



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MODERN EDUCATION
(IJMOE)
www.ijmoe.com



GRAMMAR TEACHING STRATEGIES OF ESL EDUCATORS IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ayuni Madarina Abdul Rahman^{1*}

¹ Department of Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Malaysia
Email: madarina@uitm.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 18.06.2025

Revised date: 09.07.2025

Accepted date: 13.08.2025

Published date: 10.09.2025

To cite this document:

Abdul Rahman, M. A. (2025). Grammar Teaching Strategies in ESL Classrooms: Insights from Malaysian Higher Education. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (26), 675-688.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.726045

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Abstract:

This research explores how English as a Second Language (ESL) educators employed the strategies to teach grammar in classrooms within Malaysian higher education institutions, particularly the ways they address the challenges. A qualitative design was employed where the data was collected through semi-structured interviews with five ESL educators across various Peninsular Malaysia. The findings revealed four key strategies: peer collaboration for resource sharing, ongoing professional development to adapt to evolving pedagogies, reliance on standardized reference materials for instructional consistency, and modification of assessment rubrics to capture implicit grammar learning. While these strategies reflect educators' commitment to learner-centred instruction, institutional constraints, particularly exam-oriented curricula, limit their wider application. The study contributes to theory, practice, and policy by aligning educator strategies with Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching and Sociocultural Theory. Practically, it offers insights for curriculum reform, targeted teacher training, and more flexible assessment practices. Future research should integrate student perspectives and classroom observations to validate findings and extend insights across broader Malaysian and regional ESL contexts.

Keywords:

Grammar Instruction, ESL Classrooms, Malaysian Higher Education, Professional Development, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, Sociocultural Theory

Introduction

Within the scope of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysian higher learning institutions, grammar instruction remains a critical aspect of developing students' language proficiency. While mastering grammar is essential for effective communication, teaching

grammar presents unique challenges for educators. These challenges are often compounded by students' varying levels of language competence, making it difficult to adopt a one-size-fits-all teaching method (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Rahman, Hassan, & Nor, 2021). Moreover, universities have put greater emphasis on the use of English as the medium of interaction which put more importance on educators and students (Rahman, Aziz, & Ismail, 2024). In addition, educators must connect grammar teaching to wider curriculum expectations ensuring that language skills are developed alongside critical thinking and academic literacy (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022; Nurmala, Zawawi, & Halim, 2022). An emphasis on exams frequently reduces grammar learning to memorization rather than real application, which may hinder students' ability to use grammar effectively in real communicative situations (Wong, Norazman, & Kaur, 2021; Subramaniam & Wong, 2020). Therefore, to promote the consistent use of grammar rules while providing a meaningful learning environment, educators need to adopt an eclectic approach despite institutional limitations

However, despite the range of strategies and support systems available, many of these approaches remain coping mechanisms rather than long-term solutions. While such strategies improve classroom engagement, they often overlooked to fully address main issues such as large class sizes, assessment-driven instruction, and varied learner proficiency levels (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Wong, Norazman, & Kaur, 2021). The tension created in this situation has made educators caught between institutional expectations and the pedagogical need to foster communicative competence. Thus, this continuous dilemma highlights the need to examine how educators overcome these challenges in practice, and whether current strategies can meaningfully sustain grammar learning outcomes in Malaysian tertiary education.

The challenges have pushed educators to adopt more dynamic strategies, reflecting their commitment to tackling grammar teaching issues and prioritizing student engagement (Yunus & Hashim, 2021; Rahman et al., 2021). Continuous effort shows by educators in order to make grammar teaching more enlightening not only enhance competency but also build their confidence in English communication (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022; Pawlak, 2024). This commitment to professional growth and instructional improvement ensures that grammar teaching evolves alongside students' needs and the demands of the education system (Ellis, 2006; Richards, 2006).

Nevertheless, despite such efforts, systemic constraints such as exam-driven teaching and institutional expectations often limit the sustainability of these strategies. Therefore, this study not only explores the strategies used by Malaysian ESL educators in grammar teaching but also considers their broader contributions to pedagogy and policy. By linking classroom practices with institutional and policy-level implications, the study highlights pathways for improving both instructional approaches and systemic support for ESL grammar instruction in Malaysian higher education.

