

NEGOTIATING GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN NON-FORMAL EFL SETTING: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO INDONESIAN TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Grammar instruction remains a central yet contested component of English language teaching (ELT), particularly in non-formal EFL settings where pedagogical flexibility often intersects with institutional and commercial demands. Despite the rapid growth of non-formal English education in Indonesia, limited research has examined how grammar instruction is interpreted, negotiated, and practiced in decentralized learning environments. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to explore how English teachers at the Accelerated English Centre (AEC) Medan conceptualize and negotiate grammar instruction within a non-formal institutional context. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on grammar pedagogy in privately managed EFL institutions, an area that remains underrepresented in mainstream ELT research dominated by formal school settings. Anchored in a narrative inquiry framework within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, this qualitative study involved five English teachers and five students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis. The findings revealed four interrelated themes: the dominance of explicit grammar instruction, the integration of grammar with communicative tasks, tensions between pedagogical ideals and institutional expectations, and adaptive instructional strategies shaped by learner needs and classroom realities. The findings demonstrate that grammar instruction in non-formal EFL settings is not merely the transmission of grammatical rules, but a dynamic and context-sensitive process shaped by teacher agency, learner expectations, and institutional pressures. The study contributes theoretically by extending Focus on Form (FonF), postmethod pedagogy, and constructivist perspectives into underexplored non-formal educational spaces. Practically, it highlights the importance of adaptive professional development and flexible instructional design in supporting effective grammar pedagogy in emerging EFL sectors. Overall, this research underscores the need to recognize local teaching ecologies and contextual realities in shaping grammar instruction within contemporary English language education.

Keywords: *Grammar Instruction; Non-Formal Education; Narrative Inquiry; Teacher Agency; Focus on Form*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction continues to play a significant role in English language teaching (ELT), particularly in EFL contexts where learners are expected to achieve both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. Recent studies have emphasized that grammar teaching remains essential for supporting learners' language development, especially when integrated with meaningful communication and contextualized classroom interaction (Nassaji, 2020; Gao, 2022). In many Asian EFL settings, grammar instruction is still strongly associated with academic

achievement, learner confidence, and communicative performance, making it an indispensable component of English pedagogy.

This shift has also been supported by constructivist perspectives in second language education, which view learning as socially constructed, context-sensitive, and shaped by interaction. Within this framework, grammar is not simply a set of abstract rules to be memorized, but a functional tool negotiated through communicative practice (Farrell, 2022; Gao, 2022). Grammar teaching, therefore, becomes more effective when situated within learners' goals, experiences, and sociocultural settings.

Empirical studies in recent years have further nuanced this view. For instance, Hadeli et al. (2023) found that combining formative assessment with communicative grammar instruction significantly improved students' oral performance. This suggests that structure and interaction are not opposing forces, but complementary aspects of grammar pedagogy. Likewise, a large-scale mixed-methods study by Hendriani et al. (2023) found that students' preferences for grammar learning models are influenced by teacher presence and extrinsic motivation, highlighting the affective and relational dimensions of grammar pedagogy. Complementary findings from Siregar and Puspitorini (2024) revealed a strong preference—among both students and teachers—for integrated grammar approaches in Indonesian high schools, challenging traditional reliance on isolated instruction.

In addition to these classroom-based perspectives, research has also begun to explore grammar instruction in digital and non-traditional environments. Binova et al. (2024), using a narrative inquiry approach, reported that gamified platforms such as Quizizz increased learner motivation and improved grammar retention when tasks were aligned with learner identities and real-life communication. This supports the argument that grammar instruction must be not only cognitively rigorous but also emotionally engaging and technologically adaptive.

