

Possible Ways of Teaching Grammar

Mohammad Al Ghafri¹

Ms. Tahaseena Syed²

Younes Audeh³

^{1,2,3}English Department -Ibri College of Applied Sciences-Oman
P.O.Box 14, Ibri, PC 516, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract: Teaching grammar is believed to be so demanding: memorizing lots of rules, using complex usages, facing vague and obscure structures, etc. This has made grammar teachers try diverse teaching methods in order to make this subject palatable for their students--some follow traditional methods, others try the Communicative Approach and stress that in order for students to acquire and speak language easily and fluently, they need not be exposed to so many direct grammar rules: it can be acquired subconsciously and through authentic practice. In order to have a good idea about this issue, a questionnaire is given to level A Foundation Programme students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences- the Sultanate of Oman. What the researchers have found is that students prefer learning grammar implicitly—following the Communicative Method. Discussion, implications, and suggestions will be highlighted throughout the article.

Key words: grammar, implicit, rules, fluent, communicative, traditional, meaning.

Introduction

Decades ago, teachers of grammar were looked at as smart and brilliant figures in the local society for they carried a heavy heritage of responsibility--teaching grammar. They were patient, hard-working, and understanding in classrooms, spent much time explaining and clarifying complex structures hoping that their students would acquire the target language easily. Later on, some new and different teaching methods appeared. Some voices declared that proficiency in grammar does not always mean proficiency and fluency in speaking the target language. No doubt there are a good number of students who know much about the grammar rules, but they seem to be scared to speak before a certain audience, even their colleagues. They are utterly “care-takers”, most of the time. This article highlights some possible methods of teaching grammar, bearing in mind that there is no best way of teaching; any way proves successful and beneficial should be respected and followed.

Literature Review

Many and different methods of teaching grammar have been tried, tested, adopted, or refused. Some proved successful and lasted for a long time, while others got expired soon, and failed to fulfill students' needs in learning and understanding grammar. No matter what method(s) to follow in teaching grammar, learners still need it in order to comprehend well the material at hand. Grammar represents the backbone of all languages. Regardless of what methods teachers follow in teaching, is English grammar easy or difficult?

English grammar is notoriously difficult to learn for both native and second language speakers. There are so many intricacies, obscure rules, and exceptions that it comes no surprise that different generations of teachers have used various approaches to teaching grammar to train literate English writers (Macfadyen, 2015, Para. 1).

In fact there are so many ways to teach grammar. Well-experienced teachers know how to attract their students' attention to this point, though there is no "best way" ever in teaching any subject--what suits a certain country or society might not suit another. One way of teaching grammar is by asking students to write simple sentences first, and then exchange them with their colleagues, and later on they all discuss the structure of those sentences together. These sentences could be written on the board for comments and more elaboration. In the U.S.A. and Canada schools, for example, some teachers thought of expanding the writing method so as to broaden students' horizons by getting them involved in writing paragraphs or short stories about their likes or dislikes. This method encourages students to recognize both, language and grammar rules. "This method is often used in schools in the U.S. and Canada. Students are encouraged to explore language through creative writing and reading, picking up correct grammar usage along the way". (Macfadyen, 2015, Para. 4). However, the Grammar Translation Method is different.

Conti (2016, para.4), explores one method of teaching grammar: the Grammar Translation which was –one day- remarkable and used in a number of academic institutions in different parts of the world. It concentrates on memorizing rules, language usage, vocabulary, etc. "in this educational paradigm, language is therefore taught as something to know, as a set of rules and words to memorize rather than an instrument to use in a real-life communicative context".

