



## EFL Learner's Beliefs in Learning Grammar

Susanti<sup>1</sup>, Sucitra Juliana Emsil<sup>2</sup>, Abdul Halim<sup>3</sup>, Dewi Atikah<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kendari, Indonesia.

<sup>2,3,4</sup>English Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kendari, Indonesia.

Corresponding email: [susanti@iainkendari.ac.id](mailto:susanti@iainkendari.ac.id)

### Article info

Submitted : 4 July 2022  
Revised : 29 August 2023  
Accepted : 3 March 2024

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to identify students' beliefs about learning grammar. Data were collected by using questionnaire and reflection of twenty-five English Education Department students. The data were analyzed based on thematic analysis which consists of six themes emerged. This study focuses on students' beliefs in learning grammar particularly on the aspect of the importance of grammar, learners' needs in learning grammar, learners' strategy in learning grammar, learners' beliefs about difficulty of grammar, learners belief on the error correction and feedback and learners confidence of using grammar in communication. This will provide information to lecturers and universities to take advantage of beliefs in learning grammar. This study thus implies that the educators can design the lesson by taking into consideration the students' beliefs.

**Keywords:** *Importance of Grammar; Learning Grammar; Students' Beliefs.*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of belief has become the focus of research in the world of education. In addition, beliefs about language learning may contain some personal assessment values of each person (Vibulpol, 2004). Puchta (1999) states that belief is a cause-and-effect relationship, and it influences our thinking about the environment around us. Belief can play an important and significant role in determining behavior and thought which is why students' beliefs related to language learning become important. This is a kind of proposition that a person can consciously or unconsciously have and is also evaluative because it is accepted as true by the person who holds it (Borg, 2001). These pre-existing beliefs play an important role to form teachers and researchers' behaviors and practices in teaching process (Incecay & Dollar, 2011). According to Davis (2003) beliefs held by language learners can provide useful insights and enlighten students' thought processes and behaviors related to language learning. All students, especially older ones, have very strong beliefs, usually based on prior learning experiences, and opinions on how instructions should be conveyed.

Beliefs about language learning have become one of researchers' interests in the field of second language acquisition. Several studies have been carried out in the last two decades to examine beliefs about language learning from various groups of second language learners and



EFL learners (Peacock, 1999; Ebrahimi et al., 2015; Sogutlu, 2016). In another study, Male (2011) examined the opinion of EFL students about the teaching of English grammar. He used a questionnaire for data collection. The findings of the study showed that most of the students saw grammar important in learning English. They report that grammar is important in writing, but is not as important in speaking. Also, the students seemed to like explicit instruction more than implicit instruction in learning English grammar.

According to Horwitz (1988) Teachers can gain better understanding of learners' expectations and satisfaction with their language classes by having the knowledge of learners' beliefs. In line with Lightbown & Spada (2013) Research has shown that learners' belief can be an influential factor in their learning experiences in the classroom. Studying learners' beliefs can help teachers set appropriate teaching strategies and develop greater flexibility in their application. In Indonesian context, there also some researchers who are aware with learner beliefs study; Amrullah et al., (2017) they studied about Language learning beliefs of Indonesian English education study program students. They conducted the study at Sriwijaya University Sumatra. Iswati (2020) investigated the learners' beliefs in learning English. There also those who took different subject that is Putrawan et al., (2019) A study on EFL learners belief about translation as a learning strategy in Indonesia. However, the grammar learning in IAIN Kendari taking place during three semesters from first until third semester English Education Department. The learning process started from part of speech until tenses. This research is necessary to know the students' perceptions in learning grammar.

Although many studies have so far been conducted on learners belief all over the world including Indonesian contexts, many researchers focus on language learning; but there are still not researchers who study about grammar especially in Kendari context where the students tend to have limited knowledge on grammar and language use. This study is therefore more significant on learners' beliefs and attitudes towards grammar skill, so that teacher or lecturer can set appropriate teaching strategies in teaching grammar.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used qualitative research where the method of content analysis was used to collect the research results. The study intends to perceive what the students in English education department of higher education beliefs about learning grammar. The participant of this study involved the students of the English Education Department in the fourth semester. The participants of this research consist of 25 students, and this was done purposively. The criteria used to select the participants are always present in every class meeting and have good internet access. Collecting data is an important part of every research to find out the information needed in that research. In collecting data researchers used questionnaires and journal reflection. This test is done in one week. There are two steps taken by the researcher to get the data from this research. The first, researcher prepared questionnaires guidelines related to the field of the study. Then the researcher explained to the participants what questionnaires are and how to answer the questions. Then the researcher collected data for one week. After all data is collected, the researcher analyzed the answers from the participants for two days. After a week, the researcher



