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Enacting a Discovery Task Worksheet for Grammar in an Indonesian Boarding-School EFL Class

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ABSTRACT

Discovery-based grammar teaching assumes that learners can notice forms, compare examples, and formulate rules from input, yet little is known about how such tasks unfold with low-proficiency learners in real classrooms. This descriptive qualitative study examined (1) how a Discovery Task Worksheet (DTW) on adjectives and adverbs was enacted in grammar lessons and (2) how students responded to it behaviorally and cognitively. Participants were one English teacher and 28 Grade 10 students at Al-Kautsar Boarding School, Indonesia. Data from 1 observed lesson were collected through an 18-item observation checklist, field notes, and documentation, including students completed worksheets, and were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The teacher opened with instructions and worked examples, allotted about ten minutes for individual work, and provided extensive scaffolding, partly in Indonesian. Students participated and attempted the task, but most could not yet identify patterns, compare examples, justify their answers, or write conclusions independently, and the discussion and sharing stages did not take place. Discovery in this class therefore functioned as guided, teacher-mediated discovery. The study suggests that DTW instructions, example sequencing, collaborative stages, and working time should be calibrated to learners' proficiency, and it offers a classroom-based counterpoint to predominantly positive reports of discovery learning in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Keywords: guided discovery, inductive grammar teaching, discovery task worksheet, scaffolding, EFL, low-proficiency learners

INTRODUCTION

For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), grammar is more than memorising rules. Learners need to notice language forms, understand their functions, and use them accurately in context. The gap between knowing a rule and using it is easy to see in class: a student may state a rule fluently but fail to recognise the same pattern in an unfamiliar sentence. Second language acquisition research has long argued that conscious attention to form, or noticing, is

a condition for turning input into intake (Schmidt, 1990), and that grammar instruction can be designed to raise learners' awareness of how forms work rather than only to drill them (Ellis, 2002). Research on grammar learning strategies points in the same direction, showing that learners actively work to understand rules and structures in use (Pawlak, 2018, 2020). From this view, learning grammar is an active cognitive process, and discovery-oriented tasks are one way of engaging it.

At Al-Kautsar Boarding School, a *Discovery Task Worksheet* (DTW) is already part of grammar lessons in Class 10A. The worksheet, designed by the class teacher, presents several example sentences on adjectives and adverbs and guides students through six stages: observing examples, identifying forms or patterns, analyzing and comparing them, discussing findings, drawing conclusions, and applying the rule (a sample page is provided in Appendix 1). Students' responses to such a task are not uniform. Some take part actively and complete the worksheet, while others struggle to find patterns or participate less. This study therefore does not assume that responses are positive; it records the responses that actually appear in the classroom. Following the engagement framework of Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), responses are viewed in terms of behavioral engagement (visible participation, such as asking, answering, discussing, and completing tasks) and cognitive engagement (observable thinking, such as noticing patterns, explaining relationships, and drawing conclusions). Because the data are observational, emotional engagement is limited to visible signs, such as confusion, and is interpreted cautiously. These dimensions organize the qualitative data; they are not statistical variables.

The gap this article addresses is not that discovery learning has never been studied. Grammar teaching, discovery learning, and worksheets have each been researched, and Indonesian studies mostly report positive outcomes of discovery-based grammar instruction (Darussalam & Fahrinawati, 2023; Putri et al., 2023). What remains rare is a close qualitative account of how a discovery worksheet is enacted with low-proficiency learners and what happens when learners cannot complete its stages independently. Such an account matters because research on cognitive load warns that minimally guided instruction is often less effective for novices than guided instruction (Kirschner et al., 2006). The boarding-school setting adds relevance because English instruction in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools *(pesantren)* operates under particular constraints that may affect how discovery tasks unfold. Teachers in *pesantren* report that students' English is generally weak, with persistent difficulties in vocabulary and grammar, and that the time allocated to English is insufficient, so students often cannot complete tasks within a lesson (Marzulina et al., 2021). English must also compete with religious subjects and Arabic, and some students regard it as less important than religious knowledge, which lowers their motivation (Mustofa & Romadhon, 2025). In addition, teachers face classes with diverse learning needs and limited teaching resources (Nasution & Armin, 2025). Together, these conditions (low proficiency, limited lesson time, and competing institutional priorities) make the *pesantren* classroom a demanding context for discovery-based grammar learning, which requires learners to understand English input well enough to notice and analyze its patterns independently. The focus is the classroom process and students' responses, not the measurement of a treatment effect. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions:

