Teaching and Learning English Grammar: Opportunities and Challenges in ASEAN Countries

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Abstract

While substantial research has explored English grammar learning in East and South Asia, its classroom implementation in other Asian regions—particularly within ASEAN countries—remains underexamined. This study investigates the opportunities and challenges in implementing English grammar instruction across ASEAN countries. A systematic literature review was conducted using the ERIC database, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2024. Applying defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 24 relevant articles covering five ASEAN countries (i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand) were selected for analysis. Findings reveal that English grammar instruction enhances competence in the four macro language skills, improves grammatical accuracy, and increases learner confidence in academic and professional settings. However, challenges persist, including first language (L1) interference, limited student motivation, low confidence, and insufficient opportunities to use English in real-life contexts, often resulting in fear of criticism. To address these issues, the study emphasizes the importance of student-centered strategies, the integration of digital learning tools, and more opportunities for authentic communication. It is concluded that English grammar instruction positively impacts proficiency and confidence, but its full potential is constrained by persistent learner-related and instructional challenges. The study recommends checking for more recent studies from other ASEAN countries beyond the five reviewed, using additional databases, and encouraging classroom practices that foster real-world language use and regular student feedback.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar, as the system and structure of language, encompasses both syntax and morphology, playing a fundamental role in language instruction (Habibi, 2021; Jasmina & Farmonova, 2023). It is considered the scientific study of any language, with rules that govern its organization across various categories, primarily regulating the correct order of words in a sentence (Handayani & Johan, 2018). According to Ratnaningsih and Azizah (2019), writing and reading are essential skills for learning English, and these skills are closely intertwined, as "grammar is a set of finite rules by which we can construct infinite sentences" (Nur, 2020).

Moreover, the failure to apply proper grammar can hinder the reader's understanding, affecting the clarity of the ideas being communicated (Bram & Angelina, 2022). This is why a person is considered language proficient if they can spontaneously apply the rules and components of language in real-world contexts in a non-rehearsed manner (Rubio & Hacking, 2019) or activate their awareness of whether and how both language forms match (Butzkamm, 2003). However, it must be understood that the use of grammar is more challenging than any other aspect of language for students, especially for those with lower motivation toward grammar (Graus & Coppen, 2015). Additionally, the study by Mohammadkarimi (2022) revealed that the weaknesses and issues of undergraduate students were mostly related to grammatical structure and punctuation usage.

For this reason, Nagai and Shirav (2023) examined the effects of deductive and inductive grammar instruction in communicative teaching. While both approaches have their merits—deductive instruction involves explaining rules first, while inductive instruction encourages students to discover the rules through examples—effective grammar instruction in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) requires a balance between grammar accuracy and meaningful language use. As language teaching continues to evolve, understanding which approach is more effective in communicative contexts is becoming increasingly important. On the other hand, Dizon and Gold (2023) explored how the use of Grammarly, an Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tool, affects EFL students' Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and learner autonomy (LA). FLA, a common barrier to language learning, often diminishes students' confidence and progress. In contrast, LA—students' ability to take charge of their learning—can enhance motivation and engagement. Thus, the study suggested that Grammarly can reduce FLA by providing instant feedback, making the correction process less intimidating, and thereby fostering a more autonomous and confident approach to language learning.

Scholars such as Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020) and Chaleila and Khalaila (2020) have identified common grammatical errors among undergraduate students in Western Asia, particularly those from Israel, Iraq, Jordan, and Oman. These errors include verb tense issues, article misuse, incorrect word order, noun ending errors, sentence structure problems, composing nominal sentences, and prepositional mistakes. In contrast, Jama (2022) found that most Arabian undergraduate students demonstrated a stronger grasp of infinitive sentences compared to gerund forms. He recommended that English teachers teach gerund and infinitive forms separately to reduce confusion among EFL learners and emphasized the importance of integrating English skills, especially writing and grammar. Other research has also highlighted various strategies for addressing grammatical errors, such as implicit grammar instruction, meaning-focused instruction (Daloglu, 2020), and the use of the mother tongue in English grammar learning (Tubayqi, 2021). Furthermore, in the Turkish context, Dincer and Polat (2022) explored the impact of Flipped Learning (FL) on students' grammar proficiency and their attitudes toward this new instructional model. Their study revealed that the flipped classroom approach, which allocates more time for in-class tasks and fosters collaborative

learning, motivated EFL learners to study grammar structures, improved their grammar competency, and enhanced their engagement during class.

