

## **Exploring Indonesian EFL Learners' Perception of English Learning Grammar**

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### **Abstract**

*This study presents Indonesia English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' perception of English learning grammar in response of 'stigma' appeared among learners where grammar is considered as a difficult but crucial sub-skill to master. The goals of this research are specifically to figure out whether and how grammar is seen as its disreputable status as well as to explore their competence or motivation, what obstacles that learners experience while studying it, and which learning models that learners prefer to apply in their grammar learning. To achieve that aims, this study involves 500 respondents from three different levels of education; lower secondary school learners, upper secondary school learners, and university learners across country using online closes-ended and open-ended questionnaires. The data then was analyzed on the corridor of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The result of this study showed that Indonesia EFL learners truly viewed grammar as difficult but essential to learn and master. Learners had also stated that teachers' factors and English school textbook became dominant obstacle in comprehending grammar. Last, learners were likely to choose variative models of learning, particularly technology in learning grammar.*

*Keywords: EFL learners, grammar, perception.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Grammar, like many people have known, is defined as a systematic pattern of language or simply understand as rules that form a language (Kroeger, 2005; Cowan, 2008). This notion is eminent to often be used to describe grammar in variety of language including

English. Not like others, English grammar is unique, and its movement is so dynamic over decades. If we look at historical side, English grammar has developed from old English structure to middle English to at last modern English construction (See on Gelderen, 2006). English grammar that exists now firms to modern English format where it tends to be seen as a prescriptive study or known as formal grammar; more up-to-date for learners to apply. This formal grammar has been taught at school since long time ago (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1990), and it becomes prominent area to study and explore.

There are number of reasons that make English formal grammar study is fascinating to be explored by many researchers around the world. English grammar has been well-known associated for its two main statuses; disreputable and decent, which make researchers put a lot of interest to it. At first, grammar has notorious stigma because it is commonly viewed as difficult or frightening subject on the eyes of many learners who study it (Al-mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011). However, there is also a strong and positive “belief” about grammar from learners which views how crucial it is to study and master (Widodo, 2006). This is a such of dilemma; in one side, it is hard to learn, but on the other side, it is important to acquire. Hence, many researchers stick their study to investigate more about English grammar. Their researches are varied depends on area that they are looking for or concern most.

In the context of Indonesia, for sure, plenty researchers has studied English grammar for their own purpose. Again, they mostly feel interested to discover grammar issue experienced by the learners since English is recognized and categorized as foreign language in Indonesia (Lauder, 2008). To be noticed first, grammar learning or study in Indonesia is “a must” or undeniable for learners as it is inserted to school curriculum at tiered levels of study (See in Spolsky & Sung, 2015; Komariah, 2017). This situation creates complexity, particularly in understanding the concept of grammar and how to apply it comprehensively. EFL learners in Indonesia mostly do not have English knowledge background, and potentially, they get problem in learning English.

A study from Stardy (2011) for instance, has found that many of his learners are known hard in learning English grammar than other sub-skills or skills of English. Another research from Sary (2015) also has exposed that 98% of her learners really get difficulties or weaknesses in learning or mastering English grammar. Those literatures have shown that learning and mastering grammar are true a challenge for EFL learners in Indonesia, and mastering grammar are not easy as teachers imagine. However, it is still unclear whether or not Indonesia EFL learners “in general” truly feel problem in learning grammar which effects their English proficiency. It can be case by case or lies in particular context. It is true, those literatures have shown that grammar problem occurred and experienced by learners, but it is better to investigate more deeply to focus on the learners’ perspective within high number of them and wide scale research to expose. Involving many learners, of course, can be the valuable source of information in validating this issue.

As it is mentioned previously, the best ways to find out about grammar learning problems is through the learners themselves. If in the perspective of learning English for specific purposes or (ESP) is known as Need Analysis, which is a way that is done by teachers to be able to determine the initial status of their learners and treatment to be used for

learners (Brown, 2016), in this matter, we can do the same thing by confronting issue of grammar which is always be negative stigma but crucial to study for learners in mastering English or even added with others related questions about English learning grammar such as their competence and motivation, what obstacles or challenges that they experience while studying grammar, or which models of English learning grammar that they prefer to apply in their study. This can be exposed through the corridor of perception study of grammar learning from the learners' point of view.

