

Revisiting Views of Grammar and Grammar Learning Strategy Use: A Multiple Case Study in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

It was undoubted that studies on grammar instruction have long been discussed. However, there remains a dearth of research on how English as a foreign language (EFL) high school students learn grammar. Revisiting this line of grammar research, the researchers explored how EFL students experienced grammar learning at high schools in Vietnam. The researchers conducted a qualitative multiple case study and used semi-structured individual interviews as the main instrument for data collection in this study. Six high school Vietnamese students were interviewed regarding their views on the role of grammar and their use of grammar learning strategies. Grounded on pedagogies of grammar instruction, the study showed that most participants still learned English grammar through

the traditional approach, i.e., FoFs instruction. Findings from the inductive content analysis indicated that all participants acknowledged the essential role of grammar in learning English, and demonstrated a strategic approach to grammar learning, with environmental and behavioral management and cognitive strategies being the most popular strategies. The findings can help English teachers adjust their teaching approach and techniques to maximize students' grammar achievement and enhance their effective grammar learning strategies for long-term benefits. The study contributes to research on Asian EFL students' attitudes towards grammar learning and their use of grammar learning strategies.

Keywords: *beliefs; high school students; grammar; strategies; Vietnam.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Grammar plays an undeniably significant role when students start to learn English as a foreign language, especially in improving their language performance at school. Many linguists have extensively discussed the importance and necessity of grammar in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) (e.g., Cook, 2016; Halliday, 2003). Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted in grammar teaching, exploring the effect of a particular grammar teaching method and technique such as Focus on Form (FoF) versus Focus on forms (FoFs) instruction (e.g., Long, 1991; Marzban & Mokheri, 2012), explicit versus implicit learning (e.g., Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Dekeyser, 1994), grammar-based teaching (e.g., Azar, 2007), using singing in grammar teaching (e.g., Busse et al., 2021) and computer-assisted educational games (e.g., Kayan & Aydin, 2020). Nevertheless, for grammar teaching to be successful, learners' beliefs and grammar learning strategy use must be investigated as all successful learning depends on what is going on inside the learner's mind and their regulatory behavior (Zimmerman, 2000).

Learner beliefs about language learning have been studied for more than three decades, mainly in the United States, with the earliest work on Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz, 1999). Since the 1990s, it has been researched in other EFL/ESL countries such as Thailand (e.g., Fujiwara, 2014), Vietnam (e.g., Bernat, 2004), and Malaysia (e.g., Peng & Hui, 2012). Learner beliefs were also reported to correlate with strategy use (e.g., Yang, 1999), motivation (e.g., Bernat, 2004), and proficiency (e.g., Fujiwara, 2014). However, little research has been conducted regarding learners' beliefs about the role of grammar in Vietnam. Although there are a few published studies on grammar research, these studies included Vietnamese teachers as the main participants and lacked Vietnamese students' qualitative perspectives (e.g., Phan, 2017).

Likewise, grammar learning strategies (GLSs) were substantially neglected in the lines of grammar research as highlighted by Pawlak (2020b). Researching GLSs is important

because studies have proved a positive relationship between students' use of learning strategies and language achievement (e.g., Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh, 2020; Chen et al., 2020), and thus, the lack of grammar strategies may hinder students from gaining grammar achievement. Also, due to the lack of qualitative research on GLSs, many EFL researchers tended to adapt existing questionnaires of language learning strategies to measure EFL students' grammar learning strategy use without providing information about psychometric properties (e.g., Alsied et al., 2018; Abri et al., 2017; Gürata, 2008; Gimeno, 2002). A qualitative approach to explore EFL learners' GLSs would, therefore, be a first and often very helpful step to instrument development and adaptation because it can help researchers gain insights into students' actual use of GLSs, perception, and learning experiences. Thus, the present study seeks to understand Vietnamese high school students' attitudes towards the role of grammar and their use of GLSs by using in-depth semi-structured interviews.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1. Pedagogies of Grammar Instruction

