

## ISOLATED AND INTEGRATED GRAMMAR TEACHING IN TERTIARY EFL CONTEXT: INDONESIAN TEACHERS' BELIEFS

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### Abstract

While there are a lot of debates surrounding isolated and integrated grammar teaching, there is still limited research on their uses in EFL settings with larger class sizes and different learning environments. To fill in this gap, this case study investigates teachers' beliefs toward isolated grammar teaching (Focus on Forms/FoFs) and integrated grammar teaching (largely a version of Focus on Form/FonF) in the context of EFL tertiary language study in Indonesia. The data were obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 Indonesian teachers of a private university's English language program. In general, the teachers tended to value one of the approaches for different aspects, but there was less consensus on their effectiveness to promote students' ability to apply grammar in context. In spite of this, most considered the approaches to complement each other. Nevertheless, over half of the participants indicated that isolated grammar teaching should assume a primary role in their context for practical reasons. Drawing on mostly teachers' experience in grammar teaching, this small-scale research offers more crucial insights into how isolated and integrated grammar teaching like FonFs and FonF are viewed at a more practical level amidst controversies on how to best teach grammar.

**Keywords:** Focus on Form/Forms, Teachers' Beliefs, Tertiary EFL Context

### INTRODUCTION

ELT scholars and practitioners increasingly agree that language focus on grammar is an essential aspect of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as it affects students' success in learning the language. In spite of this, there seems to be little agreement on how to deliver grammar instruction to such students. One issue that has often been debated is whether grammar instruction will be better delivered exclusively in isolation or integratively as part of the instruction for teaching higher communicative skills or tasks, such as reading, writing, and speaking. According to Spada and Lightbown (2008), integrating grammar into context can give a positive contribution to the second language development both in short and long terms.

Nevertheless, there is also a view that separate focus on grammar is also necessary for specific contexts (Ellis, 2002b; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Although there is evidence supporting each of the approaches/methods, the integrated approach seems to receive far more theoretical favor in EFL contexts as well as in experimental settings. The isolated approach, on the other hand, is often seen to be somewhat outdated and ineffective. This view seems to be counterintuitive as the traditional approach is still widely practiced, especially in countries like China and Indonesia where students are normally taught in larger classes.

This issue is especially important in the context of tertiary EFL programs such as in Indonesia because normally there are pressures to enable their students to communicate effectively in both written and spoken English just within several years. It is, therefore, crucial to investigate different aspects of the choices regarding the approaches of grammar instructions in such contexts, one of which is the teachers' beliefs, which has often been neglected in SLA (Graus & Coppen, 2015a). With this in mind, this study seeks to examine university English teachers' views towards isolated grammar teaching and grammar focus embedded in communicative tasks, such as speaking and writing. The findings in this study are expected to shed more light on the use of the two grammar teaching approaches in the context of undergraduate English language programs in a developing country and may provide understanding for EFL teachers in general as they are faced with selecting ways of delivering grammar in real classrooms.

According to Ellis (2006, p. 84), grammar teaching may be broadly defined as "any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that can internalize it". This notion implies that, while grammar teaching involves a conscious effort, it does not have to include a presentation and practice of grammatical items or either of them (Ellis, 2006). It may also be implicitly done where inputs are given, and learners are expected to discover the rules themselves.

Although grammar is an essential component of a language and plays a crucial role in meaning-making, scholars like Krashen (1982) believed that grammar should not be taught because, like in L1 development, its acquisition was accidental through language use. However, while this view seems to have reduced the focus on grammar in communicative language teaching, research shows that language focus assists students better develop their language competence (Ellis, 2006; Long, 1988; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Thus, the issue is not whether or not grammar should be taught, but how it should be taught.

Grammar teaching is often categorized into isolated and integrated types. The differentiation is frequently based on whether or not the focus on grammar items is embedded in the context of communication or separate from it, which seems to be a common understanding among practitioners. Isolated grammar teaching is generally associated with the traditional way where grammatical items are presented and practiced. In contrast, the integrated one is usually linked to communicative contexts. However, Long (1991) proposed a more elaborate typology which consists of two teaching approaches: Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on Forms (FonFs). In FonF, the linguistic element delivery develops from the communicative and content-based activity and grammar rules are taught implicitly and incidentally following the learners' emerging needs (Long, 1991). Within this approach attention to form is given after the meaning is evident through students' engagement with language use (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Norris & Ortega, 2000). Elaborating Long's more limited concept, Ellis defines FonF as "various techniques designed to attract learners' attention to form while they are using the L2 as a tool for communicating" (2016, p. 409). In this way, the language focus in FonF may also be pre-

planned, explicit, and contain some communicative content. What makes FonF different from FonFs is the former centers on the teaching of communicative skill, but, borrowing Doughty and Williams' words, it also "entails a focus on formal elements of language" (1998, p. 4).

