

HOW UNIVERSITY EFL LEARNERS PERCEIVE GRAMMAR IN PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

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Abstract:

This study explored English education students' perceptions of the role of grammar in productive skills, particularly speaking and writing. Employing a qualitative research design, the study involved 25 university students who were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in learning and using English in academic settings. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews that allowed students to express their views and challenges in greater depth. The collected data were then analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns and themes. The findings revealed that many students view grammar as a crucial component in developing accurate and comprehensible productive skills. Nevertheless, they also acknowledged that the use of grammar, especially in speaking, can be flexible and dependent on the communicative context, such as whether the situation is formal or informal. Furthermore, several students reported experiencing ongoing difficulties in applying grammatical rules, which they attributed to limited vocabulary, anxiety during speaking activities, and low self-confidence when producing English in real-time communication.

Keywords: Learners, Grammar, Productive Skills

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa pendidikan bahasa Inggris terhadap peran tata bahasa dalam keterampilan produktif, khususnya berbicara dan menulis. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan 25 mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling berdasarkan pengalaman mereka dalam mempelajari dan menggunakan bahasa Inggris di lingkungan akademik. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur yang memungkinkan mahasiswa untuk mengungkapkan pandangan dan tantangan mereka secara lebih mendalam. Data yang diperoleh kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik kualitatif untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema yang muncul. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa banyak mahasiswa memandang tata bahasa sebagai komponen penting dalam mengembangkan keterampilan produktif yang akurat dan mudah dipahami. Namun demikian, mereka juga mengakui bahwa penggunaan tata bahasa, terutama dalam berbicara, dapat bersifat fleksibel dan bergantung pada konteks komunikasi, seperti apakah situasinya formal atau informal. Selain itu, beberapa mahasiswa melaporkan mengalami kesulitan berkelanjutan dalam menerapkan aturan tata bahasa, yang mereka kaitkan dengan keterbatasan kosakata, kecemasan saat berbicara, dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri ketika menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam komunikasi secara langsung.

Kata Kunci: Mahasiswa, Tata Bahasa, Keterampilan Produktif

INTRODUCTION

English plays a crucial role in today's era of globalization. Mastering English not only enables communication with people from different countries



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but also provides access to information, career development, and broader worldviews. In this rapidly globalizing era, English has assumed a central position as the primary language of international communication (Haryadi & Aminuddin, 2023). The ability to communicate effectively in English opens doors to expanded educational opportunities, global career prospects, and international collaboration (Tayirovna, 2024).

To achieve effective English communication, it is essential to master both productive and receptive skills. Mastering these skills facilitates success in various aspects of life education, work, and cross-cultural interactions making them valuable assets for every individual (Abdushukurova, 2024). Receptive skills refer to the ability to comprehend language expressed by others, both orally (listening) and in writing (reading) (Sreena & Ilankumaran, 2018). These skills allow individuals to understand spoken and written information, thereby enriching their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge (Abdushukurova, 2024).

In contrast, productive skills involve an individual's ability to produce language, encompassing the creative process of transforming thoughts and ideas into coherent and meaningful expressions. These skills go beyond delivering information they include the capacity to express oneself, present arguments, and persuade others (Aldobekhi & Abahussain, 2024). Productive skills, particularly speaking and writing, are fundamental for EFL learners as they enable them to communicate ideas effectively in both spoken and written forms (Aisyah et al., 2024). Writing allows individuals to present their thoughts in a more structured and in-depth manner (Riswanto et al., 2023), while speaking remains the most frequently used skill in daily life. The ability to communicate effectively in spoken English opens numerous opportunities in academic, professional, and social contexts (Huriati et al., 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of productive skills, many EFL learners continue to struggle with developing speaking and writing proficiency. Common challenges include low motivation, limited learning resources, and, most importantly, difficulties in using correct grammar (Fitria, 2023). One of the major obstacles is the lack of deep understanding of grammatical concepts. Because grammar rules are often abstract and complex, learners may become confused and find it difficult to apply them correctly. Consequently, repetitive grammatical errors occur, hindering effective communication (Daskan, 2023). Moreover, poor grammar knowledge affects not only writing but also fluency and accuracy in speaking. Frequent grammatical errors can disrupt communication flow and obscure meaning (Lutfulloyevna, 2023), reducing learners' confidence when interacting with native speakers. As emphasized by Chowdhury (2014), grammar is the key to expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings, while Praise and Meenakshi (2014) highlight that understanding grammar is essential to ensure messages are clearly understood by listeners or readers.