prepared the second data that is reflection guidelines related to the title of the study. Then the researcher explained to the respondents what reflection is and how to answer the questions. The researcher gave the students three days to fill the reflection. After all data was collected, researcher analyzed all students answers regarding their beliefs of grammar skill for one week. To collect data in this study, the researcher prepared a test sheet (Google form). Not only that, the researcher confirmed to participants that they would be participants of this research and the researcher also explained the aims and objectives of giving questionnaires and reflecting to the participants. After the participants agreed to this, the researchers were able to collect all the necessary data.

## RESULT

### **Belief about the importance of grammar**

*It helps master the language.*

In learning grammar, students argue that grammar is an important thing that they must know to master a language. As narrated of one of students' reflection:

*"In my opinion, learning grammar is important, because grammar serves to organize the use of the language we use." (S.T9)*

From the students' narration above revealed that for mastering English language the students have to learn grammar. Therefore, grammar is important to learn.

*It improves writing quality.*

In learning grammar, most students argue that grammar is an important thing that they must master in case to make good writing. As five students narrated on student reflections:

*"I think it is important, because we need to learn it so that we can write sentences with good grammar, and it is very necessary in the process of preparing journals or articles." (S.T2)*

The student's narration above revealed that for make a good writing, the students must learn grammar. Therefore, grammar is important to learn.

*It supports students' communication ability.*

From the results of student reflection on the importance of grammar, it was also found that students argue that grammar is important to help students in communicating. The students' responses based on the statement are as follows:

*"I think it is important because when we speak, we have to use good and correct grammar. Because speaking is not just talking but requires grammar. Therefore, grammar is very important." (S.T6)*

The students' narration above revealed that to have good communication the students must learn grammar. Therefore, grammar is important to learn.

*It is an obligation for educators.*

From the results of student reflection on the importance of grammar, it was also found that students argue that grammar is an obligation for prospective English teacher. As narrated by students' reflection:

*"In my opinion, as students of English education in particular, grammar is very important because we are required to educate not only how to speak in English but to know grammar properly and correctly and it is our obligation as students who will later become educators to know grammar itself." (S.T5)*



*It will help students in the future.*

From the results of student reflection on the importance of grammar, it was also found that students argue that grammar is important for continuing higher education and in the world of work.

*“Grammar is very important in continuing higher education and in the world of work.*

*Because mastering grammar will really help achieve a high TOEFL score. By getting the highest TOEFL score, it will be easy for us to get master’s and doctoral scholarships abroad and easy to get a job because we are professionals in using good and correct English.”*

*(S.T12)*

Stand on students’ answer about their belief about the importance of grammar, students think grammar is important and helped a lot in several things. It will help students in mastering and organize the language, help in writing and speaking, also helpful for continuing higher education and in world of work.

### **Beliefs about learning strategy**

*Learning grammar through reading article and grammar book*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about learning strategy, it was found that most of the students improve their grammar through reading articles and grammar book. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*“My efforts are reading stories, articles, and journals in English. I saw how the sentence patterns in the text were formed and tried to understand them” (ST.1)*

*Learning grammar through practicing answering grammar exercises.*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about learning strategy, it was also found that students improve their grammar through practice answering grammar exercises. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*“I like to do exercises or questions in the form of grammar because that way my skills will be honed”. (ST2)*

*Learning grammar through watching videos.*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about learning strategy, it was also found that students improve their grammar through watching video. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*“My effort to learn grammar is that I often listen to music and watch variety shows that use English from where I pay attention to how he speaks and the use of grammar when he speaks. I also sometimes read some websites on Google to help me in theory”. (ST8)*

*Learning grammar through memorizing and learning tenses.*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about learning strategy, it was also found that a small number of students memorize and learn tenses to improve their grammar. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*“The effort I make to improve my English grammar skills is by frequently viewing social media accounts that contain lessons on grammar. Not infrequently, I also memorize various tenses and try to use them in everyday life. For example, when chatting with friends on social media. I also sometimes learn from English songs and see the grammar used”. (ST6)*

Based on these reflections it can be concluded that students have variety of strategy to improve their grammar skill, but most strategy that the students use was reading various book such as article, grammar book, and journal and practice answering grammar exercises.