FonFs, on the other hand, is when linguistic structures become the focus of the instruction. When grammar is taught in this way, the form is delivered separately, integrated into sentence and short texts levels and with limited use of communication or content activity (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). FonFs is based on the traditional language teaching drawing on a structural syllabus. In such an approach, the grammar rules are explicitly referred to by explaining them or directing the learners to find them in a sample of L2 (Cowan, 2008) and grammatical items are "to be studied and learned as objects" (Ellis, 2016, p. 409).

It is important to note that FonF and FonFs are different from Form-Focused Instructions (FFIs) proposed by Spada and Lightbown (2008). According to the scholars, integrated FFI is when the attention of the learners "is drawn to language form during communicative or content-based instruction" (Spada & Lightbown, 2008, p. 186). Corresponding to Ellis' (2002) and Doughty and Williams' (1998) concepts of FonF, its focus on grammar may be incidental or pre-planned (Spada & Lightbown, 2008). On the other hand, Spada & Lightbown (2008) mention that isolated FFI consists of some activities which are discretely parts of the communicative use of language and typically involve explicit reference to grammatical rules. Unlike FonFs, FFI is part of a program that incorporates communicative language teaching or content-based instruction. However, while isolated FFI may focus on directing students to learn particular grammatical items, the aim is to facilitate the learners towards using L2 as a means of communication at a later stage. It is, for example, may be used to prepare the learners for communicative activity or assist them after an activity in which they have had difficulty with a particular grammatical form. It is important to note that isolated and integrative FFIs are not mutually exclusive but rather two ends on a continuum and are treated as approaches rather than methods.

For the present research, isolated grammar teaching may be defined as a separate/isolated instruction specially devoted to focus on discrete grammatical items by using primarily explicit techniques. Examples of this type are focus on forms and isolated FFI. The goal is for the students to master the linguistic forms and use them accurately in contexts. Integrated grammar delivery, on the other hand, is defined as the teaching of grammar as an integrated part of an instruction that is focused on the meaning or use of language through communicative tasks. Examples of grammar teaching that apply this approach are FonF and integrated FFI. The main aim is to enable learners to do specific communicative tasks in the target language with the language focus given only after they receive a relatively significant amount contextual L2 exposure.

Both isolated and integrated approaches of grammar delivery have their own merits and drawbacks. DeKeyser (2003) believed that explicit grammar teaching in isolation is useful in the stages of a learner's language acquisition. Even though some theorists argue that genuine grammatical competence is gained more easily while students are learning to communicate in L2, DeKeyser claimed that isolated grammar could also be processed through practice and retrieved for communication use. Thus, a person with explicit knowledge understands the language and the can articulate the rules learned.

Contrary to isolated grammar, integrated grammar is language focus carried out as part of a situation or context of when the language is used. According to Anderson (2005), as mentioned in Mart (2013) grammar in context offers a meaningful framework that connects reality in the targeted language. The use of dialogues and authentic materials in the real world where people

generally use to talk to each other is a way of teaching grammar in context for learners to use grammar effectively in communication. This type of instruction seems to aim more at an implicit knowledge of grammar, which may be readily retrieved during spontaneous communicative tasks (Brown, 2000).

