

## ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING GRAMMAR AT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF MATARAM

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors affecting grammar mastery among English language students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram using a descriptive qualitative approach. It involves 25 first-semester students who participated in grammar tests, with data analysed through the Miles and Huberman model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings highlight several significant challenges. First, the dominance of theoretical teaching methods without adequate practical application makes grammar learning difficult for students. Students often memorize rules but struggle to apply them in real contexts. Second, the lack of opportunities to practice speaking English limits students' ability to internalize grammatical structures, reducing their confidence and fluency. Although English exposure through media is frequent, it is generally passive such as listening to songs or watching movies without interactive engagement. Third, students face challenges in understanding English vocabulary, particularly idiomatic expressions and cultural references, which are often absent from local linguistic environments. These unfamiliar elements create confusion and hinder comprehension. The study suggests that grammar instruction should be more communicative, include cultural integration, and provide active learning opportunities to enhance grammar mastery. These findings offer valuable insights for improving English grammar teaching strategies in similar EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** *English Grammar, English Language Teaching, Vocabulary of English, Vocabulary Acquisition, Technology in Grammar Learning.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of the most fundamental components in the language learning process, serving as the backbone that supports learners in constructing meaning, organizing thoughts, and conveying messages accurately. As a structural foundation, grammar encompasses a complex system of rules and principles that govern the formation of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in a language. Grammar enables learners to form coherent and meaningful utterances by providing a framework for correct sentence structure, proper verb tense usage, subject-verb

agreement, word order, and the application of parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions (Ajaj, 2022). In the context of English language learning, especially for those learning it as a foreign language (EFL), grammar is not merely a theoretical construct but a practical necessity. Grammar supports the development of the four main language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing by ensuring learners have the tools to understand and produce accurate and understandable language (Sorohiti et al., 2024). Mastery of grammar enables EFL learners to understand texts more effectively, interact orally with fluency and accuracy, and compose well-structured written compositions (Yunita et al., 2018). Without a strong understanding of grammar, students may face significant barriers in receptive and productive skills, which can hinder their academic achievement and professional communication. In higher education, especially in fields where English is the language of instruction or a required subject, grammar competence is essential for students to succeed in assignments, presentations, discussions, and research activities.

Despite its essential role, grammar is often considered one of the most challenging aspects of learning a new language. This perception is particularly common among learners whose native language differs significantly from English in terms of structure and syntax (Effendi et al., 2017). Students learning English in a formal classroom setting without consistent exposure to natural language use often struggle to internalize grammar rules and apply them appropriately in communication. Several interrelated factors contribute to this difficulty (Akay & Toraman, 2015). First, the abstract and sometimes contradictory nature of grammar rules can confuse learners, especially when rules are introduced without sufficient context or practical application. Second, a lack of meaningful exposure to English through media, conversation, or immersive experiences limits students' ability to reinforce what they learn in class. Third, student-related factors such as low motivation, negative attitudes toward grammar, and anxiety about making mistakes can reduce engagement and hinder learning (Ameliani, 2019). Finally, teaching methods also play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences with grammar. In Indonesian higher education, grammar instruction often follows a traditional teacher-centred model that emphasizes memorization of rules and mechanical completion of exercises (Jaya & Jabri, 2025). This explicit and prescriptive approach tends to overlook the importance of communicative competence and student interaction. This approach also fails to accommodate individual learning styles and preferences, thereby limiting students' opportunities to practice using grammar in authentic and dynamic contexts (Akbar & Ahmad, 2017). As a result, students may become disengaged, perceive grammar as irrelevant, and struggle to apply what they have learned in real-life situations, both within and outside the academic environment.

A number of studies have examined the ongoing challenges faced by students in mastering English grammar, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Grammar, although important for language proficiency, often becomes a barrier for learners when taught in isolation. Ahsan et al. (2020) argue that grammar learning becomes far more effective when integrated into meaningful and communicative activities (Rejeki, 2023). Their research shows that students are

more successful in internalizing grammatical structures when they are integrated into real-life language tasks, rather than presented as abstract rules (Islam & Mufidah, 2022). In classrooms where grammar is treated as a separate skill independent of writing, speaking, or listening students often struggle to see its relevance, leading to low motivation and poor retention. Yacob & Yunus (2019) agree with this view, stating that while explicit instruction remains necessary, it must be complemented by opportunities for practical use through communicative interaction. For example, grammar tasks integrated into peer discussions, collaborative writing, or presentations allow students to experiment with structures in functional contexts. Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam (2011) further emphasize that grammar instruction must connect three essential components: form, meaning, and usage. This model proposes that students not only learn to identify grammatical forms but also understand the meaning conveyed by each form and the situations in which each form is appropriately used (Komara & Tiarsiwi, 2021). When grammar instruction neglects any of these dimensions, students may develop partial knowledge that fails to support genuine communicative competence.

