DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING NOUN CLAUSES BY STUDENTS IN INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH GRAMMAR CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT
Grammar appears to be unavoidably challenging for most L2 learners, particularly when it comes to acquiring noun clause. A noun clause is a dependent phrase that functions similarly to a noun. It has been a difficult area for EFL university students at Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang. The purpose of this study was to discover the students' challenges in learning noun clauses and how they dealt with their issues. The chosen participants were 25 students from the Intermediate Grammar Class in 2022. The method of the research was qualitative. The data was collected through doing interview. The data revealed that students had three major difficulties interpreting noun clauses. Recognizing functions, creating noun clauses, and identifying the subject and verb of a noun phrase were all tough. In addition, three strategies were employed by students to overcome learning barriers. They were going through materials, asking peers, looking for information, and exercising on the Internet.

Keywords: EFL Learning Difficulty, Learning Strategies, Grammar, Noun Clause

1. INTRODUCTION
Grammar is sometimes viewed as the most unappealing aspect of foreign language teaching. Grammar, according to Baron (1982) in Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011), causes pupils distress. Grammar appears to be inevitable for the majority of L2 learners. As a result, the debate over how to teach grammar has become so vast in order to resolve this issue.
Drilling, mimicking, and memory have been regarded as useful strategies in the field of foreign language acquisition throughout the history of grammar education (Mat & Soon, 2010). Mimicry gives students the essential meaningful repetition of the target language's production and perception. Memorization is concerned with language acquisition. Meanwhile, drilling focuses on speaking patterns.
However, some teachers choose to supply their pupils with teaching materials that are routinely utilized in foreign language classes, such as scripted conversations, language learning CDs, and the Internet. The tools can be used by students when they are studying grammar. Can (2009) describes how learners are given the opportunity to interact and work together while learning the language by producing their own ideas and projects utilizing educational resources like as online learning materials.
Students may have their own expectations in their grammar learning process, despite the fact that different ways are employed to teach grammar. Many teachers have validated student’s expectations of clear grammar education, as indicated by Borg (1999, in Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). Borgs also stated that clear grammar instruction is preferred

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by pupils due to expectations and feelings of insecurity, according to the teachers. They frequently feel that having intellectual understanding of grammar and its principles through formal grammar training would ultimately enable them to utilize the language and limit their errors. However, many pupils are terrified of committing grammar mistakes. As a result, they felt uneasy, which might lead to challenges in their learning development. Students” language skills are to some extent developed by their teachers who are their first instructor in modelling grammar rules and language patterns in the target language. As a result, teachers’ teaching strategies have a significant effect in students' learning. As a result, the author performed research on students' challenges in acquiring noun clauses in an Intermediate Grammar course. The study's goal was to discover the students' challenges in learning noun clauses and how they dealt with them. It was carried out at Muhammadiyah University of Tangerang’s English Language Education Program. The following research questions led the study: "What are the students' difficulties in learning noun clauses in the Intermediate English Grammar classroom?" and "How do students deal with difficulties in learning noun clauses?"

**Literature Review**

**Noun Clause**

Noun clauses are important constructions in English that might be difficult for EFL students to understand since they serve several roles (Khudayer, 2013). Noun clauses can take many different forms. A noun clause, according to Khudhayer (2013), is a dependent clause that may function as a noun. It is made up of a subject and a verb. The noun clause has numerous purposes. Megginson (1996) and Khudhayer (2013) classified noun clause functions into numerous categories. They can be a subject, a direct object, an indirect object, a subject complement, an object complement, an object of preposition, or an appositive.

**Grammar Learning Difficulties**

DeKeyser (2005) found three areas of difficulties for learners in acquiring grammar in his research. The first challenge is the ambiguity of meaning. It results from target language characteristics that do not present in their L1.

Articles, grammatical gender, and classifiers can all be included. The intricacy of shape is the second challenge. It stems from parts of the target language that are exceedingly complicated and need a lot of precise allomorph and morpheme selections as well as being in the correct syntactic location in a sentence. The intricacy of the form-meaning link is the final challenge. It arises when the connection between form and meaning is not clear.

**Students' Potential Difficulties in Learning Noun Clause**

Baithy (2014) discovered that most first graders at a senior high school in Indonesia had trouble utilizing subordinators correctly while learning reported speech with a noun clause. Baithy (2014) discovered that pupils struggled to comprehend the noun clause norms. Another study conducted by Khudayer (2013) on 60 Iraqi students at an EFL institution discovered two areas of difficulty that students have while employing noun clauses in English. Another study conducted by Khudayer (2013) on 60 Iraqi students at an EFL institution discovered two areas of difficulty that students have while employing noun clauses in English.