In South Asia, particularly within the context of Pakistan, Rauf et al. (2023) investigated the comparative effectiveness of inductive and deductive teaching methods on English grammar acquisition among undergraduate students. Their findings suggest that an inductive, student-centered approach, especially when applied to tenses and modal verbs, leads to superior learning outcomes. In a similar vein, Doley and Kakoti (2024) explored the impact of blocking and interleaving techniques on the retention of grammatical and lexical knowledge among Indian EFL learners. Their research found no statistically significant difference in retention rates between the two methods, both at the initial and final stages of the practice sessions.

In East Asia, Wu (2022) found that L2 proficiency influences language awareness, with grammatical and pragmatic awareness developing unevenly. In particular, the overemphasis on pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms, especially in China, often leads to the neglect of grammatical development. This imbalance occurs because pragmatic development does not automatically lead to corresponding grammatical development. In Korea, Cho and Song (2023) investigated the impact of visual input enhancement and working memory on reading comprehension and grammar learning among Korean EFL learners. Their findings indicated that while there was no adverse effect on reading comprehension, there was a positive overall effect on grammar learning. Similarly, Kim (2020) suggested that consistent exposure to English or instruction at an early age (at least 3 hours per week before age 12) positively impacts learners' ability to process English articles in real-time and their linguistic representation of Type 5 articles. Given that the minimum exposure in their study was only 3 hours per week and considering the difficulty of English articles for Korean EFL learners, they emphasized that consistent, high-quality input at an early age can benefit both article acquisition and overall L2 proficiency. Furthermore, Ko's (2022) study found that Korean EFL students performed poorly in six specific grammatical areas: participial structures, tense, for/since, gerunds, the third-person singular -s in the simple present tense, and the distinction between many and much. Time prepositions (for/since) and quantitative adjectives (many/much), areas often overlooked in prior research, were particularly challenging for Korean learners. With this, it was suggested that the subtle differences between these grammatical features may be too minor for students to grasp while constructing sentences; and to address this, EFL teachers should leverage class activities that encourage students to apply their existing knowledge rather than simply providing explicit rules for these grammatical features (Ko, 2022).

Based on the articles reviewed, most of the research concentrated in the Western (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Chaleila & Khalaila, 2020; Daloglu, 2020; Dincer & Polat, 2022; Jama, 2022; Tubayqi, 2021), South (Doley & Kakoti, 2024; Rauf et al., 2023), and Eastern parts of Asia (Cho & Song, 2023; Kim, 2020; Ko, 2022; Wu, 2022). While there is a substantial body of research on English grammar learning in East and South Asia, particularly in countries like China, Japan, South Korea, India, and Pakistan, research from other Asian regions, especially Southeast Asia, is less prominent. Thus, there is a limited understanding of the current state of English grammar learning in Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, this study aims to explore how English grammar is implemented in ASEAN countries, particularly focusing on the opportunities and challenges in its classroom implementation. Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1. What are the opportunities for teaching English grammar in classrooms across ASEAN countries?
2. What are the challenges of teaching English grammar in classrooms across ASEAN countries?

METHODS

Research Design

The research employs a systematic literature review to examine the opportunities and challenges with regard to English grammar in the context of ASEAN countries. This type of review brings together existing knowledge from research literature using systematic, explicit, and accountable methods (Gough et al., 2012) and that is setting criteria for the screening of search articles.