In addition to pedagogical strategies, psychological and affective factors are also increasingly recognized as influential factors in grammar acquisition. Emotional variables such as anxiety, self-confidence and motivation play an important role in shaping learners' attitudes towards grammar learning. Farooq et al. (2012) identified anxiety as a major barrier in grammar-focused classes, noting that the fear of making mistakes especially in front of peers can suppress student participation and reduce teaching effectiveness (Matiso, 2023). This phenomenon is in line with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that emotional barriers can prevent input from being fully processed by learners. Adolph (2016) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which specifically refers to the nervousness and apprehension that learners feel in language classes, often triggered by grammar exercises or error correction. FLCA can make students reluctant to experiment with the language or ask questions when they don't understand, thus slowing down their progress. Beno et al. (2022) also argue that students' internal beliefs whether they see themselves as "good" or "bad" at grammar, directly affect their willingness to engage with the material. Confident and motivated learners tend to persevere in learning difficult concepts, while those with negative attitudes may avoid practice altogether. (Riadil, 2020) emphasizes that these psychological and emotional challenges must be overcome through support and encouragement.

In the context of higher education in Indonesia, several studies have revealed that grammar continues to be a big challenge for EFL students. Rahayu (2015) found that even after years of learning English, many students still struggle to apply complex grammatical structures, especially in writing (Apolonio, 2021). This includes frequent problems such as misuse of verb tenses, inconsistent subject-descriptor agreement, and errors in sentence construction. Leong & Ahmadi (2015) further document these difficulties, and attribute them to the dominance of rote learning and memorization-based instruction (Briewin et al., 2013). In many Indonesian universities, grammar is still taught with teacher-centred methods, where students are expected to passively absorb rules without engaging in

meaningful use. Akbari (2015), in a study conducted at a university in Sumatra, reported that students tend to memorize grammar patterns for exams but cannot apply them in authentic contexts such as essays or presentations (Zhang, 2020). These findings suggest that grammar teaching in higher education in Indonesia is still too theoretical and exam-oriented, less communicative and less learner-centred which is supported by research. In addition, gaps in teacher training and resource availability in different regions contribute to the inconsistent quality of grammar teaching (Dehghani et al., 2016). In some regions, especially outside Java and Sumatra, students may have limited access to experienced teachers, up-to-date materials and exposure to authentic English.

While there has been a wealth of research examining the challenges in grammar learning among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia, there remains a significant gap in research focusing specifically on students in the eastern part of Indonesia. Most of the existing literature is concentrated in more developed and resource-rich regions, such as Java and Sumatra, where access to quality education, experienced instructors, and modern teaching materials is generally higher (Kesaulya et al., 2024). As a result, the unique challenges faced by students in other regions-such as West Nusa Tenggara, where Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram is located-are often overlooked. The lack of regional representation in academic research leads to a limited understanding of how geographical, socio-economic, and linguistic factors affect grammar learning in different regions of Indonesia (Syafryadin et al., 2022). The importance of context-appropriate studies, especially in areas with limited educational resources and different language contact environments. Without such localized studies, educators and curriculum developers are forced to rely on generalized findings that may not be applicable to their students' realities (Ratnasari, 2020). For example, differences in students' first language (L1), learning environment, and exposure to English outside the classroom can significantly affect how grammar is acquired and internalized (Kadir, 2020). The assumption that challenges and solutions identified in Java or Sumatra will automatically apply to students in Mataram may lead to ineffective pedagogical interventions. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the specific experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram to fill this gap and contribute to a more equitable distribution of educational research in Indonesia.