However, according to Brown (2000), although a child may implicitly learn the language, he/she will not have the ability to explain the rules explicitly. Therefore, contextual grammar delivery might result in the de-emphasized language rules when they are learned unconsciously. This may become a downside as students may not acquire explicit knowledge, which may be defined as “conscious knowledge about a language (rules, conventions of use) that learners can often verbalize (Storch, 2015, p. 349). With such knowledge, students will be able to identify, correct, and learn from their mistakes since it may “[facilitate] the intake and development of implicit language which is useful to monitor the language output” (Widodo, 2006, p. 125). Besides, Li and Song (2007) pointed out, focus on communicative abilities also tends to pay lesser attention to grammatical errors made by the students. This may result in inaccuracies in the students’ language use, and if they are not attended, they may result in fossilized forms. Despite what research and experts’ views show about integrated and isolated grammar teaching, teachers’ views may have different beliefs. As Larsen-Freeman (2015) noted, there is still indeed a significant gap between research on grammar and teacher’s practice, which often relates to their beliefs. As practitioners, teachers develop their methods/approaches drawing on their personal inferences from their successes and failures in teaching (Hoffman, 2006, in Smith, 2013). They also often teach in the way they were taught (Farrell & Lim, 2005; Spada & Lightbown, 2008). Therefore, they may not be agreements among teachers on which promote language learning most positively. In spite of this, it is crucial to investigate their beliefs about grammar teaching delivery to gain further insights into how it is perceived at the practical level. Knowledge of such perceptions is paramount to understand how teachers approach their work (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001).

Relatively few studies have been conducted in examining teacher’s attitudes and/or beliefs towards grammar and its delivery. Teachers are shown to see grammar as a crucial part of their teaching (Borg & Burns, 2008; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Canch & Barnard, 2009; Richards et al., 2001). Research seems to show more positive beliefs/attitudes of teachers towards integrated approach (Barnard & Scampton, 2009; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Canch & Barnard, 2009). However, they also demonstrated mixed views on how grammar teaching should be approached. Although the teachers appeared to favor FonF, they significantly supported the need for explicit language focus and discussion of grammar rules. This is in line with the finding of Richards et al. (2001, p. 54), which show teachers’ preference for the communicative approach but many still held the belief that direct grammar teaching is needed for EFL/ESL students. Graus and Coppen’s (2015b) research of student teachers, however, shows different trends across the lengths of study of its participants. While most student teachers preferred form-focused, explicit, inductive instruction and FonFs, more senior and post-graduates students tended to favor meaning-focused, implicit instruction and FonF. Despite this, it was widely believed that higher level learners would benefit from learning rules inductively and FonFs.

The traditional approach seems to continue having a significant place in language teaching across the globe. Farrell and Lim’s case study (2005) revealed that a participant doubted that incidental or implicit grammar teaching was helpful for students without adequate language skills. On the other hand, the other teachers they examined, although believing in both integrated and isolated grammar teaching, nevertheless tended to employ the more traditional approach. Several factors were identified to have possibly led to such attitudes. Besides the teacher’s

reverence for the traditional grammar approach, time availability also seemed to have affected teachers' practice. Being more straightforward, the traditional approach was seen to be more applicable to cover a lot of learning materials within a limited amount of time (Farrell & Lim, 2005). These results were supported by Uysal and Bardakci's (2014) study of 108 fourth and fifth grade EFL teachers in Turkey, which reveals a strong tendency to prefer more traditional methods reflecting the adoption of FonFs. Several reasons were put forward why this was the case: time constraints (3 hours/week), crowded classes (40 students in a class), low student motivation and their resulting class-management issues, and cultural and L1 problems (e.g., low literacy).

Poole (2005) also brought up the issue of time constraint when it comes to FonF or FonFs. He believed that integrated grammar teaching, such as FonF does not guarantee the development to a particular level of L2 proficiency within a specific period. This may present an issue to EFL tertiary language programs like those in Indonesia where students are expected to achieve a post-intermediate level by the time they graduate. Poole (2005) also pointed out that focus on form seems to be more suited to small class size to enable teachers to make adequate follow up to students' needs, such as by giving ample feedback to students' errors in writing. More research is, therefore, necessary to see how FonF works in contexts with fewer resources rather than in ideal settings including those in experimental studies.

## METHOD

### Context of the study

This research aims to identify teachers' beliefs toward isolated and integrated grammar deliveries. This research was conducted in an English Language Education Program of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The first year students' proficiencies ranges from lower beginners to advance. Based on the latest grammar and vocabulary test scores of the latest first-year students (2017), the intake was shown to have a broad range of students with different abilities. There were 26,2% students of lower beginners' to the elementary level, 22,4% of the pre-intermediate level, 31,8% of the intermediate level, 15% of the upper-intermediate level, and 5,60% of the advance level. All the students are expected to graduate with a post-intermediate level proficiency by the time they graduate (about 3.5-4 years).