Search Strategy

The researchers used only one database to locate related articles: the Educational Research Information Center (ERIC). This database provides access to full texts, references, citations, and abstracts, covering many areas of education, such as English grammar, language learning, and teaching approaches, making it a reliable source for this study. Moreover, the researchers used "English Grammar" as a keyword in searching for journal articles, which were then assessed according to specified criteria.

Screening and Coding

In the screening process, the researchers employed the following criteria: a) journal publication type, b) year of publication, c) demographic location, d) language, and e) descriptor or subject area. Specifically, the researchers considered full-text, peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2024. While Wolf (2019) recommends reviewing literature from at least the past ten years—especially in fields like humanities, arts, literature, and history—the researchers limited the range to the most recent five years to focus on the latest developments and due to the large number of studies available. Regarding demographics, all journal articles from ASEAN countries were included, while articles from non-ASEAN countries were excluded. For the subject area, the researchers focused on articles related to grammar and undergraduate students, excluding those that were not relevant to these areas.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Selecting Journal Articles in the Present Study

Parameters	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Journal Publication Type	Journal of peer-reviewed research articles are available in full text or open-access	Articles that are not peer-reviewed, lacking full text, or open access.
Time Frame	Published between 2020 and 2024	Published before 2000
Description	The focus is on Grammar and Undergraduate Students	The focus is not on English Grammar and not on undergraduate students
Demographic Focus	The journal articles are set in ASEAN countries.	The setting of the journal articles is not from ASEAN countries.
Sourced Data	Data from ERIC	Other sources are not mentioned.

Furthermore, the researchers followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart to track the articles surveyed and scanned until the final number was reached, based on the identified criteria. As shown in Figure 1, 9,538 articles were identified from the ERIC database using the specific keyword. The application of inclusion and

exclusion criteria through automation tools resulted in the identification of 5,249 peer-reviewed journal articles, with 4,289 articles excluded. Subsequently, the automation tool identified 1,494 peer-reviewed articles with full text, excluding the 3,755 articles that did not meet the criteria.

