

AN ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES AND PREFERENCES IN LEARNING GRAMMAR (A STUDY AT STAIN MAJENE)

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Abstract

This research examines the difficulties and learning preferences of English Education students at STAIN Majene in learning grammar. Grammar is considered as a fundamental part in a language due to it contains structure or rules on how the parts of a language are used, while Indonesian EFL students still find it difficult to learn English grammar as it has complex materials. Using a mixed-method approach with purposive sampling technique, the research includes semi-structured interviews with 15 students from the 2021-2023 cohorts and a questionnaire distributed to all 70 students. This research employed Miles and Huberman's data reduction analysis and descriptive statistical analysis techniques in analyzing the data. Findings indicate that students struggle with environmental factors (lack of practice, limited class time), psychological factors (fear of judgment, varied perceptions of grammar's importance), and linguistic factors (material complexity, tense diversity). Students demonstrate diverse learning preferences with kinesthetic learning being most preferred (82%), followed by auditory (73%) and visual learning (70%). They favor video-based applications (94%) and media-integrated lectures with quick feedback (92%). While individual learning is slightly preferred over collaborative learning, students adapt their preferences contextually, emphasizing the need for hands-on practice, multimedia integration, and flexible learning environments. This highlights the need for educators to adapt teaching methods to address these difficulties and accommodate diverse learning preferences. Implementing engaging instructional strategies can enhance student comprehension and retention of grammar, offering valuable insights for improving English education programs and guiding future research.

Keywords: Learning Grammar, Students' Difficulties, Students' Preferences

INTRODUCTION

Rossiter (2021), Grammar serves as the foundation for sentence production and coherent expression of ideas. Communication without language can be hard and ambiguous, similar to driving without road signs. Grammar, in this context, refers to a fundamental set of linguistic standards and practices that govern the proper form and interpretation of spoken and written language. By sticking to these established rules, students can ensure that their spoken and written communications are communicated clearly, precisely, and coherently, eliminating the risk of ambiguity or misunderstanding. As a result, a thorough comprehension of grammatical norms is essential for effectively communicating intended meanings and facilitating intelligible interactions within the English-speaking discourse community. According to Avazovna (2024), grammar comprises of rules and principles that govern how a language functions, how words are used in sentences, and when to use them.

The divergence in linguistic rules (Grammar) between the Indonesian and English languages has culminated in a pervasive challenge frequently encountered by students pursuing English as a foreign language in the Indonesian context. As noted

by Arisman (2023), one of the most difficult issues students encounter when learning English is understanding grammar rules and how to apply them correctly. The grammatical rules of English differ greatly from those of Indonesian, making learning challenging for students. Also found by Komara (2021) that most students find English grammar challenging due to its extensive content and numerous complex rules or formulas, which often leads to difficulty and diminished interest in grammar study.

According to Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011), even after extensive training, many students continue to struggle with grammatical rules, indicating that students have difficulty acquiring grammar. This quandary necessitates a thorough review of present educational frameworks as well as the exploration of alternative strategies for improving students' grasp of grammar. Therefore, educators need to know students' difficulties and preferences in learning grammar so that the learning process can run effectively. Mkonto (2015), learning preferences comprise the different ways in which people choose to interact with and process information, going beyond the specific modalities often associated with learning styles. Instead, learning preferences encompass a broader variety of elements that determine how a person approaches learning. According to Amelia (2023), learning preferences are an important aspect of the teaching and learning process, which includes more than just methods of teaching. They include techniques, methodology, and environmental factors that individuals find most favorable to educational engagement and knowledge assimilation during various learning activities.

When lecturers accommodate to their how students learn, they are more likely to understand and retain the material. Each learning preference has unique properties, and no preference is superior to the others. Students' learning preferences reflect the numerous ways individuals interact with knowledge, which are dynamic and context-dependent. Understanding students' preferences plays an important role in the process of learning which is believed to help educators to create learning strategies that suit students' needs. According to Alper (2004), understanding students' learning preferences is critical for developing and implementing successful and engaging instructional practices. Educators must have this understanding because it helps them to personalise their pedagogical strategies, resulting in learning experiences that appeal to a diverse range of students and their various tendencies.