When the research was carried out, the program implemented both isolated (FonFs) and integrated (FonF) approaches to help their students learn grammar. The isolated grammar instruction took the form of independent grammar courses (8 credits in total, including four credits for tutorials). During the data collection, the courses were conducted in medium-sized classes, each usually consists of 20-25 students. On the other hand, the integrated language focus (mainly a version of focus on form) was embedded in language skill courses which were offered in over 30 credits in total. Each class typically consisted of 20 students, with less numbers of students in speaking classes. The skill courses were mostly provided in the first and second year.

### Use of terms

This research applies the *principal* terms of "isolated" and "integrated" grammar teaching to refer to, respectively, independent grammar courses and that embedded in skill courses. There were three reasons for using these terms. First, the terms were considered to be more familiar with the participants involved in the study. Second, the study aims to focus on the quality of the approaches as being separate from or embedded in larger language tasks. In this way, the results can be compared to previous studies investigating separate and integrated grammar teaching

other than focus on forms and focus on form. Thirdly, the FonF grammar teaching examined in this study involved students with different abilities and the level of difficulty of the courses may not be suitable for less proficient students. Hence, there was no guarantee that meaning can be made evident to every student through contexts before each of them was given language focus. It is, therefore, probably safer to use the more generic “integrated” term. In spite of this, focus on forms or focus on form will sometimes still be used to refer to previous studies and as a basis for comparison.

### Participants of the study

Ten teachers who had taught English grammar using isolated and/or integrated approach participated in this research. Although there were initially eleven teachers, one teacher (Teacher H) was excluded because she was not available for further clarification of her data. All the ten teachers had taught English for more than two years. The longest teaching period was 45 years and the shortest was two years. Other teachers ranged from 13-18 years of teaching experience. Two teachers had pursued their further education in Linguistics (G & D), one in English literature (C), and the rest in English Language Teaching.

Table 1. Participants’ Teaching Background

Teacher	Gender	Years of teaching	Teaching experience	
			isolated grammar course	integrated grammar teaching
A	M	16	✓ (in the past)	✓
B	M	18	-	✓
C	F	16	✓ (in the past)	✓
D	F	16	✓	✓
E	F	45	✓	-
F	F	17	-	✓
G	F	5-6	✓	✓
I	F	13	-	✓
J	M	2	✓	✓
K	F	14	✓ (in the past)	✓

### Data collection

A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data. Each teacher was asked the same questions on their beliefs about the approaches’ (a) stimulation level; (b) effectiveness, (c) appropriateness. It was made clear to the interviewees that isolated grammar teaching refers to that carried out in independent grammar courses and the integrated one refers to embedded grammar teaching in the program’s skill courses. Below are the main interview questions:

1. What do you think of the stimulation level of each approach for the students?
2. Effectiveness:
  - a. What do you think of the effectiveness of each approach to assist students to understand the meaning of grammatical forms?
  - b. What do you think of the effectiveness of each approach to help students to produce forms accurately?

- c. What do you think of the effectiveness of each approach to help students apply grammar in communicative contexts?
  3. In your opinion, how appropriate is each of the grammar teaching approach in the context of teaching English as a foreign language in your English Language Program?
- Further short interviews were carried out with participants to clarify different parts of the interview to ensure correct interpretation for the data analysis. They were mainly conducted through face to face meetings, but two were done through a telephone call or WhatsApp texting.

### **Data analysis**

The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and coded by a team member and a lecturer who did not belong to the team independently. Any differences between the resulting themes were resolved through consensus, and when no agreement was reached, a third party was involved in mediating the discrepancy. Participants were also further contacted to confirm the team's interpretations in regards to their stances when it was deemed necessary.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The collected data show that all the ten interviewed teachers saw grammar as an essential aspect of language pedagogy where most teachers had positive views towards isolated and integrated approaches in light of different aspects. In spite of this, many stressed the importance of isolated grammar teaching for a range of reasons. The participants' opinions were mainly experiential as they had taught grammar using either approach or both of them, but they gave thoughtful considerations of the relevant issues. The interview data show that the teachers' beliefs were significantly influenced by factors such as their teaching success and failures, learning context, students' backgrounds, and practical aspects.