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the two dichotomies concerning grammar instruction in English language classrooms. Concerns revolve around explicit versus implicit or deductive versus inductive instruction. In deductive and explicit teaching, rules are given before any examples are provided, while in an inductive and implicit lesson, rules are inferred from given examples (Thornbury, 1999). Besides, Larsen-Freeman (2003) remarked that if the grammar rules are quite simple, it is unnecessary to apply the inductive approach, but for complex grammar items, to exemplify and clarify the rules' usage in contexts clearly, it is better to present them inductively. Also, if more focus is on the strong communicative approach and less on grammar instruction, low accuracy can result (Hinkel & Fotos, 2001). For instance, Lightbown and Spada's (1990) study revealed that after being exposed to a five-month intensive ESL course, native French speakers who received form-focused instruction could use English structures such

as progressive -ing and adjective-noun order in noun phrases with accuracy to a greater degree than the students in classrooms in which lessons were solely communicative.

Long (1991) recommended the 'focus-on form' (FoF) approach, which contrasts with the traditional structure-based grammar teaching, i.e., the 'focus-on-forms' (FoFs) approach. In addition, Long (1998) pointed out that in FoFs instruction, grammar is introduced out of contexts, meaning that specific grammatical points have already been systematically pre-selected, and follow-up exercises are already designed to tackle those grammatical features. A typical example of FoFs will be in a lesson taught using the 3P technique (Criado, 2013; Ur, 2018). Meanwhile, FoF instruction draws students' attention to meaning. Only when students encounter communication problems will attention to forms be given. A good example of this type of instruction can be observed through a task-based lesson, where teachers do not predetermine what grammar feature will be studied.

Previous studies support the idea that FoF instruction can boost learners' confidence in using English and lead to positive results in enhancing learners' communicative competence (Takano, 2018), as an effective method for grammar error treatment (Shintani, 2015). However, the meta-analysis of 48 experimental and quasi-experimental studies conducted on grammar instruction in the foreign and second language instructional settings (including English and French) from 1980 to 1998 showed that both FoF and FoFs instruction produced substantial and equivalent effect sizes (Norris & Ortega, 2001). Also, the results showed that explicit types of grammar instruction, with explanations and focused practice, are more productive and contribute significantly to achievement than implicit models.

II.2. Beliefs about the Role of Grammar and Grammar Teaching Methods

The importance of grammar has long been acknowledged by linguists and educators. Not only is grammar "the most distinctive aspect of language" (Cook, 2016, p. 9), but it

is also a part of communicative competence (Yalden, 1987) and “a mode of entry to the study of meaning” (Halliday, 2003, p. 180). Similarly, EFL learners have been reported to acknowledge the indispensable role of grammar. For instance, Hos and Kecec (2015) found in their qualitative findings that most university Turkish students perceived grammar as essential. Likewise, Thai university students believed it was necessary to learn grammar (Saengboon, 2017). Mixed results were also found for EFL students’ views on grammar teaching methods in different countries. Graus and Coppin (2016) found that most Dutch university students preferred explicit, form-focused, and inductive grammar instruction. Meanwhile, Chinese students believed that combining traditional and communicative approaches would enhance their grammar learning (Deng & Lin, 2016).

II.3. Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS)

GLSs were defined as “actions and thoughts that learners consciously employ to make language learning and/or language use easier, more effective, more efficient, and more enjoyable” (Oxford et al., 2007, p. 117). Asian learners have been reported to use a variety of strategies for grammar learning. For instance, adopting Pawlak’s (2018a) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory, Kadir et al. (2020) revealed that second-year university Indonesian students used metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies at a medium level, with social strategy having the highest mean score. Using Oxford’s (1990) SILL, Supakorn et al. (2018) compared Chinese and Thai high achieving and low-achieving 11th graders in their GLSs. The results indicated that high achievers used more GLSs than low achievers in both Asian countries, although Thai students used more GLSs than Chinese learners for both proficiency groups. Thai high achievers employed more memory, cognitive, affective, and social strategies than Chinese high-achieving counterparts and Thai low-achievers used more metacognitive, social, and affective strategies than Chinese low-achieving peers.

