

EFL STUDENTS' LEARNING ANXIETY IN USING GRAMMAR AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to discover how students experienced learning anxiety when using English grammar in vocational high schools. This study used a descriptive quantitative method with 36 vocational high students of the eleventh grade in the areas of West Java and Jakarta as the participants. The data included the participants' perspectives on their learning anxiety about grammar use in English learning. Based on the results, as many as 15% of students experienced a lack of motivation, 49% experienced insecurity, and 37% of students did not understand English grammar. As a result, students experienced significant learning anxiety while using the English language in a discourse without having a strong command of the language. It is then recommended that this study enable vocational high school students and teachers to find solutions to anxiety about using English in order that students can learn English grammar without anxiety or having fears.

Keywords: Anxiety; English Learning; Grammar Use; Vocational High School

INTRODUCTION

English is a worldwide language and is taught in numerous nations across the world. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all skills of 'English language. In the context of English components, grammar is one of the fundamental skills that must be mastered to be successful in academic writing at educational institutions. Thus, students must utilize standardized grammar and follow

grammatical norms. However, without instruction, students cannot develop their linguistic abilities. As a way to improve their spelling, grammar, and punctuation, many domestic student groups require practical interventions (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2023). As a result, grammar instruction was not isolated to other abilities in the process of language learning since learning grammar is integrated into the study of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students can sometimes make mistakes when writing and completing sentences or essays in English due to the language used.

Grammar is a necessary linguistic system that must be taught in English classes for broad reasons. Grammar instruction develops the intentional use of language, understanding, and expressive skills. When teaching foreign languages, grammar teaching stimulates the students to correctly learn and apply the language while also developing a person's language skills by publishing information in mother tongue education.

Grammar is one of the problems the EFL students face when learning a foreign language. Regarding grammar, Sila (2010) reported that adolescent students fear negative assessment of grammar by teachers, and as a result, it was found that high school students felt anxious because most of the class time was focused only on grammar class (Rachmawaty et al., 2019). Furthermore, the lack of grammatical accuracy could be the factor influencing the increased risk of students' anxiety in writing (Rasool et al., 2023). For students to properly articulate their ideas and accurately interpret them, they must understand grammatical conventions. The purpose of studying grammar is to talk and write in a clearer and more effective manner (Royani & Sadiyah, 2019). It shows that grammar is important in communication since it demonstrates how language is used. Thus, when students grasp good grammar, they can readily, clearly, and precisely articulate their ideas.

Anxiety is a state of tension, dread, nervousness, and worry that an individual experiences as a result of an activation of the autonomic nervous system. Anxiety is a psychological concept that psychologists often define as a sensation of apprehension, a nebulous fear that is only tangentially tied to an object (Oflaz, 2019). In the context of learning a foreign or second language, anxiety refers to the feeling of being extremely worried about the new language being learned. Anxiety exhibits symptoms like dry mouth, worry, discomfort, concern, avoid speaking, and struggle with language learning.

A mental and physical condition known as anxiety is characterized by certain symptoms of emotion, physics, cognition, and behavior. Since they must process linguistic material while also developing their own thoughts, students who learn English as a second or foreign language experience difficulties when they are anxious. According to research on the impact of anxiety in learning a foreign

language, anxiety has a negative effect on the performance of EFL students.(Anggraeny et al., 2020).

Grammar anxiety can impair other abilities like speaking and writing. The grammar encourages the speaker to speak slowly and hesitantly. In other words, it makes someone feel anxious. In fact, it is suitable for sending and typing text messages. This is because speakers and writers try to focus on mentally analyzing grammatical rules rather than using them (Sabah & Mahmood, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that a number of variables affect students' nervousness when speaking English. It was discovered in a study (Salmiah & Fitriyani, 2022). The findings in their research are that there were two types of student anxiety, namely, self-related anxiety and social factor anxiety. Moreover, the anxiety factor is more on the lack of understanding of English grammar. Another study by (Rachmawaty et al., 2019) found that a lot of research shows anxiety as a barrier to language learning and a negative variable in L2 or FL learning. Anxiety could be a significant factor in L2 learning (Amini, 2022) (Syahbani & Apoko, 2023). In a report on language anxiety among 242 students in a Philippine learning institution, (Jugo, 2020) disclosed that behaviors such as speaking in error correction and oral communication with English speakers brought about high anxiety among Filipino students, while writing in negative self-perception and lack of understanding caused moderate anxiety.