Grammar Translation Method highlights the role of the teacher more than the students'. The teacher explains rules, teaches vocabulary, and gives exercises based on- normally- abstract materials. The teacher's concern is the product: students have to excel in memorizing words, structure, and expressions. Moreover, accuracy becomes more important than fluency. (Conti, 2016). Boukhaz (2015, para. 4) has a say regarding the use of Grammar Translation Method. He admits that it doesn't teach students the skill of communicating, or the ability to conduct meetings or talks before some audience. "Furthermore, many researchers have attested to the fact that language teaching cannot be limited solely to grammar teaching. This is so because the explicit teaching of grammar does not result in fluency". When teachers take the maximum effort in classrooms, students become negative: they sit and listen with no active or positive participation. Their main interest is taking notes, paying attention

to teacher's explanation without being much involved in the material being discussed. That is what happens in traditional teaching when the utmost priority is pure mechanical practices of grammar rules.

The traditional approach to grammar instruction, teachers would include various activities focused on mastery of discrete grammar elements. Perhaps a "Grammar Point of the Day" or a textbook explanation of a rule followed by mechanical practice. The practice was likely also a textbook or workbook exercise with the main goal of demonstrating mastery of the grammar point, which was then supposed to transfer to language production". (Harris, 2017, para. 12).

The Communicative Approach, however, is much different from the Grammar Translation, or any method that underestimates, or reduces the role of students. The Communicative Approach is mainly *Student Centered*: students play the major role in class; given more chances and freedom to express themselves. It cherishes group and pair work a lot, so that students discuss the material at hand in a natural way; away from teachers' authority or even corporal punishment, on rare occasions. The teacher, on the other hand, has many roles to play: facilitator, counselor, teacher, observer, and guide (Conti, 2016). Students' mother tongue is avoided, everything is given in the second language (L2).

The important part of Communicative Language Teaching is that we can teach our students to communicate right from the beginning by presenting the target language through context. We do not need to teach English using students' mother tongue (as in the Grammar Translation method) and get the students to memorize sentences as other grammatical methods do. (Admin. 2013, para. 4).

In the Communicative Approach, every word counts-- has both a function and meaning. Words are not randomly uttered or used. Admin (2013, para.2) highlight[s] this point clearly "Every single sentence – and sometimes single words- has a function (i.e. meaning that the speaker is trying to convey)". What about introducing both, Grammar and Communication together?

There have been a number of research studies that show the combination of having a grammar component in a communicative program allows students to progress faster and better than if there were no grammar component (Azar & Swan, 2015, para. 15).

This way promotes students' skills in both structure and communication. Students become more skillful in the way they talk, participate, and convey correct messages to others with a good knowledge of rules. Teaching grammar explicitly makes students bored and fed up. Moreover, it could be frustrating and ineffective.

Strictly explicit grammar study however, and even grammar-focused lessons are often not communicatively based. They can therefore be boring, cumbersome and difficult for students to assimilate. The strict teaching of grammar / structure, except with students of the Logical –

Mathematical or Verbal – Linguistic multiple intelligences, can be frustrating and highly ineffective”. (Lynch, n.d., para.5).

Self-dependent students read, comprehend, and remember grammatical rules in a better way when they do that alone and without much teacher assistance, or even interference. Rules become comprehensible by trying two main ways of instruction: inductive and/ or deductive.

Some teachers argue that learners remember grammatical rules better when they discover them on their own. However, most adult learners including EFL learners seem to benefit from teacher-direct grammar instruction that is presented to correspond to their specific needs. It is recommended that learners be provided with both inductive and deductive types of grammatical activities or authentic tasks requiring meaningful communication provided that the teacher is the decision-maker and grammatical objectives are defined in advance. (Nachiengmai, n.d., para.15).

In the deductive way, rules are highlighted and explained well, examples are given, students apply them explicitly to show their comprehension, whereas the inductive way stresses using so many examples and usages so as to reach- derivate- the rule required. There is a negative point in following the inductive method-- no authentic material is presented. This makes students parrot rules as abstract usages without knowing what comes behind that. “The Inductive Approach has neglected one major criterion in the teaching of grammatical structures, namely the authenticity of the context in which these forms occur”. (Nasr, 2016, para. 10). No matter what method in teaching grammar is followed, teaching pure grammar does not assure language comprehension. Language could be acquired naturally without learning grammar, as in the case of native speakers.