Furthermore, some cognitive learning strategies, such as memorization and controlled practice for grammar learning, were used more frequently by students of elementary

English level than advanced learners (e.g., Pawlak, 2008). Also, the translation strategy was used differently to learn grammar by learners of various proficiency levels. For instance, Japanese students of English beginner and intermediate level believed that translation strategy was effective in facilitating grammar learning (Horwitz, 1999). In contrast, the translation strategy was not perceived effective by more proficient, and English-majored Taiwanese students who used this strategy less frequently than their non-proficient peers (Liao, 2006). Also, Pawlak (2008) reported that most advanced Polish students adopted the formal practice and consulted printed reference grammar sources but used memorization less frequently and rarely used translation, contrastive analysis, natural practice, compensation, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies.

Language learning strategy research has witnessed significant advances and developments in recent years, primarily in conceptualizing the strategy construct (Oxford, 1990; Pawlak, 2011; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman, 2000). The conceptualizations have been shifted from the notion of strategic learning to self-regulation, examined under the psychological perspectives (Oxford, 2016; Rose, 2012). SRL refers to “self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions for attaining one’s learning goals” (Zimmerman & Moylan, 2009, p.299). According to Zimmerman (1986), learners become active participants at different stages in their SRL process because they have metacognitive strategies (planning, organizing, self-instructing, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating), motivation (competence, self-efficacy, and autonomy), and appropriate behaviors (selecting, structuring, and creating conducive learning environments). SRL strategies have been well-documented in language and science learning. For instance, Zimmerman and Pons (1986) identified 14 SRL strategies (e.g., self-evaluation, seeking information, environmental structuring, rehearsing and memorizing, and review notes) that 10th graders used during class, homework, and studying in a writing course. Also, Cleary (2006) found that high school students used adaptive strategies such as seeking and learning information and managing environment and behavior strategies and also demonstrated maladaptive regulatory behaviors (i.e., strategies students use to avoid

learning) when self-regulating their science learning.

In addition, elements of metacognition and self-regulation have been integrated into recent language learning studies in EFL contexts (e.g., An et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2013) to broaden the traditional strategy research. Also, a few studies provided insights into how students may employ various strategies in learning grammatical points of a language. Gimeno (2002), for instance, conducted a grammar learning strategy intervention on 60 Spanish secondary school students to compare the effects of metacognitive and cognitive strategies on learning English conditional sentence Type 2. The results show that the metacognitive group benefited from macro strategies such as preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion, and outperformed the cognitive group in grammar interpretation tests and inductive ability. This further indicates that in comparison to cognitive strategies (e.g., memorization of grammatical rules, repetition, and over-practicing), which are often encouraged in many EFL language classrooms (Oxford et al., 2007), there may be other strategies in learning grammar that can be more productive because students who use only memorization strategies tend to have lower performance scores than students who employ metacognitive strategies (Chiu et al., 2007).

II.4. Grammar Learning in Vietnam

In Vietnam, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was introduced in the 2000s, and despite this, most English language programs in Vietnamese high schools still focus on grammar and vocabulary, with explicit grammar teaching being the most popular instructional method (Phan, 2018). Besides, despite being sent to language training schools and centers to learn CLT approaches, e.g., learning through discovery and project-based learning, most school teachers continued to use the traditional method in their practical teaching context (Pham, 2007; Phan, 2017). It is challenging to apply CLT to language teaching classrooms in Vietnam because of factors on the part of students (e.g., lack of communication opportunities and low proficiency level), teachers (e.g., lack of training, feeling of inadequacy), the educational system (e.g., large class

sizes, insufficient facilities, textbooks, exam-focused) (Pham, 2007; Phan, 2017).

Despite the national plan for foreign languages from 2008 and 2020 to develop students' foreign language productive skills, most Vietnamese high school students continued to learn grammar in FoFs and GTM classrooms (Phan, 2018). Thus, there remains a myth concerning what high school Vietnamese students think about this way of learning grammar and their beliefs about grammar teaching methods. Although most Vietnamese high school students have learned English for many years, they still find it hard to use even simple and common vocabulary and grammar to communicate in the English language in daily conversations (Nguyen & Le, 2020). Dan (2008) conducted a study with seventy-two Vietnamese college students, including both English majors and non-English majors, to explore common problems that Vietnamese students encountered with grammar. Dan (2008) concluded that Vietnamese students commit widespread errors with tense and aspect although they have spent years learning English. When Vietnamese students learn English grammar, they tend to copy down the structures, do exercises to get familiar with the structures, and frequently employ memorization strategies to remember the grammar rules and structures (Duong & Nguyen, 2006). However, whether Vietnamese high school students use other GLS to learn grammar is still unknown due to a lack of previous studies.

