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# Teaching Grammar in Intermediate English Grammar Class: What is Happening beyond the Classroom?

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## Abstract

Teaching grammar is a very complex task to do since the lecturer does not only teach the rules but also teach other aspects of language. As language component, grammar will always play a significant role within the English skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In relation to this regard, this study exposed the practice of teaching grammar at intermediate grammar class as a part of grammar courses in State University of Malang and seek for the issues of what was happening beyond the classroom which encompassed lecturer' role, students' role, classroom management strategy, approach, technique, materials, tasks, language used, lecturer-students interaction, and students' participation in teaching and learning process. This study used both qualitative and quantitative research approach where the results were described quantitatively in numbers and qualitatively in words describing the phenomena taking place. The results suggested that the teaching and learning process of intermediate grammar at State University of Malang manages to meet almost all of the indicators and criteria within the aspects measured in the observation checklist. The teaching and learning process manages to meet 86.2 % of the indicators which means it meets 50 indicators out of 58. Thus, the teaching and learning process can be considered as excellent.



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## INTRODUCTION

According to Ur (1988:4), grammar can be defined as the rule of how to combine and construct words into larger units in aspect of meaning. This definition is supported by Thornbury (1999:1). Thornbury (1991:1) asserts that grammar is a study of possibility in forming structures used in a language. Another definition is stated by Radford (1988:2). Radford (1988:2) explains that grammar refers to the set of rules or principles that contain how to construct, pronounce, and understand phrases and sentences in the language concerned. In other words, it is not only the aspect of syntax that is going to be learned, but also the aspect of phonology and morphology as well. Because of this reason, teaching grammar is essential in the mastery of language.

Applying certain approach and technique in teaching grammar not only make the teaching and learning process become effective and meaningful but also improve the students' competence in understanding the grammar rules. A number of previous studies have been done to know the effect of using certain approach and technique in teaching grammar. Ho and Binh (2014) used communicative approach to teach grammar by applying some dialogues and interactional activities. The result of their study showed that the grammar mastery of the learners was improved and the learners could do well in the test. The mean score of the learners who were taught by using communicative approach (7,38) was higher than those who were not (5,64). Meanwhile, Nahid et al., (2015) used conscious-raising task technique to teach grammar. This technique required the learners to formulate grammar rules from the tasks and discuss the rules with their friends. The result of his study also showed that the learners' score in grammar test was improved.

There are four approaches that can be applied in the teaching grammar. The first is inductive approach which emphasizes on a process of discovering the grammar rules by examining examples. When they discover the rules, they will practice by creating their own examples (Thornbury, 1999). The second is deductive approach which emphasizes on a process in which the teachers presents the grammar rules and gives examples by highlighting the rules. The third is implicit presentation of forms approach which emphasizes on a process in using the target form in certain communication (Savage, 2010 cited in Brown, 2015:469). The fourth is focus on form approach which emphasizes on a process of trying to draw the learners' attention to the target grammatical rules while they are engaged in communicative activities.

Meanwhile, the principles that underline grammar teaching are focusing on all three dimensions of grammar, namely form, meaning, and use, letting the learners to have the opportunity in practicing and using forms in

communicative tasks, emphasizing on both input-based (comprehension) and output-based (production) grammar and vocabulary, and using inductive, deductive, implicit presentation of forms or focus on forms approach based on the learning objective and the learners' need (Loewen, 2011 cited in Brown, 2015:473).

In terms of techniques for teaching grammar, there are some techniques that can be used to help the learners notice and pay attention to grammar rules (Brown, 2015:474-479); (1) the first technique is using charts, objects, maps, and drawings; (2) the second technique is using dialogues and conversations; (3) the third technique is input enhancement which involves highlighting certain target of grammatical forms in a reading text or stressing certain forms when speaking; (4) the fourth technique is input flood. It contains a target structure that appears frequently; (5) the fifth technique is input processing. It refers to the process of using text for input. Thus, the learners can make the necessary connections in authentic contexts of L2 use; (6) the sixth technique is dictogloss. Dictogloss means a task-based procedure designed to help L2 learners internalize certain grammatical elements that are built into a text. Through the reconstruction of a text, the learners come to notice certain grammar rules.

All in all, this current research focuses in identifying the teaching and learning process of English grammar, especially within intermediate level, and highlights the strength as well as the obstacle for the learning process.