Other studies conducted by (Septiana & Agustina, 2020; Siregar, 2022) disclosed that students noticed signs of anxiety and some students became anxious, feared making mistakes in the target language, and avoided or participated in classes because they were afraid and ashamed to use English. In addition, it was said that the majority of students (78.38%) felt that they always struggled to make proper and correct sentences due to their lack of knowledge of grammar (Alisha et al., 2019). The study of problems involving the synthesis of grammar and structure in Indonesian TOEFL by (Hampp et al., 2021) demonstrated that there was a lack of vocabulary and grammatical practice. Meanwhile, (Tambunan et al., 2022) investigated EFL students' linguistic barriers using Grammarly as automated writing evaluation feedback, and they found that grammar was the main problem students had. Thus, teachers were expected to provide online corrective feedback for students in the academic writing course learning process. Another study (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020) on EFL students' problems in using tenses found that EFL students experienced problems with some tenses that have long formulas and are rarely used.

As many relevant studies emphasize on EFL students' lack of grammar use and their anxiety to use English in general schools, this current study focuses on students' anxiety on the use of grammar use in the level of vocational high school, and this study is rare to conduct by other previous studies. Therefore, this research

is expected to contribute critical views for students to anticipate their learning anxiety in practicing English better in the future. One research question addressed, namely: How do EFL students experience their anxiety in using English grammar in vocational high school?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Grammar

Grammar is an important component of English (Aniuranti et al., 2021). It is concerned with the principles of language usage that contribute to sentence creation (Rachmawaty et al., 2019). Grammar teaching should thus be done successfully and given prominence in grammar education (Gülen Canlı & Tepeli, 2019). Grammar is not a talent with subjects and rules that students must memorize; rather, it is the skill of effectively applying, interpreting, analyzing, and recreating (Çelikpazu, 2022).

Grammar education is the most problematic area in mother tongue education (Çelikpazu, 2022). Grammar can create an atmosphere of discomfort and even fear in students, and also it is often difficult for many students to understand (Aniuranti et al., 2021). Learning a language involves not only studying the various language competence skills but also going into the fundamental set of rules that control how sentences are put together in the target language. Despite the fact that numerous studies on grammar instruction and acquisition have been carried out, they tended to disregard how pupils felt about and approached studying grammar.

In addition, guidance and Learning grammar and writing in a foreign/second language (L2) has long been a challenge for both teachers and students in the long run (Al-Jarf, 2022). Grammar and spelling errors and weaknesses are a major concern for many (L2) teachers and students. Some researchers study grammatical errors to address spelling errors, especially grammatical errors. According to Kampookaew (2020), it was found a grammatical mistake by his EFL student in Thailand in writing an essay. Errors found were nouns, verbs, and errors in parts of speech, articles, and prepositions. Singular and plural errors were also included, accounting for 84.07% of all errors, as well as the wrong use of singular and plural nouns, subject-verb conflicts, and article deletion (Al-Jarf, 2022).

Learning anxiety

Talking about anxiety is a comprehensive human response to risk or threat; each person has unique thoughts and disturbances that remind them of their fear (Salmiah & Fitriyani, 2022). According to empirical studies on foreign language anxiety, students experience some level of worry when learning a foreign language, and scholars agree that anxiety is associated with proficiency (Jawas, 2019).

In English skills, anxiety is mostly brought on by concerns about fluency, intonation, and pronunciation, fears of using the target language with others, speaking about unfamiliar topics, and time constraints. These concerns were mentioned as other major causes of speaking anxiety (Pahargyan, 2021). Moreover, other elements that influence learners' anxiety levels include low vocabulary knowledge, lack of confidence, attitudes toward the target language, confusion in grammar, and previous exposure to the target language. Anxiety problems are considered to mostly happen in speaking skills between other English skills (Hudayani et al., 2020). However, speaking and writing skills are also important to be researched further in terms of anxiety factors, as both are productive skills.