Based on the review of the related literature, the study proposed two research questions:

- (1) What are Vietnamese high school students' attitudes towards the role of grammar in learning English?

- (2) What grammar learning strategies do Vietnamese high school students use to learn English grammar?

III. METHODOLOGY

III.1. Design

The researchers conducted a multiple qualitative case study, an essential strategy to describe and expand the understanding of a specific phenomenon. In a multiple case study approach, regularities among cases are revealed, and emerging concepts in each case that are not found in the remaining cases can be either rejected or confirmed (Stake, 1995). In other words, this approach is employed to illustrate and gain insights into a specific issue by seeking another layer of themes that emerge across all the investigated cases. Hence, to dig deeper into the pursuit of insights and critical comments and afford the participants opportunities to describe and reflect on their learning experiences, the researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews.

III.2. Participants

Six high school Vietnamese students (three boys and three girls), aged between 15 and 18, studying at various high schools in the northern and southern parts of Vietnam were recruited through a snowball sampling technique. The researchers identified a small number of students who have the necessary characteristics, and these students served as informants to help researchers get in touch with other students who are eligible for inclusion criteria (e.g., studying at a public high school and having at least 7 years of learning English). This sampling technique was used because it was difficult for the researchers to get access to the population of high school students in all three regions in Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic. To obtain a more accurate and general picture of grammar learning and beliefs, only non-English majors were selected as these students can represent the majority of Vietnamese high school students who do not choose English as a major. Moreover, more 12th graders were chosen because they can provide a better reflective overview of how they have learned English grammar and the

learning problems they encountered from middle school to high school. The participants and their guardians received a consent form via email and signed it electronically. Before the actual interview, the researcher called each participant to introduce herself, briefed them on the purpose of the study so that the participants got to know her before scheduling an online Skype interview with them. Participants were also informed that their interviews would be recorded, and all their personal information was kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used for participants, and their personal information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

No	Names	Gender	Age	Grade	English proficiency level	Locations of high schools	Preference for learning grammar	Years of formal English learning	Classroom
1	KA	Female	17	12	Elementary	Ho Chi Minh City	No	7	Traditional
2	May	Female	15	10	Pre-intermediate	Ha Noi Capital	Neutral	7	Task-based
3	Noah	Male	18	12	Intermediate	Ho Chi Minh City	Neutral	7	Traditional
4	Taylor	Female	16	11	Pre-intermediate	Ho Chi Minh City	Neutral	9	Traditional
5	Pierre	Male	17	12	Elementary	Long An Province	No	7	Traditional
6	Quade	Male	18	12	Pre-intermediate	Long An Province	Yes	7	Traditional

III.3. Data collection

Each interview lasted about 40-50 minutes and was conducted in a face-to-face Skype video meeting. The interview was conducted in Vietnamese. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim into a word document for coding with careful and thorough consideration during transcription. The transcript was subsequently translated into English. Audio files were safely stored and downloaded onto a computer. The interviews comprise 16 questions structured in three blocks: the first one was about collecting demographic data; the second was about responding to research questions, and the last was geared towards students' answering grammar sentences (See Appendix).

Students' handouts, shared electronically with the researcher, were also examined.

III.4. Data analysis

Data were gathered, collected, transcribed, and analyzed based on the inductive content analysis guidelines suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2014) and Creswell (2007). The researchers organized the qualitative data through open coding and created categories for abstraction. Accordingly, the researchers clarified the content by reading through the transcripts many times, writing marginal notes, and forming initial codes. The researchers also described each case and its context and used categorical aggregation to establish themes and patterns. After common patterns among cases were found, the researchers identified dissimilar patterns before checking and rechecking codes with data and clustering them into final categories. The researchers continued revising and refining the category system, and within each category, searched for sub-topics, including contradictory viewpoints and new insights. Suitable direct quotes from the interviews were used to illustrate, support, validate the findings.

