitigated through the use of classroom observations as a complementary data source (Nasution, 2023).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The analysis of classroom practices revealed several recurring patterns in the teaching of grammar in vocational high schools (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). The findings are organized into four main themes: (1) approaches to grammar instruction, (2) challenges encountered, (3) student responses, and (4) contextual integration of grammar (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025).

### Approaches to Grammar Instruction

The data indicate that teachers employed two primary approaches to grammar instruction: *focus on forms* and *focus on form* (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). Reflective journals showed that *focus on forms* was commonly implemented through explicit explanation of grammatical rules, followed by structured exercises such as sentence completion and error correction. In these sessions, teachers emphasized accuracy and correctness, and students were typically required to produce grammatically correct sentences based on given patterns (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021).

Classroom observations revealed that during *focus on forms* activities, students were generally able to complete written tasks successfully. However, their participation in oral activities was limited, and they often relied on memorized structures rather than spontaneous language use (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

In contrast, *focus on form* was observed in lessons where grammar was integrated into communicative tasks (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021). Teachers designed activities such as role-plays, dialogue practice, and task-based sentence construction related to vocational contexts. Reflective journals indicated that teachers used these activities to draw students' attention to grammatical features while maintaining the flow of communication (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025).

Observations showed that students were more actively engaged during these activities. They participated in discussions, attempted to express ideas, and interacted with peers, although grammatical errors were still present in their spoken output (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

### Challenges Encountered

The data revealed several challenges faced by teachers in implementing grammar instruction. One of the most frequently reported issues in reflective journals was the variation in students' prior knowledge (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). Teachers noted that some students demonstrated a clear understanding of basic grammar, while others struggled with simple sentence structures.

Classroom observations supported this finding, showing differences in students' ability to complete tasks. Some students were able to respond quickly and accurately, while others required additional guidance and support (Ratna, 2023).

Another challenge identified in the data was student motivation. Reflective journals indicated that students tended to show lower engagement during rule-based instruction (Yulia & Prasetya, 2025).

Teachers reported that some students appeared passive and reluctant to participate in grammar-focused activities.

However, observations revealed that student participation increased when grammar was incorporated into vocationally relevant tasks (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). In these situations, students were more willing to engage in activities such as role-playing workplace scenarios or completing job-related communication tasks (Surya & Mustaji, 2024).

### **Student Responses**

Student responses to different instructional approaches varied depending on the type of activity. During *focus on forms* instruction, students demonstrated the ability to complete written exercises with a relatively high level of accuracy (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). However, their responses were often limited to controlled formats, and spontaneous language production was rarely observed (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

In contrast, during communicative activities, students showed greater willingness to participate and interact (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). Observations indicated that students attempted to express ideas using their own words, even when their grammatical accuracy was not fully developed (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021).

Reflective journals also noted that students appeared more confident when engaging in contextualized tasks, particularly those related to their vocational fields (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). For example, students in hospitality programs participated actively in simulated guest interactions, while business students engaged in writing simple professional messages (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025).

### **Contextual Integration of Grammar**

A consistent pattern across the data was the integration of grammar into vocational contexts (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). Teachers reported designing activities that reflected real-world applications, such as writing emails, conducting service dialogues, and describing technical processes (Wahyuni & Nurdiyansyah, 2024).

Classroom observations confirmed that these activities created opportunities for students to use grammar in meaningful situations (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). Students were observed applying grammatical structures while completing tasks related to their field of study (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

The data also indicated that contextualized activities were associated with higher levels of student engagement (Yulia & Prasetya, 2025). Students were more attentive, participated more actively, and demonstrated greater interest when grammar was presented as part of vocationally relevant tasks (Surya & Mustaji, 2024).

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide important insights into how grammar instruction is implemented in gradrvocational high school contexts and how different approaches influence student learning (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). The results highlight the coexistence of focus on forms and focus on form, as well as the need to balance accuracy and communicative competence in grammar teaching (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

The use of focus on forms observed in this study reflects a traditional approach to grammar instruction, where explicit explanation and controlled practice are emphasized. This approach appears to

support students' ability to produce grammatically accurate sentences, particularly in written tasks (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021). However, the findings also indicate that students exposed primarily to this approach showed limited participation in spontaneous communication. This pattern aligns with recent studies on form focused instruction, which show that isolated grammar practice may not fully transfer to real time interaction (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). The present study reinforces this view by showing that accuracy oriented instruction alone does not necessarily lead to active language use in real time interaction.

In contrast, the implementation of focus on form in this study demonstrates the value of integrating grammar into meaningful communication (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021). Students were more actively engaged when grammar was embedded in contextualized tasks, such as role plays and vocational simulations. This supports more recent empirical work in Indonesian secondary and vocational education, which shows that combining explicit grammar instruction with communicative tasks effectively develops both accuracy and fluency (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). The findings suggest that when learners are encouraged to use language for meaningful purposes, they are more likely to participate and experiment with linguistic forms, even if their accuracy is not yet fully developed.

