

## HOW EFL LEARNERS PERCEIVE GRAMMAR IN SPEAKING AND WRITING

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**Abstract:** Studies about grammar have been conducted by many researchers. As an essential aspect of communication, grammar is closely related to the mastery of language skills, including two productive skills: speaking and writing. This research addresses how EFL learners perceive grammar in speaking and writing. The study involved the fourth-semester students of English Education Department of Universitas Tidar. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather information on their opinions on the significance of grammar in speaking and writing. The result shows that in writing, EFL learners value grammar as a crucial aspect; therefore, they focus on grammar when they produce written text. Meanwhile, in speaking, some learners believe that grammar is important so that they take notice of grammar when they speak, but other learners regard it as not crucial and they do not pay attention to its usage when they communicate. This finding is interesting since in EFL learning context, learners' perception on the role of grammar in speaking and writing is important to the success of the language learning itself.

Keywords: EFL perception, grammar, speaking, writing

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### INTRODUCTION

Grammar is a fundamental component of communication, both in written and spoken form, to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings. It is a language's set of rules for modifying words' forms and linking them together to make sentence (Chowdhury, 2014). Moreover, grammar is needed to make people understand the meaning of a message being conveyed (Praise & Meenakshi, 2014). Thus, for English language learners, understanding grammar is crucial to develop since it enables them to communicate and talk like native speakers (Shakir, 2021). People who are learning a language should be concerned with its grammar since it will greatly improve their performance in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Amongst the four language skills, speaking is often considered crucial because the goal of communication cannot be accomplished successfully without this ability (Akhter et al., 2020). Besides speaking, writing skill is important to acquire as well since it serves as a valuable instrument for communication as well as learning (Asiah et al., 2020). People can express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings by speaking and writing. Moreover, these skills are often considered evidence of one's language system's development.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context, students' perception on the role of grammar in speaking and writing is important. Thus, this research addresses on how EFL learners perceive grammar in speaking and writing. Further, it investigates to what extent learners feel that grammar is important or unimportant for both skills. The study is important since psychological factor plays a big part in students' learning success (Arifin, 2017).

The research conducted (Sahid, 2019) found that according to students' view, speaking ability is influenced by grammatical proficiency. Most students believed that high grammatical skill is a prerequisite for good speaking abilities. Meanwhile, the research conducted by (Zam Zam & Suriaman, 2021) suggested that there is a positive association between the students' grammar and speaking ability, indicating that grammar helps with speaking ability but is not the primary predictor of speaking performance. Nevertheless, the studies do not compare the students' view about the importance of grammar in speaking and writing.

Speaking is considered the most-used productive skill in communication as humans are more active in speaking (Rao, 2019). Youngster begins to express themselves verbally before writing. This shows that speech is the primary form of human communication. Therefore, everyone should become proficient in communicating in sophisticated and precise language since it is a daily necessity (Derakhshan, 2016). Brown in Ilham et al. (2020) states that there are six components to indicate that a person is skilled in speaking; they are: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and task. Of the components, grammar is regarded as the most crucial. It is easier to comprehend the purpose and meaning of a communication when it is communicated using proper grammar. For instance, in public speaking, to ensure that communications are conveyed accurately and objectives are met on purpose, grammar is used to prevent errors and misunderstandings (Handayani, 2018). It means that a person with excellent grammar will become a better speaker.

Meanwhile, in the contemporary society, writing ability plays a critical part today. It is an action to convert knowledge into written form (Ningsih, 2016). In writing, grammar is crucial since it is required in the process of arranging ideas (Setyowati & Hardiastikna, 2019). To be credible, readable, communicative, and clear, grammar must be used correctly. In addition to giving the opportunity to choose your style stance, mastering grammar will enable a writer to make his/her work understandable. In addition, to improve their writing, writers should carefully review the grammar, the structure, the coherence and cohesiveness of their ideas and the evidence they used (Abbas & Herdi, 2018). That is why writing seems to be more challenging than speaking.

The above statements indicate that the mastery of both speaking and writing skills is closely related to grammar proficiency. Therefore, in learning a language, for example English, the global language, learners need to know how to put together a proper sentence. In order to speak and write English meaningfully, a learner must be able to manipulate structure and recognise acceptable grammatical form. Understanding grammar can help language learners proficient in a language both orally and in writing.

