Students’ Attitudes towards Learning English Grammar: The Case of the English Department Students at the University of Raparin.

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Abstract
This research paper investigates the students' attitudes toward learning English grammar and the possible factors that may affect the learning process. The significance of the study is revealing the attitudes of the English department students of Raparin University towards English Grammar. For this, some questions were raised to identify the students' perspectives, methods, and techniques used by the instructors. The research was carried out at the English language department in the College of Basic Education at the University of Raparin. The study involved 40 second and third-year EFL learners who participated in an online questionnaire that included 20 items and the mixed method used to gather the data. The results present that while students recognize the importance of grammar in language learning, they find it challenging to learn. Also, the researcher discovered that the technique instructors use to teach grammar is unsuitable, and students find grammar complex because of its numerous rules. Finally, the study illustrates the significance of encouraging and nurturing positive attitudes among learners toward learning the language's grammar to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Basic education, EFL students' attitudes, English grammar, instructors, positive attitudes, students' perception

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Introduction

Attitudes and students' foreign language learning achievements are interrelated. Fakeye (2010) stated that positive attitudes toward a second language enhance learners' motivation to learn. Additionally, Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified motivation and attitudes as the main factors that affect language learning.

Grammar as a system and structure plays a decisive role in language learning, and it is considered an important segment for effective communication in the target language. Regarding the importance of grammar in foreign language learning, Lightbown (1991) describes grammar as a "hook" for learners, providing a foundation to develop proficiency in the target language.

Learners' perspectives can be affected by some factors, which may impact the process of learning English grammar. Therefore, to enhance the efficiency of teaching English, teachers need to exert a positive mindset among learners toward learning the language's grammar.

While previous studies on students' attitudes toward learning English grammar were conducted, they have yet to target students of the English department at Raparin University. This study adds to the resolution of the issue and provides explanations for the possibility of such matters among English department students. It seeks to show the students' attitudes and uncover their viewpoints about English grammar and find out factors affecting their attitudes.

The study aims to investigate EFL students' attitudes toward English grammar as a language element, and it also examines factors that can either positively or negatively affect the process. It is significant because it presents how English department students deal with grammar inside and outside the classroom.

The research aims to realize the attitudes of English department students at the University of Raparin towards English grammar and factors that may impact the process. This paper tries to answer the following research questions:

1- What is the attitude of students in the English Department towards English grammar at the University of Raparin?
2- To what extent do the English Department students of Raparin University see the process of grammar learning as enjoyable?
3- How well do the teaching methods or techniques employed by the teachers of the English Department at the University of Raparin fill the needs of students?
4- What is the perception of grammar among the English Department student of Raparin University?

This study includes a relevant literature review that provides the historical background on students' attitudes toward English grammar. The method section presents how the research was conducted at the University of Raparin. The findings section illustrates the results, and the discussion section interprets and summarizes the finding. Finally, the list of references includes all the references cited throughout the text.

Literature Review

Grammar consistently recognizes as the essential segment for learners to communicate effectively in the target language. Krashen (1982) highlighted that grammar is a skill acquired naturally within meaningful situations and rejected designing grammar-based language curricula. For Hedge (2000), grammar and the ways of teaching it stimulate the acquisition process. Similarly, Ellis (2006) states that explicitly teaching grammar helps develop implicit knowledge and supports language development. Also, Ur suggested that the grammatical forms taught could
be used automatically in written and spoken communication if the learners give enough chance to practice (Ur, 1996).

Furthermore, acquiring knowledge of grammar in the primary language and secondary language are correlated. Both Hudson and Walmsley (2005) outlined that understanding one's first language, particularly its grammar, actually supports understanding a second language.

Borg (2003) asserted that students’ attitudes play an influential role in many issues and activities that teachers use. Still, it is mostly ignored in the language learning process in the most previously conducted research. For Fakeye (2010) learner's attitude is one of the most critical factors that impact foreign language learning. According to Straaijer (2016), the attitudes they might have to reflect not only their personal opinions but also the social order that individuals are a part of. Similarly, Aceron (2015) presented that the way to help students improve their performance in grammar is by changing their attitude toward English grammar learning. Zhou (2009) revealed and stated that it is mainly related to the beliefs of educators and administrators because the learners do not know what they need.