As it may hinder students from learning their target language, anxiety about learning a foreign language plays a significant role in the process. As a result of the distinctive nature of the language learning process, foreign language anxiety is a true self-perception, mood, and behavior pattern. Additionally, anxiety associated with learning a foreign language is a situational type of anxiety (Abdullah et al., 2022) that is linked to the language learning environment and does not appear to have a strong relationship to other types of anxiety.

Affective variable anxiety affects cognitive development, which has a negative impact on learning (Çelikpazu, 2022). Individual differences in learners' beliefs, attitudes, expectations, motivation, and emotions are linked to their level of anxiety. As students build opinions and attitudes regarding language acquisition, anxiety may develop. If students' initial impressions of language learning are unfavorable, anxiety may start to develop, and if unfavorable experiences continue, anxiety may cause students to develop unfavorable opinions about themselves.

Horwitz describes foreign language anxiety as a unique complex structure made up of beliefs, self-perceptions, actions, and emotions associated with intra-class language acquisition that result from the unique characteristics of the language learning process (Coşkun & Taşgın, 2018). When speaking with others, communication anxiety is a sign of nervousness. Communication anxiety also includes having trouble listening to and comprehending verbal material, as well as having trouble speaking to people one-on-one or in front of a group. Overthinking not only distracts the student from focusing on the proper use of the language whenever it is necessary, but it also results in poor learning outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive quantitative method with 36 students of the eleventh grade at Muhammadiyah Vocational High School Number 2 in West Java, Bina Prestasi Vocational School, Yapimda Vocational High School, and Vocational High School Number 12 in Jakarta as the participants in which the data include the

participants' perspectives on their learning anxiety of grammar use in English learning.

The instrument of this study was a questionnaire consisting of 15 statements that used the Likert scale as a measure from strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral (N), agree (A), to strongly agree (SA) with two types of questions, namely a positive question to measure a positive scale, and a negative question to measure a negative scale. Positive questions are scored 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, while negative questions are scored 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. There are three aspects of measuring anxiety in the questionnaire: motivation with two questions, insecurity with eight questions, and understanding with five questions. The questionnaire was distributed to the students of four vocational schools in Jakarta who were willing to complete the questionnaire. This study analyzed data using saturated sampling techniques as the study relatively had a small population size. In analyzing the data, the steps taken were checking and calculating the score of each answer chosen by the students on the questionnaire that has been given in the form of percentages and in descriptive statistics to determine the mean and standard deviation for each item.

FINDING

This section presents some results related to how vocational high school students experienced their learning anxiety in the use of grammar to practice English. The following table shows three categories as factors that affect the students' anxiety: motivation, insecurity, and understanding.

Table 1. Students' Anxiety on the Use of Grammar

Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA	Σ	%	Mean	STDEV
Motivation									
1. I have great enthusiasm to learn grammar in class.	2	3	9	10	12	135	8%	3.75	1.18
2. I feel less motivated in learning English grammar.	9	9	10	7	1	126	7%	2.50	1.16
Insecurity									
3. I am more often silent when the teacher asks questions about grammar.	8	12	9	3	4	125	7%	3.36	0.99
4. I prefer to sit at the back rather than the front during English grammar lessons.	8	13	8	2	5	125	7%	2.53	1.25
5. I am afraid that if I use the wrong grammar, my friends will laugh at me.	6	7	8	9	6	106	6%	2.53	1.30
6. I get excited when the teacher forbids English grammar.	11	10	9	3	3	131	8%	3.06	1.35
7. I feel insecure about my grammar when asked to	4	5	12	9	6	100	6%	2.69	1.19