It is worth noting that while all the participants were not asked of their preferences, the participants tended to compare the two approaches straight away. Therefore, the data are often comparative. Although initially intended to investigate the participants' perceptions towards the two types of grammar teaching, this study also revealed insights on problems and challenges teachers faced in applying the approaches in tertiary EFL context. More detailed findings are discussed as follow.

### **Perceived level of stimulation**

Stimulation level refers to the capacity of the approaches under study to attract students' interest in learning grammar in class. Most teachers (7 out of 11, A, C, D, E, F, I, J) were confident that integrated grammar was more interesting than the isolated one. This finding seems to echo Long's view that Focus on Forms tends to be boring, which leads to "declines in motivation [and] attention" (1998, p. 38).

The most common reason why integrated grammar was seen to be more stimulating was it teaches grammatical items that are directly relevant to their needs (teachers A, C, D, E, I). Here the teachers saw that students were more motivated to attend to teachers' grammatical inputs when they related to their language task they were required to do. In the program's integrated grammar, this feedback was often given to individuals or groups on writing drafts or oral presentation or language focus on a specific grammatical to the whole class.

Another reason was teaching grammar in the context of doing other language activities was seen to be more attractive (teachers D, E, I, J). Two teachers (teachers I, J) pointed out that, as grammar is usually perceived to be something "terrifying or "scary", teaching it in such a

context will make it less threatening. The teachers' views indicated that integrated grammar could be an aid in stimulating students' participation by teaching grammar more implicitly through language use. As I mentioned:

“I personally think when students hear the word grammar, it sounds very scary – something very difficult and complicated. So it is not interesting. Teaching it using the integrated approach will wrap it up so the grammar will not be conspicuous.”  
(Teacher I)

While there was less support for isolated grammar, three teachers who favor integrated grammar (teachers A, F, I) also believed that it could be attractive to students for different reasons. Two teachers (teachers F and I) thought that the approach would be of interest to students who want to learn grammar deeper. This, however, only seems to apply to a small number of students as many did not tend to have an analytic mind. Teacher A, on the other hand, believed that isolated grammar teaching could be made attractive to students when it offered more opportunities for students to apply the forms they are studying in expanded contexts. Teacher F also shared this view.

The rest of the teachers (4) were indecisive on whether or not each of the grammar teaching approaches can stimulate interest in grammar. One teacher (K) pointed out that it would very much depend on different factors so she could not say about their level of stimulation. Another teacher appeared to be more skeptical. Believing that grammar is seen so negatively by students, she was not sure if grammar teaching was attractive regardless of how it is taught, including in integrated language focus. In her opinion, students just attended to it in class because they had to. In her statement, she mentioned, “I’m not sure which one makes [the students] more motivated, because they have to. So they just go with the class”. In a similar line, teacher B pointed out:

“I don’t know. But I think they were forced, or they were conditioned to attend to the grammar. So I don’t know whether the motivation level is going up or down [in integrated grammar teaching]. I have no idea.” (Teacher B)

### **Perceived effectiveness**

The perceived effectiveness of each of the approaches is measured by its capacity to promote students' (1) understanding of the meaning of grammatical forms, (2) accuracy, and (3) ability to apply grammar in communication.

#### ***Effectiveness to assist students understand the meaning of grammatical forms***

When asked on the effectiveness of each of the approach to help students to understand the meaning of grammatical items, most participants (6 – teachers B, D, E, G, I, J) were shown to favor isolated grammar teaching. The crucial first reason was that it tended to be mostly explicit (teachers B, G, J) it helped EFL students to comprehend the meaning of grammatical forms more easily. The second reason was the approach was more intensive by giving a lot of exercises and/or more focused on grammar compared to the integrated one.

Three teachers (teachers G, I, J) further linked their reason(s) to the limited exposure of L2 in their context. Teacher G, for instance, said that although students were given more language inputs when grammar was integrated into content/skill courses, the amount was still too limited to help them fully understand grammatical meaning by brief or incidental explanation, let alone to figure it out themselves. In her point of view, therefore, EFL students needed explicit grammar teaching to help them work out the meaning of grammatical items.