Schulz (2001) and Loewen et al. (2009) conducted studies on the role of grammar in language learning. They both revealed that grammar for most participants is recognized as a basis on which they can build up the information they learn about the language, and it helps them develop their writing, reading, and speaking skills. Furthermore, Bernat and Lloyd, as cited in Chali et al. (2020), believe that there is always a place for grammar, as it is an essential part of learning a language.

Connecting grammar to speaking ability Hoge (2014) illustrated that grammar kills your speaking ability and can overload the mind. He also believes that focusing too much on grammar makes you speak slower and tentative or, in other words, makes you feel anxious and anxiety.

The goal of studying grammar can differ among students; for some, it is a tool to avoid errors. For example, Zhou (2009) stated that students want to learn grammar to avoid making mistakes while writing. Similarly, İncecay and Dollar (2011) revealed that students regard grammar as a crucial segment of language learning and recommended teaching more communicatively.

Grammar is a necessity of language learning, but it is not interesting to study. Jean and Simard (2011) found that both students and teachers regarded grammar instructions as highly beneficial but not very entertaining. They also asserted that students feel that grammatical materials are complicated or confusing for them to understand due to having a massive number of rules in grammar. Conversely, Andrew (2021) highlighted that complexity is not an inherent quality of grammar; it can be either straightforward or highly complex and hinges on how it is presented.

Method

A research approach is a strategy for organizing and carrying out research. The researcher uses a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) for conducting this research. These methods allow the necessary data and material collection for subsequent statistical processing and analysis.

English Department in the College of Basic Education at the University of Raparin was the site of this study. Second- and Third-year students in the English department taking English for academic purposes make up the population of this research. Forty students participated in the study. The students are preparing to become English instructors in the future as they are learning
the English language. Their viewpoint could provide a fresh perspective on the problems associated with students' attitudes toward English grammar.

The researcher used a survey to collect data about the students' attitudes toward English. The survey is an online Likert scale questionnaire that consists of two sections. The second section includes 20 items and is distributed to each participant using Google Forms.

An online questionnaire was used to collect data, with the questions carefully crafted to be appropriate for the participants, context, and research topic. The survey was completed by the university's second and third-year EFL learners, with 40 participants selected for data collection. The participants were evenly split between male and female Kurdish EFL students, with 60% in their third and 40% in their second years. Once the data was collected from all 40 participants, it was analyzed and interpreted to draw the research findings.

Findings
To assess the students' attitudes toward English Grammar, a series of statements were designed to probe their motivations and sentiments regarding the subject. The students were given a set of twenty statements, each accompanied by four response options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, or strongly agree.

The findings presented in Figure One depict the results of a seven-item survey. Item (1) reveals that around 72% of the students recognize the significance of grammar in language learning and acknowledge its crucial role, while the remaining 28% express dissent. Item (2) indicates that 70% of the participants agree that their mother tongue facilitates understanding English grammar, while 30% disagree. The majority of students (70%) believe that their grammar has improved after completing several courses, as shown in item (3), whereas a minority (30%) holds a contrary opinion.

Concerning the connection between grammar and communication skills, item (4) suggests that more than half of the students (60%) believe there is a connection between the two, while 40% do not agree. Item (5) demonstrates that a significant proportion of the students (67.5%) believe that grammar courses enhance their confidence in learning English, while 32.5% hold an opposing view. Learning grammar is not enjoyable for (55%) of students, as presented in item (6), while 45% find it enjoyable. Finally, item (7) reveals that 45% of the participants study English grammar to feel more comfortable when communicating with native speakers, while 55% do not consider helpful grammar for communication with them.

![Figure 1. Students' attitudes towards the English grammar](chart.png)
The findings presented in Figure two show the results of various items, including (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13). Item eight indicated that 50% of the students believe grammar is functional when traveling abroad, while the other half disagrees. Item (nine) shows that 75% of the students find grammar applicable daily, while 25% do not. Item (10) reveals that the majority of the students (72.5%) are interested in pursuing additional grammar courses, whereas 27.5% of the students are satisfied with their current level of grammar education. According to the item (11), 52.5% of the students prefer to study grammar independently, while 47.5% do not. Item (12) displays that 60% of the students feel that the grammar teaching techniques used by their instructors are insufficient, while 40% approve of the methods employed by the English language department. Item (13) suggests that 62.5% of the students support eliminating grammar classes from the program, while 37.5% oppose this decision. Lastly, item (14) shows that a significant portion of the participants (67.5%) do not believe grammar to be crucial as long as their communication is effective, while 32.5% hold the opposite view.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2. The use of grammar among the English department students**