## **METHODS**

As it was conducted in natural classroom situation without disturbing the teaching and learning process, descriptive qualitative design was employed in this study to venture out the students' role, the lecturer's role, classroom management strategy, approach, technique, materials, tasks, language used, lecturer-students interaction, and students' participation in teaching and learning process. Considering that purpose, the source of data was focused on the lecturer of intermediate grammar class and 34 students of intermediate grammar class at State University of Malang. This course is the second of a three-part English Grammar course which provides the students with the knowledge of English Grammar, the ability to apply this knowledge in comprehension and production, and the practices for taking the structure and written expression part of the TOEFL. Intermediate English Grammar focuses on gerund and infinitives, noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverbial clauses (See Catalog English Department of State University of Malang, 2016).

The data were collected through observation by using observation checklist and field notes as the instrument. The observation checklist was

developed from the blueprint in the form of table consisting of six columns. The first column contained the dimension of the checklist related to the teacher's and student's attribute. The second column contained the teaching framework consisting of pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching. The third column contained the aspects that were going to be observed. The fourth column contained 57 descriptions or the indicators of the aspects. The fifth column contained whether the descriptions or indicators done during the teaching and learning process or not. The last column contained further information about the observation in the form of comments from the researchers. Meanwhile, field note was filled with the description of the lecturer and the students' activities in the classroom.

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data came up from the result of observation checklist in the form of percentage. After finding out the percentage, the data were analysed by using descriptors to determine whether the teaching and learning process of grammar was excellent (84%-100%), good (67%-83%), fair (51%-67%), or poor (below 50%). Meanwhile, the qualitative data were in the form of words and description from the field note. These data were analysed by comparing and relating them to some theories about teaching grammar. Then, the analysis was presented descriptively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the classroom observation within the teaching of intermediate grammar class is as follow:

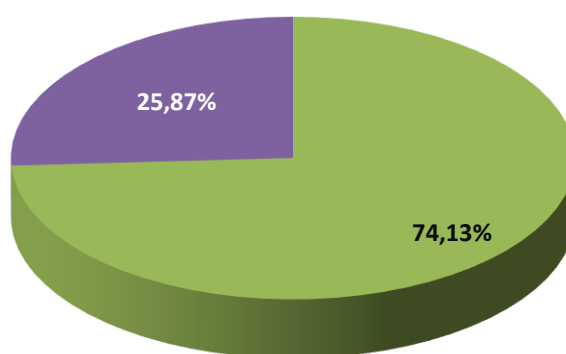
**Table 1.** Recapitulation of Classroom Observation Result

No	Teaching Framework and Students Attribute	Aspects	Number of Indicators	Evaluation Checklist	
				Yes	No
1	Pre-teaching	Role of the lecturer	5	4	1
		Role of the students	3	3	-
2	Whilst-teaching	Classroom Management Strategy	13	13	-
		Approach	4	3	1
		Technique	7	4	3
		Material	2	1	1
		Task	2	1	1
		Language used	6	6	-

		Lecturer-students' interaction	4	4	-
3	Post-teaching	Role of the lecturer	4	4	-
		Role of students	3	2	1
4	Students' participation	Motivation	2	2	-
		Enthusiasm	1	1	-
5	Language used	Appropriateness	2	2	-
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>58</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>8</b>

From the table, it can be said that the teaching and learning process met most of the indicators within each aspect. Totally, it met 50 indicators and only failed to meet 8 indicators. It can be said that the teaching and learning process met most of indicators in the checklist. It managed to met 74.13% of the indicators and failed to meet 25.87% of them.

■ "Meet the indicators"    ■ "Does not meet the indicators"



**Chart 1.** The Percentage of Classroom Observation Result

### ***Pre-teaching Activities***

Pre-teaching activities included two observing variables, that is, lecturer's role and students' role. The lecture's roles in pre-teaching were greeting the students, checking the students' attendance list, reviewing previous grammar lesson, ensuring the previous homework, and activating the students' background knowledge. Greeting the students fostered positive relationship as a manner of providing the students with a warm environment. Meanwhile, checking attendance list was an important activity to know the students' condition. It was good for the teachers to be aware and care of the students who

came to the class and who missed their work or absent. As McLeod et al., (2003: 35) assert that taking attendance is the primary responsibility of the teachers. It should be done as soon as the students engage in the opening activity. In addition, reviewing previous grammar lesson and ensuring the previous homework were also important to make sure that the students comprehend the previous lesson so that they would not find it difficult in learning the new material. After reviewing previous grammar lesson and ensuring the previous homework, activating the students' background knowledge was needed. The lecturer did this activity by asking some questions related to the material. According to Christen and Murphy (1991), the students' background knowledge is divided into three categories, that is, much, some, and little. The teacher needs to check what background knowledge exists about the material by doing some activities like brainstorming the material or asking questions related to the material. Meanwhile, the students' role in pre-teaching were listening to the lecturer when she checked the attendance list, responding to the questions asked by the lecturer and giving comments when she reviewed previous lesson, ensured the previous homework, and activated their background knowledge.