In response to this gap in the literature, this study aims to analyse the difficulties faced by English Language Education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram in learning English grammar. The research is designed not only to identify the most challenging aspects of grammar-such as the use of tenses, sentence structure, or subject-description agreement-but also to explore the underlying causes of these difficulties, which can range from instructional methods to student affective factors such as motivation and anxiety. By conducting this analysis in a local context, this study intends to uncover patterns that are specific to the educational, cultural, and linguistic environment in Mataram. These insights will be invaluable to inform more effective and context-appropriate teaching strategies that can improve students' grammatical competence. In addition, this research also aims to provide practical recommendations for teachers, such as

incorporating a more communicative and student-centred approach, providing grammar instruction through contextual examples, and overcoming psychological barriers to learning. Ultimately, the findings from this study are expected to contribute to the development of a more responsive and inclusive grammar teaching model, not only for Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, but also for other institutions in the same context in Eastern Indonesia. As such, this research seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their geographical location, have access to effective and meaningful English language education.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the challenges faced by students in mastering English grammar at Muhammadiyah University Mataram. The focus of this study is to identify specific grammatical difficulties and contextual factors that influence the grammar learning process based on the results of diagnostic grammar tests. Literature review is used as a theoretical foundation and as a context for analysing data, but it is not used as the primary data source to remain consistent with the qualitative research approach.

The participants in this study consisted of 25 first-semester students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program in the 2024/2025 academic year. Comprising 12 male and 13 female students, they were purposively selected from the compulsory course “Grammar I” because they were considered to represent a group of early learners who were receiving formal English grammar instruction. Their English proficiency levels ranged from A2 to B1 based on the results of the program's initial diagnostic evaluation. This group was considered relevant for uncovering difficulties in grammar learning because they were directly involved in basic grammatical materials.

Data collection was conducted through a diagnostic grammar test developed by the researcher in collaboration with the grammar course instructor. The test consisted of 30 items in multiple-choice, sentence correction, and fill-in-the-blank formats, covering grammar aspects commonly identified as challenges, such as tenses, passive sentences, and modal verbs. Content validation was performed by two expert lecturers, and the test was piloted on five non-participating students to ensure clarity and difficulty level. The test was administered in class on January 7, 2025, with a duration of 45 minutes. Data analysis followed an interactive model comprising three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, students' answers were classified based on the type of error; in the presentation stage, the data was organized into tables and narratives to illustrate error patterns; and in the final stage, conclusions were drawn based on the triangulation of students' answers, expert input, and relevant theoretical context. This process enabled a deep understanding of the grammar learning difficulties faced by students in a real learning context.

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Finding**

Based on the results of an investigation into the linguistic challenges faced by students, it was found that there were significant difficulties in mastering the basic

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aspects of English grammar, particularly in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs. The most striking errors were seen in the use of the simple past tense, where students scored lowest with an average of only 36% correct answers (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). This indicates a lack of understanding of irregular verb forms and the proper placement of negative sentences using auxiliary verbs. Similar difficulties also arise in the Simple Present Tense, especially when combined with subject-verb agreement and the use of auxiliary verbs. Students often make mistakes such as omitting the -s ending on certain verbs and incorrectly using *does* and *do* as auxiliary verbs. Additionally, errors in subject-verb agreement in both tenses indicate that students still struggle to match singular and plural subjects with the appropriate verb forms, especially in more complex sentences involving auxiliary verbs. They also demonstrate difficulties in forming negative and interrogative sentences, such as incorrectly or forgetting to use auxiliary verbs and improperly using the base form of verbs after auxiliary verbs. These findings indicate deeper problems in basic grammar comprehension, which become more complex when several rules must be applied simultaneously, such as in combinations of tenses, agreement, and auxiliaries (Hashim et al., 2019). To overcome these difficulties, students need focused and structured practice that begins with mastering each component of grammar separately, followed by exercises that challenge them to apply these rules in an integrated manner. Additionally, the use of interactive learning media and contextual approaches can help reinforce understanding and application of grammar in more practical communication.

To better understand the specific grammatical difficulties students encounter in using the Simple Present Tense, Table 1 shows some of the most common errors identified in their written responses. These errors include mistakes related to verb agreement and the use of auxiliary verbs, which are basic components in the formation of present tenses.

**Table 1: Common Errors in Simple Present Tense**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Omission of Verb Agreement	Andi go to school ( <i>should be goes</i> )	Lack of understanding of singular-plural verb forms.
Incorrect Use of Auxiliary	Do she like ice cream? ( <i>should be Does she like</i> )	Confusion with auxiliary verb rules.