RQ1: How is the Discovery Task Worksheet enacted in grammar lessons in Class 10A at Al-Kautsar Boarding School?

RQ2: How do students respond behaviourally and cognitively to learning grammar with the Discovery Task Worksheet?

LITERATURE REVIEW

How grammar is taught strongly affects what students can learn. A long-standing distinction is made between deductive teaching, in which a rule is presented and then practiced, and inductive teaching, in which learners work from examples towards a rule (Thornbury, 1999). In practice, teachers combine direct explanation, guided practice, communicative activities, and tasks that direct attention to form. Smith (2022) found that school English teachers use many approaches rather than relying only on direct rule explanation, and Abduh and Algouzi (2020) showed in a Saudi EFL context how teachers' perceptions shape their grammar teaching practices. Collins and Ruivivar (2021) argue that classroom grammar teaching still needs sustained research, particularly on how teachers create opportunities for learners to notice grammar during meaningful interaction.

Discovery learning is one way to create these opportunities. In guided discovery, students receive language examples and are led to find relationships between forms, compare them, discuss their ideas, and formulate a conclusion. Grammar consciousness-raising tasks follow the same logic, aiming at explicit understanding of a feature rather than immediate accurate production (Ellis, 2002). The teacher remains a guide who gives instructions, asks questions, and provides feedback. This guidance can be understood as scaffolding, the temporary support that enables learners to complete tasks they cannot yet manage alone (Wood et al., 1976). Guided discovery therefore does not leave students alone; the activity has a clear direction. However, the amount of guidance matters. Kirschner et al. (2006) argue that minimally guided approaches place heavy demands on novices' working memory, which suggests that the success of discovery tasks depends on learners' prior knowledge and on the support provided.

A worksheet can support this process. A discovery worksheet is more than a list of questions; it leads students step by step through observing, analyzing, discussing, concluding, and applying. Outside ELT, Anggraini and Susilowati (2022) developed a discovery-based worksheet in science education and showed that a worksheet can be designed as a tool for discovery rather than only a place to write answers. In ELT, Sorohiti and Aini (2021) examined what makes grammar materials interesting for learners, a reminder that learners' perceptions of materials also matter. Putri, Utami, and Rahmawati (2023) described discovery-based grammar teaching through the stages of stimulation, problem statement, data collection, data processing, verification, and generalization, and Darussalam and Fahrinawati (2023) reported improved grammar competence through discovery learning in a classroom action research study in an Islamic education program. These studies report largely positive outcomes but focus on stages completed or scores gained rather than on what happens when learners struggle. Masaryk (2024) cautions that discovery learning has limits and requires preparation from both teachers and students. Taken together, the literature suggests that a discovery worksheet can structure the noticing process, but that its success depends on scaffolding and learners' readiness. This study examines that interplay in an actual classroom.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a descriptive qualitative design. Descriptive qualitative studies aim to provide a comprehensive account of a phenomenon and require clear reasons for how

participants are selected and how data are collected, analyzed, and reported (Kim et al., 2017). Such descriptions stay close to the data with limited interpretation (Doyle et al., 2020), and qualitative inquiry is suited to exploring a bounded classroom phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design fits this study because the research questions ask how an existing classroom practice is carried out and how students respond to it. The researchers did not manipulate variables, form an experimental group, or compare test scores.