The findings presented in Figure three demonstrate the outcomes of six items (15-20). Item (15) shows that 57.5% of the students feel that enhancing their grammar abilities is crucial to improving their English speaking skills, while the remaining 42.5% do not share this belief. As for item (16), most students (70%) find it mentally challenging to focus on grammar rules while speaking in English, but 30% feel differently. Item (17) indicates that 85% of the students associate grammar with rules, systems, and structures, while the remaining 15% do not make this association. Concerning item (18), 40% of the students believe that grammar is intended for linguists, scholars, and nerds, while the remaining 60% consider it significant for language learning. Additionally, item (19) shows that 67.5% of the students find communicative classes more significant than grammar, while 32.5% disagree. Finally, according to the item (20), 65% of the students feel nervous and irritated when they hear "grammar," whereas 35% do not experience any particular reaction.
Overall, the study findings illustrate a variety of attitudes among the students of Raparin University toward English Grammar. While a substantial part recognizes the importance of grammar and thinks it contributes to language skill development, some students show disinterest or doubt its relevance. The findings further indicate differing perspectives on the connection between grammar and communication skills, teaching methods, and the necessity of grammar in different contexts.

**Discussion**

This study aimed to devise a tool for appraising students’ attitudes toward learning English grammar. For this, a series of inquiries are posed, and the answers to these questions are provided below.

1- What is the attitude of students in the English Department towards English grammar at the University of Raparin?

Grammar is considered an essential component of language learning; in this study, most participants acknowledged that grammar is crucial for them and have an attitude toward it. This finding ultimately supports the findings of Schulz (2001) and Loewen et al. (2009), who revealed that grammar is a foundation for learners to build their knowledge about the language and enhance their reading, writing, and speaking skills. İncecay and Dollar (2011) also agree that students regard grammar as a critical aspect of language learning. And the results agree with the words of Fakeye (2010), who illustrated that a learner's attitude is one of the most critical factors that impact foreign language learning. Correspondingly, Aceron (2015) presented that the way to help students improve their performance in grammar is by changing their attitude toward English grammar learning. This finding also matches the words of Borg (2003), who asserted that students’ attitudes
play an influential role in many issues and activities that teachers use. Still, it is mostly ignored in the process of language learning in the most previously conducted research.

2- To what extent do the English Department students of Raparin University see the grammar learning process as enjoyable? However, a minority of students find learning grammar enjoyable, as revealed by Jean and Simard (2011), who argued that both students and teachers find grammar instruction useful but not entertaining.

3- How well do the teaching methods or techniques employed by the teachers of the English Department at the University of Raparin fill the needs of students? More than half of the participants believe that their instructors' grammar teaching techniques are inadequate, and these results match the assertion of Andrew (2020), who said that complexity is not an inherent quality of grammar but depends on how it corresponds with the result.

4- What is the perception of grammar among the English Department student of Raparin University? The term "grammar" makes about two-thirds of the participants feel anxious and irritated, which corresponds with Hoge's (2014) argument that grammar makes one's speaking slower and tentative, causing anxiety. Lastly, most students associate grammar with rules, systems, and structures, as Jean and Simard (2011) noted, who found that students consider grammatical materials complicated or confusing due to the abundance of rules involved.

Conclusion
To conclude, the main aim of this investigation is to examine students' perceptions and attitudes towards English grammar. There is a significant variation in the attitudes of students towards English grammar. While some students see grammar as critical for language learning and communication improvement, others consider it unimportant or challenging. Interestingly, most students believe their native language facilitates their understanding of English grammar. Furthermore, students generally see grammar courses as beneficial for building confidence in English learning. Still, they also show dissatisfaction with the teaching methods employed by instructors in the English Department of Raparin University. While most students believe that grammar is not essential as long as communication is impactful, many also recognize the practical use of grammar in their daily lives. It is noteworthy that a vast majority of the student associate grammar with rules and structures, and some of them find the term "grammar" nerve-wracking. These findings indicate the significance of acknowledging and addressing students' diverse attitudes toward grammar to develop language instruction effectiveness.

About the Author
Dr. Rizgar M. Ameen specializes in sociolinguistics, with a particular interest in TEFL and education. He has a Master in ELT and a Doctorate in Linguistics. Head of English Language Department - College of Basic Education/ University of Raparin.
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