According to the researcher's experience as a student who has taken three distinct levels of grammar lessons, everyone has a unique learning experience. Stated by Turville, J. (2013), learning preferences are dynamic and evolve continuously rather than remaining fixed. Additionally, individuals can intentionally cultivate competencies across various learning domains. When the lecturer demonstrates a specific strategy in class, some students may not comprehend or find it difficult to absorb, while others believe the method is helpful for them. Then, in a subsequent meeting using a different method or activity, students who previously did not understand the content got it this time, and vice versa. This demonstrates that everyone has unique learning preferences. Researcher also find that Grammar issues are also common among supervisors of student thesis proposals and theses. It implies that students struggle to construct grammatically acceptable phrases, thus this needs to be investigated because students have learnt three levels of grammar from three separate instructors, but these grammar issues are still discovered by lecturers. According to Ellis (2009), difficulties in learning grammar can be divided into three major types: 1) Environmental influences are external and include the student's frequency and quality of language exposure. 2) Linguistic elements refer to a language's complexity and

structure, while psychological aspects refer to a student's cognitive powers and ability to learn new grammatical rules. These are issues caused by the student's mind and cognitive processes, not the language or the external surroundings.

In conclusion, understanding students' difficulties and their learning preferences are essential for educators to develop effective teaching strategies.

Several relevant studies have contributed to understanding students' grammar learning preferences and difficulties in EFL contexts. Ayesha Akter Munni and Md. Habibur Rahman (2022) conducted research titled "Exploring Undergraduates' Perceptions and Preferences for Grammar Teaching in EFL Writing Classes," which aimed to identify students' learning preferences specifically focusing on grammar teaching in writing classes for EFL students. Similarly, Hamid Mahmoodi, Mehry Haddad Narafshan, and Hassan Shahabi (2021) investigated "Learners' Preferences in English Language Learning: A Cross-Sectional Study at Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences," focusing on skills that are favored by students in learning English. Additionally, Zufar Bagas Prasetyo (2020) contributed to this field with research entitled "The Difficulties in Learning Grammar for Indonesian Students" which employed a Literature Review research design and focused specifically on identifying students' difficulties in learning grammar, providing insights into the challenges faced by Indonesian learners in grammar acquisition.

Based on the research's background, the researcher developed the following research questions: 1) What difficulties do English Education students at STAIN Majene face in learning grammar? 2) What are the learning preferences of English Education students at STAIN Majene in learning grammar? In accordance with these research questions, the research has two primary goals: first, to identify the difficulties encountered by English Education students at STAIN Majene in learning grammar, and second, to investigate these students' learning preferences in connection to grammar education. This research focusses on two aspects: students' learning difficulties and learning preferences, rather than just one as in prior studies, because comprehending both learning difficulties and learning preferences is interconnected.

METHOD

This research used a mixed-method approach with a QUAL-quant research design as the methodological framework. The major purpose was to thoroughly research and understand the research subjects' life experiences. The researcher use this technique to research the substance of the occurrences encountered by the research subjects, focussing on their perspectives and interpretations of these experiences. Thus, the goal of this research is to elucidate the underlying significance of the participants' experiences.

The research's population consisted of STAIN Majene's English education department students from the classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023. The sample criteria for this research include students who have taken grammar classes. The class of 2021 has 30 students; the class of 2022 has 28 students; and the class of 2023 has 12 students. Four students from the 2023 class, five from the 2022 class, and six from the 2021 class, for a total of fifteen students, will be chosen as a representative of the entire class to be interviewed; they were chosen based on their experience learning grammar.

This research used a semi-structured interview to gather detailed and contextualised information regarding students' difficulties and preferences for learning grammar. This research used a questionnaire with a two-point (0-1) scale that was

developed from Joy Reid's (1984) Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (PLSPQ), which had 28 items. A questionnaire is used to gather information about students' learning preferences for learning grammar in a broader context.