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The study took place in Class 10A at Al-Kautsar Boarding School, Indonesia, in the 2026/2027 academic year and had been conducted at even semester 2025/2026. The class was selected purposively because the DTW was already used in its grammar lessons, so the study examined an existing practice rather than a treatment introduced by the researchers. The lessons covered adjectives and adverbs. The participants were the English teacher of Class 10A and 28 students, whose English proficiency was at various level. A lesson of 80 minutes were observed.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected through classroom observation, field notes, and documentation. Observation used an 18-item checklist derived from the research questions and the DTW stages: observing, identifying, analyzing or comparing, discussing, concluding, and applying. Further items addressed teacher guidance and student responses. Before use, the checklist was reviewed for relevance and clarity by validators. Each item was marked Y (observed) or N (not observed) for the class as a whole. Because a Y/N mark cannot show what happened, the observer also wrote field notes on the sequence of activities, the problems that arose, and the teacher's adjustments; excerpts are coded by lesson and entry (e.g., FN-L1-03). Documentation consisted of the DTW, students completed worksheets, and photographs of classroom activities. Interviews with the teacher and students were planned but are not part of the data reported here; this is addressed in the limitations.

Data analysis followed three connected activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). Checklist data and field notes were sorted by research question and grouped into categories: enactment of the DTW, behavioral responses, and cognitive responses, with visible emotional signs noted cautiously. Students' completed worksheets were analyzed stage by stage, recording whether a pattern was identified, whether examples were compared, and whether the written conclusion was accurate, partially accurate, or absent. The categories were then read together across sources to check consistency. To support trustworthiness, the checklist was compared with the field notes and worksheets, a *thick description* of the classroom was provided, and observation was kept separate from interpretation (Hamilton, 2020; Stenfors et al., 2020). Because observation and coding were conducted by one researcher, the categories were discussed with the co-authors (peer debriefing) and the account of the lesson was checked with the teacher (member checking).

Ethical procedures were followed throughout. Permission was obtained from the school and, because the students were minors, written consent was obtained from their parents or guardians and assent from the students themselves. Students are not named, and their faces are blurred in all photographs.

FINDINGS

The results are presented by research question: RQ1 concerns how the DTW was enacted, and RQ2 concerns how students responded. Table 1 summarises the checklist results (item-level results are given in Appendix 2), and the field notes and worksheets are used to explain each mark.

Table 1. Summary of the observation checklist results

Aspect observed	Observed (Y)	Not observed (N)
Opening and instructions	The teacher explained the aim and instructions of the DTW; the worksheet contained examples	—
Discovery stages	Students looked at examples	Identifying forms or patterns; comparing examples; analysing the link between form and function; writing conclusions
Student interaction	Asking questions about the task; taking part in class activities	Discussing findings; answering or giving reasons; sharing findings
Finishing the task	Working on the task; trying to apply understanding	—
Teacher's role	Giving *scaffolding*; adjusting how the DTW was used; following the planned lesson sequence	—
Visible response	Confusion and difficulty	—

In general, the first part of the lesson (instructions, examples, and looking at the examples) and the application part took place. The core stages of discovery, from finding patterns to writing conclusions, were not observed. The sections below explain how this happened.

RQ1: HOW THE DTW WAS ENACTED IN GRAMMAR LESSONS

The teacher opened the lesson by stating the aim and instructions of the activity and then introduced the task. Before students started, the teacher briefly explained the target forms using examples from the worksheet (Figure 1). The lesson thus began with teacher guidance rather than with students exploring the examples alone, which may have helped students who were unfamiliar with this kind of task to understand its direction.



Figure 1. The teacher explains how to do the DTW

After the explanation, the teacher distributed the worksheet and allowed about ten minutes for individual work. At this stage, students were expected to observe the examples, notice patterns, compare forms, and formulate the rule (Figure 2). The checklist shows that the observing stage took place, but identifying patterns, comparing examples, and analyzing the relationship between form and function were not observed. The field notes indicate that many students did not fully understand the task. The worksheets confirm this picture: several students identified the target pattern. Most students also could not explain the reasons for their answers when asked.