III.5. Trustworthiness and Reflexibility

The use of self in research means that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, and the researchers' position was used as a form of reliability (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). The researchers were aware that their position and reflexivity affected how they made sense of participants' worldviews. Also, the researchers used document analysis to triangulate the interview data by analyzing students' handouts. Besides, the researchers abandoned their expert stance and held a neutral attitude towards participants' sharing, following Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) guidelines. Moreover, as advised by Glesne (2015), to enhance the reliability of the data analysis, the researchers conducted many reviews of the translated transcripts, double-checked, and discussed the descriptions of the codes, illustrative data extracts, and the category scheme.

IV. FINDINGS

Most participants still learned grammar in traditional classrooms with explicit FoFs instruction and only one participant was taught with a task-based approach. Despite being exposed to different grammar teaching methods, all participants had a positive attitude towards the centrality of grammar in learning English and used different GLSs. These main findings are reported as follows.

IV.1. Positive attitudes towards the role of grammar

Grammar was defined by participants in the study as mastering sentence structures and formulae, and to all participants, grammar played a crucial role in learning English whether they liked learning it or not. For instance, May remarked, “Grammar is an indispensable thing” and KA posited, “grammar is very important”. Other participants explained the importance of grammar stating that learning grammar lends itself to learning other skills. They also argued that if learners possessed grammar competence, they would have a proper degree of cognitive control over the structures used for both speaking and writing and they could make themselves understood by producing utterances grammatically.

Grammar helps us understand the sentence structures and the writing style adopted by foreigners. So, I think it is very important. (Quade)

Grammar helps us speak fluently and present ideas better when we write... If I don't master English grammar, then I won't be able to learn other skills well. (Taylor)

I think it is quite important because if our grammar is not good, we will make sentence mistakes when we speak, which makes it difficult for others to understand. (Pierre)

In addition to skills development, the essential role of grammar was also examined on other dimensions. For instance, May and Noah pointed out that learning grammar could facilitate advanced English studies and preparation for an English international test such

as IELTS, TOEIC, and TOEFL.

If we study grammar well, it will be beneficial for us when we practice and prepare for the IELTS exam. (May)

If I study higher, the grammar I know will help me in my learning a lot. (Noah)

Notably, Noah pointed out that most high schools in Vietnam seriously focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary for the high-stakes exam, which was also evidenced by the content of the handouts participants were given after learning one unit in class for further practice.

Grammar is very important because we only have written and reading exams... At my school, we are studying grammar from the beginner to the intermediate level. Perhaps at other better schools, they teach students much more advanced grammar, and most of these schools focus on grammar and vocabulary. (Noah)

From participants' considerations on the role of grammar in learning English, it can be concluded that learning grammar is very important for these EFL high school learners, probably because the grammar-based examination is still in practice.

IV.2. Grammar Learning Strategies

IV.2.1. Environmental and behavioral management strategies

Despite learning with a different teaching approach, all participants used learning strategies to assist them in grammar learning. The first group of strategies, the environmental and behavioral strategies, indicate regulatory strategy use during studying and homework completion, such as looking for support and resources, time management, and habit formation. For instance, when faced with learning difficulties, KA tended to seek help from her friends or teachers:

I often ask my friends who can understand the English foreign teacher to

translate for me. If I misunderstand something, I will ask my teacher so that I will not repeat the error in the next test.

Moreover, to facilitate the understanding and memorization of the grammar structures, some students shared that they learned grammar in meaningful contexts with illustrative examples that suit their English level.

When we learn tenses or new grammatical structures, we should find two or three examples for us to practice until we understand them. (KA)

When I study a grammar sentence, I have to put it in context. I think I will remember it for a longer period. (Noah)

Having gotten access to the Internet, some participants also self-studied by using the Google search engine to seek online materials and multimedia sources or download grammar learning applications. Thus, knowing how to employ multiples of available virtual sources to serve their grammar learning suggests that participants know how to self-regulate their learning. In particular, they reported using environmental management strategies to assist their grammar studies.