The researcher collected data using a comprehensive dual approach to obtain extensive information on students' difficulties and preferences in learning grammar, employing both semi-structured interview techniques and questionnaire distribution for triangulation of data. The researcher conducted a series of conversations with 15 respondents from the population as representatives using the voice note feature of the WhatsApp application to explore their perspectives, feelings, and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, with the primary goal of obtaining a genuine picture of the research subjects' experiences. Simultaneously, a systematic data gathering strategy was implemented through the distribution of questionnaires via Google Form to all students in the 2021, 2022, and 2023 classes of the English Education Study Program, including several open-ended questions to collect data on each student's challenges with learning grammar. This dual methodology approach ensured that the data collected would include a diverse range of opinions and experiences from both in-depth qualitative interviews and broader quantitative responses, potentially revealing patterns or trends that may be used to improve future grammar education pedagogy while providing a thorough and representative picture of students' learning preferences and difficulties.

The researcher employed a comprehensive analytical approach combining Miles and Huberman's data reduction technique with descriptive statistical analysis to examine the collected data on students' challenges and learning preferences. Miles and Huberman's (1983) data reduction method, defined as the process of choosing, simplifying, and altering previously obtained raw data through refining, classifying, guiding, deleting extraneous data, and organizing information to reach conclusions, was applied to the qualitative interview data. Concurrently, descriptive statistical analysis approaches were utilized to examine the quantitative survey data, whereby the researcher systematically arranged questionnaire replies, calculated relevant statistical values for each questionnaire item, and determined the frequency of students' selections for each learning preference category, presenting these findings as percentages to provide a clear picture of how students' choices varied across different learning preference dimensions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students Difficulties in Learning Grammar

a. Environmental Factors

From the results of interviews, the difficulties of English language education students at STAIN Majene in learning grammar are caused by several environmental factors such as:

1) Lack of practice

Some students recognize that their difficulties in mastering grammar stem largely from a lack of consistent practice, they tend to forget what they have learned because of less practice.

“When I try to learn grammar, I always forget, especially the advanced grammar material, I always forget because it's not practiced enough.” (AG, Student, Interview)

“In my opinion, the difficulty of learning grammar is due to lack of practice so it does not quickly understand.” (FJB, Student, Interview)

“According to my experience of learning grammar, the first difficulty is because it is not our first language, the second is that I am still very lacking in vocabulary, the third is that grammar patterns or formulas like to swap because there are 16 tenses that if not memorized will tend to be switched, and finally because I lack practice.” (NA, Student, Interview)

2) Lack of Classroom Time

Some students rely exclusively on in-class instruction for their grammar education, failing to supplement their learning with additional practice outside of formal lessons. This over-reliance on classroom time becomes problematic when considering the relatively small amount of time dedicated to grammar instruction in a typical academic week.

“Yes, I think the duration of learning grammar in class is not enough and that is one of the reasons why I feel difficult in grammar because outside of the class I very rarely learn grammar.” (R, Student, Interview)

“When it comes to time, in my opinion, the learning time for grammar needs to be increased a little, because based on my experience from the 1st to the 2nd then, the lecturer who taught grammar really started from the beginning. So, the lecturer explains it until we really understand, the material will not move if we don't understand. And usually, 1 material has a lot of explanations so often 1 material is not completed in 1 meeting.” (HA, Student, Interview)

“2 credits for learning grammar is not enough because sometimes it takes more than 2 hours to learn one material, so the small duration of learning grammar in class is one of the factors that cause me difficulty in learning grammar.” (S, Student, Interview)

3) Examples Provision

Having good examples is vital while studying language, yet it also present complications for students. When students only see a few comparable instances, they may not comprehend how to apply the grammar in varied contexts. Sometimes the examples in books are straightforward, but the lecturer utilizes more difficult ones in class. This might leave students feeling disoriented and unclear of how to use grammar effectively. These issues might make it difficult for students to understand and apply grammatical rules in their speech and writing.

“I think lecturers should give examples of simple sentences so that they are easy to understand.” (ND, Student, Interview)

“The lack of explanation of grammar examples is still lacking so it is not balanced with what was shown and taught.” (FJB, Student, Interview)

b. Psychological Factors

These psychological factors go beyond merely considering the cognitive abilities of the students; they also encompass a broader range of influences, including the students' perspectives on grammar and their overall attitudes toward the subject.