*Many experts in the field of English teaching think that emphasis on grammar doesn't lead to successful learning. To illustrate, a student, for them, doesn't need to study grammar to learn English. One of their major arguments is the process of **language acquisition**; which means anyone can acquire and speak a language fluently without learning grammar. That's why, students according to them shouldn't be exposed to 'much' grammar, or even any grammar rule. Also, they associate the issue with how the native speakers communicate 'accurately' without learning all the rules. (Elkadaoui, 2018, para.2).*

Normally, old hands try many ways in teaching and dealing with students. Students, in general, need to concentrate more on the material discussed. Using solid and traditional ways may get them bored or distracted. Teaching grammar as a process is more fun and more rewarding.

Teaching grammar as a process is more fun than teaching it as a thing. All you need to do is to change the way you see the language you teach, mainly the way you define grammar. Once you learn that there are different ways to see grammar, you will definitely get the point of teaching grammar as a process and not as a thing. (Lima, para. 14).

It is, sometimes, acceptable to use students’ first language while explaining grammar rules in case they- students- get stuck and become cognitively overloaded.

If the target grammar structure is complex and it is likely to cause cognitive overload to our students, it is preferable to avoid using the target language in order to prevent divided attention. After all, we want all of their attentional resources focused solely on understanding the grammar point(s) we are aiming to ‘teach’. (Conti, 2016, para. 2).

The ultimate aim of teaching any language is to have acquisition. In other words, students need to learn and use the language they are taught. This cannot happen unless they are exposed to meaning and real interaction in the second language. Teaching through abstract grammatical material is no use unless utilized in a communicative manner. “Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding”. (Schutz, 2019, para. 2).

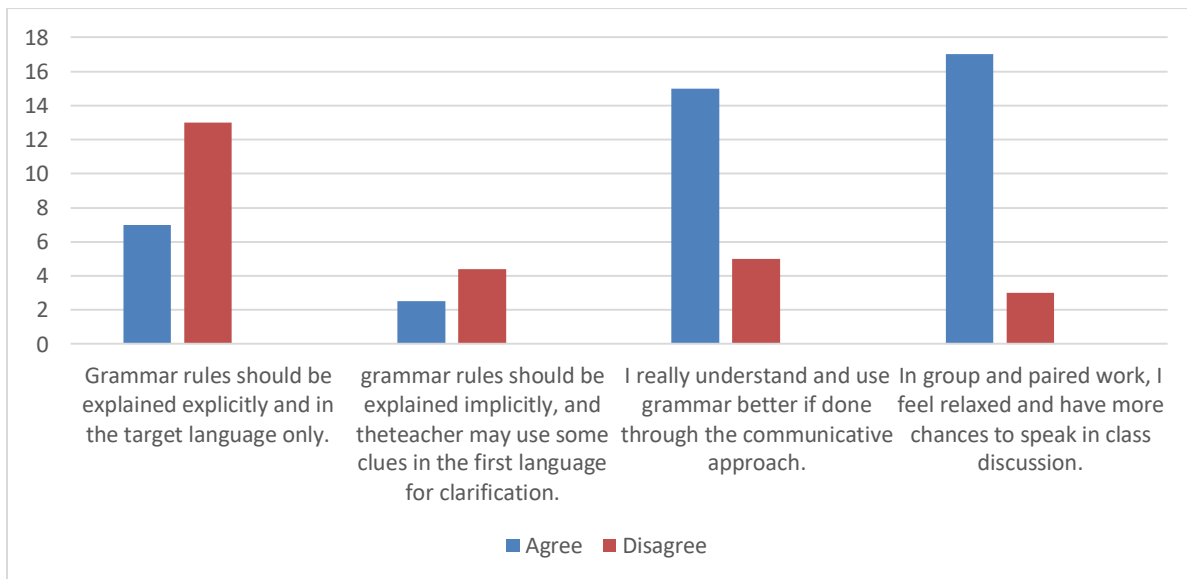
Survey Results

Possible Ways of Teaching Grammar

A survey was conducted among 20 students of level A Foundation Program at Ibri College of Applied Sciences. The purpose of the survey is to check students’ preference: learning grammar through the Communicative Approach or the Traditional one.