Table 1 shows that students often have difficulty applying the rule of adding -s to third-person singular verbs and choosing the correct auxiliary verb in present tense sentence constructions. The high frequency of such errors indicates a gap in basic grammar knowledge, especially in distinguishing between singular and plural forms and understanding the use of auxiliary verbs in interrogative sentences.

To further analyze students' difficulties in using past tense structures, Table 2 details common errors found in the use of Simple Past Tenses. The main focus is on errors involving irregular verb forms and negative sentence formation, both of which require a strong understanding of auxiliary verb usage and past tense transformations.

**Table 2: Common Errors in Simple Past Tense**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Substitution of Present Verb	He write a letter ( <i>should be wrote</i> )	Confusion with irregular verbs in past tense.
Auxiliary Omission in Negatives	They don't meet ( <i>should be didn't meet</i> )	Lack of mastery in forming negative sentences in past tense.

Table 2 shows that students have significant difficulty using irregular verbs correctly and forming negative sentences in the past tense. The replacement of present tense verbs with past tense verbs, as well as the omission of auxiliary words such as “didn't,” indicates that learners do not yet fully understand the structural shifts required when expressing actions in the past.

In addition to difficulties in using tenses, students also often make mistakes related to subject-verb agreement. Table 3 shows common errors identified in this area, particularly those involving mismatches between singular or plural subjects and the appropriate verb forms, as well as the inappropriate use of auxiliary verbs with certain types of subjects.

**Table 3: Common Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Singular-Plural Mismatch	The girls wants cake ( <i>should be want</i> )	Lack of understanding of subject-verb agreement rules.
Incorrect Auxiliary Pairing	Does the boy go? ( <i>should be Does the boy go</i> )	Misapplication of auxiliary with singular subjects.

This table highlights the persistent difficulties students experience in matching subjects with the appropriate verb forms, particularly when distinguishing between singular and plural constructions. Errors such as adding -s to plural subjects or incorrect use of auxiliary verbs such as does reflect confusion about basic agreement rules and reinforce the need for instruction focused on subject-verb agreement.

One area where students often have difficulty is the use of auxiliary verbs, especially in forming negative and interrogative sentences. Table 4 shows examples of common errors that indicate students' difficulties in omitting and misusing auxiliary verbs in basic sentence structures.

**Table 4: Common Errors in Auxiliary Verbs**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Auxiliary Omission	She likes coffee ( <i>should be Does she like</i> )	Misunderstanding the necessity of auxiliary verbs.
Incorrect Negative Forms	He don't play ( <i>should be doesn't play</i> )	Lack of familiarity with forming negatives using auxiliaries.

Table 4 indicates that students often omit or incorrectly form structures based on auxiliary verbs when asking questions or forming negative sentences. This confusion indicates a gap in understanding of when and how to use auxiliary verbs such as “does” or “do,” especially in negative sentences and interrogative forms. These findings suggest that more explicit instruction and targeted practice in the use of auxiliary verbs is needed.

When auxiliary verbs are combined with past tense constructions, students often make mistakes that reflect confusion about verb forms and sentence structure.

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Table 5 identifies common errors in the use of auxiliary verbs with base verbs and the formation of negative sentences in Simple Past Tenses.

**Table 5: Common Errors in Simple Past Tense + Auxiliary Verbs**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Incorrect Auxiliary Usage	Did she goes? ( <i>should be go</i> )	Failure to apply the rule of base verbs after <i>did</i> .
Omission of Auxiliary in Negatives	I not see him ( <i>should be did not see</i> )	Incomplete understanding of negative sentence structure.

Table 5 demonstrates that students frequently misuse or omit auxiliary verbs when forming past tense sentences. The use of “did” follow by the incorrect verb form, as well as the absence of auxiliary verbs in negative sentences, indicates a lack of clarity about how auxiliary verbs function in the context of both affirmative and negative past tense sentences. More targeted practice on these structures is essential to reinforce understanding.

In more complex sentence constructions involving subject-verb agreement and auxiliary verbs, students tend to make multiple errors. Table 6 shows common errors in combining auxiliary verbs with the correct subject-verb agreement, especially in the present and past tenses.