Grammar, traditionally defined as the system for constructing sentences, serves as the foundation for creating complex expressions (H. Al-khresheh & Orak, 2021). As the cornerstone of language, grammar plays a vital role in

enhancing communicative competence. A solid grasp of grammar allows individuals to communicate clearly and effectively, both in writing and speaking, thereby preventing misunderstandings (Fitria, 2023). Proper grammar supports accurate pronunciation, appropriate word choice, and correct sentence structure. In speaking, it helps speakers convey messages clearly and systematically (Lavadia, 2023), while in writing, it enables the construction of coherent, wellorganized, and easily comprehensible texts (Hariati & Siahaan, 2024). Mastery of grammar also improves the overall quality of writing, both in content and form. Several studies have explored EFL learners' perceptions of grammar in productive skills. For instance, Normawati (2023) found that learners consider grammar a crucial component, particularly in writing. However, perceptions of grammar's importance in speaking vary some learners emphasize its role, while others regard it as less essential during communication. Zam and Suriaman (2021) reported a positive but moderate correlation between grammar mastery and speaking ability, suggesting that grammar is an important, though not exclusive, factor influencing speaking skills. Similarly, Fitria (2023) revealed that students acknowledge the importance of grammar but still face challenges in understanding and applying it effectively.

Research on students' perceptions of grammar and its influence on productive skills especially speaking and writing remains limited. While previous studies confirm students' awareness of grammar's importance in writing, their understanding of its role in oral communication requires deeper exploration. Furthermore, the specific factors that influence students' ability to apply grammar in real communicative contexts remain unclear. Given the essential role of communication in various aspects of modern life, this research is urgently needed to identify existing gaps and to design more effective learning strategies. The expected outcome is an improvement in students' overall language competence, particularly in a global context that demands strong communication skills.

This study, therefore, aims to identify and analyze the factors that significantly influence students' understanding and use of English grammar in oral and written communication. A solid command of grammar is a key prerequisite for effective interaction in today's globalized academic and professional environments. Although numerous studies have been conducted on English language learning, relatively few have focused specifically on the factors affecting students' ability to apply grammatical rules in productive skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research focuses on fifth-semester students of the English Education Department who have completed both Speaking and Writing courses. The research sample was determined using purposive sampling, involving a total of 25 students as participants.

The study aims to explore students' perceptions in depth regarding the use of grammar in productive skills. Therefore, a qualitative research method was employed, as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the

complexity of human perceptions (Sugiyono, 2013). Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. The researcher adapted the interview questions from Normawati's (2023) study, which included two categories of questions: (1) general questions about students' English learning and grammar, and (2) questions about students' perceptions of grammar in writing and speaking. The questions are presented as follows:

- 1. How long have you been learning English?
- 2. Why do you learn English?
- 3. What is grammar? What do you think about grammar?
- 4. Is grammar crucial for effective communication?
- 5. In your opinion, what method is most effective for learning grammar?
- 6. Do you think grammar is important in speaking and writing? Please explain why.
- 7. What do you think is the function of grammar in speaking and writing?
- 8. Do you pay attention to grammar when you speak and write? Please explain.
- 9. Do you find it difficult to use grammar in speaking and writing? What factors cause these difficulties? Please explain.