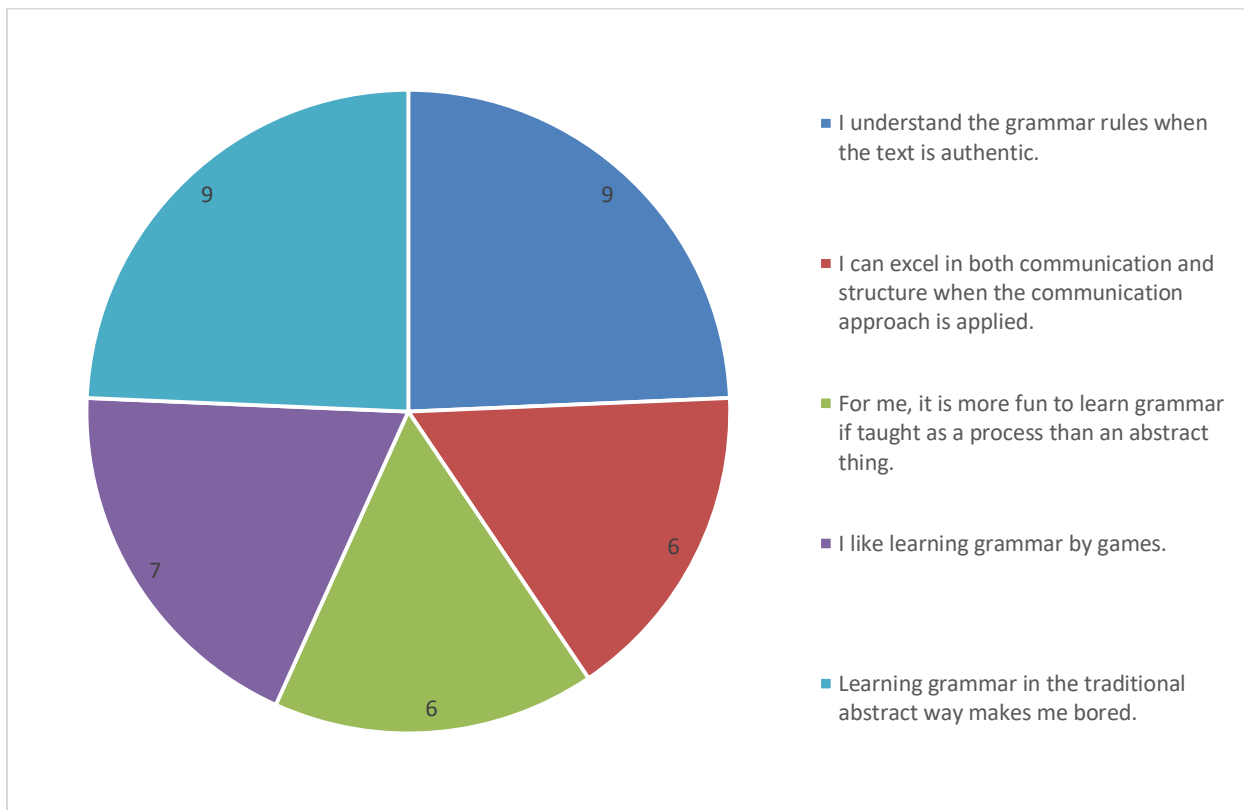
The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire given to students to complete. The questionnaire highlights some types of questions such as: “Agree” / “Disagree”, “Choose the Best Statement”, and “Yes” / “No”.