Next, the publication time frame was considered, with only articles published between 2020 and the present included. This further reduced the number of articles to 557, excluding an additional 937 research articles. The focus was then refined to journal articles related to grammar, undergraduate students, and higher education, which resulted in 145 articles remaining, while 412 articles were excluded for not meeting the time frame criterion. Finally, 24 journal articles focusing on English grammar in ASEAN countries were identified through manual checking, with 121 articles excluded.
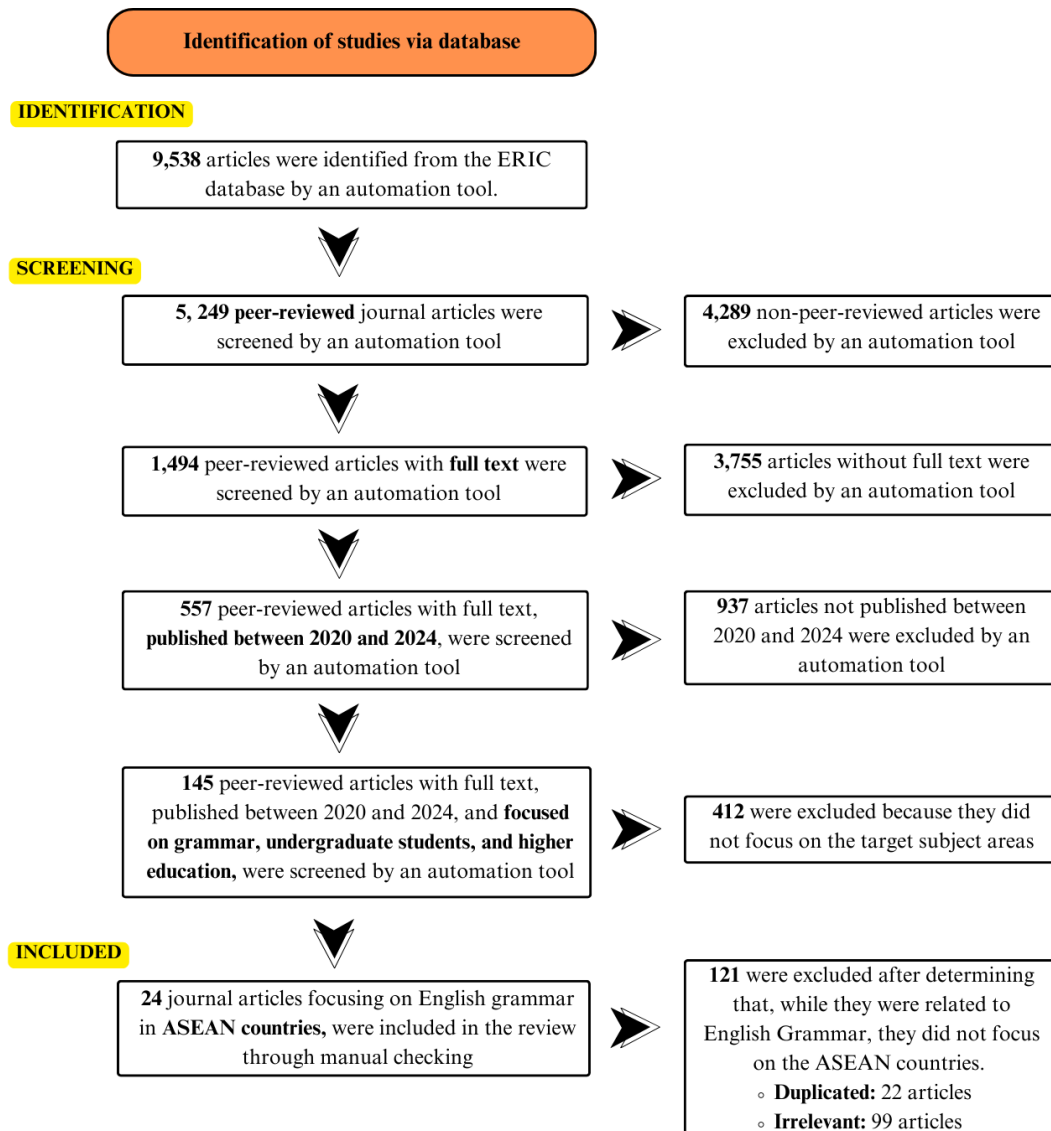

Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart Showing the Screening of Articles

Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis, the researchers mapped the different countries in Southeast Asia where the reviewed studies were concentrated. Figure 1 shows that studies from Indonesia encompass a range of research, including those by Nurhayati (2020), Ardi and Rianita (2022), Pardede et al. (2023), Fitrawati (2021), Fauzan et al. (2022), Rahayu et al. (2022), and Azaz (2022). Malaysia's contributions

are represented by the works of Ong and Rahim (2021), as well as Mehat and Ismail (2021). In the Philippines, Armea et al. (2022) provide valuable insights, while Hien (2023) and Nguyen (2020) offer a study from Vietnam. Thailand is home to a wide array of research, including works by Kaosayapandhu (2023), Taladngoen et al. (2020), Stephens and Sanderson (2021), Sukavatee (2023), Jitpanich et al. (2022), Pornwiriyakit (2022), Boonraksa and Naisena (2022), Shutt and Tangkiengsirisin (2023), and Tantiwicha and Sinwongsuwat (2021). Additionally, contributions to the body of research from the region include works by Kampookaew (2020), Chantajinda (2021), and Kitjaroonchai and Maywald (2024).