The variation in student engagement observed in this study also highlights the role of motivation in grammar learning. Students demonstrated higher levels of participation when instructional activities were directly related to their vocational fields (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). This finding is consistent with contemporary research on contextual learning in Indonesian vocational schools, which shows that students' motivation increases when learning tasks are closely connected to real world professional practices (Wahyuni & Nurdiansyah, 2024). In vocational contexts, where students are oriented toward practical outcomes, the perceived usefulness of learning activities plays a crucial role in shaping their motivation (Yulia & Prasetya, 2025). The present study extends this perspective by showing that contextualization is not only beneficial but essential in making grammar instruction meaningful for vocational learners.

Another important finding concerns the role of reflective practice in shaping instructional strategies. Teachers who engaged in reflective journaling demonstrated greater awareness of their teaching approaches and student responses, allowing them to adapt their methods accordingly (Bajang & Mustari, 2024). This observation supports recent studies on reflective practice in Indonesian classrooms, which show that systematic reflection helps teachers move beyond rule based instruction toward more interactive and student centered approaches (Hasan, 2024). In this study, reflection enabled teachers to recognize the limitations of purely rule based instruction and to experiment with more interactive and contextualized approaches. This suggests that effective grammar teaching is not fixed but evolves through continuous evaluation and adaptation.

While the findings support existing theories in second language acquisition, they also reveal the distinctive characteristics of vocational education contexts (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). Unlike general EFL settings, vocational classrooms require learners to apply language skills in specific professional domains. This creates a unique demand for grammar instruction that is both accurate and immediately applicable (Wahyuni & Nurdiansyah, 2024). The study demonstrates that the effectiveness of instructional approaches is closely linked to their relevance to vocational tasks. In this sense, the findings extend existing perspectives by showing that context is not merely a supporting factor but a central component in shaping language learning outcomes (Surya & Mustaji, 2024).

Furthermore, the results suggest that a blended approach to grammar instruction is particularly suitable for vocational education (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). The combination of explicit instruction and

communicative practice allows learners to develop structural knowledge while also applying it in meaningful contexts. Rather than viewing focus on forms and focus on form as competing approaches, this study highlights their complementary roles in supporting different aspects of language development (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022). This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding grammar teaching in vocational settings.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on grammar instruction by emphasizing the importance of context sensitive approaches (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). It highlights that effective grammar teaching in vocational high schools must go beyond the transmission of rules and focus on enabling students to use language in real world situations (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). By integrating grammatical accuracy with communicative relevance, teachers can better prepare students for both academic success and professional communication (Wahyuni & Nurdianyansyah, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study explored grammar instruction in grade X SMKN 1 Tapaktuan through a qualitative reflective design. The findings indicate that grammar teaching is implemented through a combination of *focus on forms* and *focus on form* approaches, each contributing differently to students' language development (Rahmah & Mulyani, 2021; Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). While *focus on forms* supports grammatical accuracy through explicit instruction and structured practice, *focus on form* enhances communicative fluency by embedding grammar within meaningful and contextualized tasks (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2021; Putri & Kurniawan, 2025).

The study also identified several instructional challenges, including differences in students' prior knowledge and varying levels of motivation (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022). These challenges highlight the complexity of teaching grammar in vocational contexts, where learners come from diverse academic backgrounds and have different learning needs (Ratna, 2023). In response to these challenges, teachers were found to adapt their instructional strategies by integrating grammar into vocationally relevant activities, which helped increase student engagement and participation (Surya & Mustaji, 2024).

Reflective practice emerged as an important element in improving grammar instruction. Through reflection, teachers were able to evaluate their teaching strategies, recognize classroom challenges, and make necessary adjustments to better support student learning (Bajang & Mustari, 2024). This suggests that continuous reflection plays a key role in enhancing instructional effectiveness in dynamic classroom environments (Hasan, 2024).

Importantly, the findings of this study emphasize that grammar instruction in vocational education should not prioritize accuracy or fluency in isolation (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022). Instead, an integrated approach that combines explicit instruction with contextualized practice is more effective in addressing the dual needs of vocational learners: linguistic competence and workplace communication skills (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). This balance allows students to develop both the structural knowledge and the practical ability required in real-world professional contexts (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

From a pedagogical perspective, this study suggests that teachers should design grammar instruction that is context-sensitive and aligned with students' vocational fields (Surya & Mustaji, 2024). Integrating grammar into authentic tasks such as workplace simulations, professional communication, and job-related scenarios can enhance both motivation and learning outcomes (Wahyuni & Nurdianyansyah,

2024). In addition, encouraging reflective teaching practices can support continuous improvement in instructional quality (Hasan, 2024).

Overall, this study contributes to EFL pedagogy by demonstrating that effective grammar instruction in vocational high schools requires a balanced, contextualized, and reflective approach (Putri & Kurniawan, 2025). By aligning grammar teaching with vocational needs, educators can better prepare students for both academic achievement and professional readiness (Kurniawati & Suwardi, 2022).

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