Table1: Shows students’ responses to “Agree” / “Disagree” questions.



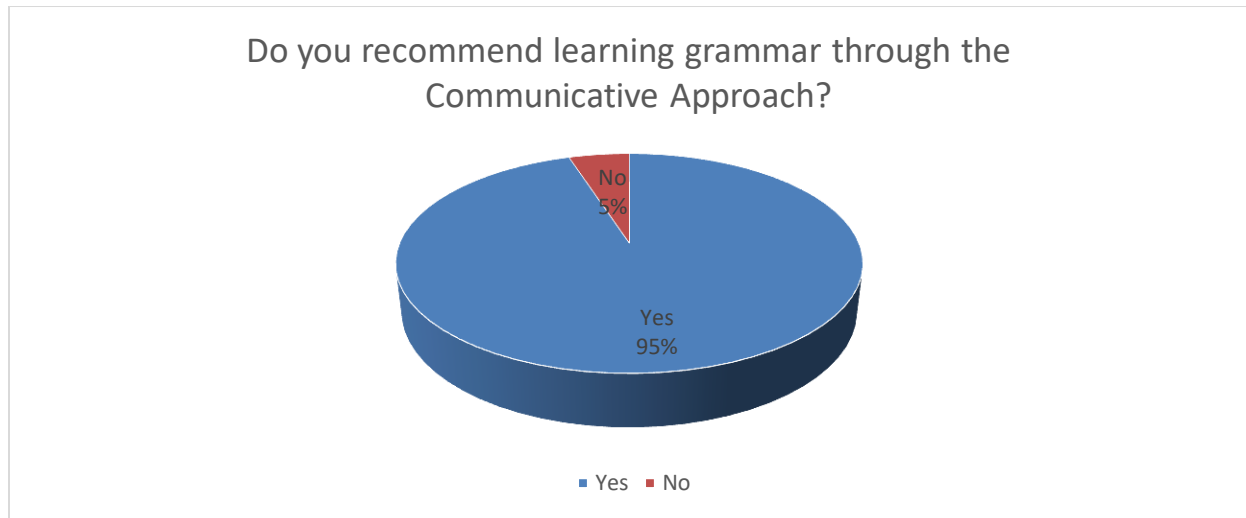
From the analysis of table 1, the most significant items for the first question are as follows. The bar graph clearly states that 13 students disagreed that grammar rules should be explained explicitly and in the target language only, but there are seven students who responded positively. Moreover, 15 students agreed that grammar rules should be explained implicitly, and the teacher may use some clues in the first language for clarification. This helps them understand grammar better and they can perform well in the future. In addition, 15 students agreed that they really understand and use grammar better if done through the Communicative Approach. However, 17 students agreed that in group and paired work, they feel relaxed and have more chances to speak in class discussion.

Table 2: Shows students’ responses to their best choice among the statements.



From the data of table two, the most significant items are as follows. This table sheds light on the second type of questions: choosing the best statement. The choice of students is clear by preferring the statements almost evenly and prefer to learn grammar through the Communicative Approach. 9 students say they understand grammar rules when the text is authentic and learning grammar in the traditional abstract way makes them bored. 6 students say they can excel in both communication and structure when the Communicative Approach is applied and it is more fun to learn grammar if taught as a process rather than an abstract thing. 7 students prefer learning grammar by games.

Table 3: Shows students' response to learning grammar through the Communicative Approach.



From the data of table three, the result clearly states that students prefer learning grammar implicitly by following the Communicative Method.

To sum up, students presumably are clear and have chosen the Communicative Approach to be the best learning method to understand grammar better. The Traditional Method scares them and seems difficult to follow. As the techniques of teaching have evolved with modern world, the students' understanding perspectives have also changed. However, for a better understanding of grammar to EFL students, knowledge of grammar needs to be conveyed in a better and enjoyable way -- the Communicative Approach seems to be the right option.