Figure 2. Students work on the DTW

These difficulties shaped the discovery process. Instead of drawing conclusions from the examples, many students waited for further explanation from the teacher, and no findings were presented or shared during the lesson. The discovery stages were therefore not completed independently: students had examples and time, but most needed additional help to interpret the information and finish the process.

In response, the teacher provided additional support. The checklist confirms that the teacher assisted students who had difficulty and adjusted the lesson accordingly. The teacher

simplified the task explanation, helped students individually, and switched to Indonesian when English explanations were not sufficient (Figure 3). The field notes link students' confusion to difficulty in understanding the English instructions and the vocabulary of the examples. This support functioned as *scaffolding* (Wood et al., 1976). Even so, the amount of support needed shows that students could not yet move through the discovery stages alone.



Figure 3. The teacher helps students during the DTW activity

Students were given time to work on the worksheet. The checklist shows that they attempted to apply their emerging understanding and took part in class activities, but the field notes show that many did not finish within ten minutes. No discussion took place in which students compared answers, explained their thinking, or wrote a shared conclusion. Towards the end, the teacher checked whether students had finished and understood what they had written, and briefly repeated the explanation before closing. The lesson followed the planned sequence of explanation followed by individual work, with extra help added when difficulties arose.

RQ2: STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO LEARNING WITH THE DTW

Behaviourally, students attempted the DTW after receiving the teacher's instructions. The checklist records participation in class activities, effort to complete the task, and questions about the task. However, participation is not the same as independent work. Many students needed help to understand what the task required, so the teacher stayed close to them throughout. Cooperation was not evident: although the DTW includes a discussion stage, the lesson was organised as individual work, and students did not share findings or explain conclusions to one another. This mismatch between the design of the worksheet and its enactment helps explain why the social stages of discovery were absent. Completing a classroom task and engaging in the discovery process are therefore related but distinct.

Emotionally, the observation captured only visible signs. Most students appeared confused and had difficulty understanding or completing the DTW. These signs do not show whether students enjoyed the activity, felt motivated, or preferred it to other approaches: confusion during a task does not necessarily indicate dislike of the method, and participation does not necessarily indicate confidence. This study therefore makes no claims about students' attitudes towards the DTW.

Cognitively, the clearest difficulty lay in the grammatical reasoning the task required. Most students could not identify patterns, compare examples, explain the relationship between form and function, or write a conclusion from the examples. The worksheets show typical errors such as adjectives used in adverb positions, or blank conclusion sections. Teacher explanation, partly in Indonesian, allowed students to continue working, and the final review was an attempt to check understanding. However, the data cannot confirm whether all students eventually understood the concept.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the lesson contained several elements of discovery-based grammar teaching: the DTW provided examples, students had time to examine them, and the teacher helped when difficulties arose. Yet most students could not notice patterns, compare examples, analyze form–function relationships, or draw conclusions without help. This contrasts with Putri et al. (2023) and Darussalam and Fahrinawati (2023), who reported that students worked through the discovery stages and improved their grammar. Several differences may explain this. Darussalam and Fahrinawati's action research refined instruction across successive cycles, whereas this study observed a single lesson; the students observed here appeared to have limited proficiency, so the instructions and examples themselves formed a barrier; and the ten-minute individual format left no room for the collaborative stages. The finding is consistent with Masaryk (2024), who noted that discovery learning in high school EFL grammar has limits and requires preparation from both teachers and students. Providing examples and a discovery task does not guarantee that students can work out grammar rules without support.

The students' difficulties suggest that the discovery process required more guidance than the worksheet alone could provide. Students first had to understand the instructions, then notice the relevant features, and then connect the examples with their grammatical function; when the first step failed, the later steps became inaccessible. This sequence reflects Schmidt's (1990) argument that noticing precedes further processing: learners who cannot yet attend to the relevant form have little to analyze. It also aligns with Kirschner et al.'s (2006) argument that novices benefit from explicit guidance, such as worked examples, before they are asked to discover rules. This does not mean that the DTW is unsuitable for these students; rather, its use must take into account their English proficiency and their experience of working with grammar examples.