First, 56.1% of all learners had trouble employing noun clauses at the recognition level due to poor comprehension of a distinction in the foreign language. The learners' job at this level is to highlight the noun clauses in the provided sentences and mention them whether they are finite or non-finite, and demonstrate how these noun clauses operate in the
phrases. Second, 75.3% of all learners had trouble using noun clauses at the production stage, when the learners' objective is to provide 10 examples depending on what is expected of them. It happened for a variety of reasons. The first is due to overgeneralization, in which learners failed to apply the taught content correctly to the actual setting. The second is due to learners' ignorance of constraints, in which they apply some rules to a category to which they are not relevant. The last is due to insufficient rule application.

Based on the research, it is feasible to conclude that the obstacles that learners may experience when learning noun clauses are diverse. Learners may struggle to comprehend the noun clause rules, recognize noun clauses, identify the kind of noun clause (finite / non-finite) and its functions, and correctly produce sentences with noun clauses.

**Grammar Learning Strategies**

According to Yalcin (2005), Wenden and Rubin defined learning strategies as "any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and utilization of information." Yalcin (2005) distinguished between two types of learning processes: direct and indirect strategies.

Direct strategies are classified into three types. The first is memory techniques. They are viewed as mental tools, such as making mental associations, using visuals and sounds, evaluating thoroughly, and deploying actions. The second kind is cognitive strategies, which work directly on incoming information and change it to improve learning. The third category is compensatory methods, which aid in the use of a new language for understanding or production.

Meanwhile, indirect strategies are classified as metacognitive, emotional, and social. Language acquisition is supervised, regulated, or self-directed via metacognitive techniques. Affective strategies are concerned with reducing anxiety, encouraging oneself, and checking one's emotional temperature, whereas social strategies are concerned with communication between and among individuals, such as asking questions, working with others, and empathizing with others. According to Gurata (2008), all learners adopt certain tactics to increase their learning. A number of academics have also looked at the learning mechanisms that aid in grammar learning. Gimeno's (2002, as reported in Gurata, 2008) study found that using cognitive and metacognitive learning methodologies to teach grammatical points improved the experimental group more than the control group.

Furthermore, Yalcin (2005) discovered that 70.2% of Preparatory School students at the University of Gaziantep employ grammar learning styles that include cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective. Cognitive learning allows pupils to improve their understanding, acquisition, and retention. Meanwhile, metacognitive learning allows learners to assess their own learning after completing a task. Social/affective learning is the use of social interactions to aid in comprehension and retention, which may be accomplished via studying with peers. Students will naturally want to figure out how to become better learners. They will also consider their educational advancement. Different students may use different strategies based on what they require in their learning objectives.

**Previous Research on Noun Clause Learning**

Lee (n.d.) conducted a survey of 216 Taiwanese students to assess their grasp of three important English clauses (Adjective Clause, Adverbial Clause, and Noun Clause). The research was carried out in Taiwan. There were 80 Science College students, 90 Management College students, 43 Design College students, and 3 Humanity College students among the participants. According to the findings of the survey, 50% of the students stated that they did not comprehend the meaning and functions of the three major clauses of
English, 63% admitted that these clauses were extremely difficult to learn, and 15% admitted that they did not understand the clauses at all. Despite having studied the three major English clauses for many years, half of the total pupils are unsure how to utilize them.

Agcam, Coban, and Cisdik (2015) explored the difficulties Turkish adult learners had in understanding English syntactic movement in the formation of noun clauses. The research was carried out at Cukurova University at Turkey's English language teaching department. Participants were 17 Turkish-speaking adult learners with upper-intermediate English skills. Grammaticality Judgment Task, Scrambled Sentence Task, and Elicited Imitation Task were used to collect data. The findings indicated that learners have certain dispositional issues when it comes to recognizing specific structures in noun clauses. According to the percentage, 85.86% of learners are effective in detecting movement when the noun phrase has auxiliary (such as to be, do, and modal), but 74.83% struggle when it does not have auxiliary.