Despite the range of studies on Malaysian ESL learners' grammar challenges (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021; Wong, Norazman, & Kaur, 2021), relatively few focus on educators' strategies for balancing fluency and accuracy within communicative frameworks. This study therefore focuses on the practical strategies employed by Malaysian ESL lecturers, with the aim of understanding not only how grammar is taught, but also how these teaching choices connect to broader issues of policy, pedagogy, and curriculum reform.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- (i) identify grammar teaching strategies employed by ESL educators in Malaysian tertiary institutions,
- (ii) explore contributions to pedagogy and policy.

Research Scope

This study focuses on Malaysian higher education, involving five ESL educators with over five years' teaching experience.

Research Questions

- (i) What grammar teaching strategies are employed by ESL educators in Malaysian tertiary institutions?
- (ii) How do these strategies contribute to pedagogy and policy in ESL grammar instruction?

Literature Review

Grammar Instruction in ESL and the Malaysian Context

Teaching and learning grammar are the important foundation in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms as it provides learners with language accuracy and language proficiency that is essential for academic and career growth. As the indicators of language competency, university students need to be able to use correct grammar for academic writing, able to participate in formal discussions, and involve in course presentation. Thus, grammar instruction has a vital role in students' academic success that led them in competitive working environment later. The mastery of grammar allows learners to avoid common language pitfalls that could lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, making it a foundational component of language proficiency at the tertiary level and beyond.

National policies and curricula emphasize explicit grammar teaching, recognizing its role in sustaining language standards in higher education. However, educators frequently face systemic challenges such as large class sizes, tight schedules, and exam-driven environments (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). These constraints often limit the time available for interactive or communicative activities, forcing educators to prioritize coverage of grammar rules and structures over student-centred and communicative practices. Consequently, many educators resort to traditional, rule-focused instruction despite the growing advocacy for communicative and task-based approaches that encourage contextualized learning and real-world language use (Adickalam & Yunus, 2022). This national policy, institutions demand, and teaching skills have created dilemma for educators to implement a balanced and engaging grammar learning environment.

Approaches to Grammar Instruction

In grammar teaching lesson, ESL educators have implied varied strategies to balance between traditional and modern approaches. Initially, grammar is taught explicitly where the rules are provided before the learner do it practically and promote rote memorization learning. However, as the education evolved, grammar is introduced in implicitly, where students learned grammar in active learning where real life examples are provided. In which, both instructions have offered its own strengths and weaknesses. Explicit instruction provides a more structured and rule-driven learning context, particularly for low-level proficient students. As compared to

implicit instruction, it offers a more engaging learning environment where they learned grammar together with other language skills.

The continuous debate between to teach grammar explicitly or implicitly have affected the variations in language education particularly through the influence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). This promotes that grammar learning should be gained from communication tasks, aligning with sociocultural theories that highlight communication competency, group work, and peer support (Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme, 2021). Despite the benefits mentioned, educators were affected by this dilemma when there is mismatch between communicative teaching methods and assessment systems, which frequently prioritize grammatical accuracy over fluency. As a result, educators must constantly balance the need to prepare students for standardized tests and formal assessments with the aim to improve their communication competency in real-world contexts.

Strategies and Support Systems Used by Educators

Malaysian ESL educators have used many coping strategies to overcome these challenges that focused on improving their teaching styles and students' achievement. Educators used time management techniques, such as creating more collaborative group work than individuals that allow them to cover more lessons in given time (Yunus & Hashim, 2021). This is supported in Adickalam & Yunus (2022) which highlights that group work can enhance students' collaboration, that helps them to practice grammar in a more meaningful context when they are working with one another. Also, some educators have used gamification strategies that have interactive elements in order to boost their motivation in learning grammar (Chan, Lee, & Tan, 2021). Another important support mechanism in teaching grammar is peer collaboration between educators where they can exchange ideas, share lesson materials, discuss informal and formal strategies, improve teaching skills and create new plans to tackle classroom challenges (Whiteley, 2008; Abdu & Ramani, 2011). In order to manage the varied need of students nowadays, this teaching culture is crucial to maintain the professional development despite various classroom backgrounds.