1) Fear of Being Judged

Some students said that they were afraid of being judged when they wanted to practice the grammar they had learned. They are afraid of being judged as pretentious or *sok Inggris* which makes them discourage speaking English.

“It's a bit embarrassing to use English. For example, when we meet with organization friends in other departments when we try to improvise Indonesian-English, it will cause responses from them like “Aih sok sok Inggris sekali ki” So that is an obstacle for us TBI students to practice, especially in grammar.” (S, Student, Interview)

“As for the frequency of hearing speech in English, no. Because that's how it is, around campus people are still shy about using English because they are afraid of being called pretentious.” (MKM, Student, Interview)

2) Fear of Making Mistakes

Students tend to feel anxious and afraid that they will make mistakes when appointed by the lecturer to compose sentences when the lecturer wants to evaluate students' understanding of the learning that has been done.

“As for anxiety and fear, there must be some. Because of the anxiety and fear of not being able to answer the questions correctly. (R, Student, Interview)

“I am anxious, for example, the lecturer has explained but I don't understand, then suddenly I am appointed to answer the question. So I immediately feel anxious and panic.” (S, Student, Interview)

3) Perspectives on the Unnecessity of Grammar

Students' perceptions of grammar play a significant role in their ability to master it effectively. When students view grammar as an important component of their learning, they are more likely to put in the effort needed to achieve proficiency. Conversely, if they frequently hear phrases like “Grammar is not very important for speaking,” this can shape their beliefs about the relevance of grammar in their overall communication skills.

“The principle we use in practicing using English is that the important thing is that we have confidence. So, grammar is not really necessary when it is in the scope of friendship. I try to be like a native speaker who doesn't pay much attention to grammar.” (AH, Student, Interview)

“I heard that people don't care about grammar, the important thing is that they speak English and people understand what we say.” (HA, Student, Interview)

b. Linguistic Factors

Another significant factor contributing to the difficulties that students encounter while learning grammar is known as linguistic factors. This refers to difficulties that arise directly from the nature of the grammar material itself.

1) Material Complexity

This complexity is compounded by the sheer volume of grammar topics that students must navigate, each with its own level of complexity.

“Why I find grammar difficult is because it's too complex, there are too many formulas in it. So, for example, if you study it in one day, there are several materials, so your brain is like heating up to learn it because you have to memorize the formulas.” (S, Student, Interview)

“So, if asked about whether learning grammar is difficult, in my opinion learning grammar is a bit difficult, because in my personal opinion learning grammar is quite complex. In my opinion, it is enough to make students lazy to learn it, because it is very complex.” (R, Student, Interview)

2) Multiplicity of Tenses

The variety of tenses is another important linguistic factor that many students encounter during their language-learning journey. In particular, the wide variety of tense formulas together with the various changes and exceptions associated with them, can present a significant challenge.

“I think learning grammar is difficult, my difficulties in learning grammar are usually in tenses and the match between the subject and the verb and vocabulary. Sometimes I'm confused about which tenses to use, besides that I often doubt whether the verbs I use are appropriate or not with the subject.” (TA, Student, Interview)

“The difference between English and Indonesian is mainly in the grammatical part where English has complex tenses rules, but Indonesian is more consistent and simple.” (FJB, Student, Interview)

The results of the interviews conducted above clearly show that students face difficulties in learning grammar, difficulties that mainly mentioned by students are the large number of tenses rules they have to learn or the material is complex which make it hard to learn grammar. With so many tenses to learn, students often feel overwhelmed by the amount of grammar material they have to absorb. In a book entitled *Exploring Contemporary English Language Education Practices (2024)* in chapter “Difficulties in L2 English Essay Writing”, one noticeable difficulty identified from the participants which is 10 over 12 students, that using correct vocabulary and grammar was a big challenge for the students. The students stated that they usually made grammatical mistakes, particularly tenses. The complexity of these rules, combined with a wide array of other grammatical concepts, creates a challenging

