

Learners' Structure Defect Analysis on Written Text in EFL Learning in Politeknik Negeri Bali

I Wayan Eka Dian Rahmanu^{1✉}, Ni Made Kariati², and Kumiko Shishido³

¹²Business Administration Department, Politeknik Negeri Bali

³Language Department, Osaka University, Japan

✉Jl. Kampus Bukit Jimbaran, Kuta Selatan, Badung, Bali-80364 Telp.+62 361 701981, Indonesia

✉rahmanu.eka@pnb.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The current study attempts to gauge the student's grammatical comprehension. It is done through defect analysis on students answers on subject-verb agreement and simple past tense questions. The participants were 143 students who study English as a foreign language in the Business Administration Department in the Bali State Polytechnic (Politeknik Negeri Bali). Google form containing multiple choice questions were distributed to the participants. A descriptive method was then employed to elaborate the result. The current study found that, in general, students' ability to make the correct grammatical judgment is very low. Students were confused about both subject-verb agreement and simple past tense. These findings suggest that students' grammatical skill should be trained more frequently. Grammar is essential in building the students' English skill, it facilitates users of English to convey their message clearly in communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Comprehending patterns or rules in making a sentence or statement is essential for English learners. These skills could increase students' ability in using and learning English. For learners who have unconscious knowledge grammar, it may be sufficient for simple language use. However, the learners who tend to communicate with well-defined structures must go for deeper comprehension and proficiency in what they learn of grammar offers (Debata, 2013). This means that grammar ability can help learners to deliver the language with prowess structure. Comprehensions and also abilities in learning English could not be separated as those are linked and supported each other by cognitive or affective skills and grammar is one of the cognitive abilities in learning English. Besides, understanding structure in learning towards learners' skill in creating and building a sentence is a must as these skills help learners create a proper English.

In learning all English skills, students should concern about the system of rules which underlie a given language. Besides that, as learners, two types of structure or grammar: theoretical and practical can be learned from the basics to the advance. Practical grammar gives practical rules of the use of the linguistic structures while theoretical grammar gives an analysis of the structures in the light of general principles of linguistics and the existing schools and approaches (Valeika, 2003). Based on Valeika's statements, grammar should be understood and comprehended by learners or students in focusing and interesting in the structure of a sentence in English.

There are some authors explain and elaborate on the meaning and the importance of grammar which should be applied during the learning process. The elaborations help learners to know and grasp the concepts of grammar specifically. Explicit is the nature of grammar, absolute and fixed, a target or goal that speakers need attain to be good speakers or writers of the language (Decapua, 2008). Grammar is the set of rules that describes how words and groups of words can be arranged to form sentences in a particular language. Understanding how structure and words relate to each other can be elaborated through a diagram and one diagram that can be found in linguistics as well as in some grammar textbook is called a phrase structure diagram (Cowan, 2008).

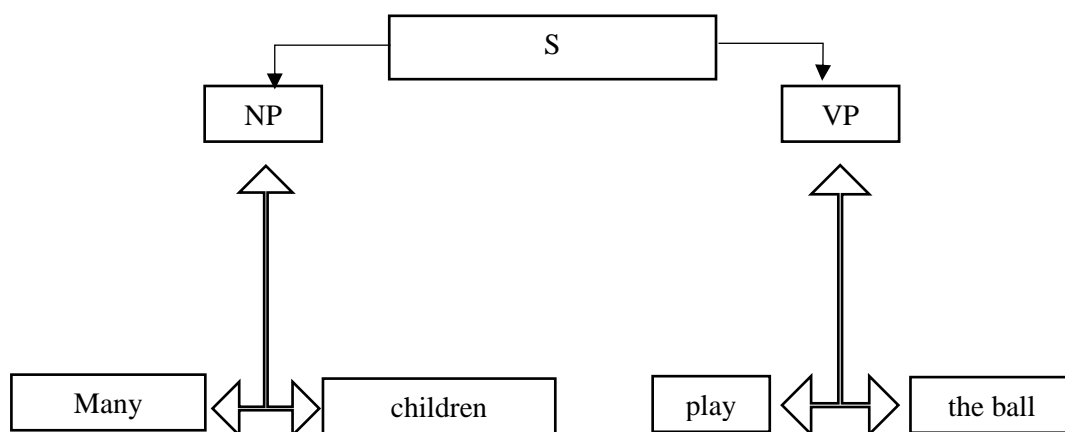


Chart 1: Phrase Structure Diagram

The diagram above uses some symbols which represent specific grammar grouping in a sentence. Symbol S means sentence, NP means noun phrase, VP means verb phrase, these parts of elements create a sentence. The branches link higher order elements and make up a sentence based on grammar patterns. Some discussions which are kinds of structure and grammar for instance verb gerund, subject-verb agreement, and simple past tense would help students to learn grammar deeper and support learners' skills in using English as EFL (English as Foreign Language) and ESL (English as Second Language).