Applying grammatical rules effectively is crucial because it does not only contribute to the clarity of a phrase but also influences its meaning. Thus, students must master grammar in order to write or talk in a better and more effective way. However, the use of grammar is seen to be more formal in writing than in speaking. Written grammar is the focus of grammar books, and students are typically taught this instead of spoken grammar. It should be acknowledged that, typically, individuals rarely focus much on the words, phrases, structures, or conjunctions when they speak. Consequently, unlike in writing, grammar in spoken language is often less rigorous and more flexible (Cao Thanh, 2015). This happens because when speaking, people frequently choose the words based on what their fellow participants are saying as the conversation progresses. People could continuously be interrupted instead of being able to speak freely. On the other hand, in writing, readers have less chance to clarify the meaning of the text.

**METHOD**

Descriptive qualitative research was used as the design of this research. A thorough grasp of the subject matter will be obtained by employing descriptive qualitative research (Ary et al., 2014). This study was conducted at Universitas Tidar and involved 30 fourth-semester students of English Education Department of the Faculty of Teachers Training and Education. The majority of the participants have learnt English since they studied in elementary school, and they have got six credits of speaking courses and six credits of writing courses at the university before the investigation. To get detailed information regarding their perceptions on the importance of grammar in speaking and writing, an open-ended questionnaire was used as the instrument of the research. There were two types of questions asked: general questions about the students’ English language learning and grammar and questions about the students’ view on grammar in speaking and learning. The questions were as follows:

**Table 1. General Questions about English Language Learning and Grammar**

No.	Questions
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 to effective communication?

**Table 2. Questions about Grammar in Speaking and Writing**

No.	Questions Related to Grammar and Speaking	Questions Related to Grammar and Writing
1.	Is grammar important in speaking? (Rate 1-5) How important is it? (Elaborate)	Is grammar important in writing? (Rate 1-5) How important is it? (Elaborate)

No.	Questions Related to Grammar and Speaking	Questions Related to Grammar and Writing
2.	What do you believe the function of grammar in speaking?	What do you believe the function of grammar in writing?
3.	How can grammar improve your spoken communication? Do you need accuracy in speaking?	How can grammar improve your written communication? Do you need accuracy in writing?
4.	Do you take notice of your grammar when you speak? Why or why not?	Do you take notice of your grammar when you write? Why or why not?
5.	Among the components of speaking by Brown (2004): (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and task), which do you pay attention to the most when speaking? Why?	Among the components of writing by Brown (2004): organisation, content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, which do you pay attention to the most when writing? Why?

After the data were collected, the stages of data analysis were managed. The researcher applied many steps developed by (Ary et al., 2014) when assessing the data. Organising and familiarising were the initial stages. The researcher examined the data several times in order to become familiar with them. The data was then organized by the researcher. Coding and reducing were the following processes. The researcher coded and translated the data into language in this stage. Finally, the researcher concluded by interpreting the findings of the investigation and summarizing them in paragraph form.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

According to the responses of the participants, most students began to learn English since they were in elementary school. It means that normally they have been learning English for more than thirteen years. Further, the majority of the students state the reasons they learn English is that that they are aware of the importance of mastering English in this era. For English is currently used as an international language, they learn English in order to be able to communicate globally. Moreover, they think that being proficient in English will greatly improve their prospects of expanding their professional chance for a future career, studying overseas, and having easier access to knowledge and information. Further, when asked about their view on grammar when using English language in communication, they have different opinions. The responses show that the students value grammar in English language mastery. They state that grammar functions as the rule to construct sentence. In other words, they consider grammar as the basis to control word order. Furthermore, the students state that grammar is important to facilitate communication. If a person's grammar is bad, he/she will produce too many errors. Consequently, it will cause misconceptions and confusion so that the texts produced become meaningless. However, there are some opinions that state that in a formal situation, grammar is critical, but it is not essential

while speaking, especially in everyday interaction. The statements indicate that there is difference in opinions regarding the level of importance of grammar in oral and written communication.