The data in this study were analyzed qualitatively through several stages. First, the data collection process began with conducting interviews and transcribing the responses. Second, the data were coded to label and categorize relevant information for analysis. Third, data reduction was carried out by summarizing and selecting essential information while discarding irrelevant details. Finally, the data were presented through examination, organization, and categorization to produce clear and structured descriptive findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION Finding

Duration of Learning English

In this findings, the majority of respondents indicated that they had started learning Englsih since Elementary School, with the duration of study varying from 10 to 15 years. This reflects a long-term commitment to English language acquistion among EFL students. For example, Respondent 1 stated, "I have been leraning English since Elementary School, which means about 15 years," which show significant dedication to learning this language. On the other hand, Respondent 6 added, "I've been learning English since Elementary School, but deepened it only when I entered University," further emphasizing that although they have been learning English for a long time, the process of deepening and mastering grammar and more complex communicatio skills often only begins at the higher education level.

This phenomenon shows that although many university students have a strong background in English, their level of mastery can vary significantly. This my be due to a variety of factors, including the teaching methods received, opportunities to practice, as well as individual motivation in learning the language.

Reasons for Learning English

Based on the interview results, the majority of respondents stated that learning English is important because it is part of the education curriculum at school. Respondent 1 stated, "I learn English because it is included in the lessons at school. So, it makes me now want to learn English in depth." This shows that the early introduction of English aims to prepare students for global challenges.

In addition, many respondents also realized the importance of English in international communication and the need for employment and education. Respondent 15 revealed:

"I learn English because firstly because I am interested and also it is very important to learn English, because English is used to communicate internationally. In addition, I want to continue my studies abroad. By learning English I think it will make it easier for me to communicate easily with people from different countries and also English is one of the requirements for getting a scholarship."

This statement reflects an awareness of the dominant role of English in various fields, such as business and technology, and as an important tool for achieving academic and professional goals.

Students Opinions on Grammar and the Use of Grammar to Communicate Effectively

Regarding grammar, the Respondents in this findings showed a diversity of understanding, but in general they agreed that grammar functions as a set of rules govrning the use of language. Respondet 3 stated, "Grammar is a rule that regulates sentence structure, word forms, as well as certain rules in the language so as to make a sentence more composed." This statement highlights the structural aspect of grammar, which includes how words are organzed to form coherent and meaningful sentences.

On the other hand, Respondent 16 added, "Grammar is the rules that govern the way we speak and write in English, so that the message we want to convey can be understood by others." This shows that grammar does not only function in the context of writing, but it also very important in oral communication, where clarity and precision of languauge use are key to conveying a message effectively.

The majority of Respondents emphasized the importance of grammar to achieve communication. Respondent 2 stated, "Yes, grammar is very important because it makes it easier to communicate well and easy to understand what we say." This statement reflects an awareness of the role of grammar in creating clarity and precision in communication, which is indispensable to avoid misunderstandings.

However, some Respondents expressed more felxible views regarding the use of grammar, especially in the contex of informal communication as respondent 4 argued,

"In my opinion, the use of grammar does not need to be paid too much attention. We can adjust depending on the situation. For example the situation is informal like with friends, the important thins is that both understand what is conveyed."

This shows that while grammar has animportant role in ensuring clarity, there are times when flexibility in its use can create a more familiar and comfortable atmosphere in communcation.

Thus, a good understanding of grammar is essential in the context of communication, especially in Eglish which is an international language. Grammar acts as a foundation that allows individuals to express their ideas and thoughts in a clear and stryctured manner. Without an adequate understanding of grammar, communication can become ambiguous and confusingg, which in turn can hinder effective interaction.

The importance of paying attention to Grammar in Speaking and Writing

In this findings, the majority of Respondnets agreed that grammar has a very important role in writing, Resondent 17 asserted,

"Mastering grammar is a must especially in terms of writing, because good grammar gives clear and effective writing results."

However, on the other hand, there are differences of opinion regarding its significance in speaking. Respondent 8 said,

"I don't think grammar in speaking is very important, what is important is that other person understands what we say and makes he conversation more natural and enjoyable."

This view suggest that althoung grammar is considered important, the context of communication especially in spoken situations, can influence individuals' perceptions of how strictly they should follow grammar rules.