### **Learners' beliefs about grammar difficulties level**

*Difficulties to memorize and learn the formulas of tenses.*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about difficulty of grammar, it was found that students had quite hard to memorize the formulas of tenses. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"In my opinion learning grammar is quite difficult because there are many parts or sentence patterns that must be studied, and it often makes students feel bored and lazy to learn grammar". (ST2)*

*Difficulties choosing vocabulary.*

From the results of student reflection on the beliefs about the difficulty of grammar, it was also found that students were quite difficult to choose the appropriate words. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"Learning English grammar is not easy. Where you must be able to memorize formulas or a lot of vocabulary. Another difficulty is making sentences that are grammatically correct. Then choose the right vocabulary so that the sentence can be translated according to 100%. It was very difficult because many words had the same meaning but in different forms. Sometimes I still like to make mistakes in choosing vocabulary in making sentences". (ST14)*

From the statement above, the following were the data obtained by the researcher regarding the difficulties of students in grammar learning all of students stated that learning grammar is quite difficult. Some of the student answers displayed is representative of all student answers.

### **The confidence of using grammar in communication**

*Students are not confident.*

From the results of student reflection on the confidence of using grammar in communication, it was found that students were not confident with their grammar knowledge. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

*"So far, I have not been confident when speaking in English in front of other people, and it sometimes makes me feel embarrassed to speak in person. I prefer to write down or arrange the sentences I want to say in advance, I do this to ensure that my grammar is used correctly". (ST2)*

*Students are confident.*

Furthermore, there were two students who stated that they confidence with their grammar knowledge in communicating because she has mastered the pattern of making sentences and often practice communicating with friends.

*"I'm confident. In communicating, people tend to use patterns or sentence structures that are not too difficult. And so far, I feel that I have quite mastered the pattern of compiling simple sentences that are commonly used in everyday life. In addition, I quite often practice with my friends. So, in communicating, I no longer doubted my grammar skills." (S.T10)*

## **DISCUSSION**

In this section, the researcher presented a discussion of the research findings. This study analyzed students' beliefs regarding their grammar learning. The data were obtained through two instruments, questionnaire and reflection. At the beginning, based on the learners' beliefs on



definition of grammar, the researcher notice that mostly students' have perception to the definition of grammar that grammar is a set of structures and rules of a language. This study in line with the previous study that has been carried out which explains view towards the grammar definition who perceived grammar as a set of rules in which the words can help learners with what to say in order to speak a language (Swan's, 2005). In addition, it also corresponded by Isyam (2007) who has attempted to describe grammar based on concepts suggested by some experts. According to the definition, grammar is a set of definite rules for arranging words and other components to form correct sentences in a specific language, which provide meaning to whoever uses the language, whether speaking, listening, writing, reading, or even thinking.

As results revealed, all the participants share a very positive attitude towards grammar knowledge and grammar instruction in the EFL classroom. The researcher notice that students agree that grammar is important and has to be learnt because grammar is the main element to master English and it will help them in writing, speaking, communicating also for continuing higher education and in world of work. The importance of grammar in foreign language acquisition had been highlighted in Tajzadeh, Khodabandehlou, and Jahandar (2013) who considered writing as a significant factor in learning grammar and declared that learning the grammatical rules was required to write a foreign language accurately. It was in line with Incecay and Dollar (2011) found that most students liked studying grammar since it has been believed to be an important component of language to be able to communicate with foreign people. It also supported by Sogutlu (2016) stated that a vast majority agrees that grammar is essential to mastery of the language and think they will have learned the language after having learned its grammar.

