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Exploring students' perceptions of English grammar learning and its pedagogical implication at Vocational High School

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ABSTRACT

Grammar is the system of language which deals with the form and structure of words in making sentences well, therefore grammar plays an important role in English subjects. Yet, many students place grammar as the last choice in English subjects, especially students at Vocational High Schools (VHS) who learn English as English for Specific Purpose (ESP) learners, and they are focused on production skills rather than language skill knowledge. Therefore this study was held to investigate VHS students' perceptions of English grammar learning to understand and complete their needs in the class. This study was conducted on a VHS with 112 eleventh graders as the participants. This study obtained quantitative data through a survey by distributing a questionnaire adapted from Xiao (2019), Sariçoban (2016), and Sopin (2015) with three main aspects such as students' attitudes, students' learning styles, and grammar teaching method preferred by students in English grammar learning. This study revealed that students at this VHS have positive attitudes toward English grammar learning, they also like guided learning styles, and prefer varied teaching ways from the teacher in learning English grammar.

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1. Introduction

Grammar is one of the language components or a system of language which deals with the form and structure of words in making sentences well. Learning a language doesn't mean only studying four skills of proficiency; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but also understanding the system of rules underlying. Xiao (2019) stated that grammatical knowledge is closely connected with phonetics, vocabulary, discourse, and pragmatic knowledge, and directly influences the accuracy and appropriateness of language competence and expression. Therefore, grammar plays an important role to be taught in learning English as basic knowledge.

These days, English grammar learning is considered difficult and complex knowledge which makes students feel insecure when learning. As stated by Paris and Yussof (2012), grammar classes are perceived as scary and complicated by students. Many students take grammar as their last interest. As stated by Mahbub (2018) it usually happens to Secondary School students, precisely students at Vocational High Schools (VHS) who learn English as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learners. Since students at VHS are prepared to enter the workplace and focus on the development of students skills in a specific field, so their interest and enjoyment in English are small, moreover in English grammar.

The success of English grammar learning can be seen in how students feel enjoy and confident in learning English grammar. Incecaý and Dollar (2011) stated that learners' beliefs may be influential factors in their experience within the classroom. It can also be influenced by how the interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment also the learning tasks that are implemented in the classroom, or it can be called pedagogical implication (Murphy, 2008). Therefore, understanding students' perceptions of English Grammar and its pedagogical implication that including how the student's attitudes toward English grammar learning, how the student's learning style, and how the grammar teaching method is preferred by students while in the class, it can impact their competence in learning English Grammar and can make students believe that learning English Grammar is pleasing.

In VHS, English is taught as ESP, and it should be totally different from General English (GE) instructions which are very general in nature (Pramono, 2012). Teaching English in VHS should refer to the program of study that is being taught to students. As aforementioned, students at VHS still need knowledge of English. It can be needed for a specific discipline or a particular communicative context for their skills in a specific field (Lailiyah & Yustisia, 2022; Liu et al., 2011). Teaching grammar in VHS is not as detailed as teaching grammar for university students majoring in English. It means that teaching grammar in VHS is integrated. It can be explained that teaching grammar in VHS needs to be integrated into the specific field of their major of study (Integrated-Learning).

2. Method

This research used a quantitative approach that deals with numerical and statistical data. This research also applied a survey as the design of the study. In collecting the data, the researchers conducted only at one point in time, so a Cross-Sectional design was also applied in this research.

The researchers used a questionnaire as the instrument of this research, which was distributed in the form of a paper to eleventh graders of SMK Negeri 12 Malang. The questionnaire was adapted from Xiao (2019), Sariçoban (2016), and Sopin (2015). Before being validated by the expert, the questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstanding among students. It consisted of 18 statements, and was divided into three aspects, those are students' attitudes toward English grammar learning, students' learning styles in learning English grammar, and teaching methods preferred by students in English grammar learning. The researchers used the two-Likert scale which is used to allow the individual student to choose the options written in the questionnaire, they are (1) disagree and (2) agree. The researchers, then, inputted the data using Microsoft Excel and then

analyzed the result of the scale using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 to find out the score of the criteria of each question.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Students' Attitudes Toward English Grammar Learning

In this aspect, the focus was on students' feelings toward English grammar learning, this means how students perceive English grammar and English grammar learning in the class. Six statements were presented in items number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The result of students' responses is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Result of students' attitudes toward English Grammar learning