Despite these advances, most empirical research has focused on formal school settings, leaving a critical gap in understanding how grammar is conceptualized and practiced in non-formal EFL contexts particularly in market-driven, privately run institutions. In Indonesia, non-formal English language centers such as the Accelerated English Centre (AEC) Medan serve a growing population of learners

but operate outside national curricula and institutional standardization. Teachers in such institutions often possess greater pedagogical autonomy but face challenges related to commercial demands, time constraints, learner heterogeneity, and limited access to professional development (Wang & Chen, 2023). These conditions place teachers in a unique position where they must negotiate grammar instruction dynamically—adapting content, strategies, and roles in real-time based on contextual factors.

However, little is known about how grammar instruction is interpreted, enacted, and redefined in these settings. Few studies have systematically examined how non-formal EFL teachers understand grammar pedagogy, how they respond to institutional pressures and student needs, or how their beliefs and practices evolve through experience. As such, there is a need to expand the theoretical application of Focus on Form (FonF) and postmethod pedagogy to account for decentralized, teacher-driven environments.

To address this gap, the present study explores the lived pedagogical experiences of English teachers at AEC Medan, a non-formal institution offering grammar-integrated instruction to diverse learners. Adopting a narrative inquiry within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm informed by recent qualitative language teacher research (Barkhuizen, 2023), the research investigates how grammar instruction is conceptualized and negotiated in a context marked by pedagogical autonomy and institutional limitations. Theoretically, this study contributes to the reconceptualization of grammar instruction as a flexible, dialogic, and situated practice. Practically, it offers insights into how professional development and instructional design can better support grammar teaching in emerging, under-regulated EFL sectors.

While frameworks such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Focus on Form (FonF), and constructivist pedagogy have received robust empirical support, their application in Indonesian non-formal EFL settings remains under-theorized. In market-driven institutions like AEC Medan, where teaching is influenced by learner demands, managerial expectations, and time constraints, these theoretical models are often recontextualized or selectively applied. For instance, TBLT's structured communicative sequencing (Ellis et al., 2020) may be perceived as time-intensive and less compatible with fast-paced learning demands commonly

found in tuition-based environments. Likewise, while recent FonF perspectives emphasize interaction-driven grammar learning (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021), teachers in non-formal centers tend to adopt a deliberate, pre-planned focus on form to meet learners' expectations for immediate grammatical clarity and measurable improvement.

Furthermore, the constructivist view of language learning as dialogic and situated (Farrell, 2022) is challenged by logistical realities such as limited curriculum guidelines, heterogeneous student profiles, and a lack of institutional collaboration platforms. These conditions compel teachers to engage in situated improvisation, often blending explicit instruction with contextual scaffolding in ways that deviate from canonical models. Khoi and Long (2021) emphasize that teacher identity and practice in semi-regulated spaces are shaped by external social pressures and internal negotiations. Similarly, Hutabarat (2023) shows how non-native English teachers in private Indonesian institutions build adaptive pedagogies through personal experience, rather than strict adherence to formal training. Nguyen and Tesar (2024) also highlight the ambiguity of ELT teacher identity in non-formal settings, arguing that narrative positioning is heavily influenced by institutional culture and pedagogical autonomy. These findings also suggest that grammar pedagogy in non-formal institutions is frequently shaped by contextual adaptation rather than strict methodological adherence, requiring teachers to negotiate between communicative ideals, learner expectations, and institutional realities (Farrell, 2022; Nguyen & Tesar, 2024).

Thus, this study contributes to theory-building by investigating how globally endorsed frameworks are appropriated, reinterpreted, or resisted in under-explored, non-formal EFL spaces. It calls for theoretical elasticity and a greater appreciation of local pedagogical ecologies when applying mainstream models in Indonesian teaching contexts.

By foregrounding teacher and learner voices, this study expands the landscape of grammar pedagogy by examining instructional practices in non-formal EFL institutions that are frequently overlooked in mainstream ELT research. The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of how grammar instruction is dynamically negotiated within a market-driven and pedagogically flexible learning environment, where teachers continuously adapt between communicative ideals,

institutional expectations, and learner demands. Unlike most previous studies that focus primarily on formal school contexts, this research highlights the complex realities of grammar teaching in decentralized, privately managed English institutions in Indonesia.