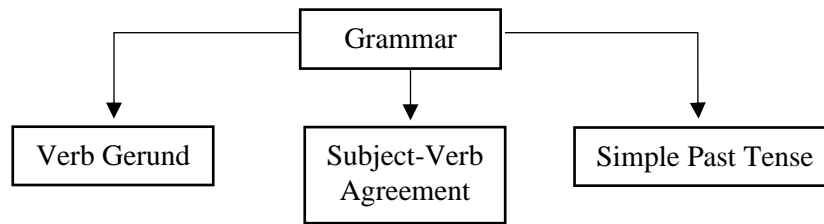


Chart 2: Three kinds of grammatical structures in consideration for the current research

Verb Gerund

A gerund is the -ing form of a verb and used as a noun (Azar, 2003).

For example, *She enjoys walking in the park*. “walking” is a gerund and used as the object of the verb *enjoy*. The verbs for instance *stop*, *mind*, *finish*, *keep*, *discuss*, *consider*, and *quit* are followed by gerunds. Besides that, the gerund also follows phrasal verbs such as *keep on*, *put off*, *think about*, and *talk about*. *They stop transferring the data from the old laptop*. The second example, “transferring” is a gerund which follows the verb *stop*. These two examples are important as the concept in learning gerund is the verb-ing form which would be a noun in a sentence.

Subject-Verb Agreement

In English grammar, subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) which is also called subject-verb concord. In other words, they both must be singular or they both must be plural. For instance, Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; vice versa (Eastwood, 2002).

The girl [singular subject] reads [singular verb] mystery stories. The girls [plural subject] read [plural verb] mystery stories. Tony [singular subject] is [singular verb] sleep. Tony and her friends [plural subject] are [plural verb] asleep. Further, there is an agreement with *be*, *have*, and a present-simple verb. Then he adds that with a past-tense verb is an agreement only with *be*. It means that subject-verb agreement of simple past tense is in nominal form. For instance, “I was happy yesterday”, “We were late for the movie last night”. However, the following structure for verbal is added “ed” at the end of verb or change into V2 for instance “Robert played soccer this last morning”, “Sophia went swimming in the pool last weekend”. Subject-verb agreement in the present simple tense, the singular subject (she, he, it) takes a verb in -s, -es, or is. It means that verb in present simple tense both verbal and nominal form should agree with its subject. For instance, “Marco works in an office”, “Jorge’s Dad Allan is retired”, “Marina is Bob’s wife”, or “Frada live in Jakarta“. Plural subject (you, they, we) with to be “are” and also, I with “am”, for example: “I am an English teacher in Malang”. In verbal form, the subject is followed by a verb and *do* or *does* is used as an auxiliary for all of the subjects in a negative or question sentence. For example, “Marco doesn’t have any brothers”. “Does Marco have any brothers?”. The present continuous, also called the present progressive, is one of the present tenses used in modern English, the others being the simple present and the emphatic present. To describe something which is happening at the exact moment of speech, for instance, “The boy is crying”. Likewise, the rules are the same as a present simple, and to distinguish it the teacher can put time signal at the end or in the first sentence.

From the explanations above, subject-verb agreement is an agreement between subject and verb. If the subject is singular, the verb is singular, and if the subject plural, the verb is plural because the meaning of the sentence will be unclear without the subject and the verb that agrees on each other. Agreeing to the explanation above, the concept of subject-verb agreement is a basic principle of English language grammar. However, the students are still confused about applying subject-verb agreement rules and their lack of knowledge of the rules of the target language is the main factor in causing the written production errors (Al Murshidi, 2014). Similarly, by Leech, who states that concord is also called agreement in the most general terms, concord is a relation between two elements such that they match one another in terms of some grammatical feature (Leech, 2006). It means that agreement is a relation between two elements that should agree to each other, for instance, the agreement between a subject and a verb. Moreover, according to Leech, in addition to the subject-verb agreement (concord), there is also a noun-pronoun agreement (concord), which is an agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent in terms of number, person, and gender. Then, the writer adds that in English, the most important agreement (concord) is number concord between subject and (finite) verb.