This reflects the reality that in everyday communcation, the main goal is to convey a massage clearly, although sometimes perfect grammar is not always necessary. While in writing, we must pay attention to grammar, because writing is something that will be read repeatedly by others. Therefore, it is very important for us to pay attention to grammar in writing.

Difficulties in Using Grammar in Speaking and Writing

In this finding, many respondents said they experienced difficulties in using grammar, especially when speaking spontaneously. Respondent 23 revealed

"My difficulty in using grammar is because I still have not mastered the formula or rules in using grammar well, besides that, grammar is a complex thing so there are often mistakes in placing the words, especially in speaking which is often done spontaneously."

This statement reflects the challenges that individuals face when they have to respond quickly in communication situations, where uncertainty regarding grammar rules can hinder their ability to express ideas clearly.

While in writing, some Respondents said there were also difficulties in the use of grammar in writing, as Respondent 11 said:

"When writing, I have quite difficulty using grammar. Because writing is one of the skills that is difficult for someone to do, where writing requires accuracy and is also permanent in nature that can be seen and read by others repeatedly."

Factors causing difficulties in using grammar varied, but some common factors identified that caused students' difficulties in using grammar in productive skills included lack of vocabulary, language anxiety, and lack of practice. Respondent 5 stated,

"The factor that makes it difficult for me to apply grammar is the limited vocabulary, which is very influential in constructing sentences and also language structures in different grammars."

This finding suggests that a limited understanding of vocabulary, which would be a significant barrier in effective communication and language structures that could hinder their ability to construct proper sentences. In addition, anxiety while speaking was also a frequently mentioned factor, as expressed by In Respondent 22, "I often feel anxiety in speaking due to lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes." This shows that psychological factors, such as low self-confidence, can interact with linguistic challenges, creating a cycle that is difficult to overcome.

Difficulties in using grammar are not only caused by linguistic factors, but also by psychological factors that affect individual confidence. Therefore, it is important for educators to develop a comprehensive approach to language teaching, which not only focuses on mastering grammar and vocabulary, but also creates a supportive environment to reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence. By providing more opportunities to practice speaking in safe and supportive situations, it is hoped that students can overcome the difficulties they face and become more confident in using grammar effectively.

Methods of Learning Grammar

In this study, respondents provided a range of methods that they considered effective for learning grammar, reflecting the diversity of approaches that can be taken in the learning process. Some respondents suggested the use of interactive media, such as apps and videos. As stated by Respondent 18,

"In this global era, with increasingly sophisticated technology, to learn grammar we can easily understand by using short videos or using visual learning that makes the lesson easier to understand and fun."

This statement shows that utilizing modern technology can enhance the learning experience, making the grammar learning process more interesting and accessible. Visual media, such as short videos, not only help in explaining grammar concepts in a clearer way, but can also improve information retention through engaging visual elements.

On the other hand, some Respondents suggested more traditional yet still effective methods. Respondent 12 stated,

"I prefer to learn with hands-on exercises such as making sentences or speaking in small groups, where we will discuss with each other and correct the mistakes we make in using grammar."

Which shows that hands-on practice and social interaction can strengthen the understanding and application of grammar. This method allows students to apply the theories they have learned in a real context, as well as get immediate feedback from peers and teachers. Meanwhile, I Respondent 14 emphasized, "I like to learn by reading books or articles, then try to rewrite them in my own style." This approach shows that learning through reading can enrich vocabulary and understanding of sentence structure, while encouraging creativity in expressing ideas.

These diverse methods show that respondents have different approaches to learning grammar, depending on their personal preferences and learning styles. This underlines the importance of flexibility in grammar teaching, where educators need to recognize and appreciate individual differences in ways of learning. By providing a variety of learning methods - from the use of interactive technology, practical exercises, to reading and writing - educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This diverse approach will not only improve students' understanding of grammar, but will also motivate them to engage more actively in the learning process, resulting in better language acquisition and confidence in communication.