I often download apps to learn grammar... If a grammar lesson is difficult for me, I will go online, and search materials related to it. (May)

I watch English movies and listen to music in English, pay attention to new things to learn. This works for me. There are things that teachers do not teach, but thanks to watching movies, when taking tests, there are sentences I remember when watching movies, and I can do it. (Quade)

In addition to managing the learning environment, all participants mentioned using behavioral management strategies to adapt to the learning environment requirements. For instance, participants employed over-practicing (i.e., doing and redoing numerous

exercises in handouts or assignments) to get familiar with grammatical structures and memorize the formulae more easily. The following instances illustrate the use of this strategy.

I take out the handouts and homework exercises assigned by my teacher in class, and I do them again and again and memorize the structure. (Pierre)

I think when teachers deliver the lesson, we should try to remember right away what they teach and do exercises all over and over again. (Quade).

IV.2.2 Cognitive and metacognitive strategies

The next group of strategies, cognitive strategies, involves taking notes of and reviewing structures, using given words to analyze grammar sentences, guessing and making inferences, and translating. Among the cognitive strategies, translation and reviewing were the most widely used by all participants. For instance, Taylor shared that she often “reviewe[d] the lessons immediately after class because [she could] remember the knowledge better.” When finding the answers to grammar sentences, she often “read the whole sentence, analyze[d] the type of sentence, and inferre[d] the structure.” Instances of other participants’ employment of cognitive strategies concern “tak[ing] notes of grammar structures, formulae, and examples” (taken from KA), “translat[ing] the whole sentence to find out the meaning and look[ing] for signal words or signs” (taken from Quade) and “guess[ing]” (taken from Pierre).

In addition to cognitive strategies, some participants also used metacognitive learning strategies, which include using strategies to understand how they learn and to consciously complete an exercise or a learning task successfully, including planning, and making efforts in learning. For example, Taylor shared how she planned grammar lessons, and Quade vocalized the necessity of making efforts in grammar learning.

If there is a grammar class tomorrow, I will take time to prepare for the lesson tonight. If my teacher doesn’t tell me what to study tomorrow, I’ll prepare for

the next unit. (Taylor).

I think when teachers deliver the lesson, we should try to remember right away what they teach...we should focus on studying it because later on we need a lot of English. (Quade)

Although planning and making an effort in learning contributes to the repertoire of successful learning strategies, the responses from the students in this study seem to indicate that few students use these strategies for grammar learning. As May pointed out, "If [students] memorize the structures but still make mistakes in their answers, they should try to understand what mistakes they made." Although understanding mistakes is a part of the self-reflection process, only one student (May) directly mentioned this strategy. It seems that most students who participated in this study did not know how to fully self-reflect on their learning, which may explain their failure to give correct answers to some grammar sentences in the practice part of the interview, although they had already learned all the grammatical points in the English program that the researcher used to test them.

Also, some of them used maladaptive strategies, i.e., strategies that students often use to avoid learning or that impede their learning. The first instance concerns giving up easily after several unsuccessful learning attempts.

If a grammar lesson is difficult for me, I will go online and search for materials related to it. If I still cannot understand it, I will give up. (KA).

Besides, students' failure to make appropriate learning plans and inability to maintain or balance focus on learning are epitomes of the lack of adaptive strategies.

Because I think I will study it at university again, I focus on studying the subjects that I think I will sit for the university entrance exam. I think the problem lies with me, not the grammar. (Pierre)

When I took the high school entrance exam, I spent a lot of time studying but if there was no exam or test, I didn't pay much attention to studying English. When there was no pressure of sitting for the high school entrance exam, I did not realize the importance of studying English on my initiative. (May)

Other instances of students' lack of adaptive strategies to control their learning included their failure to make regular efforts to review what they learned and attribution of a lack of self-motivation to negative personality traits, i.e., laziness or boredom.