Figure 1. Distribution on the No. of Articles per Countries in the Southeast Asia
Note. Created by paintmaps.com

Since the researchers' focus was on identifying the opportunities and challenges within the classroom, a thematic analysis was conducted following the guidelines of Clarke and Braun (2013) to examine the current state of English Grammar in higher education institutions (HEIs) across Asia. The analysis focused on the opportunities and challenges of English Grammar implementation and offered recommendations for improving the English Grammar learning and teaching methods in these institutions. The analysis followed these steps: a) familiarizing with the data, b) creating initial codes, c) identifying themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and f) writing the report. In this study, the researchers used Microsoft Excel to organize the data, particularly the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The data were coded based on the research questions and grouped into themes by combining similar codes. These themes were then discussed and written about in the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of English grammar instruction in Southeast Asian classrooms, particularly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, offers both clear opportunities and complex challenges. Mastery of grammar has been consistently linked to improved academic performance, enhanced communicative competence, and greater confidence among learners. Across

ASEAN countries, where English serves as either a second or foreign language, a synthesis of research findings reveals that effective grammar instruction strengthens learners' foundation in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet, despite these opportunities, disparities in access, instructional methods, learner motivation, and teacher preparedness hinder optimal outcomes.

Opportunities in Grammar Instruction Across ASEAN

Enhancing Grammatical Accuracy and Communication

Grammar instruction provides a critical foundation for developing proficiency in all four language skills. Students who acquire grammatical competence can construct clearer sentences, comprehend texts more effectively, and express themselves with greater precision. This has a direct impact on their ability to participate in both academic and professional discourse. In Thailand, where most of the studies in the region are concentrated, grammar instruction supports TOEIC performance and overall proficiency (Taladngoen et al., 2023). Similarly, in the Philippines and Indonesia, the integration of grammar with literature and reflective teaching practices boosts writing and comprehension (Armea et al., 2022; Fitrawati, 2021; Pardede et al., 2023).

Technology-Enhanced and Game-Based Learning

Interactive technologies and gamified platforms like Kahoot!, Duolingo, and mobile applications are being widely adopted across the region. These tools help motivate learners, support autonomous learning, and make grammar instruction more engaging (Kaosayapandhu, 2023; Ardi & Rianita, 2022). In Indonesia, learners showed increased participation and confidence through technology-based activities (Nurhayati, 2020). In Vietnam, the use of digital quizzes and collaborative learning through platforms like PowerPoint has enhanced group engagement and grammar retention (Hien, 2023).

Pedagogical Strategies and Flexibility

Effective grammar instruction in ASEAN is marked by the use of both inductive and deductive approaches. These strategies allow learners to analyze their own errors, engage with patterns in authentic contexts, and internalize grammatical rules more effectively (Fauzan et al., 2022; Ong & Rahim, 2021). Constructed analysis (CA) and data-driven learning (DDL) provide learners with tools to self-correct and monitor their progress. The grammar-translation method, still widely used, remains effective for building vocabulary and sentence structure, particularly when supported by dictionary use and translation exercises (Boonraksa & Naisena, 2022; Pornwiriyakit, 2022).

Contextual and Professional Relevance

Grammar instruction is increasingly aligned with real-world applications, such as writing business reports or navigating e-commerce communication. In Thailand and Malaysia, learners equipped with grammar knowledge can create more precise and professional texts (Jitpanich et al., 2022). This alignment supports the growing demand for English proficiency in global and regional labor markets.

Cross-Cutting Challenges in Grammar Learning and Teaching

Despite these opportunities, learners and educators in Southeast Asia encounter several recurring challenges that impact the effectiveness of grammar instruction.

First Language Interference and Structural Differences

A common challenge across the region is the influence of the first language (L1) on second language (L2) grammar acquisition. In Thailand and Malaysia, differences in syntax, morphology, and phonology between L1 and English result in frequent errors in subject-verb agreement, quantifiers,

and tense usage (Chantajinda, 2021; Kampookaew, 2020; Mehat & Ismail, 2021; Tantiwicha & Sinwongsuwat, 2021). Thai learners, for instance, often omit final consonants and misplace stress patterns, making their speech unintelligible to native speakers (Shutt & Tangkiengsirisin, 2023).