The teacher's initial explanation and subsequent help also show that the lesson was not independent discovery but guided discovery: students worked with examples but received explanations when they encountered problems. This reflects how the worksheet was actually used, with the teacher ensuring that students could continue. It also agrees with Smith (2022), who found that school grammar teaching is varied and seldom follows one pure approach, and with Thornbury's (1999) observation that inductive and deductive elements are often combined in practice.

The teacher's *scaffolding* is another important finding. The teacher re-explained, supported students individually, used Indonesian when needed, and reviewed the material before closing; rather than only extending time, the teacher clarified the task and adjusted the support. The use of Indonesian can be understood as a principled resource rather than a failure of English-medium instruction. Cook (2001) argues that the first language can be used deliberately to convey meaning and explain tasks, and the translanguaging perspective treats

learners' full linguistic repertoire as a support for learning (García & Li Wei, 2014). Chang (2026), who examined low-proficiency EFL learners' engagement in flipped grammar learning, likewise highlights the need to design grammar activities around such learners' needs. At the same time, the large amount of support suggests that students may need clearer instructions, more carefully sequenced examples, or guided practice before they can complete discovery tasks more independently.

Students' participation and difficulties also show the difference between doing a task and engaging with its learning goal. In terms of the engagement framework (Fredricks et al., 2004), behavioral engagement was present, whereas cognitive engagement with the discovery reasoning was limited. Students can fill in a worksheet without understanding the examples or the reasoning needed to reach a grammar conclusion. The absence of discussion and independent explanation indicates that the social and analytical sides of discovery learning did not emerge; the activity resembled teacher-supported individual work more than collaborative analysis of evidence. Working time should also be considered. The data cannot show that ten minutes was too short for every student, but the observed difficulties suggest that time should be planned together with the difficulty of the task and students' prior knowledge.

Several practical implications follow for designing and using a DTW with lower-proficiency learners. First, instructions can be simplified or given bilingually, with one item modelled before students begin. Second, examples can be sequenced from contrastive pairs (e.g., *She is careful* / *She drives carefully*) to mixed sentences, so that the target contrast is salient. Third, each stage can include one or two guiding questions, such as "Which word describes the noun, and which describes the verb?" Fourth, a short pair-talk step before students write conclusions can restore the collaborative stage. Fifth, time can be allocated per stage rather than for the worksheet as a whole. These suggestions are derived from the observations and are not evidence that such changes improve achievement; they warrant testing in future studies.

Several limitations should be noted. The data come from limited observed lesson in one class, so the account is bound to its context and is not intended for generalization. Interviews were not included, so the perspectives of the students and the teacher, including students' attitudes towards the DTW, are not represented. Observation and coding were carried out mainly by one researcher, a limitation that peer debriefing and member checking reduce but do not remove. Observing more lessons would also show whether students become more independent after repeated use of the DTW.

CONCLUSION

Regarding RQ1, the DTW in Class 10A at Al-Kautsar Boarding School was enacted as a sequence of teacher explanation with examples, about ten minutes of individual worksheet work, individual teacher support (partly in Indonesian), a brief final review, and closing. The planned sequence was maintained, but the discussion and sharing stages built into the worksheet did not take place, and substantial extra support was needed. Regarding RQ2, students responded behaviorally by attempting the task and following the lesson, but cognitively most could not yet identify patterns, compare examples, explain their answers, or write conclusions independently. Visible confusion was observed, but students' attitudes towards the DTW cannot be inferred from observation data.

In conclusion, the DTW gave students a structure for working with grammar examples, but discovery in this class functioned as guided discovery that depended on the teacher's *scaffolding*. The study contributes a classroom-based account of how a discovery task unfolds when learners lack the proficiency to complete its stages, complementing the predominantly positive reports of discovery learning in Indonesian EFL contexts. These findings describe the observed practice and should not be read as evidence that the DTW is effective or ineffective in general. Teachers may consider simplified or bilingual instructions, sequenced contrastive examples, guiding questions, and a collaborative step. Future research should add interviews and systematic worksheet analysis to observation and follow the class over several lessons.

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