	write a sentence on the blackboard.									
8.	I feel anxious when I speak English with wrong grammar.	1	3	11	11	10	134	8%	3.28	1.16
9.	I am afraid of being wrong in terms of writing English as my knowledge of grammar is inadequate.	2	3	10	14	7	126	7%	2.36	1.25
	Understanding									
10.	I do not memorize all the formulas in the grammar.	2	3	15	12	4	95	5%	3.22	1.22
11.	I always answer the teacher's questions about grammar.	7	7	16	2	4	97	6%	3.25	1.27
12.	I am confused about the use of grammar.	3	5	13	9	6	98	6%	3.08	1.08
13.	I often make grammar mistakes in writing and speaking.	5	3	13	8	7	117	7%	3.72	1.06
14.	I rarely use grammar other than simple present and simple past.	3	7	13	10	3	111	6%	3.58	1.08
15.	I do not master the basic rules of written English grammar	5	7	11	8	5	119	7%	3.03	1.25
							Total =	1745	100%	

These results are then presented in figure 1 to illustrate the level of anxiety factors. It points out that insecurity in using English grammar becomes the dominant level experienced by the students.

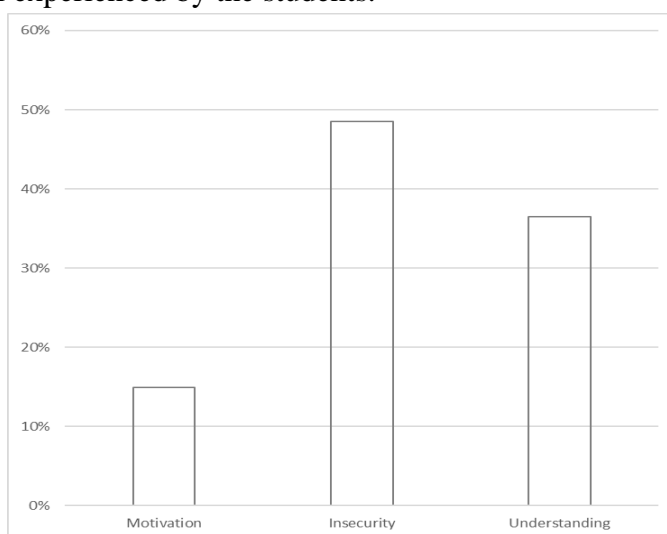


Figure 1. Diagram of Students' Anxiety Factor Grouping Results

From the Figure 1, there were factors of anxiety about using English grammar in English for Vocational High School students which lack of motivation

in using English grammar, insecure in using English grammar, and lack understanding of English grammar.

Lack of motivation in using English grammar

Based on the answers from 36 Vocational High School students, as many as 15% of students experienced a lack of motivation in using English grammar. It indicated that they felt less motivated to practice English, mainly in using English grammar correctly. However, it was found that they had great enthusiasm for using English grammar for English practice.

Insecure in using English grammar

From the answers of 36 Vocational High School students, as many as 49% of students experienced insecurity in using English grammar. It indicated that the students were more often silent when the teacher asked questions about grammar. The students preferred to sit at the back rather than the front. During English grammar lessons, the students were afraid that if they used the wrong grammar, their friends would laugh at them. In addition, they got excited when the teacher forbid English grammar. Then, students felt insecure about their grammar when asked to write a sentence on the board. Students also felt anxious when they spoke English with the wrong grammar.

Lack of understanding English grammar

In line with the responses from 36 Vocational High School students, as many as 37% of students did not understand English grammar. The students realized that they were lacking knowledge of English grammar even though they had studied it since junior high school. They did not understand grammar related to memorizing grammar formulas. The students rarely used other tenses besides simple present tense and simple past tense. Apart from the formula, they did not understand the basic rules of written English grammar which included subject verbs, noun phrases, word orders, conjunctions.

The following is presented a diagram illustrating the students' anxiety in using English grammar.