Item	English Statements	Scores		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
1	I love studying English grammar.	22 19.6%	90 80.4%	112 100%
2	I think learning grammar is boring.	70 62.5%	42 37.5%	112 100%
3	I think learning grammar is more difficult than learning Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking.	71 63.4%	41 36.6%	112 100%
4	Confident in learning well.	53 47.3%	59 52.7%	112 100%
5	At first, I'm afraid of making grammar mistakes, but then I overcome this problem myself and try to take part in the activities.	30 26.8%	82 73.2%	112 100%
6	I believe that if I learn grammar, I will have no problem with English.	32 28.6%	80 71.4%	112 100%

According to the data, it can be concluded that students maintain interest and self-confidence in English grammar learning. It can be seen that most students like studying English grammar (80.4%), and commonly express the feeling that learning grammar is not boring (62.5%). The students devote that learning grammar is not difficult but rather than learning other skills like writing, reading speaking, and listening (63.4%), so most students are confident in learning grammar well (52.7%). They try to overcome their difficulties in learning grammar (73.2%) because they believe it can help them while learning English subjects (71.4%).

3.2. Students' learning styles in learning English Grammar

In this aspect, the focus was on students' learning styles in learning English grammar. Six statements were presented in items number 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. There were three variables; those

are the way students rewrite the teacher's explanation, students' superiority in learning English grammar, and the way students learn with friends.

The way students rewrite teacher's explanation

This variable discussed how students rewrite teachers' explanations about English grammar while in class. There was one statement that was presented in item number 7. The result of how students rewrite the teacher's explanation is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Result of the way students rewrite teacher's explanation

Item	English Statements	Scores		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
7	After my teacher presents a new structure, I take notes with my own expressions and write my own example sentences.	64	48	112
		57.1%	42.9%	100%

According to the data, most students do not take notes with their own expressions and example sentences (57.1%). From the data, it can be seen that most students rewrite the teacher's explanation based on what the teacher wrote on the blackboard or whiteboard. So, the teacher needs to write the explanations of the material clearly and effectively to make students understand, and then they can rewrite the explanation well.

Students' superiority in learning English Grammar

This variable discussed something needed that made students feel confident in learning English grammar while in class. Three statements were presented in items number 8, 9, and 10. The result of students' responses is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Result of students' superiority in learning English Grammar

Item	English Statements	Scores		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
8	If I get exercises about the new structures that my teacher has just presented, I can better learn and I will not forget them.	34	78	112
		30.4%	68.6%	100%
9	I can better learn a new structure through formulas, graphs, or grids.	28	84	112
		25.0%	75.0%	100%
10	I follow written directions better than oral directions.	40	72	112
		35.7%	64.3%	100%

According to the data, most students think that exercises from teachers related to the material that has been presented are important (68.6%). The students can better learn a new structure through formulas, graphs, or grids (75.0%), and the written directions can help students more (64.3%). Therefore, it is needed for the teacher to take some notes on the blackboard or whiteboard while explaining the material.

The way students learn with friends

This variable discussed how students build interactions or relationships with their friends while learning English grammar in class. Two statements were presented in items number 11 and 12. The result of the way students learn with friends is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Result of the way students learn with friends

Item	English Statements	Scores		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
11	Whereas I'm mainly learning the new structures from my teacher, I also observe my friends who are successful in English to strengthen the structures I've learned.	17 15.2%	95 84.8%	112 100%
12	In class, I prefer working on my own rather than collaborating with my friends	98 87.5%	14 12.5%	112 100%

According to the data, most students learn English grammar together with their friends who are successful in English to strengthen their learning (84.8%), and they also prefer collaboration learning with their friends when learning English grammar (87.5%). It can be concluded that most students agree to build interactions and relationships with their friends to make them more motivated.

3.3. Grammar Teaching Method Preferred by Students

In this aspect, the focus was on what students needs and desire when a teacher teaches English grammar in the class. Six statements were presented in items number 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. The result of students' responses is shown in Table 5.

According to the data, most students prefer a teacher's presentation about grammar structure in a real context (85.7%), and commonly want the explanation with all details and in a formulaic way (72.3%), by presenting the structures from simple to complex (84.8%). The students prefer the teacher's correction of their grammatical mistakes (81.3%), and also the teacher's correction of the language used in learning English grammar (91.1%). Most students also prefer the teacher's presentation about English grammar in varied and effective ways, like using stories, movie clips, jokes, English songs, or summarizing some grammar knowledge into memorable tips (91.1%).