Based on the literature research and past studies, it is possible to infer that learning Noun Clause is difficult for EFL students. The problems range from grasping the meaning and purpose to identifying specific structures in noun clauses, knowing noun clause rules, recognizing noun clauses, and correctly constructing sentences containing noun clauses. Regarding the potential challenges that EFL students may have when learning noun clauses, it would be interesting to perform further research on this topic. The inquiry is required not only to learn about the types of learning issues, but also to discover how students solve their own learning problems.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out at Muhammadiyah Tangerang University in Faculty of Language and Arts, Cikokol, Tangerang, Indonesia. The writer did this study in the English Language Education Program since grammar instruction is critical for these students who are preparing to be English teachers. Through qualitative research, the researcher focused on taking an interview as a data collection. The Intermediate English Grammar class was chosen as the site of inquiry. According to the course syllabus, the Intermediate English Grammar Course needs students to recognize the value of studying specific English grammatical structures and to appropriately form constructs employing the taught English grammatical structures: the level of sentences and brief paragraphs, and one of the grammatical objects covered is the noun clause.

Participants of the Study

The study's participants were Intermediate Grammar Course students in Semester 2 of the 2022/2023 academic year. The students were 38 in the Intermediate English Grammar class, and the chosen participants in this study were 25 students.

Instruments of Data Collection

Interview was chosen to collect the data. The following questions were used as the instrument to gather data for this study by the author:
1. What are the difficulties in learning noun clause?
2. What are the strategies to comprehend noun clause?

Procedures of Data Collection

To begin, the writer scheduled an appointment with each participant. Due to time constraints, it was done for roughly 10 to 15 minutes. The questions were delivered in Indonesian to allow participants to express their thoughts in detail, allowing the writer to
obtain genuine and thorough data. The interview was executed after an Intermediate Grammar class on June 20, 2023. The author used an audio recorder to record the conversations.

Data Analysis of Procedures
The conversations that were recorded were transcribed. The transcribed data was then grouped depending on the topics provided by the writer. The themes were developed in response to the study questions: Students’ Difficulties in Learning Noun Clauses and Students’ Strategies to Handle Their Learning Problems. Based on each of them, the data was presented descriptively in the results and discussion section. Some portions from the interview results will be given in English as proof of the findings.

3. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDING
The writer offers the study's findings and discussion in this part in an attempt to address the research questions of students' difficulty learning noun clauses in the Intermediate English Grammar course. According to the interview, all 25 students agreed that mastering noun clauses is challenging. The obstacles they encountered and the methods they used to overcome them are discussed further down.

Students’ Difficulties in Learning Noun Clause
The study discovered three types of student challenges in learning noun clauses. First, the study discovered that the varied purposes of the noun clause left students perplexed when it came to recognizing the phrase's functions. That was stated by 17 of the 23 pupils. The professor frequently asked the pupils identify the purpose of a noun phrase, and these students frequently failed the test. Megginson (1996 in Kudhayer, 2013) classified noun clause functions into seven kinds. They are the noun phrase as a subject, the direct object, the indirect object, the subject complement, the object complements, the object of preposition, and the appositive.

The following is an excerpt from the discussion:
Excerpt 1:
I am really confused when I must identify every function of a noun clause.
So many types of noun clause and it makes me confused to understand each type. (Participant 1)

Excerpt 2:
If I have to determine a function of a noun clause, I always make mistakes because too many functions of noun clause and it is difficult to be learned. (Participant 15)

Excerpt 3:
To find the functions of noun clause is really hard for me to do because one noun clause has different function. (Participant 26)

According to the pupils, the greatest difficulty that generated confusion in learning was the diverse roles of noun clauses. The findings are comparable to those of Khudayer (2013), who discovered that 56.1% of 60 Iraqi learners had trouble understanding the functions of noun clauses because they did not comprehend the distinctions well enough.

The second problem discovered in this study is creating a noun clause on your own.
7 of the total 23 students stated that it is difficult for them to produce a noun clause that expresses a specific function because they are unable to identify the function appropriately. The following is an extract from the conversation.

**Excerpt 4:**
when I have to make a noun clause is the most difficult thing because I still don’t understand each type of noun clause. (Participant 9)

As seen in the excerpt, it is understandable for the students to struggle with creating a noun clause when they have yet to grasp the rules of each function. As a result, pupils may make errors when constructing phrases with a noun clause. Participants in Khudayer's (2013) study also had difficulty developing formulations with noun clauses.