In grade 9, I studied a lot about [grammar]to sit for the high school entrance exam, but after the exam, I didn't review so I didn't remember...(May)

If I study hard, my grammar will be good, but if I am lazy or bored, I will get discouraged easily. (Pierre)

V. DISCUSSION

In light of the findings, participating students generally had positive attitudes towards the role that grammar plays in their English learning journey. Most of them still learned grammar in traditional classrooms (except one student-May). Although learning in diverse language classrooms, participants had reflective thoughts about teaching approaches and adopted multiple strategies to deal with grammar learning. In particular, these findings were discussed as follows.

The fact that most students are taught with explicit FoFs instruction may indicate that the traditional grammar teaching approach is still prevalent in Vietnam, although, in some high schools in the capital city, students can be taught with the CLT approach. Thus, this indicates that mixed practices in grammar teaching exist in Vietnam. Also, as pointed out by participants, high school teachers often required students to focus on learning grammar for passing exams. However, this practice could unintentionally feed into students' minds that learning grammar at high school was all about mastering

predetermined grammar knowledge for high-stakes exams. Despite the emphasis on learning grammar to pass exams, participants believed that grammar was essential for skills development and international English tests. Thus, their beliefs were consistent with the positive attitude that EFL students in South East Asia (e.g., Deng & Lin, 2016; Saengboon, 2017) and other regions (e.g., Hos & Kekec, 2015; Graus & Coppen, 2016) held about grammar in previous studies.

Besides, participants' beliefs about the centrality of grammar were in line with those of linguists and educators, such as Cook (2016) and Halliday (2003) who emphasized the essential role of grammar in learning languages and highlighted the long-term benefits of learning grammar, enabling us to make sense of what we speak and write. Thus, it seems that the positive beliefs about the importance of grammar in language learning are not only unanimous among EFL learners in most Southeast Asian countries but also those in other nations. Also, from the participants' perspectives, the traditional FoFs approach to grammar teaching does not seem problematic because participants approved focusing on forms when learning grammar, which confirms Daloglu's (2020) findings. Thus, Vietnamese English teachers should consider learner beliefs and balance them with contextual factors, learners' characteristics, and assessment requirements since learner beliefs can affect how they internalize the language. Accordingly, English teachers should not completely abandon the FoFs approach in ongoing language teaching reforms, because the findings in this study showed that participants did not indicate antipathy towards this type of instruction. Combining different grammar teaching approaches, updating teaching techniques, and varying instructional activities can increase students' motivation in learning grammar.

Consistent with the findings of other Asian students such as Indonesian, Chinese and Thai learners who were reported to employ a variety of strategies to learn grammar (e.g., Kadir et al., 2020; Supakorn et al., 2018), participants also used various GLSs such as environmental and behavioral management and cognitive strategies. Also,

metacognitive strategies were found among some participants of pre-intermediate and intermediate levels. Nevertheless, students used traditional cognitive learning strategies such as translation and reviewing records more often than the remaining strategies. Previously, Taiwanese students in Liao (2006) and Japanese students in Oh (1996, as cited in Horwitz, 1999) believed the translation strategy was helpful for learning grammar, and this belief was also mentioned by participants in this study. The most surprising results, however, concerning Vietnamese learners' grammar learning strategy use is their report of maladaptive strategies, i.e., lack of metacognitive strategies which has not been mentioned in previous studies. Evidence of maladaptive strategies such as failing to make plans, ascribing incorrect attributional causes, exerting an insufficient effort, and giving up learning early indicate that learners may face learning problems because of not knowing how to practice the adaptive strategies to facilitate grammar learning.

Hence, the findings of strategies that students use to learn grammar inform English teachers to help students tackle grammar learning problems linked with these maladaptive strategies. By guiding students to search for materials, seek help, and self-regulate their grammar learning, teachers can help students become autonomous learners. Despite having to cover many sections in a grammar lesson within a limited amount of time in class, English teachers can consider orienting students to learn self-regulated learning strategies in tutoring or extra classes organized by the school. Although English teachers have to face a mismatch between the modern and strategic teaching approaches and the testing system in Vietnam, which was more traditional and form-focused, teachers should balance educational goals and provide chances for students to develop learner autonomy as much as they can, which will be likely to bring long-term benefits.