The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Focus on Form (FonF), postmethod pedagogy, and constructivist perspectives into under-explored non-formal EFL settings. It also contributes practically by providing insights into how grammar instruction can be designed more adaptively, contextually, and responsively to support learner engagement and communicative development. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that effective grammar pedagogy is not determined solely by methodological adherence, but by teachers' ability to interpret contextual realities, exercise pedagogical agency, and respond meaningfully to learners' communicative needs.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm commonly used in qualitative language education research (Barkhuizen, 2023) to explore how grammar instruction is conceptualized and negotiated by English teachers in a non-formal EFL setting. This design was chosen to capture the complexity of teaching practices in a bounded, real-world context—specifically, the Accelerated English Centre (AEC) Medan (Yin, 2018). To gain deeper insights into how teachers make sense of their instructional experiences, the study adopted narrative inquiry as its core methodological approach. Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to studies involving teacher identity, professional agency, and pedagogical reasoning, as it allows individuals to construct and share stories that reflect their lived realities (Barkhuizen, 2023; Nguyen & Tesar, 2024). In the context of non-formal education, where institutional structures are often minimal and teaching is highly contextualized, narrative inquiry enables researchers to explore how teachers navigate complex intersections of personal belief, institutional expectation, and classroom practice (Khoi & Long, 2021).

The research was conducted at AEC Medan, a private English course offering grammar-integrated instruction to students of various ages and proficiency

levels. Five English teachers and five students were selected through purposive maximum variation sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to ensure representation across diverse teaching experiences, learner backgrounds, and instructional perspectives within the non-formal EFL context. Data were collected from three sources: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to maintain authenticity, and then translated using a back-translation procedure to maintain linguistic accuracy and meaning equivalence throughout the analysis process (Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2021). Classroom observations focused on how grammar was introduced, explained, and practiced, while documents such as lesson plans and worksheets were reviewed to contextualize instructional decisions and contextual teaching practices (Morgan, 2022).

To analyze the data, a dual approach combining thematic analysis and narrative analysis was used. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis framework: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and final reporting. Codes were generated inductively from the data while being informed by recent perspectives on Focus on Form (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021) and postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2021). This analytical combination allowed the study to capture both recurring pedagogical patterns and the evolving meanings embedded within teachers' lived instructional experiences. In parallel, narrative analysis was employed using contemporary narrative inquiry perspectives in language teacher research (Barkhuizen, 2023), which examines experiences across interaction (personal–social), continuity (past–present–future), and situation (place). Teachers' stories were analyzed using narrative coding, focusing on turning points, reflective commentary, and experiential sequences (Barkhuizen, 2023). These narratives were then re-storied into coherent accounts to trace how grammar teaching practices developed over time and across different instructional conditions.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed several validation strategies aligned with contemporary qualitative trustworthiness criteria (Tracy, 2020). Member checking was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for feedback and verification. Peer debriefing involved a second qualitative researcher reviewing the coding framework and interpretations. A reflexive journal

was maintained throughout the process to record analytic decisions, researcher positionality, and emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Triangulation across interviews, classroom observations, and instructional documents strengthened the study's credibility, confirmability, and dependability by allowing findings to be cross-validated across multiple sources of evidence. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's research ethics committee, and informed consent was provided by all participants, with assurances of anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key themes that emerged from interviews with five teachers and five students at AEC Medan, as well as classroom observations and document analysis. Through thematic analysis and narrative interpretation, four interrelated patterns were identified: (1) the dominance of explicit grammar instruction, (2) the integration of grammar with communicative tasks, (3) tensions between instructional goals and institutional demands, and (4) adaptive teaching strategies in response to classroom realities. These themes illuminate how grammar pedagogy is constructed, negotiated, and adapted in a non-formal English language teaching context. Each theme is discussed below with reference to empirical insights and relevant theoretical perspectives.