The key to stay up to date with current education development, educators need to stay informed with latest research on grammar instruction, get latest references and materials which can contribute to their knowledge (Aziz, Hashim, & Yunus, 2020). Also, educators need to involved in available workshops, seminars and any other related courses to improve pedagogical knowledge and keep abreast with latest information (Mahmud & Ismail, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). There are professional learning programmes joined by educators that provide teaching resources, discussing current trends and issues, and highlighting recommendations to teach grammar in a more appealing approaches (Faizah, Abdul Halim, Abdul Kadir, & Abdullah, 2023); Mohamad, Rosli, & Ramlan, 2023). There are standardized materials used by educators as the reliable source that are used as strategy to ensure consistency in instruction mainly when preparing for examination (Abdu & Ramani, 2011). These resources help streamline the teaching process and support independent learning, providing students with accessible materials to review outside of class.

Other than classroom techniques, peer collaboration among educators also become a prominent mechanism to overcome grammar teaching issue. Educators used lesson sharing, mentoring, material development, teaching reflection as part of the coping strategy. Furthermore, many educators engage in ongoing professional development to stay abreast of contemporary

pedagogical trends and address the shifting demands of ESL teaching. This includes attending workshops and conferences, participating in self-guided reading, and utilizing online learning platforms to explore new methods and refine their instructional skills (Yunus & Hashim, 2021). Such continuous learning enables teachers to remain responsive to evolving classroom dynamics, incorporating updated strategies that align with both communicative goals and institutional expectations.

This review highlights the persistent tension between exam-driven grammar teaching and communicative practices. Therefore, the present study extends prior research by focusing on educators' strategies for navigating this tension in Malaysian universities.

Summary of Past studies

Table 1: Summary of Past Studies

Author(s) & Year	Research Area	Key Findings	Gap / Limitation
Wong, Norazman & Kaur (2021); Subramaniam & Wong (2020)	Grammatical errors & exam-oriented instruction	Frequent student errors; reliance on memorization for tests	Limited evidence on how teachers mitigate these practices
Aziz & Kashinathan (2021); Rahman, Hassan & Nor (2021)	Learner challenges & systemic constraints	Large classes, varied proficiency, and exam pressure identified	Teaching/coping strategies not examined
Rahman, Aziz & Ismail (2024); Nurmala, Zawawi & Halim (2022)	Institutional demands on literacy & English	Universities promote English as academic medium; grammar linked to higher-order skills	Few details on classroom-level strategies
Adickalam & Yunus (2022); Ellis (2006); Richards (2006)	Pedagogical approaches	Advocated combining explicit, implicit, and communicative methods	Lack of Malaysian-based classroom evidence
Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme (2021)	Sociocultural/communicative lens	Peer support and interaction aid grammar learning	Not applied to Malaysian ESL context
Yunus & Hashim (2021); Aziz, Hashim & Yunus (2020); Mahmud & Ismail (2019); Liu et al. (2024)	Teacher professional development	Continuous training and research engagement improve teaching	Few grammar-focused strategies highlighted
Chan, Lee & Tan (2021)	Gamification strategies	Interactive platforms increase student motivation	Little evidence on long-term grammar gains

Author(s) & Year	Research Area	Key Findings	Gap / Limitation
Whiteley (2008); Abdu & Ramani (2011); Faizah et al. (2023); Mohamad, Rosli & Ramlan (2023)	Peer collaboration & professional support	Sharing resources and mentoring strengthen teaching	Weak links to classroom grammar outcomes
Pawlak (2024)	Teacher confidence & evolving strategies	Ongoing effort enhances both teacher and learner confidence	Institutional limitations not fully addressed

Source: Compiled by the author based on Wong et al. (2021); Subramaniam & Wong (2020); Aziz & Kashinathan (2021); Rahman et al. (2021, 2024); Nurmala et al. (2022); Adickalam & Yunus (2022); Ellis (2006); Richards (2006); Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme (2021); Yunus & Hashim (2021); Aziz et al. (2020); Mahmud & Ismail (2019); Liu et al. (2024); Chan et al. (2021); Whiteley (2008); Abdu & Ramani (2011); Faizah et al. (2023); Mohamad et al. (2023); Pawlak (2024).