This research also showed that the majority of students are learning grammar through reading articles and grammar books. Other than that, some students learn grammar through practice answering grammar exercises and watch video via social media (YouTube and Ted talks). It was in line with Burke & Snyder (2008) stated that YouTube is a valuable instructional resource and a teaching supplement, can motivate and engage students and assist their digital learning. As a free teaching and learning resource, YouTube is a significant consideration for educational budgets. It was also supported by Tan & Pearce (2011) who indicated that the use of video in education was an effective way to engage students and support their understanding. Video, one such technological tool, has been found to be efficient for grammar instruction because it provides learners with rich input, exposes them to authentic language through auditory and visual channels, and motivates them to learn the target language (Cabrera, Castillo, González, Quiñónez & Ochoa, 2018). Further, a small number of students memorize and learn tenses. While one participant takes grammar courses to improve her grammar skill.

Furthermore, the findings from the questionnaire about students' beliefs on errors correction and feedback, majority of students expect the teacher to correct their errors and explain to them. It was in line with Incecay and Dollar (2011) found that a striking number of the students wanted to have an immediate error correction by the teacher. It was also supported by Kavaliauskienė and Anusienė (2012) reported that learners' positive view on teacher-correction related to the importance of learning to speak English correctly. Error correction was another



element aimed to be inspected and the data show that students believe that corrective feedback has a positive role in their EFL learning (Sogutlu, 2016).

Reflection results also showed that the majority of students stated that learning grammar is quite difficult. Students found it quite hard to memorize the formulas of tenses. Then it was also quite difficult to understand the changing of the word form (part of speech) in a sentence. Then another student said that it was difficult to learn grammar because it was hard to choose the appropriate words to make sentences. It was in line with Parrot (2010) stated Indonesian learners are having difficulties in understanding and using English tenses and aspects appropriately. Therefore, choosing what tense should be used in a sentence as well as the changing verbs in the tense is difficult for the learners since their language does not mark this kind of distinction. It also supported by Richards (2005) mentioned the majority of the students have problems with past perfect tense, past perfect continuous tense, and future perfect continuous tense. This finding indicates that the students are in difficulties in understanding and using complex tenses. The three tenses have the “perfect” aspect, and it creates problems for either elementary or advanced levels of EFL learners.

Further, based on the reflection it is indicated that most of the students stated that they were not confident with their grammar knowledge because they do not really understand the use of tenses. Furthermore, there were two students who stated that they confidence with their grammar knowledge in communicating because she has mastered the pattern of making sentences and often practice communicating with friends. In addition, there were one student stated that sometimes confident and sometimes they are not confident if communicating with fellow friends they feel confident. But if they communicate with a lecturer or a professional, they feel a little insecure.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to know EFL learners’ beliefs about learning grammar in grammar class during learning grammar. This study revealed that students mostly agree that grammar is important in learning English. The result of students’ questionnaire and reflection showed six beliefs: learners’ beliefs on definition of grammar, beliefs on errors correction and feedback in learning grammar, beliefs about the importance of grammar, beliefs about learning strategy, belief about difficulty of grammar, and the confidence of using grammar in communicating.

Concerning beliefs on definition of grammar, mostly students have perception to the definition of grammar that grammar is a set of structures and rules of a language. While students beliefs on errors correction and feedback, the majority of students expect the teacher to correct their errors and explain to them.

For the belief on the importance of grammar, this study revealed that the majority of students share a very positive attitude towards grammar knowledge in the EFL classroom. Students agree that grammar is important and has to be learnt because grammar is the main element to master English and it will help them in writing, speaking, communicating also for continuing higher education and in world of work. With regards to the belief on the strategy used in learning, this study revealed that students liked reading article and grammar book, practice



answering grammar exercises, watch video via social media (YouTube and ted talks), memorize and learn tenses, and the last is take grammar courses to improve their grammar knowledge. While for belief about difficulty of grammar, this study revealed that students stated that learning grammar is quite difficult. Students found it quite hard to memorize the formulas of tenses. Then it was also quite difficult to understand the changing of the word form (part of speech) in a sentence. Then another student said that it was difficult to learn grammar because it was hard to choose the appropriate words to make sentences. Finally, beliefs about students' confidence of using grammar in communicating. Most of the students stated that they were not confident with their grammar knowledge because do not really understand the use of tenses. Furthermore, there were students who stated that they confidence with their grammar knowledge in communicating because she have mastered the pattern of making sentences and often practice communicating with friends. Next, there were students stated that sometimes confident and sometimes not, according to whom the interlocutor.

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