learning environment. As students try to understand and internalize all these rules, they may struggle to keep track of the differences between the tenses. As found by Prasetyo (2020), some students can speak English, but they struggle with following grammar norms. Students often struggle with establishing accurate sentence tenses. They sometimes utilize incorrect tenses, resulting in an incorrect sentence. Komara (2021) found out that EFL learners' perceptions of grammar learning revealed a complex picture where 49.35% viewed grammar as a paradoxical challenge that is both difficult and essential to master, while 51.4% expressed uncertainty about their own competence and motivation by selecting neutral responses. Additionally, 39.4% acknowledged encountering significant obstacles in grammar learning, yet 72.15% demonstrated strong desire for diverse and innovative teaching approaches, indicating that despite recognizing the difficulties and barriers in grammar acquisition, students remain open to alternative instructional methods that could enhance their learning experience. Another finding by Komara (2021) through an interview was for the students, the extensive content containing numerous varied regulations or structures that create difficulties and reduce their motivation to learn grammar which can lead to reduce students' willingness in practicing grammar.

1. Students' Preferences in Learning Grammar

Table 1. Learning Style

CATEGORIES	Mean Score	Percentage of Total Population
Visual	45,5	70%
Auditory	47,75	73%
Kinesthetic	53,3	82%
Tactile	41,3	63%

Table 2. Learner Type

CATEGORIES	Mean Score	Percentage of Total Population
Collaborative	37,67	57%
Individual	41,75	64,23%

Table 3. Learning Media

Learning Media	Percentage of Total Population
PPT	86%
Website	55%
Whiteboard	68%
Video/Apk	94%

Table 4. Learning Approach (Involvement with learning Media)

Involvement with Learning Media	Percentage of Total Population
The lecture applies media with immediate feedback	92%
The lecture applies media that allows students to learn independently	78%
Lecture applies media that allows students to discuss with friends and lecturers	89%

From the tables above, it shows that students' learning preferences are not limited to just one type of learning style; instead, the results show a more complex pattern. For the table 1 shows what learning style that preferred by students in learning Grammar Among these learning styles, the Kinesthetic approach appears to be the most prevalent. It has the highest mean score of 53.3 and is represented in 82% of the total population. Following closely is the Auditory learning style, with a mean score of 47.75 and representation in 73% of the population, and visual learners make up the third largest group, with a mean score of 45.5 and presence in 70% of the population. While for the table 3, it presents data on preferred learning media among a student population which shows the students prefer to learn through Video and Application which chosen by 94% of the total population.

So, it can be concluded that students preferred to actively engaged in doing hands-on practice such as task-based learning (doing exercises or assignment) problem solving activity, students also attracted to learning through watching video and listening to it.

“My favorite teaching method is task-based learning, where the lecturer gives the material and then there is an assignment where you have to work on a problem. Well, that makes me feel excited to be able to work on that task.” (S, Student, interview)

“The strategies I use are working on problems, watching videos about grammar, and often using the duolingo application to learn grammar.” (R, Student, Interview)

“One of the techniques that I like in learning grammar is when the lecturer shows or plays videos through the LCD because this method can help me understand grammar.” (TA, Student, Interview)

For the table 2, This table summarizes the questionnaire results for learner types, which are separated into two categories: collaborative and individual. This data provides an overview of a population's preferred learning style. The Collaborative learner type has an average score of 37.67 and accounts for 57% of the overall population. This suggests that more than half of the population prefers or finds it more productive to study in collaborative settings. Individual learners have a higher mean score of 41.75 and account for 64.23% of the entire population. This suggests that the majority of the people prefers to study independently. The overlap value between the two types of learners, meaning that some students have characteristics of both learning styles. This confirms that a person's learning preferences can be flexible and can change depending on the context or type of task at hand.