Overall, prior studies emphasize student errors, systemic barriers, and diverse teaching approaches. However, few directly examine educators' adaptive strategies in Malaysian tertiary classrooms, which this study addresses.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by three complementary frameworks that collectively frame grammar instruction within communicative and learner-centred approaches.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):

CLT emphasizes the use of language for authentic communication rather than the rote learning of grammatical forms. It supports implicit grammar learning through meaningful interaction, where accuracy develops alongside fluency (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the Malaysian context, CLT is relevant because it addresses the tension between students' exam-driven focus on grammar accuracy and the need for communicative competence in academic and professional settings.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):

TBLT situates grammar acquisition within the completion of meaningful tasks, allowing students to learn structures incidentally while focusing on real-world communication (Prabhu, 1987; Willis, 1996; Ellis, 2003). Its emphasis on task design and learner engagement complements CLT by providing concrete classroom techniques such as problem-solving activities, group projects, and presentations. However, the alignment of TBLT with institutional demands in Malaysia remains challenging, especially where grammar is assessed in formal, accuracy-oriented contexts.

Sociocultural Theory (SCT):

SCT highlights social interaction, scaffolding, and peer relationship in language development (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This framework is particularly relevant in Malaysian classrooms, where educators often rely on group-based and peer-learning strategies to manage large classes and mixed proficiency levels. SCT provides the rationale for

such collaborative approaches, showing how learners can co-construct knowledge and support each other's grammar development.

Taken together, these frameworks offer a useful lens to examine how Malaysian ESL educators navigate the persistent tension between exam-oriented grammar instruction and the promotion of communicative, student-centred learning.

Research Gaps

The current body of literature has explored student error analysis, learner challenges and general instructional approaches, limited research has captured educators' lived experiences and adaptive strategies in teaching grammar within Malaysian higher education. Specifically, few studies have focused on how educators realign rubrics to accommodate communicative grammar teaching, how standardized materials integrated flexibly across different proficiency levels and how educators' current practices shape ongoing grammar pedagogy. This study addresses these gaps by documenting the coping strategies and reflective practices of Malaysian ESL educators, thereby contributing new insights to the discourse on effective grammar instruction in tertiary education.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed to examine ESL educators teaching strategies within Malaysian tertiary education. This design is suitable for this study as it offers the nature to investigate educators' real-life experiences, behaviours, and decision-making processes in grammar instruction which contributes to richer and descriptive findings (Merriam, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study also examined the challenges faces by educators while teaching grammar in ESL classrooms. By doing this, the study hope to discover the strategies used by educators while addressing multiple needs of learners in tertiary education (Richards, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Research Sampling

For the research sampling, the technique used was purposive sampling to select participants based on specific characteristics appropriate to the research (Kumar, 2011). The sample comprised of five ESL educators (E1-E5) drawn from higher learning institutions in Peninsular Malaysia. Selection was guided by three main requirements: (i) having more than 5 years of teaching ESL experience, (ii) Prior experience teaching grammar courses at the tertiary level, and (iii) familiarity with diverse grammar teaching approaches. This purposive strategy ensured that the participants possessed extensive knowledge of grammar instruction and were well-positioned to provide in-depth reflections on their practices. Purposive sampling relies on the researcher's decision to recognize respective educators that most likely to provide meaningful and related data, thereby enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection

For this study, the researcher implements semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) emphasize that semi-structured interviews promote authentic dialogue, allowing participants to articulate their insights in depth. This format encourages participants to reflect critically and share rich, nuanced insights while

maintaining alignment with the study's research objectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The interviews were done around 45 minutes to one hour duration for each respondent, collecting the data and exploring the insights of each respondent sufficiently. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and the researcher then transcribed for analysis. A set of open-ended guiding questions was used to explore:

- Strategies for teaching grammar in ESL classrooms.
- Coping mechanisms to address instructional challenges.
- Experiences with collaboration, resource sharing, and professional development.
- Reflections on assessment practices and adaptation of standardized materials.

Semi-structured interviews have been shown to be especially effective in ESL studies for uncovering educators' hidden beliefs and classroom practices (Alsaawi, 2014; O'Leary, 2017).