Perception is a process of operating the humans' senses simultaneously with experiences, and behaviors (Goldstein, 2010). Perception was first reviewed by a German psychologist, Wilhelm Wundt (1879) in the context of psychology who tried to extract a person's information to the world through a process of sensory stimulus (Bennet, 1973). We know, humans have senses that function to see things, hear sounds, and feel somethings. Using perception study may expose humans' experience of world realities that differ from one another. Perception studies have been widely used not only in psychology or philosophy, but also in various fields of science, including education. Valle & Halling (1989) revealed that perception is a valid source of information because it can represent the human cognitive function of something. Perception is the best way to connect between the ability of human cognition with experience of world reality (Toivanen, 2013). Perception seems suitable to explore more of this English learning grammar issue faced by learners.

Underlying the concern and points of interest above, the researchers found gaps and tries to validate issues first of English learning grammar condition in Indonesia from the EFL learners' perspective within high number of participants and wide scale of research. Then, this research will look and add more questions on the possible obstacles that learners experienced as well as will discover grammar learning models in which learners prefer to use for their English grammar study. The researchers state 3 main questions in this study; 1) How is grammar is viewed and perceived by EFL learners in Indonesia? 2) What are the obstacles faced by EFL learners while learning English grammar? and 3) What should be the ideal models of grammar learning chosen by English learners in Indonesia? Therefore, this research may reveal the authentic perceptions of Indonesia EFL learners towards English learning grammar they study.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research around the study of EFL learners' perceptions of grammar has been widely carried out, one of them is by Alhaysony and Alhaisoni (2017) who explored the perception of learners and teachers towards English learning grammar. Their research was conducted in the context of Saudi Arabia with some focuses on uncovering grammatical difficulties from the perspective of learners (universities) and lecturers and knowing which English grammar features were considered difficult by them. In addition, their study also tried to explore the reasons and causes of the difficulties that the research subjects experienced. The results of their study showed that learners' perceptions of grammar tend to be difficult as it is influenced by various reasons or factors. The cause of grammar difficulties was concluded related to the knowledge and influence of L1, L2 proficiency, complexity of grammatical aspects, factors of learners and lecturers themselves, as well as the poor quality of textbooks used by students. Shortly, this opens great chance to find more than Alhaysony and

Alhaisoni (2017) did. It is believed that there will be more causes and reasons that this research may expose.

Similar research was also published by Xiao (2019) with aims to explore the perceptions of Chinese learners (upper secondary school) from the perspective of attitude, style, and expectations especially what methods are preferred and expected by students when learning English grammar. The results of his study indicated that EFL learners in China had a good attitude or positive view of grammar which is important according to them although it was also difficult like EFL commonly stated. Then, learners in China preferred to choose a group of learning model to be used in the classroom as one as learners like to study grammar with fun learning concept through discovery and consultation approach. It gave learners way to do an observation, do a reasoning, and do active communication, not just listening to the teacher passively. However, Xiao (2019) is too strict to the findings that discovery and consultation approach as the main choice by upper students in China. Again, it is believed that there must be different choice of grammar learning approach, method, or media that can be figured out.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia itself, there are simply a few studies or limited source of references that focus on learners' perception of English learning grammar. Studies from Sturdy (2011) or Sary (2015) are the examples. Other research by Hendriani (2018) explored more on the selection of grammar learning methods favored by learners in Indonesia grammar. The results of her research showed that explicit (deductive) grammar and group

discussion models were preferred by learners to study in class. Unfortunately, her research did not expose other various options of grammar learning models, such as the use of media, techniques, instructions, or methods that could be selected by Indonesia learners in her research. This is important to fill such gaps found from above studies.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

The method used in this research is mix method. Quantitative is used for calculating the data as the result of the use of online closed-ended questionnaire instrument in this study (Likert's scale within 5 measurements; 1= Strongly disagree (SD), 2= Disagree (D), 3= Neutral (Neutral/N), 4= Agree (A), and 5= Strongly agree (SA)). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) stated that a quantitative can be applied to the type of research using a closed questionnaire. Meanwhile, qualitative is used for finding meaning from data obtained from also online open-ended questionnaire instrument. As expressed by Creswell (2007), qualitative can examine and understand data with full description format of what is experienced by research subjects. Quantitative and qualitative methods are very suitable to be applied in exploring Indonesia learners' perception of English learning grammar.