Low Confidence and Anxiety Among Learners

Learner anxiety and lack of confidence in using English impede grammar acquisition. Many students across ASEAN avoid speaking due to fear of making grammatical errors and receiving negative feedback, limiting their opportunities for practice and improvement (Azaz, 2022; Rahayu et al., 2022; Sukavatee, 2023). In Vietnam, changes in instructional methods—such as washback techniques—caused anxiety and resistance among undergraduates unfamiliar with self-directed learning environments (Nguyen, 2020).

Uneven Access to Learning Materials and Assessment

Limited exposure to English assessments, particularly in listening and reading, results in weak vocabulary development and grammar comprehension. Research in Thailand and Malaysia has shown that students often lack opportunities to engage with English in authentic or test-based contexts, reinforcing a cycle of low proficiency (Kitjaroonchai & Maywald, 2024; Mahmoud, 2022; Ong & Rahim, 2021). Moreover, students tend to rely heavily on rote memorization rather than the application of grammatical rules in real contexts.

Teacher Preparedness and Instructional Constraints

Teacher-centered approaches remain dominant in several countries, limiting student engagement and autonomy. In some contexts, teachers are unfamiliar with new methodologies or hesitant to adopt learner-centered strategies. This contributes to reduced learner motivation and dependence on instructors (Stephens & Sanderson, 2021). Continuous professional development is needed to ensure teachers are equipped to implement innovative grammar teaching practices and address learner needs dynamically.

Curriculum Rigidity and Learner Diversity

Another major challenge is the mismatch between standardized curricula and the diverse needs of learners. Grammar instruction often fails to accommodate students' varied proficiency levels, learning styles, and backgrounds. Without adaptation, grammar lessons can become repetitive and disengaging. Countries like Indonesia and Vietnam highlight the need for adaptive instruction and learner-centered materials to improve engagement (Fauzan et al., 2022; Hien, 2023).

As observed across ASEAN, a consistent pattern emerges: countries with stronger integration of technology, learner-centered strategies, and teacher training tend to report more successful grammar learning outcomes. Thailand leads in empirical studies, demonstrating diverse approaches from flipped classrooms to inductive grammar teaching. Indonesia and Vietnam emphasize learner engagement through mobile applications and game-based platforms, while Malaysia's challenges reveal gaps in assessment exposure and curriculum flexibility. However, countries where English is taught primarily as a foreign language still grapple with systemic issues, including low student motivation, L1 interference, and limited teacher capacity. While digital tools offer promise, their effectiveness depends on how well they are integrated into pedagogical practices. Teacher training and ongoing feedback mechanisms are essential for adapting instruction to students' needs.

CONCLUSION

Grammar instruction across ASEAN offers both significant opportunities and persistent challenges. In countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, it enhances learners'

proficiency in the four core language skills, enabling clearer communication in academic and professional contexts. Technology-based platforms like Kahoot!, Duolingo, and Hello English have been effective in increasing learner motivation and confidence, especially in Indonesia and Vietnam. However, the benefits of these tools are underutilized in countries like Malaysia, where limited exposure to real-world applications has hindered progress. Despite these opportunities, challenges such as first language interference, student anxiety, and teacher-centered instruction persist across the region, emphasizing the need for professional development and the adoption of learner-centered strategies. Addressing these challenges requires integrating real-life grammar applications, offering scaffolding for diverse learning needs, and equipping teachers with the necessary resources to effectively use technology and adapt their teaching methods.

Future research should expand the scope to include underrepresented ASEAN countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, and Singapore, and broaden the search to include additional academic databases. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of grammar instruction practices across the region, allowing for the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for teaching English grammar in ASEAN schools.

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