Data Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed thematically. First, the researcher read through the material several times to gain familiarity. Next, key phrases were highlighted and grouped them into codes that represented common practices or challenges, such as peer collaboration or rubric modification. These codes were gradually refined into larger themes that captured broader teaching strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to existing theories of grammar teaching and the wider literature. To check credibility, participants were given opportunities to review their transcripts, and the emerging themes were compared against prior research to ensure consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Procedure Flow

Table 2: Research Procedure Flow

Stage	Description
Sampling	Purposive selection of 5 ESL educators (L1–L5) from Peninsular Malaysia
Data Collection	Semi-structured interviews (45–60 mins), guided by open-ended questions
Data Preparation	Audio recording, verbatim transcription
Data Analysis	Thematic analysis: coding → categorizing → theme development → interpretation
Validation	Cross-checking themes against objectives and literature

Source: Author compilation

Findings and Discussion

Thematic Findings

The analysis of interview data revealed four major strategies employed by Malaysian ESL educators to cope with the challenges of grammar instruction in tertiary education: (i) peer collaboration, (ii) ongoing professional development, (iii) modification of assessment rubrics, and (iv) reliance on standardized reference materials. These findings reflect a dynamic teaching culture where educators continuously adapt strategies to balance institutional expectations with

learners' diverse needs. Each theme is discussed below, supported by participant quotes and relevant literature.

Peer Collaboration

Peer collaboration emerged as an essential support mechanism, enabling educators to share resources, exchange ideas, and adapt teaching strategies collectively. Such collegial networks helped educators cope with workload demands and diverse student proficiency levels, echoing Whiteley (2008) and Rahman, Hassan, and Nor (2021), who emphasize the value of professional support systems in enhancing pedagogical effectiveness.

Table 3. Peer Collaboration in Grammar Teaching

Theme / Strategy	Supporting Literature	Sample Quotes from Participants
Lesson-sharing professional enhance teaching and support management	and Whiteley (2008); Rahman, discussion Hassan & Nor (2021); quality Faizah, Abdul Halim, workload Abdul Kadir, & Abdullah, 2023)	E2: "I learn from my colleagues' grammar teaching practices and apply those strategies that I feel will benefit my students." E4: "We regularly collaborate by sharing lessons, and if a particular activity seems more suitable for my class, I modify it with my colleagues' support."

Source: Semi-structured interviews

This finding resonates with Sociocultural Theory, where peer scaffolding is seen as a crucial driver of language development (Vygotsky, 1978). In this context, collaboration among educators mirrors the same process of co-construction and support that they aim to foster among their students.

Ongoing Professional Development

Continuous professional development was identified as a vital factor in sustaining effective grammar instruction. Educators engaged in formal training (e.g., workshops and conferences) as well as informal strategies such as reading grammar references or consulting with peers. This reflects Casteel's (2011) argument that effective teachers are lifelong learners and aligns with Yunus and Hashim's (2022) emphasis on the importance of self-directed growth.

Table 4. Professional Development Strategies

Theme / Strategy	Supporting Literature	Sample Quotes from Participants
Continuous through training, and resource ensures relevance	learning Casteel (2011); Yunus & reading, Hashim (2022); Aziz, Hashim & Yunus (2020); Mahmud & pedagogical Ismail (2019); Mohamad, Rosli & Ramlan (2023)	E2: "To handle my classes, I make it a point to read and learn about different strategies for teaching grammar." E4: "My strategy is to keep revising, use grammar reference texts I've bought, and draw on

Theme / Strategy	Supporting Literature	Sample Quotes from Participants
		teaching resources from peers in the same field.”

Source: Semi-structured interview

This aligns with CLT principles, which require teachers to continuously adapt strategies to foster communicative competence (Richards, 2006). Ongoing professional development ensures that educators remain responsive to changing learner needs, balancing grammar accuracy with meaningful language use in Malaysian higher education.

Modification of Assessment Rubrics

A novel finding of this study was the adaptation of institutional assessment rubrics to better align with communicative grammar instruction. While exam-oriented systems emphasize accuracy, educators highlighted the need to account for fluency and communicative competence. This supports Ellis (2006) and Williams (2011), who argue for flexible assessment practices.

Table 5: Modification of Assessment Rubrics

Theme / Strategy	Supporting Literature	Sample Quotes from Participants
Adjusting rubrics to balance accuracy with fluency in communicative grammar instruction	Ellis (2006); Zawawi, Ismail & Halim (2017); Williams (2011); Wong, Norazman & Kaur (2021); Subramaniam & Wong (2020)	E5: “Although we have to follow standard rubrics, I find them restrictive when applying implicit methods. I usually work with peers to fine-tune the scoring so that it values fluency alongside correctness.”