In contrast to the teachers who supported isolated grammar teaching for a better understanding of meaning, four (teachers A, C, F, K) teachers preferred the integrated approach by arguing that grammar meaning was best understood from context or when grammatical items were practiced in it. In spite of this, one of these four teachers (Teacher F) also believed that isolated grammar might also be useful if it allowed students to practice using the items in context. Teacher F stated that, "As long as both give students enough opportunities for students to apply the grammatical items in context, both work." (Teacher F)

### *Effectiveness to foster formal accuracy*

Regarding the effectiveness to promote grammatical accuracy, most of the teachers (9) believed that isolated grammar teaching was more superior than the integrated approach. These teachers generally put forward reasons similar to those for its capacity to help students understand grammatical meaning. The most common answer (7 teachers, A, D, E, G, I, J, K) was it was more focused or intensive on addressing the grammatical item(s) than in integrated grammar teaching. Two teachers (teachers I and J) specifically linked this quality to the use of drilling in the isolated approach.

In line with this, three of the teachers (teachers G, J, K) pointed out that isolated grammar teaching paid more attention to details or formal features. Hence, as one teacher mentioned, it "conditions the students to notice patterns" (teacher K) and students are "taught to be accurate" (teacher J). Teacher J said:

"As to [...] accuracy, isolated grammar courses will answer that. We work a lot to make [students] accurate in [their] English, in [their] grammar. We want [them] to understand from the smallest part of language [...]." (Teacher J)

In addition to this, several teachers (teachers E, I, K) also pointed out that isolated grammar allowed for more thorough discussion of grammatical forms than the integrated teaching because the more traditional approach provided more time to do so (teachers I, E, K). Drawing on her experience, Teacher I, for instance, said:

"In the context of my teaching experience, there was not enough time for me to teach grammar thoroughly when it was integrated into skill courses. I have one experience. I was teaching speaking, and my students did not understand about a particular tense. Then I spent the whole class, which was supposed to be a speaking class, explaining about grammar. And it means that I reduced their opportunity to practice speaking, and it was not good because that was a speaking class." (Teacher I)

Two teachers (teachers E and J) added that with more time, and hence focus on grammar, it was also easier to monitor students' mistakes and correct them to foster accuracy when the grammar was taught in isolation.

Another reason why isolated grammar teaching is seen to be more helpful to help students understand the meaning of grammatical forms was because it primarily uses explicit methods to teach grammar. Teacher G argued that the mostly explicit nature made their explanation about grammatical forms clearer. In line with this, teacher B pointed out:

"But from my own perception or understanding, if we do not offer specific explicit grammar instructions to the [EFL] students, I'm afraid that they just do not notice what is wrong and what is right." (Teacher B)

Regarding integrated grammar, there was only one teacher (teacher C) who firmly believed that integrated grammar was more useful for teaching accuracy. According to her, to decide what

form to use, a student must understand the context clearly. As she always pointed through her interviews, she believed that grammar should be first and foremost learned through expanded communicative contexts, which reflects the view of L2 acquisition that mirrors that of L1.

### ***Effectiveness to promote students' ability to apply grammar in communication***

Concerning the approaches' effectiveness to promote students' ability to apply grammar in communication, five teachers (teachers A, C, D, E, F, and K) favored or tended to prefer integrated grammar teaching over the isolated one. The most popular reason for this, which was brought up by each of the teachers, was because it provided more discourse-level contexts for the application of grammatical forms. One teacher (teacher D), however, explicitly expressed her reservation about this. According to her, although the approach helped students applied grammar in an expanded context in class, it only developed a short-termed memory because it did not teach the grammatical items intensively. In other words, it did not give any guarantee that students would be able to use them in real life.

In addition to the above five teachers, another participant (teacher B) also mentioned the availability of discourse contexts as one positive feature of integrated grammar teaching and its potential to foster students' applicative ability. In spite of this, he was very skeptical that the integrated approach might be well implemented in their EFL context. He gave two reasons for this. First, he doubted that every teacher has enough commitment to teaching it in content/skill courses. Second, it might disrupt the focus on the content/skill.

Three other teachers (teachers G, I, J) believed that integrated grammar would be helpful but only if it was applied for EFL students with relatively high language competence. Although they were aware that there was much more L2 input given before integrated language focus compared to that in the isolated approach, they doubted that it was enough for less proficient EFL students. G argued that in her experience students did not get enlightened but became confused about how to use specific grammatical items when she taught them using the integrated approach. Teacher G, for instance, said:

“It makes students confused instead. They do not get enough English exposure to enable them to figure things out. Although there is the Internet, our students are more interested in K-Pops than listening to English songs or watching English movies.”  
(Teacher G)

With the above considerations in mind, the three teachers strongly preferred or tended to favor the isolated approach to help students foster their ability to apply grammar in communication. Teachers I and G demonstrated strong favor towards the approach over the integrated one, but it took J some time to express his view. Stating that he tended to believe that the isolated approach was more effective in this respect, he argued that students were also taught how to use grammar in contexts in isolated grammar teaching. Although the contexts tend to be limited to sentence-level, they are more helpful for students. He argued that learning grammar in expanded context was a double challenge as students had to pay attention to more than one thing at a time.