In a simple sentence, a verb usually comes after the subject. It can be a word or a phrase that contains a simple form of the verb, an adverb, a modal, or an auxiliary. The form of a verb must be agreed with in the form of the subject (Sihombing, 2010). Besides, the writers state that a singular subject uses a singular verb and a plural subject uses a plural verb. It means that a subject-verb agreement is an agreement between subject and verb. If the subject is singular so the verb is singular and if the subject is plural, so the verb is plural. Furthermore, Huddleston states that the subject normally indicates the actor, the person, or thing performing the action, while the predicate describes the action (Huddleston, 2005). Based on this statement, a subject can be a person or a thing performing the action and a predicate describes the action.

Simple Past Tense

The simple past tense is represented by the *-ed* inflection on regular verbs and by other changes in the case of irregular verbs. Furthermore, this expresses action carried out to the time of speaking (Cowan, 2008). A simple past tense usually can be analyzed by checking and knowing the time was carried out for example *last time*, *last week*, *yesterday*, *the day before yesterday*, and so on. (1) *They ran four miles last time.* (2) *We cooked pizza last week.* (3) *She went to Irian Jaya the day before yesterday.*

In terms of EFL (English as Foreign Learners), the key to learning a foreign language was the knowledge of its grammar, especially in the form of memorized rules learned by heart and accompanied by various declensions and conjugations (Dakowska, 2005). EFL refers to those who learn English in non-English speaking countries, for instance, Japanese who learn English in their country are EFL learners (Iwai, 2011). Based on these statements, learners who study English as a foreign language must be introduced and given grammar or the rule on how to use the language. Besides that, this is significant for the learners or students with non-English speaking countries, for example, Indonesia to explore the use of grammar during learning English.

There are two previous research related to the analysis of learners' grammar error. The first study shows that the writing errors that are committed by Indonesian students in the first Senior

High School (Megaib, 2014). The result of this study is the weakest area in writing English by Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language was in grammatical aspects. Another research illustrates the undergraduate learners' writing problem in writing comprehension (Fareed, 2016). From the previous researches, in writing English, grammar is a significant problem for learners. In Senior High School or undergraduate level, students have a similar problem in learning grammar. This means the English structure is a big problem in two different levels of learners. In this study, the researchers analyze the structural defect of the first-semester learner's vocational education level.

In vocational education, English is taught for specific purposes and aimed to deliver the material based on the needs, for instance, the Tourism, Engineering, and Business Administration Department. There is none of the specific previous research analyzing students' ability on subject-verb agreement and simple past tense in the first year, especially in Polytechnic State of Bali business administration department. The comprehension of students' ability in English is significant to manage further action in increasing learners' skills in grammar. Besides, the analysis of grammar or the rule of English sentences gives the researchers reflection in treating the learners during the English lessons and activities. Considering all the above discussions, the researchers would like to analyze learners' structure especially on subject-verb agreement and simple past tense defect on written text in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

METHODS

The descriptive method is used in this qualitative research where the research applies a method that is according to the philosophy of post-positivism. The main data sources in qualitative research are words and actions, the rest is additional data such as documents and others where qualitative research results more emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, as cited in Moelong, 2010, p. 157). According to the concept, the results in this research have interpreted the findings through words that are supported by documents or data. Data collection techniques are carried out by using an internet assisted test where the students should answer each question prepared by the researchers. In collecting the data process, the researchers receive the whole result after all samples finishing the questions which are provided by the researchers.

Internet assisted test is applied to collect students' answer, this test is used as the result automatically formulated. The researchers apply google form which is one of the interactive internet assisted tests. The questions are designed and typed on google form where the correct answer is set manually by the researchers. Besides that, the researchers focus on subject-verb agreement and simple past tense in designing the topic of questions. The test is designed applicable for all learners as this system can be run from students' computers or smartphones.

There are tests item can be used in collecting data, for example, multiple choices, fill-ins, sentence completion, sentence reordering, transformations, sentence writing, and parallel writing (Harmer, 2002). In multiple choices, participants should choose the correct answer from several options which are provided for EFL learners, furthermore, this study applies multiple choices test item which is programmed on the google form.

During the activities, students are commanded to enter the name and the classroom number. Learners must answer 10 questions and be instructed by the researchers to analyze the answer options. 4 options are provided, and the students only choose one correct answer. The researchers know the whole results of the tests automatically after all learners finish answering the questions.