Source: Semi-structured interviews

This supports Williams’ (2011) assertion that balancing fluency and accuracy requires assessment reform aligned with communicative approaches. In line with CLT and TBLT, such modifications ensure that assessment reflects real language use rather than rote memorization, while also resonating with SCT by recognizing the collaborative negotiation educators undertake in adapting institutional rubrics.

Standardized Reference Materials

Lastly, educators emphasized the use of standardized grammar reference materials to ensure coherence and fairness in instruction. While flexibility was valued, reliance on core texts minimized confusion and supported exam preparation. This is consistent with Abdu and Ramani (2011) and Rahman, Aziz, and Ismail (2024), who highlight the importance of uniformity in assessment-driven contexts.

Table 6: Standardized Materials for Instructional Consistency

Theme / Strategy	Supporting Literature	Sample Quotes from Participants
Using standardized grammar references ensures coherence, reduces confusion, and supports fairness	Abdu & Ramani (2011); Rahman, Aziz & Ismail (2024)	E3: "I use one consistent book for lessons and highlight to students that our reference is Malaysian English, not American or British."

Source: Semi-structured interviews

Although potentially limiting, this strategy reflects the persistent tension between exam-focused grammar instruction and TBLT's emphasis on contextualized, task-based learning (Ellis, 2006). By relying on standardized references, educators are able to meet institutional expectations while still looking ways to include communicative elements in their lesson. This shows how system requirement continues to influence teaching and learning climate.

Overall, these findings highlight that grammar instruction in Malaysian higher education is shaped by a combination of collaborative practices, lifelong professional growth, assessment adaptations, and standardized resources. These strategies illustrate how educators work within systemic constraints while continue to promote communicative ability alongside grammatical accuracy.

Importantly, the study achieved its stated objectives by documenting these strategies and showing how they function in everyday classroom contexts.

Contributions of the Study

This study provides several key contributions. At the academic level, it enriches the literature on grammar instruction in Malaysian higher education, particularly from the perspective of educators. From a practical standpoint, it highlights strategies such as rubric modification and professional development that can be directly implemented by teachers in their classrooms. At the policy level, the findings offer valuable insights for curriculum planners and higher education institutions to better support educators through resources, training, and flexible assessment practices. Finally, at the national level, the study contributes to Malaysia's broader efforts to strengthen English language proficiency among graduates, thereby preparing them for more competitive academic and professional environments.

Implications of the study

This study carries implications for educators, institutions, and policymakers. For educators, a balanced approach that integrates explicit grammar instruction with communicative strategies is essential to meet both exam demands and learners' fluency needs. Universities should consider revising assessment rubrics to capture both accuracy and communicative competence, while also supporting teachers through sustained professional development and collaborative opportunities. At the policy level, reforms should reduce exam dependency and prioritize authentic assessment practices. Together, these implications highlight the need for systemic support to shift grammar teaching in Malaysian higher education toward more holistic, communicative models.

Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative study offers valuable insights into grammar teaching strategies from five Malaysian ESL educators; however, the findings may not fully represent practices in non-tertiary settings. The focus on grammar instruction means other aspects of language teaching, such as vocabulary or pronunciation, were beyond the study's scope. Moreover, the reliance on interview data may reflect personal biases or selective recall. Future studies could strengthen validity through classroom observations and triangulation with student perspectives.

Expanding the participant pool to include educators across Malaysia and the wider ASEAN region could provide comparative perspectives. Incorporating students' voices as part of the research design would also enrich understanding of grammar pedagogy. Finally, further work could explore the development of assessment rubrics that better balance accuracy and fluency in communicative ESL classrooms.

Conclusion

This study identified four key strategies employed by Malaysian ESL educators: peer collaboration, professional development, standardized references, and rubric modification. These reflect a commitment to learner-centred grammar teaching despite institutional constraints. The findings contribute to theory, practice, and policy by offering guidance for educators and curriculum developers.

Practically, the results highlight the need for universities to revisit assessment rubrics, strengthen collaborative professional development, and integrate communicative principles into grammar instruction. Future research should include student perspectives and classroom observations to validate and enrich these insights.

At the policy level, reducing exam-driven practices and supporting communicative, task-based approaches will allow grammar instruction to align with global pedagogical trends and students' communicative needs. Sustained institutional support will be essential for this transformation.

Acknowledgements

The author extends sincere gratitude to the participating educators who generously shared their time and insights. Special thanks are extended to colleagues and reviewers whose constructive feedback helped strengthen this paper.