Four other participants (teachers A, B, F, E) believed the isolated approach would also be effective to promote learners' competence to apply grammar in context if it also incorporated discourse level contexts for students to practice what has been taught. It is worth noting that three of the teachers (teachers A, B, E) also supported integrated grammar teaching. B suggested that isolated grammar teaching, which is largely pre-planned, should be made more communicative and provide more natural L2 models. As he saw that integrating grammar in skill/content courses was not always easy, such a step would increase the effectiveness of grammar teaching in the

language program. This view reflects Ellis' belief that FonFs "is valid as long as it includes an opportunity for learners to practice behavior in communicative tasks." (2006, p. 102).

### **Appropriateness for their EFL tertiary language program**

Despite the different views the teachers had previously mentioned, almost all teachers (9 teachers) believed that both approaches are appropriate for their EFL tertiary context. Eight of these teachers thought the two approaches should go together to yield the best results in their tertiary context. This finding supports the view that FonF and FonFs complement rather than being implemented exclusively from each other (Ellis, N, 1995, in Long, 1998). Drawing on the results of an experiment to Polish high schools students where FonF and FonFs were found to be effective, Pawlak (2012) also recommends that both approaches should be applied in the classroom.

Teacher F believed that both worked collaboratively as long as isolated grammar was also made contextual. She did not see any of them have a stronger role over the other. In spite of her slight reservation about isolated grammar teaching, she believed that the approach is equally important to assist students in learning grammar.

Unlike F, six other teachers (teachers B, D, E, I, J, K) believed that the two approaches were complementary, but the isolated grammar should assume a primary role. The teachers frequently brought up practical reasons to support their views. The most popular reason (teachers B, D, I, J, K) was because of the EFL context where they worked. As in such an environment students were seen to have less exposure to the target language, and they saw it necessary for them to receive an intensive and explicit explanation of the language.

The second reason was the knowledge acquired in isolated grammar teaching was believed to be able to help students learn L2 further, which to some extent seems to reflect Schmidt's theory of noticing (1990). Because of this, they saw it necessary for their students to receive isolated grammar instruction to develop some basic knowledge before they get reinforcement in integrated grammar teaching. In other words, they believed in a sequential implementation of the two approaches. As teacher G said:

"I think it's better if we have independent grammar and integrated grammar. So first before you integrate grammar in other courses, you have to teach them independent grammar courses, like in the traditional way." (Teacher G)

The next common reason for the complementary view but with isolated grammar teaching playing the primary role was when they saw many of their students had relatively low grammar competence/and or knowledge (teachers B, D, K, I). Three of the teachers further linked this to many, if not most, of the contemporary Indonesian students' high school English language learning in which grammar tended to be given much less focus or taught implicitly. In addition to these reasons, one teacher F said that isolated grammar teaching was suitable for tertiary students because they are adult learners. All these considerations of the learners echo Barnard and Scampton's (2009) finding in which "the teachers took into account their learners' background when deciding to adopt an explicit focus on grammar" (p. 69).

They also argued that isolated grammar was indispensable because the integrated grammar approach has limitation. Although FonF is often presented to be more favorable in previous research, the teachers identified several downsides related to the integrated approach. Six teachers (teachers K, B, E, I, G, J) revealed that it was difficult and/or not always possible to address grammar in skill/content courses in their tertiary EFL context because of the limit of time and/or the focus should be more on the content/skill. One teacher found it disruptive

sometimes as he was trying to focus more on teaching a particular skill or content (teacher B), while another teacher believed the approach did not allow them to discuss grammar in depth (teachers J and I). I noted:

“I have one experience where I had to teach speaking, and my students did not understand those particular tenses or some other grammar things like sentence structure. Then I spent the whole class, which was supposed to be a speaking class, explaining about grammar. And it means that actually I reduce their opportunity to practice speaking, and it’s not good because that’s a speaking class.” (Teacher I)