Theme 1: Dominance of Explicit Grammar Instruction

A dominant theme that emerged from the data was the central role of explicit grammar instruction in classroom practices at AEC Medan. Teachers consistently began grammar lessons with clear explanations of rules and formulas, often delivered through whiteboard diagrams, oral exposition, and structured examples. This approach was particularly evident in beginner and intermediate-level classes, where teachers emphasized the need for foundational clarity before learners could engage in productive tasks.

Teacher T1 explained, "*Saya biasanya memulai kelas dengan menjelaskan rumus grammar secara jelas supaya siswa tidak bingung di awal.*" (I usually start the class by explaining the grammar rules clearly so that students are not confused at the beginning.) Similarly, Teacher T2 noted, "*Penjelasan awal penting agar siswa tahu apa yang harus mereka praktikkan nantinya.*" (The initial explanation

is important so students know what they are going to practice.) These perspectives demonstrate a pedagogical belief that explicit instruction provides cognitive scaffolding, giving learners a structured understanding of language before engaging in application.

Students' comments affirmed this preference. Student S1 shared, "*Kalau saya tidak paham rumusnya, saya bingung waktu speaking.*" (If I don't understand the formula, I get confused during speaking.) Such statements reflect a learner mindset oriented toward grammatical correctness, with explicit rules seen as essential for building confidence and avoiding errors. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing that explicit grammar instruction continues to support learner accuracy, metalinguistic awareness, and communicative development in EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts where learners rely on grammatical clarity to build communicative confidence (Nassaji, 2020; Hadelı et al., 2023).

In the context of AEC Medan—a non-formal institution where learners often seek practical and fast-paced results—explicit grammar teaching is not a traditional fallback but a strategic response to learner needs. It reflects what Kumaravadivelu (2021) terms “parameter sensitivity”: the teacher's ability to interpret contextual factors and respond accordingly. Thus, rather than opposing communicative methods, explicit grammar instruction at AEC functions as a preparatory phase that supports later communication-based tasks.

This preference for explicit instruction reinforces recent findings suggesting that direct grammatical explanations can significantly improve learner accuracy and learner confidence, particularly when students encounter unfamiliar or complex grammatical forms in EFL classrooms (Nassaji, 2020; Siregar & Puspitorini, 2024). However, unlike their findings in formal school settings, the explicit instruction observed in this study was not rigidly deductive. Teachers in AEC Medan used rule explanation as a strategic entry point to foster student confidence and motivation, which aligns with Nassaji's (2020) call for integrating explicit knowledge as scaffolding for deeper metalinguistic awareness. This highlights a context-sensitive adaptation of FonF, where the ‘focus’ is deliberately placed upfront rather than incidentally during communication.

Moreover, this theme diverges from communicative-based models such as contemporary TBLT approaches (Ellis et al., 2020), which prioritize meaning before form. In the AEC context, grammar is foregrounded to satisfy learner expectations and institutional demands—suggesting a hybrid approach that challenges the binary between focus-on-form and focus-on-forms. It exemplifies what Kumaravadivelu (2021) describes as “parameter sensitivity,” where teachers recalibrate pedagogy based on context, learner goals, and institutional culture. This situational recalibration may represent a localized grammar pedagogy that blends structural precision with pragmatic responsiveness.

Overall, the findings indicate that explicit grammar instruction at AEC Medan functions not merely as a traditional teaching preference, but as a context-sensitive pedagogical strategy shaped by learner expectations, institutional demands, and communicative goals. Teachers appear to combine direct explanation with contextualized practice to maintain grammatical clarity while still supporting learner participation and communicative confidence. This supports recent perspectives suggesting that effective grammar instruction in EFL settings often requires balancing explicit explanation with meaningful communicative application (Farrell, 2022; Nassaji, 2020).

Theme 2: Integration of Grammar with Communicative Tasks

Despite the prominence of rule-based explanations, the data also revealed a widespread tendency among teachers to blend grammar instruction with communicative tasks. Teachers deliberately designed grammar lessons to move from explicit explanation to application, creating opportunities for students to practice forms in meaningful contexts through dialogue, role plays, and sentence-building games.