Table 5. Result of Grammar teaching method preferred by students

Item	English Statements	Scores		Total
		Disagree	Agree	
13	I would like my teacher to explain to me a new structure by presenting it in a real context.	16 14.3%	96 85.7%	112 100%
14	I would like my teacher to explain to me a new structure with all the details, and in a formulaic way.	31 27.7%	81 72.3%	112 100%
15	I prefer the teacher's presentation of new structures from simple to complex.	17 15.2%	95 84.8%	112 100%
16	I don't like being corrected for grammatical mistakes by my teacher.	91 81.3%	21 18.8%	112 100%
17	I would like my teacher to tell me whether I use the language correctly or incorrectly.	10 8.9%	102 91.1%	112 100%
18	I would like my teacher to present English grammar in a more vivid one, such as using stories, movie clips, jokes, English songs, or summarizing some grammar knowledge into memorable tips.	10 8.9%	102 91.1%	112 100%

The discussion of this research was presented based on the research findings. Based on the findings that the researcher found, students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang have positive attitudes toward English grammar learning, it can be seen from how students like studying English grammar. They also devote that learning English grammar is not boring. The finding is in contrast with the theory from Mahbub (2018) that students at VHS have less interest in English, moreover in English grammar. This may happen since they learn English as ESP learners, and then they are prepared to enter the workplace and focus on the development of students' skills in a specific field. Then, nowadays English grammar learning is considered difficult and complex knowledge that makes students feel insecure. As stated by Paris and Yussof (2012), grammar classes are perceived as scary and complicated by students. Yet, the statement is rejected by the result of this research. Based on the findings that the researchers found, students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang are confident when learning English grammar, they also think that English grammar is not more difficult than learning other skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In line with that, students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang can better learn with their friends by collaborating in groups. They believe that collaboration can strengthen their knowledge of English grammar because they can ask and learn together with their friends who are successful in English grammar. The finding is related to theory from the previous research (Sarıçoban, 2016), it is clear that students also need to use social effective strategies to learn English grammar and have a better learning environment. Then, the finding is also related to the theory from Murphy (2008), to make students get the motivation while in class, it is important to maintain the interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment also the learning tasks that are implemented in the classroom. Then, students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang like getting many exercises about the new structures that teacher presented. Students believe if they get the exercises they can remember and will not forget the material from the teacher. The result is different from the finding from previous research (Sarıçoban, 2016), that students prefer getting many materials with fun grammar teaching like using games rather than getting many exercises. Then, Xiao (2019) refuse the idea, he said that it is okay for teachers to give many exercises to students related to the material to make students have direct experience to know the differences and new ideas related to the material that was just presented by the teacher.

Then, based on the findings that the researcher found, students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang prefer detailed explanations from teachers related to English grammar material. It can be seen from how students prefer grammar presentations in real contexts and in a formulaic way. The result is related to the findings from the previous research (Xiao, 2019), the teacher needs to teach grammar knowledge in a rich and real context to get the learning process effective. Then, the students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang also prefer the teacher's correction of their grammatical mistakes and their language uses. The finding is in contrast with the theory from Lightbown and Spada (2021), that grammar instruction and error correction for foreign and second language learners have been neglected because it will not make students more communicative. Yet, Incecay and Dollar (2011) argued by stating that grammar instruction and error correction can make students know their mistakes, so they can resolve the problem, moreover, it will make them remember again and again. They also stated that learners' beliefs may be influential factors in their experience within the classroom, so it will help students if they want to do it. Then, the findings of this research also found that students at SMK Negeri 12 Malang prefer varied ways of teaching English grammar, like using stories, movie clips, jokes, English songs, or summarizing some grammar knowledge into memorable tips. The result of the finding is related to the findings from previous research (Sopin, 2015), the more varied ways the teacher in explaining the lesson, the more effective it makes students understand the lesson. So the teacher needs to know the best way to teach English grammar.

4. Conclusion

In general, the eleventh graders of SMK Negeri 12 Malang have positive attitudes toward English grammar Learning, they also like guided learning styles and they prefer varied teaching ways from the teacher while in the class. In sum, the researcher is concerned that the important thing in English grammar learning is to understand all three factors of students' perceptions from students'

attitudes toward English grammar learning, students' learning style, and the grammar teaching method preferred by students. It is also needed to build good interactions between teachers, students, and the learning environment also the learning tasks that are implemented in the classroom to make enjoy and effective English grammar teaching and learning process.

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