Finally, information about useful strategies that participants employed for learning grammar, as mentioned in this study, can be beneficial to EFL/ESL researchers who are enthusiastic about self-regulated learning strategies to design an instrument that can measure learners' self-regulation in English grammar learning. Subconstructs of

SRL strategies for learning English grammar can include environmental and behavioral management (EBM), cognitive (C), and metacognitive (MC) strategies. Instances of items that can be formulated based on the findings in this study include but do not limit to “I use different ways of learning grammar” (MC), “I employ different sources to facilitate my grammar learning” (EBM), “I translate into Vietnamese grammatical concepts, rules, structures, or usage to help me learn English grammar” (C), “I make sure I follow the grammar rules” (MC), “I notice the position of verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs when working on a grammar exercise” (C), “I make lists of important structures, rules, and usages and memorize the lists” (C) and “I make a schedule to help me organize my time to study grammar” (EBM). Admittedly, an exhaustive list of items that can be created from the findings of this study is out of the scope of this article. Hence, the researchers recommend that future studies continue this line of grammar research.

VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In summary, all participants in this study acknowledged the essential role of grammar in learning English. However, most of them were still learning in the traditional classrooms, focusing on structure presentation and memorization of grammatical formulae, which indicates that the traditional approach is still prevalent at high schools in large cities and provinces. Despite this, all participants demonstrated the ability to self-regulate their learning and adopted a strategic approach to grammar learning on their initiative despite their occasional use of maladaptive strategies, which has not been mentioned in previous studies about grammar learning in Vietnam. The study opens another avenue for grammar strategy research into adaptive and maladaptive grammar learning behaviors and strategies and provides valuable information for English teachers to provide resources and use various teaching techniques to help students self-regulate their grammar learning effectively and to design strategy intervention to tackle ineffective grammar learning problems.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. Firstly, it did not consider all high school

participants studying in various locations (e.g., rural and mountainous areas), and not all Vietnamese high school students in all teaching and learning contexts were included, who might receive different grammar instruction such as explicit versus implicit, FoF versus FoFs, GLT versus CLT. Also, due to the limited number of participants, i.e. six students, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners in Vietnam and should be interpreted with caution. Also, as the study is exploratory, it is difficult to compute the accurate percentage of students who use a particular strategy and the frequency of overall strategy use that belongs to each participant. Thus, English teachers and instructors can consider the result from this study to design an appropriate grammar learning strategy questionnaire sensitive to the local context. As strategy learning research has been a fad in recent years, the study contributes to its neglected field, i.e., GLSs, and provided valuable information regarding which GLSs Vietnamese high school students may use to facilitate their grammar learning. Thus, future research about GLSs can replicate this study to confirm the results.

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VIII. Appendix: interview questions

1. Which grade are you in?
2. When did you start to learn English?
3. What do you think your English level is?
4. Do you think you are a successful English learner?
5. How do you define a successful English learner?
6. Do you like learning English grammar?
7. What do you think about the role of grammar in learning English?
8. What do you think about the role of grammar that you learned in your high school textbooks?
9. Are you satisfied with the grammar content taught in your English textbooks?
10. What do you think is the difficulty level of learning grammar in learning English on a scale from 0 to 10?
11. What do you think is the difficulty level of learning English grammar covered in your textbook on a scale from 0 to 10?
12. What are your attitudes towards English grammar periods?
13. Do you know how to learn English grammar well?
14. Do you spend time learning English grammar seriously? If yes, how?
15. What strategies do you often use when doing English grammar exercises?
16. Find the answers to three grammar sentences and explain later how you come up with the answers.

[COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVES]

1. A mobile phone would be a _ present. (useful)

[CONDITIONAL SENTENCES]

2. If he ___(help) me work out, I ___(spend) some time tomorrow helping him with his homework

[ARTICLES: A/AN/THE/-]

3. A: Excuse me, where is _____ Room 25, please? B: It's on _____ second floor

OR

[RELATIVE PRONOUNS]

1. Scientists _____ examined the fossils say it is a plant-eating dinosaur _____ is nearly 200 million years old.

[REPORTED SPEECH]

2. She'll come and see you on Friday if that's all right', she told me.

She told me that _____ '

[REPORTED SPEECH]

3. Give me a ring if you need any help,' she told me.

She told me _____