**Table 6: Common Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement + Auxiliary Verbs**

Type of Error	Example	Possible Cause
Incorrect Auxiliary Pairing	Does she likes ice cream? ( <i>should be like</i> )	Failure to follow auxiliary and verb agreement rules.
Singular-Plural Verb Errors	The boys was here ( <i>should be were</i> )	Misunderstanding subject-verb agreement in past tense.

Table 6 illustrates that students encounter difficulties in coordinating auxiliary verbs with correct subject-verb agreement. Whether it is the incorrect use of “does” with third-person singular verbs or confusion between ‘was’ and “were,” these errors reflect broader issues in managing verb forms according to tense and agreement rules. Focusing instruction on integrating these grammar rules into integrated exercises can help reduce such errors.

To provide an overview of the areas of grammar that most frequently cause difficulties for students, Table 7 summarizes the percentage of correct answers on key grammar topics. This summary allows for the identification of the most problematic areas in terms of accuracy and comprehension, especially when grammar components are combined (e.g., tense + auxiliary + agreement).

**Table 7: Recapitulation of Students' Grammar Difficulties**

Grammar Topics	Correct Answers (%)	Difficulty Level
Simple Present Tense	43%	High
Simple Present Tense + Subject-Verb Agreement	54%	High
Simple Present Tense + Auxiliary Verbs	52%	High
Auxiliary Verbs	64%	Medium
Simple Past Tense	36%	High
Simple Past Tense + Auxiliary Verbs	41%	High
Simple Past Tense + Subject-Verb Agreement	40%	High

Table 7 shows that the most challenging area for students is Simple Past Tenses, where they achieved the lowest average score with only 36% correct

answers. Additionally, consistent difficulties were observed in Simple Present Tenses and combinations involving subject-verb agreement and auxiliary verbs. The only topic that reached a moderate level of difficulty was the separate use of auxiliary verbs. Overall, the data indicate that students face greater challenges when grammatical components are combined, reinforcing the need for targeted and integrated instruction within complex grammatical structures.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that students face significant challenges in mastering key aspects of English grammar, particularly in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs (Nugroho & Wiranata, 2021). Among the most problematic areas is the simple past tense, where students showed the lowest average performance, with only 36% of answers correct. This indicates significant confusion in using irregular verb forms and forming negative constructions with auxiliary verbs. The data reveal that students struggle to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs, often overgeneralizing rules such as applying "-ed" endings to irregular verbs like "go" ("goed" instead of "went"). This problem is compounded by a lack of consistent feedback and reinforcement during instruction. Similarly, students experience persistent difficulties in applying the rules of the Simple Present Tense, especially when these rules intersect with subject-verb agreement and the use of auxiliary verbs. Common mistakes, such as omitting the "-s" on third-person singular verbs ("He go" instead of "He goes") or the incorrect use of auxiliary verbs like "does" and "do," indicate that students lack an understanding of basic grammatical patterns, especially when multiple elements must be used together in a single structure. The combination of multiple grammatical features within a sentence increases the likelihood of errors, which shows that students have trouble with syntactic integration, not just isolated rule memorization.

These results are consistent with previous studies documenting similar difficulties among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia and other non-native English-speaking contexts. Research by Mandasari & Wahyudin (2021) shows that learners often struggle with verb conjugation, irregular verbs, and auxiliary placement due to structural differences between English and their native languages. Unlike English, the Indonesian language lacks morphological tense markers and subject-verb agreement, leading students to apply L1 structures when forming English sentences. This transfer can result in persistent errors and misinterpretations of grammar rules. Furthermore, many studies have tended to focus on these errors in isolation—looking only at verb tense or agreement separately. This study contributes additional insights by showing that students' errors become more complex and frequent when grammatical rules such as tense, agreement, and auxiliary verbs interact within a single sentence. For example, a student might correctly use an auxiliary verb but still fail to apply subject-verb agreement, indicating that partial knowledge does not translate into full competence. This layered complexity amplifies students' confusion, and it suggests that the cumulative cognitive load involved in processing and producing complex grammar is a significant barrier to accuracy. Notably, the difficulty arises not just from the content of the rules themselves, but from the interaction between these

rules and the challenge of applying them simultaneously during sentence construction.