Polytechnic State of Bali Business Administration Department which is based on vocational education is involved in collecting the data. The researchers choose 143 students in the first semester as the participants in answering the questions which are prepared by the writers. The first semester is chosen as the researchers need to know the students' earliest comprehension in English grammar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chart 3 below represents the participants' correct answers in each question. Learners select various answers in responding to the questions, as observable in the number of students' answers in Chart 3. Besides that, there are 11 bar charts explained in the results where the first bar chart explains all questions answered by the participants, and the rest bar charts illustrate the result of each question given by the researchers.

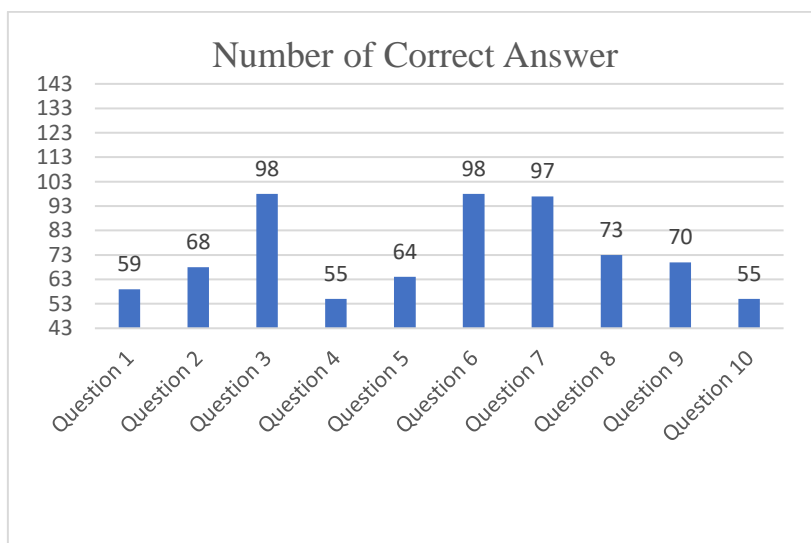


Chart 3: Number of Correct Answers

The chart illustrates the number of students who select the correct answer based on 10 questions given and provided by researchers. Overall, question number 3 and 6 were chosen the most than others, meanwhile, the least number of correct answer chosen by students was question number 4 and 10. The total number of learners who picked the correct answer on question 2 was higher than 5, furthermore question number 1 was answered slightly lower than both, question numbers 2 and 5. Meanwhile, question number 7 was chosen slightly below question number 6. Furthermore, question number 8 and 9 were chosen under the total number of students who chose question number 7. In terms of choosing the answer, there are 55 people took the correct answer on question number 4 and this is the fewest number of learners out of 143 students. The correct answer to question number 1 was chosen by 59 learners. Furthermore, question number

5 was chosen by 64 participants while question 2 had been chosen by 68 learners. Surprisingly the third question got the highest learners which were 98 people or more than half of total samples. Similarly, there are 98 participants chose the correct answer in question number 6. However, there are 73 and 70 learners who chose the correct answer in question numbers 8 and 9 respectively.

Only 4 questions out of 10 were filled correctly by more than half of the students. There are 6 questions were chosen correctly by only under 50% of students. The rest of the questions were chosen more than half of the total number of learners however this was below 70% out of 143 students. The result gives a brief explanation that subject-verb agreement is not as simple as the learners thought as the graphs explain there is none of the problem solved shows more than 70% correct. The least correct answer chosen was only 38% means that in several problems the students reach under the average.

The information and discussion in finding the data on each question can be seen from the bar charts as follow. The bar charts show the number of learners who select the answers in every question. The illustrations also mention the percentage of students in answering the grammar task.

Every workdays, my friends and I should attend and learn some subjects which are thought by more than 7 lecturers and we in regular class and sometimes in the audiovisual room
59 / 143 correct responses

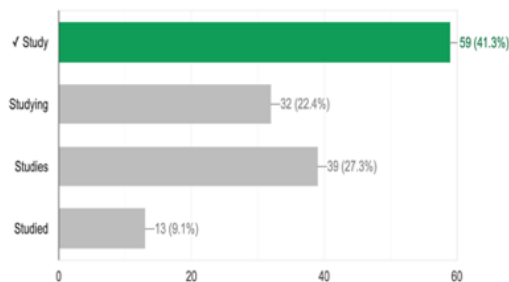


Chart 4: Students' Answer for Question 1

The researchers designed the first question was the subject-verb agreement structure concept where the subject "we" should be followed by a bare infinitive. The chart shows that the most answer which was correctly chosen by the students was "study" however, the correct answer was lower than half of the total samples in general. On the other hand, learners tended to choose "studying, studies and studied" in matching the gap as these are incorrect decision to choose when the structure is learned and discussed during the learning activities. Furthermore, the number of students who chose "studied" was the least than other answers as it is a simple past tense example of an answer.