### ***Whilst-teaching Activities***

Whilst-teaching activities included seven observing variables, namely classroom management, technique, approach, material, task, language used, and lecturer and students' interaction. Bosch (in Wu et al., 2013) says that classroom management is the process of how the teachers work, how classes operate, how the teachers and the students work together, and how instruction and learning take place. The lecturer maintained the management of the class by dividing the class into two activities, namely whole classroom activities and groups or pairs activities. Whole classroom activities were employed during the lecturer's presentation and explanation and groups or pairs activities were established when the students' have to do and discuss the tasks or exercises. During the whole classroom activities, the lecturer not only provided and explained the learning material but also granted the students some spaces to become active by letting their creativity and innovation flows. In terms of giving the instruction for doing the task, the lecturer gave clear instruction in every section and told the time allocation before the students began their pair work or group work. The instruction also encompassed what the students should do and what their roles within their group. In addition, the lecturer walked around the class to make sure that the classroom activity ran well and ensured that the students finished all of the tasks given. She was also highly aware of the students' inappropriate behavior. When the students made noise and were sleepy, the

lecturer called on their name and redirected them to appropriate behavior. All of those actions were in line with Doyle (1986: 395) who states that the role of classroom management in maintaining order in the classroom deals with the managerial function, that is, organizing classroom groups, monitoring, and pacing classroom events. Doyle's idea is supported by Ahmad et al. (2012) who assert that classroom management as the process of ensuring the classroom run smoothly despite of disruptive behavior performed by the students.

In terms of approach in teaching grammar, the lecturer implemented inductive approach to teach Intermediate Grammar class by representing the examples of grammar point in order to find out the rules. She discussed the example (direct example and example in their textbook), informed the students about the rules based on it, and used the target form in the utterances to communicate with the students in order to help them understand the meaning and sustain the communication. As Thornbury (1999) mentions that an inductive approach starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred and elicits information from the students by presenting example of the sentence. In addition, the lecturer also implemented the theory of focus on forms by asking the students to do dialogue with his or her friend by following the grammar focus. Brown and Lee (2005) note that to draw students' attention to target forms while they are engaged in communicative activities, the emphasis of teaching grammar is on the students' noticing their knowledge about grammatical features which is necessary for successful target language use and has been influential in task-based approaches to grammar instruction.

In addition to that approach, the lecturer also used dialogues and conversations and implicated input enhancement (highlighting) to teach grammar points as the teaching techniques. As stated by Abbasian and Yekani (2014), input enhancement can be used to attract students' attention to the grammar point. In this case, the lecturer gave correction and feedback on students' work by underlining the students' answer on the whiteboard to stress the grammar point and the mistake of sentence. Other techniques used by the lecturer were input processing to teach grammar points based on the exercises in the students' textbook and presentation, practice and production (PPP). During this technique, the lecturer presented and gave explanation about grammar material, instructed the students to work in group, and at the end, each of the group's members presented the result of their group work in front of the class following by the comments and feedback from peers and the lecturer.

The lecturer also used appropriate materials in teaching grammar. The materials were about the use of gerund and infinitive which belonged to the

competences that need to be mastered by the students. In delivering the materials to the students, the lecturer used a textbook. The textbook used was an international edition textbook entitled “Understanding and Using English Grammar: Fourth Edition.” This particular textbook seemed to be the core source since the lecturer and the students were only talking about the task within the textbook from the very beginning of the teaching and learning process. The content of the textbook seemed to be hand in hand with the materials need to be taught. However, the observation revealed that the lecturer relied too much to the textbook. It would be better if the lecturer used the textbook in more creative way by adding or adapting the task given within the textbook itself since using textbook creatively was one of the lecturer’s premier skills (Harmer, 2007: 147).