The sources of these grammatical errors appear to stem from both linguistic and instructional aspects. Linguistically, students are influenced by the grammatical structure of their native language. In Indonesian, grammatical tense is expressed through temporal adverbs (such as "kemarin" for "yesterday") rather than through verb conjugations. As a result, learners do not naturally internalize the need to alter verb forms to indicate time. Similarly, the concept of subject-verb agreement is absent in Indonesian grammar, which leads to fossilized errors in English sentence construction. Instructionally, many students may not receive sufficient targeted practice that emphasizes grammar in real communicative contexts. Instead, grammar is often taught in isolation, using rule-based instruction with limited opportunities for practical application. This is particularly problematic when grammar instruction is test-oriented, focusing on form completion rather than usage in speech or writing. As a result, students may learn to recognize correct forms in multiple-choice formats but still be unable to produce them in free writing or speaking tasks. Furthermore, the high error rate in sentences requiring the combination of multiple rules points to a lack of scaffolding in the teaching process. Students are often expected to produce grammatically complex sentences before they have fully mastered the individual components (Huy, 2015). This premature expectation leads to confusion and disengagement. The absence of contextualized exercises, such as dialogue writing or guided conversations, means that students fail to see the relevance of grammar rules to real-life communication, which ultimately hampers long-term retention and internalization.

These findings highlight the need for a pedagogical shift in grammar teaching. Rather than emphasizing mechanical memorization of rules, teaching should begin with focused instruction on individual grammar components, followed by integrated exercises that mimic real-life usage. For example, teaching the Simple Present Tense should not stop at drilling "he/she/it + verb-s" forms but should continue into dialogue-based role plays where students must respond using accurate tense and agreement. Teachers should employ interactive and student-centered methods, such as contextual grammar exercises, sentence transformation drills, error analysis activities, and communicative tasks that require active grammatical engagement. Mohammad & Hazarika (2016) emphasize that grammar acquisition is most effective when students are actively involved in the construction and deconstruction of sentences, rather than passively receiving explanations. Moreover, teachers can incorporate contrastive analysis to show students how English grammar differs from Indonesian grammar, helping them anticipate and correct typical errors. The use of digital learning tools can further support this process. Grammar learning platforms like Grammarly, Quill, or Kahoot can provide instant feedback and reinforce correct usage through gamified learning. These platforms also allow for individualized learning paths, enabling students to focus on their specific weaknesses. Diagnostic assessments, including self-check grammar quizzes and reflective writing tasks, can encourage metacognitive awareness, allowing students to recognize their own patterns of error and take ownership of their learning.

Despite these valuable contributions, this study also has limitations that need to be addressed in future research. The sample is relatively small, involving only 25 students from one university, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Students from other universities or regions in Indonesia might face different challenges due to variations in teaching quality, exposure to English, or sociolinguistic environments. Furthermore, the study relies primarily on test-based data, which provides a snapshot of students' grammatical competence but does not capture their learning processes or the reasons behind their errors. Without additional qualitative data such as interviews, classroom observations, or student journals some underlying causes of difficulty remain unexplored. For example, we cannot know whether students' errors stem from lack of understanding, low motivation, anxiety, or ineffective teaching strategies. Future research should consider a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative performance data with qualitative insights to create a more comprehensive understanding of how students learn grammar. Moreover, longitudinal studies could track the development of grammatical competence over time and evaluate the impact of specific interventions, such as flipped grammar classrooms or task-based grammar instruction. Investigating the role of students' attitudes, learning strategies, and exposure to authentic English materials could also enrich our understanding of grammar acquisition. By broadening the scope and depth of inquiry, future studies can contribute to the design of more effective, equitable, and learner-centred grammar instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The research findings indicate that students consistently have difficulty applying grammar rules accurately, especially when they have to use several rules simultaneously. Common errors include incorrect verb forms, omission of necessary elements, and mismatches between sentence components, reflecting limited integration between rule-based knowledge and practical language use. These patterns suggest that learners often understand grammar in isolation but struggle when it comes to applying it in connected and meaningful contexts.

These difficulties appear to be caused by a combination of language transfer effects, fragmented teaching approaches, and limited opportunities for contextual practice. As a result, students rely heavily on memorized rules without a deep conceptual understanding of how grammar functions communicatively. To address this, teaching must shift to integrated, progressive, and practice-rich learning strategies that support deeper understanding and enable students to internalize grammar use in authentic situations.

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