Discussion

The results show that the majority of respondents have started learning English since elementary school, with the duration of study varying from 10 to 15 years. This phenomenon reflects a long-term commitment to English language acquisition among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Although many students have a strong background in English, their level of mastery can vary significantly. This is in line with research showing that a long learning experience does not necessarily guarantee high communication skills, as factors

such as teaching methods, opportunities to practice, and individual motivation also play an important role (Nurhidayah, 2020). Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand students' educational backgrounds and adjust their teaching approaches to be more effective in improving English language skills, especially in more practical and applicable communication contexts.

The reasons for learning English expressed by respondents reflect the complexity of the motivations behind foreign language learning. English has become an integral part of the education curriculum in many countries, indicating that early introduction of English has become the norm in the education system. Research shows that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations contribute to successful language learning (Wiwoho & Mahanani, 2021). Pragmatic motivations, such as the desire to continue studying abroad, are also a major driver for many students to master English. With increasing opportunities for education abroad and the need to communicate in an international context, English is becoming an essential tool to achieve such goals. Therefore, a deep understanding of individual motivations in language learning can help educators design a more relevant and engaging curriculum.

The definitions of grammar expressed by respondents show a diversity of understanding, but in general they agree that grammar functions as a set of rules governing language use. Grammar serves as an important foundation in effective communication, and a good understanding of grammar can reduce misunderstandings in communication (Fitria, 2023). Research shows that a good command of grammar is not only important in the context of writing, but is also crucial in oral communication, where clarity and precision of language use are key to conveying messages effectively (Celce-Murcia, 2021). Therefore, comprehensive grammar teaching in the English curriculum is essential so that students not only understand the theory behind the rules, but can also apply them in daily practice.

While many respondents emphasized the importance of grammar, some also expressed a more flexible view regarding its use, especially in the context of informal communication. This reflects the fact that communication is often influenced by the social context and relationships between individuals (Amalia Rachmawati, 2022). In casual situations, flexibility in the use of grammar can create a more familiar and comfortable atmosphere in communication. However, it is important to remember that a good understanding of grammar is still necessary to ensure clarity in communication, especially in formal contexts.

Difficulties in using grammar were also a major focus in this study. Many respondents reported experiencing difficulties, especially when speaking spontaneously. Previous research shows that the pressure of the speaking

situation can affect an individual's ability to use grammar correctly (Tsulaia, 2022). Factors causing difficulties in using grammar vary, including lack of vocabulary, anxiety, and lack of practice. Research shows that anxiety while speaking can disrupt the communication process and affect an individual's confidence (Hong, 2024). Therefore, it is important for educators to develop a comprehensive approach to language teaching, which not only focuses on mastering grammar and vocabulary, but also creates a supportive environment to reduce anxiety and increase students' confidence.

The diverse learning methods expressed by respondents reflect the importance of flexibility in grammar teaching. The use of interactive media, such as apps and videos, can enhance the learning experience and make the learning process more engaging (Purwani, 2021). On the other hand, traditional methods such as direct practice and reading also remain relevant and effective. Research shows that a combination of different learning methods can improve students' understanding of grammar and motivate them in learning grammar.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that students have a high awareness of the importance of grammar in English speaking and writing skills. Most respondents agreed that a good understanding of grammar is key to achieving effective communication, both in formal and informal contexts. Nonetheless, they also reported difficulties in applying grammar appropriately, especially when speaking spontaneously. Factors such as anxiety, lack of vocabulary, and lack of opportunities to practice are the main obstacles that interfere with their ability to use grammar correctly. Students' perceptions show that while they value grammar, there is also a recognition of flexibility in its use, especially in more casual communication situations. This shows that students understand that social context can affect the way they communicate.

Diverse learning methods, including the use of interactive media and traditional methods, proved effective in improving students' understanding of grammar. Respondents indicated that this combination of approaches not only helped them understand grammar theory, but also encouraged active engagement in the learning process. Therefore, it is important for educators to design a curriculum that is responsive to students' needs, with an emphasis on teaching comprehensive grammar and creating a supportive learning environment. Thus, students can overcome the difficulties they face and increase their confidence in communicating, both orally and in writing, in English.

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