The participants of the study assess grammar as an important aspect in speaking. When asked to rate the level of importance of grammar in speaking between 1-5, the participants rate it with 3.7 as the average, while from 1-5, the average level of importance of grammar in writing is 4.7. Moreover, the participants' statements show that there is different perception between EFL learners in their view on the significance of grammar in speaking and writing. Further investigation indicates that they have different view on the function of grammar and the need of accuracy in speaking and writing. In speaking, some students perceive that grammar is important as it functions to convey meanings and to prevent misunderstanding. Meanwhile, some students think that grammar is not very important as they believe that their interlocutors still understand the meaning even when they do not use proper grammar. This is because they have chance to clarify and explain their intention and meaning to the interlocutors. On the other hand, in writing, all of the learners are convinced that grammar has pivotal function to share ideas and information clearly.

Explored deeper, the participants' responses indicate that the use of appropriate grammar increases their level of confidence. They think that by applying good grammar, the quality of their communication increases. Meanwhile, regarding the use of accurate grammar, some students do not agree that accuracy is needed in speaking but all of them agree that accuracy is a must in writing. This phenomenon is related to their next responses to the questions related to their concern about using grammar in speaking and writing. When the students speak, not all of them always take notice their grammar. Some of the students state that they always pay attention to their grammar when speaking, but some of them do not. They assume that despite their poor grammar, the interlocutors nearly always understand what they said. This is different from how they typically write. When they write, they highly pay attention to grammar and check it repeatedly to make sure that the grammar used is correct. Explored further, among the aspects of speaking by Brown (2004): pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and task, the students state that their first focus is on pronunciation. Meanwhile, compared to the aspects of writing by Brown (2004): organisation, content, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, they pay attention the most to grammar. This is in line with the essay by (Cao Thanh, 2015) that demonstrates how spoken grammar is more flexible than written grammar.

The findings of the study on how EFL students view grammar's significance in speaking and writing reveal an intriguing truth. The learners have been studying English for many years for some reasons, especially for global communication. In learning English language, they consider grammar as an essential aspect communication. For communication to be effective, grammar is

crucial, and it serves as one of the pillars of communication. Moreover, the mastery of grammar can improve their confidence in communicating orally and written. This is consistent with the analysis of the research conducted by Nadila (2020). Her research revealed that a number of factors, including grammatical proficiency, affect EFL students' confidence.

Explored deeper, the learners value the importance of grammar in speaking and writing differently. When they write, they pay close attention to grammar and review it several times to ensure that grammar is used correctly. This points out that EFL learners apply grammar strictly in writing. They are aware of how crucial proper grammar is when writing. They realise that grammar organises how words are put together, ordered, or modified to indicate specific types of meaning. Understanding grammar helps us use effective phrases while speaking and writing (Kusumawardani & Mardiyani, 2018). They believe that in writing, interpretation becomes more challenging and might occasionally result in divergent conclusions when grammar is broken or improper.

Nevertheless, an interesting fact occurs when they mention that grammar is important in communication but their opinions on the importance of grammar in speaking vary. Some learners strongly agree that grammar is key in oral communication so they take notice on their use of grammar when speaking. They argue that in both written and spoken communication, content and clarity of sentences are affected by grammar. Grammar errors make communication harder to understand and can even lead to misunderstanding. This is consistent with Praise and Meenakshi's statement that understanding a message's meaning and intent is made possible by grammar, which is the building block of communication (Praise & Meenakshi, 2014). Meanwhile, some students do not regard grammar as an important aspect of speaking, especially in daily communication, since they can clarify the meaning to interlocutors, so the interlocutors understand their message. Due to this belief, some EFL learners pay less attention to their grammar when they speak.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study focuses on how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners understand grammar in speaking and writing. The findings indicate that EFL students view grammar as an important component of writing; therefore, they emphasize grammar in their written work. As for speaking, some students think grammar is significant, so they pay attention to it when they speak. These learners believe that the use of proper grammar is crucial since it is the primary aspect of both spoken and written communication that enables messages to be effectively understood. They are convinced that poor grammar can make sentences meaningless and the message unclear, which might lead to misunderstanding. Meanwhile, some learners consider grammar as not

important in speaking and do not focus on grammar usage when they speak since they believe think that they have chance to clarify meanings to interlocutors.

Investigating students' attitudes about the importance of grammar is crucial and required since these attitudes may affect how they behave when learning language. For instance, students will be motivated to study and advance their grammatical competence if they believe that grammar is a crucial component of speaking and writing. Hence, it is expected that through comprehending the students' perspectives, the teacher would be able to recognise and meet the students' needs.

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