Mr. Rahmanu mostly to Polytechnic State of Bali every day to teach his students in this first semester but he also has international students for other countries.
68 / 143 correct responses

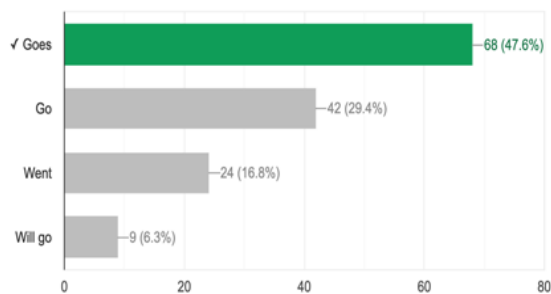


Chart 5: Students' Answer for Question 2

The question on the third bar chart concerned about the subject-verb agreement and the result was the learners tended to choose “goes” the most which are the correct answer based on the structure in English. On the other hand, the number of students was below average compare to the total number of students who chose “go”, “went” and “will go”. Besides that, the least students answered, “will go” under “went” and “go” where the total number of learners who chose these three options were still higher than the correct answer chosen.

One of his students is from Russia, her name is Elena and she is one of the students in Polytechnic State of Bali, she usually to spend...er time for sunbathing around the shore near from Kuta.
98 / 143 correct responses

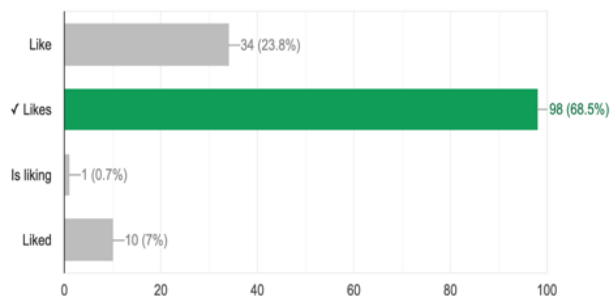


Chart 6: Students' Answer for Question 3

Generally, grasping grammar is still on learners' hands as it can be seen that students chose the correct answer mostly, although the learners answered them correctly were slightly above the average. It can be seen from the bar chart above, the students took “like” the most and this was one of the 2 highest questions that had more than half from total learners. On the opposite, almost no one thought that “is liking” was the answer except students who speculated to take this answer. In completing the sentences above, “like” was chosen over tripled than “liked” even though the total number of learners who took these answers was below the average.

She some places such as a new café some restaurants at night with her friends and sometimes with her best friend last month.

55 / 143 correct responses

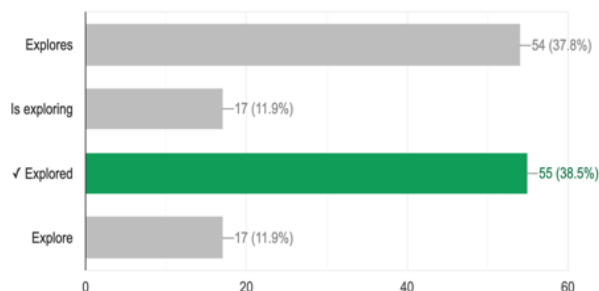


Chart 7: Students' Answer for Question 4

Sufficient understanding of simple past tense was the requirement in answering this question, in term of choosing simple past tense answer, the number of learners took “explored” more than “explores”. However, the answers reflected that the respondents tended to choose the wrong answer as the total of incorrect options were taken more than the right answer. Besides that, the pupils thought “explores” was the correct answer surprisingly because the samples chose this answer slightly below “explored” where the number of students’ who answered, “is exploring” was the same with “explore”.

She and her friends really love to go to the gym as exercise is the best way to keep our condition and body healthy. Beside doing gym, Every morning they sometimes breakfast at 8 o'clock

64 / 143 correct responses

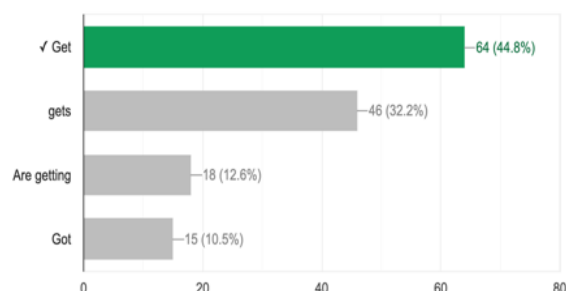


Chart 8: Students' Answer for Question 5

The data on bar chart 6 above represents learners’ skill in filling the correct gap, “get” which was the most correct answer chosen, had been selected just under the total number of students who chose the wrong answer. This can be seen from the percentage of the participants’ answers, the total students who were giving an incorrect answer tended to get higher.