After explaining the materials, tasks and exercises were given. The tasks and exercises were quite varied. Within the textbook used, there were some tasks and exercises that were done by the students such as; word completion, sentence construction (oral and written), and paragraph completion. For the word completion task, the lecturer asked the students to work individually. Meanwhile, for the sentence construction, the lecturer asked the students to work independently in pairs. Likewise, for the paragraph completion task, the lecturer asked the students to form a group consisting of three students each group write down their work in the white board to be discussed. In giving the tasks and exercises, the lecturer had done an excellent job. She gave instructions clearly and made some correction to the students’ mistakes within the process of discussing the students’ work. Whenever the students’ commit to make mistake, the lecturer did not directly correct the mistake. Instead, the lecturer asked the students to repeat what he or she had said by giving a gesture showing that actually he or she had made a mistake. As Harmer (2001:106) says that the teacher should not give any correction directly to the students. Furthermore, Harmer also says that by hinting or asking the students to repeat what he/she had will be the best way in correcting the students’ mistakes.

In the teaching of grammar itself, the lecturer had used appropriate target language since all of the students did not have any difficulties in understanding what the lecturer had said. She also used the native language to loosen the atmosphere by giving some jokes. Furthermore, the lecturer used appropriate tone which is not too high or too low in explaining as well as clarifying both of the students’ questions and answers. This is in line with Harmer’s statement (2007:34) in which he states that the teacher’s voice should be audible so that the students sit in the back row could hear his or her voice.



Related to the lecturer and the students' interaction, the lecturer was able to encourage all of the students to be active and to do their best. This could be seen from the way the lecturer asking around when the students were doing a group task activity. The lecturer also treated the students nicely and fairly. The students were comfortable and feeling secure in participating within the teaching and learning process. One of the examples that the students were feeling secure was the moment when the lecturer and the students were singing together in the beginning of the class. They sang happy birthday song to congratulate one of the students. By doing so, it will motivate the students to be more engage in the teaching and learning process. The more motivated the students are, the more they want to learn and the more they can achieve (Nilson, 2010: 55).

### ***Post-teaching Activities***

Post-teaching activities included two variables, that is, the lecturer's role and the students' role. The lecturer's role in post-teaching activities were giving questions to the students related to the material given by checking the students' understanding about gerund and infinitive, reviewing the materials that have been taught by asking the students to mention the differences between gerund and infinitive and mentioning the examples of verbs followed by gerund and infinitive, giving assignment related to the materials, and giving information about the materials for the next meeting. All those activities were considered beneficial. As Smithore (2016) states that wrap up activities like checking the students' understanding about the materials and reviewing the materials that have been taught will make the students remember the materials for a long term. In addition, giving assignments related to the materials can increase students' understanding about the materials and strengthen their critical thinking skills (Terada, 2015) and giving information about the materials for the next meeting will make the students prepare and study the materials so that they come up to the class with the knowledge of the materials.

Meanwhile, the students' role in post-teaching were answering the lecturer's questions and stating the conclusion of today's lesson. These activities showed that the focus of teaching grammar was students-centered learning. In students-centered learning, the lecturers will become facilitators and encourage the students to participate actively in the classroom (Bogdan, 2011)

## ***Students' Participation***

Students' participation in the teaching and learning process was divided into motivation and enthusiasm. The observation showed that the students' motivation and enthusiasm in the teaching and learning process were considerably good. They did the exercises actively and worked cooperatively. They also showed a good independent learning and finished the exercises on time. According to Harmer (2001:52), motivation and enthusiasm are two of the factors that influence students' achievement and performance. This motivation and enthusiasm can be caused by tasks or exercises. The tasks or exercises which lead to the students' success and offer pleasant and rewarding experiences will develop a liking for second language. As a result, the students are motivated and enthusiastic to learn. They also show good achievement and performance.

## ***Language Used***

The students used English during the teaching and learning process when they communicated with the lecturer, asked the lecturer questions, and answered the lecturer questions. Meanwhile, they used both of Indonesian and English when they communicated with their friends. This activity was good to practice speaking. As Harmer (2001:276) says that practice speaking regularly can make the students fluent in English as the foreign language.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to the result of the finding and the discussion, it can be concluded that the teaching and learning process of intermediate grammar at State University of Malang manages to meet almost all of the indicators and criteria within the aspects measured in the observation checklist. Those aspects cover pre-teaching activities, whilst-teaching activities, and post-teaching activities, the students' participation, and the language used by the students. The teaching and learning process manages to meet 86.2 % of the indicators which means it meets 50 indicators out of 58. Thus, it can be said that the teaching and learning process of intermediate grammar at State University of Malang can be classified as an excellent.

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