References

- Abdu, M., & Ramani, S. (2011). The role of standardized materials in grammar instruction: A Malaysian case study. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 872–880. doi:10.4304/jltr.2.4.872-880
- Adickalam, P., & Yunus, M. M. (2022). The effects of collaborative tasks on the speaking skills of Malaysian adolescents in an ESL classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(3), 675–687. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361390433>
- Alsaawi, A. (2014). A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. *International Journal of English Studies*, 14(1), 29–44.

- Aziz, N. H. A., & Kashinathan, S. (2021). ESL learners' challenges in speaking English in Malaysian classrooms. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(4), 430–442. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355316706>
- Aziz, N. H. A., Hashim, H., & Yunus, M. M. (2020). Enhancing ESL learners' grammar performance through reflective practice. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(11), 5234–5241. doi:10.13189/ujer.2020.081190
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. doi:10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. doi:10.1093/applin/I.1.1
- Casteel, C. P. (2011). *Effective teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learners*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Chan, S. W., Lee, C. Y., & Tan, B. H. (2021). Gamifying grammar: The effects of Kahoot! on Malaysian ESL learners' motivation. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(1), 433–446.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 83–107. doi:10.2307/40264512
- Faizah, M., Abdul Halim, N. S., Abdul Kadir, Z., & Abdullah, N. (2023). Grammar learning strategies used by ESL undergraduate students. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 19(3), 727–739. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v19i3.23612>
- Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education* (8th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lantolf, J. P. (Ed.). (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liu, Z., Yin, S. X., Lee, C., & Chen, N. F. (2024). Scaffolding language learning via multi-modal tutoring systems with pedagogical instructions. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2401.12345*. Retrieved from <https://arxiv.org>
- Mahmud, N., & Ismail, K. (2019). Mobile-assisted grammar learning for Malaysian undergraduates. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 13(2), 93–102. doi:10.3991/ijim.v13i02.9913
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mohamad, A., Rosli, N. A., & Ramlan, A. F. (2023). Grammar learning strategies used by ESL undergraduate students. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2305.11583*. Retrieved from <https://arxiv.org/abs/2305.11583>

- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. doi:10.1177/1609406917733847
- Nurmala, I., Zawawi, R., & Halim, F. A. (2022). Investigating blended grammar instruction in Malaysian ESL classrooms. *International Journal of English Language Education*, 10(3), 112–127. doi:10.5296/ijele.v10i3.20202
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. doi:10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y
- Pawlak, M. (2024). Grammar learning strategies: Towards a pedagogical intervention. ERIC Document. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov>
- Rahman, A. R. A., Aziz, N. H. A., & Ismail, M. M. (2024). Addressing systemic constraints in academic writing instruction: A case study of ESL educators in Malaysian universities. ERIC Document. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1435734.pdf>
- Rahman, N. L. A., Hassan, N., & Nor, M. N. M. (2021). Exploring ESL educators' teaching strategies in Malaysian universities. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 17(4), 250–263. doi:10.24191/ajue.v17i4.16099
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2020). Exploring teacher beliefs and practices in second language grammar teaching. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(5), 517–534. doi:10.1177/1362168819829016
- Subramaniam, G., & Wong, M. S. (2020). Error analysis of ESL students' written work in a Malaysian university. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 28(1), 135–150.
- Ting, S. H., & Mahadhir, M. (2009). Grammatical errors in spoken English of university students in Malaysia. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 9(1), 11–22.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Whiteley, S. (2008). Teacher collaboration and student achievement. *Education Review*, 60(2), 25–31.
- Williams, G. (2011). Assessing fluency and accuracy in communicative language teaching. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 8(3), 234–252. doi:10.1080/15434303.2011.565847
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Harlow: Longman.
- Wong, B. E., Norazman, N., & Kaur, P. (2021). Common grammatical errors in ESL students' writing: A Malaysian case study. ERIC Document. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1309444.pdf>
- Yunus, M. M., & Hashim, H. (2021). ESL teachers' professional development in open and distance learning (ODL): Challenges and strategies. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 437–449. doi:10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i6/10120
- Zawawi, R., Ismail, A., & Halim, N. S. (2017). Learners' perspectives on grammar instruction in Malaysian ESL classrooms. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(10), 81–88.