Teacher T2 remarked, *"Setelah saya menjelaskan aturan grammar, saya langsung beri tugas speaking atau writing supaya siswa bisa langsung pakai rumus itu."* (After I explain the grammar rules, I immediately give a speaking or writing task so students can apply the formula right away.) Observations supported this sequencing, with teachers shifting from formulaic instruction to pair work, discussions, and written production.

This strategy aligns with recent perspectives on Focus on Form, which emphasize that grammar instruction becomes more effective when integrated into meaningful communicative interaction and learner engagement (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021). However, in AEC Medan, this focus appears to be intentional and planned, rather than incidental. Teachers consciously scaffold learning by first establishing grammatical control, then embedding that knowledge in practical, low-stakes communication.

Students acknowledged the benefits of this approach. Student S3 commented, "*Kalau langsung dipakai role play, saya jadi lebih ingat aturan grammar-nya.*" (When we use role play right away, I remember the grammar rules better.) This supports the idea that communicative grammar instruction improves memory retention, boosts motivation, and lowers anxiety.

These findings echo recent research in communicative grammar teaching (Erlam & Ellis, 2018; Hadeli et al., 2023), which shows that learners benefit when they can immediately apply forms in interaction. At AEC, this blend reflects both pedagogical awareness and responsiveness to learner expectations in a result-driven, non-formal educational context.

The move from rule explanation to communicative tasks reflects a principled integration of form and function that resonates with Nassaji and Kartchava's (2021) original concept of Focus on Form. However, unlike incidental FonF strategies typically embedded in meaning-focused interaction, the integration in AEC is often deliberate and structured—a form of what Ellis et al. (2020) describe as "planned FonF." This adaptation highlights how teachers reconcile the need for structured grammatical input with learner preferences for immediate, relevant usage in communication.

The integration of grammar instruction with communicative activities in AEC Medan also demonstrates how teachers adapt contemporary grammar pedagogy to local classroom realities. Rather than separating form and meaning, teachers strategically combine explicit explanation with contextualized practice to enhance learner participation, confidence, and retention. This finding supports recent studies emphasizing that communicative grammar teaching is most effective when learners are given immediate opportunities to apply grammatical knowledge in authentic interaction (Bao & Du, 2024; Farrell, 2022).

Furthermore, these findings support Hadeli et al. (2023), who found that pairing grammar instruction with speaking activities significantly improved students' oral fluency and retention. The student testimonies in this study echo this, revealing how task-based activities enhance recall and engagement. However, unlike Hadeli's formal classroom setting, teachers in AEC operate without curriculum mandates—demonstrating that communicative grammar instruction can emerge from teacher agency rather than institutional structure. This nuance contributes a fresh perspective to communicative grammar pedagogy in non-formal education and affirms the value of adaptability in context-driven teaching.

Theme 3: Tensions Between Pedagogy and Institutional Expectations

A recurring tension noted by teachers was the challenge of balancing their pedagogical goals with the institutional pressures for fast, visible student progress. Teachers reported that both parents and management expected grammar to be taught quickly and measurably—placing implicit pressure on instructors to accelerate instruction, reduce repetition, and prioritize grammar points that could be tested.

Teacher T4 expressed, "*Ada tekanan dari orang tua dan manajemen untuk menunjukkan kemajuan cepat. Tapi grammar itu butuh waktu.*" (There is pressure from parents and management to show quick progress, but grammar takes time.) Likewise, Teacher T5 added, "*Kadang saya ingin lebih fokus ke latihan, tapi kelas harus jalan cepat karena siswa ingin hasil cepat.*" (Sometimes I want to focus more on practice, but the class has to move quickly because students want fast results.)

These statements reveal how market-driven logic—common in private language institutions—can override instructional pacing and content depth. Teachers are not only educators but also service providers expected to meet customer satisfaction, often at the expense of pedagogical thoroughness.