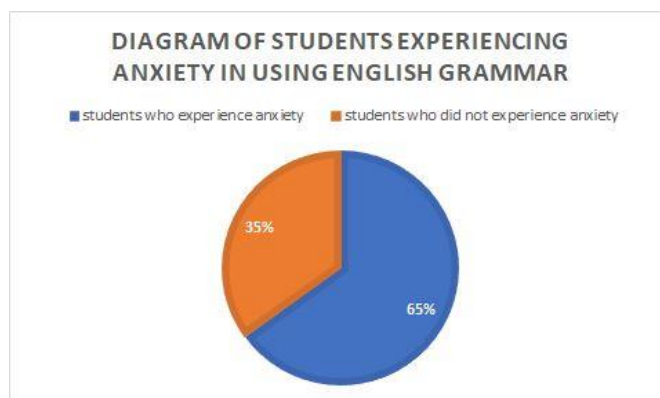


Figure 2. Diagram of the Students Experiencing Anxiety in Using English Grammar

Figure 2 shows that there were 65% of students who experienced anxiety in using English grammar. It tended that more students felt less motivated and insecure in using English grammar for their communication to other students. In addition, lack of understanding on the use of English grammar could be a barrier for the students to be better in learning English.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to discover how students experienced their anxiety in using English grammar in vocational high schools. As this study points out there are three factors affecting the students' anxiety in learning English such as motivation, insecurity and lack of understanding.

Dealing with the students' motivation, in a study by (Salmiah & Fitriyani, 2022), they found that the students had low motivation to study in English Department. Thus, they have never been interested in learning English grammar. Consequently, the students lacked motivation to learn grammar, so the students experienced anxiety in learning and using English. It is also supported by (Amini, 2022), who found that the students had low motivation to study English grammar. Therefore, they used flipped classrooms, and it could enhance students' motivation in learning English grammar. It is better for teachers to use interesting learning methods so that students' motivation in learning and using English grammar could increase.

Related to the insecurity in using English grammar, these findings were in line with a study by (Patricia, 2021) who pointed out that there were some students who stated that confidence in speaking is number 2 and the most important is grammar, then 4 out of 10 students stated that they believed if all English students had high confidence, they would have the ability to speak. It is also supported by a result showing that the use of grammar is one of the factors that influence a person's lack of confidence in speaking English (Fatmawati et al., 2020). Therefore, students rarely use English grammar and experience anxiety in using English grammar

(Giray et al., 2022). As a result, students experienced significant anxiety while using the English language in a discourse without having a strong command of the language. This result is emphasized by (Giray et al., 2022), who stated that a student's comprehension of concepts required for utilizing the English language made them more hesitant to do so, and vocabulary and other essential elements of the English language are the important ones.

The other result of the lack of understanding of the use of English grammar is supported by a study indicating that students had a high level of English writing anxiety, especially in the grammar aspect, which was becoming the main problem (Hartono & Maharani, 2020). In addition, most students dominantly had affirmative responses that the main reason for being anxious in using English was making errors in grammar (Giray et al., 2022). However, one study showed that anxiety reduced significantly in experimental class. Thus, students had some progress, particularly in grammar (Jin et al., 2021). The other result also reported that the experimental group had improved significantly their writing performance as there was a decrease in one aspect of anxiety (Sun & Fan, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Grammar is an essential linguistic system that must be taught in English classrooms, as English is a language that is spoken all over the world. One of the challenges the EFL students encounter when studying a foreign language is grammar. Students fear teachers giving them poor grades on their grammar. As this makes some students feel worried and uncomfortable, students' fear of using grammar can affect other skills, such as speaking and writing. Based on the results, 65% of Vocational High School students experienced anxiety in using grammar. This could happen due to several factors, namely low motivation, high insecurity, and low understanding of grammar. As many as 15% of students experienced a lack of motivation in using English grammar, 49% of students experienced insecurity in using English grammar, and 37% of students did not understand English grammar.

This current study is believed to have some limitations. Though this study covered four schools in some areas, yet the participants as not as many as expected. Thus, other studies in the future are required to have better results of the study. It is then recommended that this study enable vocational high school students and teachers to find solutions to anxiety about using English grammar in order that students can learn English grammar without anxiety.

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