As previously mentioned, the instruments used in this research are questionnaires (open and close) which is adapted, developed, and modified from several resources, such as Sari, Yagiz, and Konca (2017), Sopin (2015), Le and Barnard (2009), Alhaisoni and Alhaisoni (2017), and Xiao (2019). The participants involved in this research were 500 Indonesia EFL learners from three different levels of education; lower secondary school learners, upper secondary school learners, and university learners across country. Their ages

are around 13-15, 16-18, and 19-22 years old. Below is the demography table of the respondents of this research:

Table 1. The demography of respondents

<b>Demography</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	164	500
	Female	336	
<b>Age &amp; Level</b>	13-15 / Lower Secondary	201	500
	16-18 / Upper Secondary	212	
	19-22 / University	87	
<b>Regions</b>	Padang, Pekanbaru, Palembang	5	500
	Bangka, Belitung	3	
	Banten, Tangerang	8	
	Jakarta, Bogor, Depok	335	
	Bekasi, Karawang	21	
	Bandung	30	
	Majalengka, Kuningan, Cirebon	66	
	Yogyakarta, Brebes, Kudus	10	
	Surabaya, Malang	12	
	Samarinda	1	
Makassar, Sinjai	9		

The steps of this research were; 1) the researchers shared the online closed and open-ended questionnaire instruments randomly to Indonesia EFL learners from 1 December 2019 until 30 January 2020 through link <https://cutt.ly/DrBGRC6>. 2) After the data was obtained from respondents, the researchers transferred data into Microsoft Excel (see link here; <https://bit.ly/3qw8xfT>) to be tabulated and reliability checked through Cronbach's Analysis based on Vaske et al., (2017). 3) The researchers then calculated, classified, and recapitulated quantitatively from the options in the close-ended questionnaire responded by 500 EFL learners. Meanwhile, for the open-ended questionnaire responses, the researchers did summary of data. 4) After the data have been tabulated and recapitulated, the researchers did analysis to get result of the study. 5) Last, the researchers did the interpretation and discussion of the data result found in this study.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Instrument Reliability

Before calculating the data, the researchers are necessary to complete the reliability analysis of close-ended questionnaire through Cronbach's Alpha Analysis. The result was exposed below:

Table 2. Reliability Statistic

<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
0.606	20

From the table above, it can be seen that the Cronbach’s Alpha Score from 20 items responded by 500 students was 0.606. It means the close-ended questionnaire was on adequate reliability level (Vaske et al., 2017).

### 4.2 Findings

With the need of answering the questions of this research, table 3 below were the results of closed-ended questionnaire which was shown first. Then, the recapitulation was inserted afterwards.

Table 3. The close-ended questionnaire

Statements	$\bar{X}$	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Generally, I like English learning grammar.	3.63	17.8	29.6	50.6	2	0
2. Learning English grammar is difficult.	2.94	0.4	24.4	49.4	20.8	5
3. My English grammar competence is high.	2.84	1.8	12.6	56.6	25.8	3.2
4. I am highly motivated in learning English grammar.	3.52	15	29.2	49.8	5.2	0.8
5. I think grammar is the hardest sub-skill of English to master.	3.05	2.4	27.4	47.8	17.8	4.6
6. I realize that English grammar is crucial to learn and master.	4.32	44	46.6	7.6	1.4	0.4
7. Learning English grammar is not fun and stressful.	2.90	3	31.6	26.8	29.2	9.4
8. English grammar learning materials are too many.	3.71	12.4	52.2	29.2	6.2	0
9. I get difficulties to improve my English due to the lack of grammar mastery I have.	3.55	12.4	45.6	28.6	11.8	1.6
10. Grammar teaching by teacher sometimes is unclear and confusing.	3.16	8.6	29.2	35.6	23	3.6
11. Grammar teaching models (method, media, etc) from teacher are not vary.	3.09	4.6	31.8	36.2	22.4	5
12. English school textbooks are not provided with clear explanation for me.	3.32	10.6	34.6	33	20.2	1.6
13. Teacher’s grammar instruction often confuses me.	3.07	5	27.2	39.4	26.2	2.2
14. English school textbooks’ instruction is not explicitly discussed the grammar materials.	3.26	6	31.4	46.2	15.4	1
15. I easily learn English grammar without assistant (at home, etc)	2.88	4	22.4	44.2	28	1.4
16. I easily do and answer English grammar test given for me.	3.00	2.8	13.8	55.4	25	3
17. I like to learn English grammar with variative models (method, media, etc).	3.67	12.4	46.4	36.8	4.2	0.2

18. I like to learn English grammar with complete practice and test.	3.96	22	56	18	3.8	0.2
19. English grammar materials should be explained explicitly with extra description.	3.96	24.4	51.6	19.8	3.8	0.4
20. Grammar should be the basis or core of learning and mastering English.	3.99	26.8	49	21.2	2.8	0.2
<b>Total Percentage (500)</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>11.82</b>	<b>34.63</b>	<b>36.61</b>	<b>14.75</b>	<b>2.19</b>
		<b>46.45</b>			<b>16.94</b>	