“To be honest, I am an individualist so sometimes, for example, if there is an assignment, I prefer individual task to group task. If it is a group, sometimes there are members who do not do the task or they are not active in the discussion.” (S, Student, Interview)

“Usually, I do my assignments on my own, but if I don't understand something, I'll ask my friends, and in the end, we often work on it together as a group. The reason I usually work alone is to test my own abilities, and then when we work in a group, it makes learning English easier without any doubts when completing the tasks.” (FBJ,

Student, Interview)

“Both are good for me, because there are assignments that I can do alone and there are also some that are better when done in groups.” (S, Student, Interview)

“I prefer learning grammar with friends because group discussions help me to understand difficult material, and also discussion with friends make the atmosphere more exciting and fun.” (TA, Student, Interview)

Table 4 shows data on preferred learning approaches among a student population. The most popular option, with 92% preference, is lectures that incorporate media and provide quick response. This is closely followed by lectures with media that allow for student-to-student and student-to-lecturer exchanges, which are preferred by 89% of the population. The findings are reinforced by interviews with other students, who stated that they preferred to use Duolingo application, and also watch learning video through application. They like the application's rapid feedback as they are working through questions, which improves their learning experience. Furthermore, some students stated that they enjoy participating in discussions with their friends while learning grammar since this collaborative approach helps them better understand the content.

“The media that helps me, which I am currently trying to maximize are YouTube, TikTok, and Duolingo.” (R, Student, Interview)

“The media that I think is very helpful for learning grammar is the Duolingo application and Longman books because I can practice working on grammar questions.” (N, Student, Interview)

“I usually learn grammar from Instagram video reels, but learning using reels is flexible, I use it when I feel like it, if there is an exam I study through YouTube.” (S, Student, Interview)

“I prefer learning grammar in a group, because I can ask my friends if I don't understand something, or rather discussion.” (R, Student, Interview)

“For me, I prefer grouping so that we can exchange or share information.” (R, Student, Interview)

According to the findings about students' learning preferences, students' preferences in learning grammar are diverse. Most chosen or mentioned by students are they like task-based learning in learning grammar, they tend to like to get rapid feedbacks, attracted to learn with multimedia such as learning app and videos, and some of them enjoy collaborative learning. As found by Mahmoodi, H. H. (2021), Students greatly preferred diversified classroom activities, collaborative learning, and multimedia tools. They also expressed a desire for rapid feedback and bilingual teaching.

The percentages in every table have total over 100%, which implies that each student has diverse learning preferences and is not limited to just one aspect within each learning preference category. This means that students may have one, two, or more learning preferences depending on the individual and the context (subject,

material, or task). According to Amelia (2023), each learning preference has distinct characteristics, and no preference is superior to another. Students' learning preferences reflect the various ways they interact with knowledge, it is dynamic and context-dependent, frequently changing depending on the subject matter, learning objectives, and the student's current state of mind.

Lack of practice, the difficulty experienced by students where they realize that they lack practice regarding the grammar learning they have received in class. This is because after learning grammar in class, they do not practice outside of class which causes them to forget the learning they have received in class. Therefore, they prefer when in class they can do more practice by making sentences or by doing grammar problems. This can be helped in addition to doing exercises in class, students are also responsible for themselves to increase practice outside of class. In addition to the multiplicity of tenses and the complexity of grammar materials, students feel that the learning hours for grammar are still lacking because sometimes 1 material cannot be completed in just 1 meeting so that the material they have to learn accumulates in 1 meeting which they feel is less effective. In relation to their learning preferences who like to learn through learning applications and learning videos through social media applications, problems regarding complex grammar material and lack of learning time in class can be helped by students increasing learning hours outside the classroom by utilizing the media they like. Language learning applications and learning videos on social media are usually designed to be interesting, interactive, and have quick feedback for applications and short duration for videos. This can help students learn grammar when maximizing its use whether in or outside of the class.

CONCLUSION

This research identified various difficulties students face in learning grammar at STAIN Majene, which can be categorized into three main factors: environmental factors, psychological factors, and linguistic factors. Environmentally, lack of practice in daily communication, limited class time, and irrelevant or overly difficult examples are significant barriers to understanding grammar. On the psychological side, fear of negative judgment and low perception of the importance of grammar in oral communication also contribute to learning barriers. Meanwhile, the complexity of the grammar material, especially in terms of the many rules and diversity of tenses, made students feel overwhelmed.

In addition, this study also revealed students' learning preferences that complex which showed that kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learning styles dominate. Students are more comfortable learning individually but also show adaptability in collaborative learning contexts. The most preferred learning media were applications, videos, and visual presentations, indicating the need for a more interactive approach. These findings suggest that it is important to design grammar learning that takes into account these factors to be more effective.

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