Third, six of the twenty-three students said that they had difficulty recognizing the subject and verb when studying noun clauses. The following is an excerpt from the discussion:

**Excerpt 5**
It is not easy to determine the subject and the verb of a noun clause. It makes me still confused every time I execute the exercise (Participant 5)

**Excerpt 6**
It’s really difficult for me to determine the subject and the verb, because I’m still get confused enough to understand more about noun clause. (Participant 17)

The excerpts reveal that students commonly struggled to identify the subject and verb when doing an exercise on that topic. It's possible since students lacked the ability to comprehend the stuff they had learnt. It is comparable to the findings of Khudayer's (2013) study, in which pupils struggled with recognition due to inadequate understanding in the foreign language. In other words, pupils may fail the recognition level because they do not comprehend the underlying ideas.

**Students’ Strategies to Comprehend Noun Clause**

Students must experience challenges in every learning process. However, they must constantly have their own solutions in order to overcome obstacles. This study discovered three methods in which students try to solve their learning problems deal with noun clause. The first thing students did to deal with the learning difficulty was to go over the material again. Thirteen of the twenty-three students believed that rereading textbook materials aided their learning. The following is an extract from the discussion:

**Excerpt 7**
Usually, I often review the material to make me more understood about Noun Clause (Participant 12)

According to the excerpt, studying the materials will assist the student in gaining a deeper comprehension of what they have learnt. The manner in which pupils tackle situations by reviewing material can be incorporated into direct strategies, which are classified as memory strategies.

According to Yalcin (2005), memory methods enabled learners to form mental links, use imagery and sound, study thoroughly, and utilize actions. As a result, revisiting content may be included into a memory technique.
The second method is to ask your peers. Eleven of the twenty-three students said that they solved their learning challenge by consulting their friends. The following is an excerpt from the discussion.

**Excerpt 8**
I’m not too shy to ask my lecturer if I get confusion, so I can choose my friend to help me in understanding the material (Participant 16)

Inquiring with peers is an indirect method that is classified as a social strategy. According to Yalcin (2005), social strategies are concerned with communication between and among individuals, such as asking questions, working with others, and empathizing with others. As a result, asking peers which social techniques incorporate communication with others is an element of social strategies.

Meanwhile, 8 of the total 25 students stated that researching material and conducting exercises on the Internet is assisting their study. The students claimed that they may get more diverse material about noun clauses on the Internet in order to broaden their knowledge and gain a better understanding of how noun clauses work.

They also stated that performing activities from the internet benefits pupils more since it delivers the solution key once they complete it. They might find their mistake by consulting the answer key. The following is an excerpt from the conversation:

**Excerpt 9**
Usually, I find so many good materials and exercise in the Internet. There are so many definitions and examples. The answer keys are also included. So, it makes me clear know my mistakes and fix it. (Participant 4)

Direct strategies, which are classified as cognitive strategies, include how pupils deal with learning issues by seeking information and conducting tasks on the Internet. According to Yalcin (2005), cognitive strategies deal with working directly on incoming information and modifying it in ways that improve learning. As a result, the activity of students reading materials and conducting exercises on the Internet is a component of operational information to improve learning.

4. **CONCLUSION**
The findings demonstrated that students encountered three types of challenges when learning noun clauses, as well as three strategies for overcoming those issues. The first challenge encountered was determining the roles of the clause. Students thought it was challenging since there are so many different sorts of noun clause functions. Second, students indicated that it is difficult to create a noun clause with a specific function on their own. This might be due to their inability to distinguish each function properly. Third, students noted that it is difficult to distinguish the subject and verb when studying noun phrases since each function is distinct. To overcome each learning issue, students attempted to discover a solution to develop and produce a better learning. The students begin by reviewing content from their textbook to assist them in mastering noun clauses. Second, when they did not comprehend the materials, they questioned their classmates. Third, they attempted to acquire material and exercises on the internet that would help them expand their knowledge and obtain a better comprehension of noun clause functions. When dealing with noun clauses, students should be advised on the best technique to employ for at-home study.

However, the conclusions of this study have their own limitations due to the individuals and setting limitations. As a result, diverse studies with comparable contexts may
have a different outcome. In this scenario, the research findings cannot be extended to all circumstances.

It is also proposed that other academics who want to perform similar study widen the scope of the investigation. It would be fascinating to delve more into the difficulty of learning noun clauses with various subjects, such as comparing two distinct groups of participants based on their level or age. Finally, the author believes that this research will serve as a resource and consideration for those who work in the field of grammar instruction.

REFERENCES


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