From total 20 items proposed to 500 EFL learners in Indonesia about English learning grammar they experienced, it can be known that overall mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) score calculated from learners' response were around 2.88 to 4.32 ranges with total average of mean score = 3.39. The highest selected options learners chose was Strongly Agree (SA) or 11.82 and Agree (A) or 34.63 with total mean score = 46.45. Neutral (N) was selected with mean score = 36.61, meanwhile Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were chosen 14.75 and 2.19 with total mean score = 16.94. This numbers showed that learners mostly support the statements stated in close-ended questionnaire with Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) responses. The learners were also known answering the Neutral (N) option in this research. It was only found small numbers responses from learners in answering Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) options.

Next, the researchers put some classification and recapitulation of close-ended questionnaire responded by learners in following table below:

Table 4. Recapitulation of close-ended questionnaire

Classification	Numbers	Percentage (%)		
		SA + A	N	D + SD
English Grammar learning dilemma (difficult but crucial)	1, 2, 6, 7	49.35	33.60	17.05
Lack of competence and motivation in learning English grammar	3, 4, 5	29.47	51.4	19.13
Many obstacles in learning English grammar	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16,	39.4	38.64	21.96
Expect variative models for learning English grammar	17, 18, 19, 20	72.15	23.95	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 Items</b>			

From the recapitulation table 4 above, it can be known that EFL learners' perception of learning grammar was as follow; 1) learners viewed grammar as dilemma (difficult but crucial to learn and master), shown by dominant responses of Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) or 49.35% in table. 2) Learners felt confused of their competence and motivation, shown by dominant response of Neutral (N) or 51.4%. 3) Learners viewed many obstacles in learning grammar, shown by dominant responses of Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) or 39.4%. 4) Learners expect variative or unconventional models used for learning grammar, shown by dominant responses of Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) or 72.15% in the table.

Next, open-ended questionnaire was given to support the EFL learners' responses in close-ended questionnaire as one as to explore more about learners' perception of English learning grammar in different angle. table 5 below were the samples of open-ended questionnaire:

Table 5. The samples of open-ended questionnaire

Questions	Samples of 500 Learner' response
<b>1. What makes you think and feel English learning grammar is difficult to learn but still crucial to be mastered?</b>	<p><i>"Grammar materials are too many to learn, so in my opinion it is difficult. Many of the changed verbs and formula. But it still must be learned whatsoever" (learner no.264)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>"Confusing formula or structures to analyse and differentiate" (learner no.300)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>"Too many formulas. I am not interest of grammar. But grammar is tested in school test, making me to must learn it} (learner no.167).</i></p>
<b>2. Mention the hardest grammar lesson or materials that you experienced? Please put reasons too!</b>	<p><i>"Part of speeches and Subject + verbs" are hard to understand. It is foundation of English learning" (learner no.8)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>"Tenses V1-V2-V3 definitely" It different from our language" (learner.70)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>"Tenses, well for me sometimes it's hard to classified which is which" (learner no.434)</i></p>
<b>3. Please give suggestion, what is the best or suitable model that you prefer to use in learning English grammar?</b>	<p><i>Combination of variative method and technology (learner no.267)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Because of the increasingly modern era and the current generation are more inclined to use technology, grammar learning technology may be more easily understood, such as from websites, games, applications, video animation, etc (learner no.187)</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Online, definitely online, I learn most of my English online, it's not perfect but it gets me this far, student's will get more excited to learn if it means something to them, like communicating better with people from out of the country, this is just my opinion and experience everyone is different (learner no.351)</i></p>

From the overall results of 3 open questions above, it can be known in question no. 1, mostly learners perceive learning English grammar is difficult because grammar has plenty materials with a lot different rules or formulas that made them hard and uninterested to study grammar showed by three representative samples responses (learners no. 264, 300, and 167). They also added information that they kept learning and studying grammar for the needs of mastering English and be tested in their English school exam. Next, in question no. 2, mostly learners mentioned that Parts of speech and mostly Tenses became the hardest materials in English learning grammar showed by three representative samples responses (learners no. 8,