This tension is well documented in previous research (Borg, 2018; Wang & Chen, 2023), which describes how teachers in privatized ELT contexts must navigate dual accountabilities: educational integrity and institutional efficiency. At AEC, this duality resulted in compressed grammar lessons, fewer opportunities for review, and minimal formative assessment. Nevertheless, teachers demonstrated

professional judgment in managing these constraints—sometimes by assigning homework, using shortcuts, or offering after-class explanations.

In line with postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2021), teachers in this study appeared to negotiate between institutional expectations and pedagogical responsibility by making context-sensitive compromises. Although the learning environment posed structural limitations, teachers retained a degree of agency in how they sequenced, modified, and delivered grammar content.

The tensions reported by teachers highlight a dilemma frequently overlooked in grammar pedagogy literature: the commercialization of instructional outcomes. While Borg (2018) and Wang & Chen (2023) observed similar tensions in private institutions across Asia, this study extends the discussion by illustrating how those pressures directly shape the pacing, depth, and sequencing of grammar instruction. Teachers are caught between pedagogical integrity and performance-driven market logic—forcing them to negotiate coverage, skip formative assessments, and compress instructional cycles.

Theoretically, this dynamic challenges collaborative and reflective assumptions of learner-centered language teaching (Farrell, 2022), which often require time, interaction, and pedagogical flexibility that may not always be available in non-formal institutions. Instead, teachers exercise what Kumaravadivelu (2021) describes as “strategic competence”: making pedagogical compromises without abandoning learner-centered intentions. This calls for a rethinking of theoretical models to include commercial and institutional pressures as variables shaping grammar instruction in private EFL contexts.

These findings further demonstrate that grammar instruction in non-formal English institutions is strongly influenced by institutional expectations, learner demands, and market-oriented educational practices. Teachers are required to balance pedagogical ideals with practical classroom realities, often adapting instructional pacing and assessment strategies to maintain learner satisfaction and institutional efficiency. This supports recent studies emphasizing that effective grammar instruction in private EFL contexts depends heavily on adaptive teacher cognition and context-sensitive pedagogical decision-making (Farrell, 2022; Gao, 2022).

Theme 4: Adaptive Teaching Strategies in Response to Classroom Realities

The final theme highlights how AEC Medan teachers adapted their grammar instruction to address learner diversity, time constraints, and classroom dynamics. Teachers noted that each class required a different approach based on student motivation, comprehension speed, background knowledge, and even mood or time of day.

Teacher T1 shared, "*Kadang saya sudah rancang satu metode, tapi saat melihat siswa kurang paham, saya langsung ubah cara menjelaskannya.*" (Sometimes I plan a method, but when I see students struggling, I change my explanation immediately.) This ability to adjust pedagogy in real time reflects what contemporary postmethod pedagogy describes as "situational improvisation" in context-sensitive language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2021).

Diversity among learners also prompted a blend of deductive and inductive grammar approaches. For example, while some learners preferred structured rule explanations, others responded better to examples, games, or discovery-based tasks. Teachers responded by modifying content difficulty, alternating between teacher-led and student-centered activities, and incorporating more visuals or analogies.

Time limitations further shaped adaptation. In evening classes or sessions with working adults, teachers reported reducing theoretical explanations and prioritizing engaging, task-based grammar activities. As Teacher T2 remarked, "*Kalau siswa kelihatan lelah, saya kurangi bagian teori dan langsung beri latihan yang ringan.*" (If students appear tired, I skip the theory and give simple exercises.)

This theme underscores teacher agency and pedagogical sensitivity as critical assets in non-formal education. Despite the lack of official curriculum or structured support, teachers at AEC demonstrated high levels of instructional flexibility. Their grammar teaching was not scripted but responsive, personalized, and dynamically negotiated.

Such practices align with recent studies emphasizing that adaptive teaching is a defining feature of English language teaching in private institutions, where teachers frequently operate with limited institutional support and highly diverse learner needs (Nguyen & Tesar, 2024). At AEC, adaptive grammar instruction was

not merely a coping strategy, but a sign of professional competence in context-sensitive pedagogy.