In concert with I, K revealed:

“I used to believe integrated grammar is good. [...] But as a teacher I experience the struggle. How can integrate grammar in my academic writing? It’s difficult. [...] There are a lot of sub-skills I need to teach in the course. [...] There is no time to discuss grammar. And students’ mistakes are different from each other’s.” (Teacher K)

Teacher K’s concern about the difficulty of dealing with students’ individual grammatical problems was also validated by a large number of students in a writing class in the program. With around 20 students in a writing class, a teacher could get easily overwhelmed with grammar work. This issue reflects Poole’s (2005) criticism of FonF that it only works with small classes. As he says:

“Focus on form instruction [...] seems optimally suited to a classroom that is small enough to enable instructors to verbally address their students’ problematic forms, presumably via classroom discussion, Q/A sessions, and impromptu and planned public speaking events. As far as writing is concerned, such a classroom would need to allow teachers to evaluate students’ writing [...] frequently.”

Another limit put forward several teachers (teachers B, E, K). Not all teachers were interested in and/or committed to addressing grammar in content/skill courses, or were good at explaining the aspect of language (teacher J). Teacher J noted:

“Who knows that a particular teacher doesn’t really like teaching grammar because teaching grammar is different, it requires a specific skill. If he doesn’t really like teaching grammar, it might be a burden for him. If the teacher doesn’t mind, it’s OK. But it may also take time because explaining grammar takes time.” (Teacher J)

Furthermore, two teachers (teachers D & I) saw it impossible to cover all the many grammatical items needed for helping their students to become advanced learners through integrated grammar teaching. This was a very plausible point as the time to address grammar is limited when it is taught integratively and the approach normally only addresses relevant or productive forms.

On the other hand, although many of their new students were beginners, the students were expected to know or to be able to use a wide range of grammatical items at the end of their four years’ program and write a thesis in English. More focused and intensive in delivering grammar, isolated grammar instruction in independent grammar courses was seen to be able to answer the pressure. This perceived weakness of FonF confirmed Poole’s criticism on the issue (2006). Finally, teachers J and D pointed out that with the prevailing reward system, students learning through the integrated approach did not receive enough incentive to review what has been taught. This is because, not being the primary focus, grammar usually was only given a small percentage or none in the assessment rubrics of courses where grammar was taught integratively. On the other hand, they saw students studying grammar in an independent grammar course could be forced to invest more in studying it, or they would not be able to pass it. This view seems to highlight the general Indonesian education culture where students study for exams

and receive marks as tokens of their achievements. Unless there is a substantial grading, less motivated students may not put significant efforts for their learning.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to investigate teachers' beliefs toward isolated and integrated grammar teaching. In general, the teachers tended to favor the integrated approach for its capacity to stimulate students' interest, and the isolated for its effectiveness to assist students to understand the meaning of grammatical forms and, especially, to develop accuracy. However, while they were less agreement on their efficacies to promote students' communicative competence, most teachers believed they are complementary and appropriate for their context. Primarily based on experience, the teacher's views also reveal problems and challenges of the application of isolated and integrated grammar teaching at the practical level. The integrated approach was seen to be more problematic in the context where there are less English exposure, a pressure to develop students' proficiency to a certain level, and large class sizes. As language focus is only marginal in the approach, it was also considered to give less incentive for students as well as teachers to attend to it. On the other hand, several teachers stressed how the incorporation of expanded contexts would improve the efficacy of isolated grammar teaching. Despite this downside, this more traditional approach was considered to be able to provide a more reliable structure in the teachers' education context.

Being a case study, this research is limited because it involved only a small number of participants in a limited context and therefore is not generalizable (Basturkmen, 2012). It is also important to note that most of the participants had a strong background of learning English using isolated grammar teaching, which was imposed by the Indonesian government throughout their middle and high school years. This background might have influenced their perceptions of the two types of grammar teaching investigated.

Further research is necessary to confirm the findings as this study offers paramount insights into how the effectiveness of grammar teaching is seen to intertwine with various contextual practical factors. More investigation needs to be conducted in day to day education contexts rather than in experimental settings as grammar learning does not take place in a vacuum. Findings of such studies will be more likely to assist teachers who deal with less idealized situations, especially those in developing countries and areas with fewer resources.

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