70, and 434). One reason came out from learner that English grammar was different with learner's L1 rules and structure which created problem in comprehending it. Last, in question no. 3, mostly learners expected to study with variative models of learning such as unconventional methods, groups of learning, interactive media, or others. Among those selection, learners dominantly responded to learn English grammar with the use of technology, specifically online, such as website, application, mobile apps, games, video animation, and many more used in their English grammar study.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Regarding to the findings of close-ended and open-ended questionnaires, it was clearly found that most of Indonesia EFL learners positively agree that grammar was difficult but crucial to learn and master proven by the result of statements in close questions number 1, 2, 6, and 7. Stardy (2011) had mentioned this issue as "disturbing grammar" which existed mainly in EFL learners' context. In addition, from the open question no. 1, the learners clearly stated that the main reason of this was because grammar had so many materials, rules, and formula to be learned, but they could not deny grammar due to school exam factors. These evidences were also supported by the result of statements number 3, 4, and 5 in which learners were asked to expose their grammar level of competence and motivation, and their responses were dominantly on Neutral or in this case, they confused to state their grammar level and their motivation. It was potentially due to "dilemma" of learning grammar they felt which effected their learning grammar experience and perception. Ellis (2006), in his journal couple years ago, has already argued and declared that the grammar teaching and learning issue in context of Second Language Acquisition or SLA was always a "controversy".

Next, learners' perception of learning grammar was negative by stating many obstacles in learning grammar, for instance learners experienced problem with unclear grammar teaching instruction and explanation from the teacher, problem of not variative grammar teaching models from the teacher, and problem with the English school textbooks (implicitly expose grammar explanation). These results were proven by learners' statements in close questions number 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 that showed learners' types of obstacles. In fact, some studies have discovered that explicit grammar instruction is quite helpful in particular case of language learning (Male, 2011). Wang (2010), for instance, he believed that grammar instruction provided by teacher is such a necessity due to the students' input or output limitation. Meanwhile, in context of teachers and books issue, the findings showed the same cause and factors mentioned by Sopin (2015) and Alhaysony and Alhaisoni (2017). The students' grammar difficulties were dominantly come from teachers and books factors; thus, it needs more attention to solve this. Besides, the open question no. 2 strengthened this matter by putting part of speech and tenses to be the learners' number one enemy in learning and mastering grammar. Muhsin (2016) supported that among many materials in grammar, tenses ultimately become the most difficult material to study in accordance with Indonesia EFL learners' point of view.

Last, learners' perception of learning grammar was they expected variative models of learning to be used inside or outside classroom, such as various methods, groups learning, interactive media, technology, computer based, and etc. Learners' statements in close

questions number 17, 18, 19, and 20 proved this matter by exposing they wanted to have difference models with complete practice and test. This idea has been proclaimed by Hegelheimer and Fisher (2006) who explored sample technology used and worked in teaching and learning grammar context. Moreover, Saeedi and Biri (2016) has conducted or experimented one of animated sitcom as a part of technology that successfully encourage students to change their view of grammar and develop their grammar competency. Next, the sample students' open question responses number 3 also figured out that majority of learners chose the use of online new technology, for instance website, application, mobile apps, games, video animation, and many more for better learning English grammar. It may be caused by the impact of industrial revolution 4.0 happening in Indonesia nowadays, and the rise of internet that made learners' mostly chose this model. Ekaningsih (2017) supported in her research that the use of technology truly helps Indonesia EFL learners with better grammar competence.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the researchers can reveal that Indonesia EFL learners' perception of grammar was difficult but essential to be learned and mastered. This was happened in line with a lot of materials, rules, and formula that learners must study. This situation also made EFL learners confused in determining their level of competence and motivation whether they had it or not. Indonesia EFL learners perceived many obstacles in learning grammar, particularly with their teacher's unclear explanation and not variative methods used in class as one as implicit grammar explanation in English textbook they used. EFL learners expected more variative models for learning English grammar, particularly the use of technology (online) that can be potential learning tool for them to master English grammar. Nonetheless, this research is still considered to have limitation. The 500 samples are realized not well distributed across country and the high epicentrum was in Jabodetabek area. In advanced, the samples of the questionnaire can be increased by other researchers.

At last, it is fully recommended for other researchers to seek also different variables, such as motivation or factors or strategy related to the grammar issue found in Indonesia EFL learners' context. This research is believed enriching the knowledge and literature of grammar issue and status as well as providing the factors and the solution to explore more in future for the good of learners and teachers. It is also interesting to expose students' perception of learning grammar in recent situation such as during Covid-19 outbreak. Hopefully, this research can give basis information or authentic data needed for readers to create innovation in teaching and learning grammar in Indonesia as well as to study the best treatment and concept for teaching the EFL learner's grammar.

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