Recommendations

- students should be given more chances to participate in class discussion.
- teachers should use authentic materials; using short stories, games, films, listening to speeches of important figures, and then students comment on what they have watched or seen.
- the inductive way of teaching grammar helps students dive deep and get the information needed about grammar hints.
- forming groups or pairs in class encourages students to talk, discuss, and comment freely without feeling the teacher's authority. The teacher might sit with groups offering help or facilitating some vague issues.
- students are expected to apply what they are exposed to in class, if they fail doing so, teachers should try other ways to train students to get things well, and use them properly.

-teachers should avoid teaching grammar in isolation; this will not improve or raise their skills, mainly writing.

-grammar teachers should attend and participate in conferences or workshops that deal with grammar teaching. They may share their colleagues' experience and attend classes with them and have a constructive discussion afterwards.

Conclusion

As said before, there are so many different methods of teaching grammar. I dare say that all of them have both advantages and disadvantages. Once a certain method proves beneficial and successful, it is wise to adopt it; as teachers' ultimate concern is students' benefit. In the past the Grammar Translation Method of teaching was prosperous for it highlighted structure, vocabulary, and other useful skills that made students become skillful editors.

As the days go by, we see new methods of teaching language, grammar, in particular. The rise of the Communicative Approach has drawn the attention of lots of educators and started applying it. No matter what the teaching method is, dedicated teachers should always find, or even create new ways of teaching, provided that they give chances to students to play vital roles in the classroom such as negotiating, participating in oral discussions. Our students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences do admire and enjoy the Communicative Approach, as they get more freedom in doing oral or written activities in groups and/ or pairs. Moreover, they don't feel the authority of the teacher who joins groups and participates in discussing the matter at hand by offering help and clarifying vague items.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their thanks and gratitude to all participants who helped in getting this job done.

About the authors

Dr. Mohammed Al Ghafri is a full-time lecturer at the English Department / Ibri College of Applied Sciences- Oman. He holds a PhD in TESOL / University of Leeds, where he also got his MA in Education. He has had different positions: an assistant dean, acting dean, English supervisor, head of the English Department, head of the Diploma Programme at Ibri College, head of follow -up and academic training in the Sultanate of Oman.

Tahaseena Syed is an English Language instructor at the Department of English- Ibri College of Applied Sciences, Ministry of Higher Education- the Sultanate of Oman. She holds a Master's Degree in English, Master's Degree in Education and Post Graduate Diploma in English

Language Teaching. She has been teaching English for EFL/ESL undergraduate and postgraduate university students for more than a decade. Her research interests include reading, academic writing, interaction between reading and writing and challenges in EFL education. She has also finished many professional development certifications from Cambridge and Alison Learning.

Younes Audeh is the Head of the Translation Committee, and a lecturer at the Department of English at Ibri College of Applied Sciences - the Sultanate of Oman. He is an M.A. holder in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania- USA. He has been teaching English as an ESL/EFL for a long time. He has taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries. His research interest is “Academic Writing”.

References

- Admin. (2013, Nov.22nd). Teach grammar using the communicative approach: Functions and structures. Retrieved on Jan.6th. 2020. Retrieved from: <http://how-to-teach-english.Ontesol.com>
- Azar, B. & Swan, M. (2015, Sep.23rd). Students love grammar! So why do teachers hate it? Retrieved on: Jan.1st. 2020. Retrieved from: <http://learningenglish.voanews.com>
- Boukhaz, O. (2015, July 22nd). Grammar teaching in communicative language teaching: a return to form. Retrieved on: Jan. 6th. 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com>
- Conti, G. (2016, May 31st). Five things NOT to do when you teach grammar. Retrieved on Jan. 1st. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://gianfrancoconti.com>
- Elkadaoui, M. (2018, Feb. 18th). Teach or not teach grammar, is this the question? Retrieved on: Jan. 1st. 2018. Retrieved from: <https://moroccoenglish.com>
- Harris, L. (2017, May 4th). Core practices: Teach grammar as a concept and use it in context. Retrieved on: Jan. 1st. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.kentuckyteacher.org>
- Lima, D. D. (2014, Feb.26th). Teaching grammar as a process. Retrieved on: Jan.1st. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.richmondshare.com>

Lynch, L. M. (n.d.). Grammar teaching: implicit or explicit? Retrieved on Jan. 19th .2020.