The flexibility demonstrated by AEC teachers exemplifies a strong application of postmethod pedagogy—particularly the principle of situational improvisation. This theme supports Nguyen & Tesar’s (2024) finding that teacher identity and pedagogical choices are deeply influenced by environmental uncertainty and learner variation. In AEC, such adaptation includes switching between deductive and inductive strategies, simplifying explanations, or reordering content in response to learner cues.

This nuanced responsiveness goes beyond the structured flexibility assumed in TBLT or FonF models. Instead, it reflects a “pedagogy of immediacy,” where teachers prioritize learner affect, fatigue, and readiness as central to instructional design. Unlike state-regulated environments, where structure dictates practice, the AEC context allows for improvisation grounded in teacher–student rapport. This finding contributes to constructivist pedagogical theory by emphasizing relational sensitivity as a core driver of grammar instruction—particularly in low-regulation, high-autonomy settings.

The findings also indicate that adaptive grammar instruction is closely connected to teacher responsiveness, learner engagement, and classroom atmosphere. Rather than following rigid instructional procedures, teachers at AEC Medan continuously modified explanations, examples, and communicative activities based on learner readiness and participation. This supports recent perspectives suggesting that effective grammar pedagogy in non-formal EFL settings depends heavily on pedagogical flexibility, contextual awareness, and responsive teacher–student interaction (Farrell, 2022; Gao, 2022).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that grammar instruction in non-formal English institutions cannot rely solely on fixed teaching methods or standardized instructional procedures. Instead, successful grammar pedagogy requires continuous adaptation to learner diversity, classroom conditions, and institutional realities. The experiences of AEC teachers illustrate how pedagogical flexibility and teacher agency become central components of effective grammar teaching in highly dynamic EFL environments.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has explored how grammar instruction is conceptualized and enacted by English teachers at a non-formal language institution, Accelerated English Centre (AEC) Medan. Using narrative inquiry within a qualitative case study, the research identified four themes that reflect the complex and context-driven nature of grammar pedagogy in non-formal settings.

First, the dominance of explicit grammar instruction reflects both a pedagogical preference for clarity and a learner expectation for structured knowledge. Teachers use rule explanation not merely as a traditional method, but as a strategic response to students' need for accuracy, particularly in a setting where visible learning progress is prioritized. Second, grammar instruction is integrated with communicative tasks, revealing that teachers do not treat grammar and communication as oppositional, but rather as complementary dimensions of language learning. This form–function alignment underscores a practical application of Focus on Form pedagogy and supports retention and learner motivation.

Third, the findings highlight tensions between teachers' pedagogical intentions and institutional expectations. Grammar instruction at AEC is shaped not only by theoretical principles, but also by commercial demands, time pressures, and the perceived urgency of measurable outcomes. Finally, the data show that teachers actively adapt their strategies in response to classroom realities—including learner diversity, fluctuating motivation, and varying levels of grammatical preparedness. These adaptive practices demonstrate professional agency, creativity, and improvisation, all of which are essential in non-formal, low-regulation teaching contexts.

Theoretically, the study contributes to post method perspectives in ELT by showing how grammar instruction can be negotiated, situated, and improvised based on local constraints and learner needs. It affirms that effective grammar pedagogy is not the product of fixed methods, but of teacher decision-making in context. Practically, the findings suggest the need for non-formal institutions to invest in professional development, peer collaboration, and curriculum flexibility. Rather than imposing rigid models, institutions should support teacher autonomy

and provide platforms for reflective exchange—especially in grammar instruction, which requires precision, sensitivity, and contextual calibration.

Future research should examine learner perspectives in greater depth, and compare grammar teaching practices across different non-formal institutions to explore how institutional culture, teacher identity, and learner goals interact in shaping instructional choices. As private English education continues to grow in Southeast Asia and beyond, understanding the pedagogical complexities of grammar teaching in non-formal contexts remains both urgent and underdeveloped.

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