Retrieved from: <https://www.eslbase.com>

Macfadyen, S. (2015, Oct. 22nd). Different methods of teaching grammar. Retrieved on: Jan. 1st.

2020. Retrieved from: <http://www.inklyo.com>

Nachiengmai, Y. (n.d.). The teaching of grammar. Retrieved on: Jan. 1st. 2020.

Retrieved from: <https://www.teyl-j-.org>

Nasr, M. (2016). Teaching grammar to EFL university students. Retrieved on: Jan. 6th. 2020.

Retrieved from: <https://www.grin.com>

Schutz, R. E. (2019, Oct.). Stephen Krashen's theory of second language acquisition. Retrieved

on: Jan. 8th). Retrieved from: <https://www.sk.com>

Appendices

Questionnaire

في هذه الاستبانة، كلمة التراكيب اللغوية تعني :

Grammar

Question one

Do you agree, or disagree

1. اكتساب التراكيب اللغوية بالنسبة لي ضروري للغاية لاجل تعلم اللغة الانجليزية.

1. Acquiring grammar well is so important for me to learn English. Agree
disagree

2. الاجدر ان يكون شرح التراكيب اللغوية مباشرا وصرحيا وذلك بوضع القاعدة وشرحها ويكون ذلك باللغة الانجليزية فقط.

2. Grammar rules should be explained explicitly and in the target language only.

Agree disagree

3. يجب ان يكون شرح التراكيب اللغوية بطريقة ضمنية وغير مباشرة، ويمكن للمدرس ان يستخدم بعض التوضيح في اللغة الام للطلبة.

3. Grammar rules should be explained implicitly, and the teacher may use some clues in the first language for clarification. Agree disagree

4. شخصيا استوعب التراكيب اللغوية واستخدمها بشكل افضل اذا شرحها المدرس باستخدام الاسلوب التواصلي النقاشي.

4. I really understand and use grammar better if done through the Communicative Approach.

Agree disagree

5. اشعر بالراحة اكثر حين يستخدم المدرس نظام المجموعات في الشرح، وهذا يمنحني فرصة اكثر للتكلم اثناء النقاش الصفي.

5. In group and pair work, I feel relaxed and have more chances to speak in class discussion.

Agree disagree

Question two

اختر ما تراه مناسباً مما يلي:

Choose what you see best for you.

1. استوعب التراكيب اللغوية حين يتم تقديمها من خلال نصوص حقيقية وواقعية.

1. I understand grammar rules when the text is authentic

2. استوعب بشكل جيد كلا من التراكيب اللغوية والمادة المشروحة حين يتم تقديمها بالاسلوب التواصلي النقاشي .
2. I can excel in both communication and structure when the Communication Approach is applied.
3. شخصيا، استطيع القول بانني استوعب التراكيب اللغوية بطريقة اكثر متعة اذا تم تقديمها على شكل نص حقيقي اكثر مما لو تم تقديمها بطريقة مجردة.
3. For me, it is more fun to learn grammar if taught as a process than an abstract thing.
4. أحب تعلم التراكيب اللغوية بطريقة الالعاب.
4. I like learning grammar by games.
5. تعلم التراكيب اللغوية بالطريقة التقليدية المجرده يجعلني اصاب بالملل.
5. Learning grammar in the traditional abstract way makes me bored.

Question three

هل توصي باتباع الاسلوب التواصلي النقاشي في تعلم التراكيب اللغوية؟

Do you recommend learning grammar through the **Communicative Approach**?

1. Yes 2. No