She doesn't to iron the clothes as she should wear them for the daily activities
98 / 143 correct responses

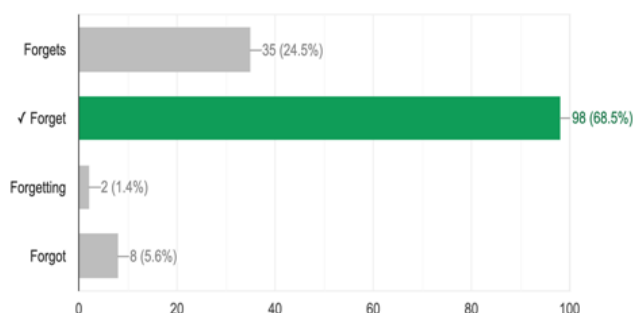


Chart 9: Students' Answer for Question 6

The researchers provided an auxiliary verb which is related to the subject-verb agreement structure in this question. Bar chart 7 mentions that the most answer correct was “forget” while “forgetting” was the least chosen. The answer to “forgetting” and “forgets” were still lower than the “forget” option selected by learners. It does mean that in this question as well as question number 3, learners took the most in choosing the right answer.

Few weeks ago, Elena the classes which are provided by the Polytechnic State of Bali to submit the assignment.
97 / 143 correct responses

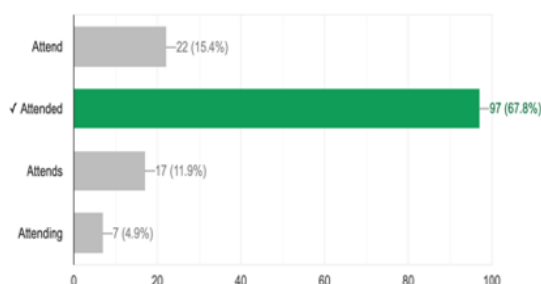


Chart 10: Students' Answer for Question 7

In this question, the concept of the simple past tense was applied by researchers, however, from the result of the learners based on the answer, the participants tended to take the right answer based on structure language. On this occasion, the “attended” option was chosen by the participants mostly, however in contrast, “attending” was the least option chosen by the students. Furthermore, there are two options chosen under the most correct answer, those are “attends” and “attend”. These two options were collected by several students during submitting the data. Participants could still give the right option in selecting the answer.

Sometimes, Elena and her friends talk about season in Moscow which is very different with Indonesia in the other hand she the weather in Indonesia and Bali for instance.
73 / 143 correct responses

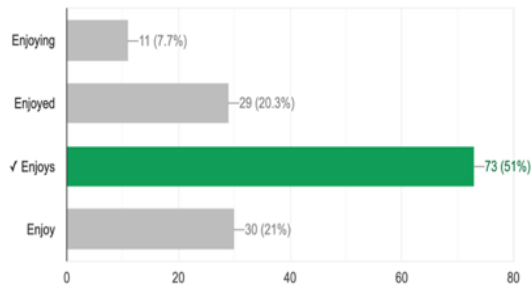


Chart 11: Students' Answer for Question 8

On this occasion, this question was based on the subject-verb agreement concept of structure. The learners should answer based on the noun showed. The pronoun “she” should be followed by “enjoys” as this is the concept of subject-verb agreement. In this question, more than half of the total learners chose “enjoys” which was the correct answer. On the other hand, the total number of learners who chose “enjoy”, ”enjoyed” and “enjoying” were slightly under the correct answer.

She usually some home works on Wednesdays and Friday, for sure his friend and she do it together at home.
70 / 143 correct responses

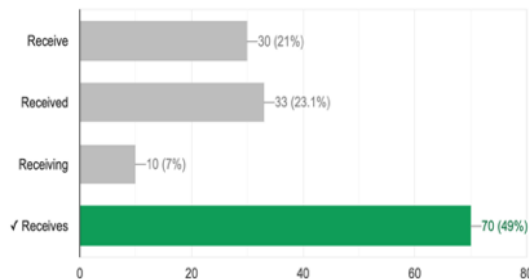


Chart 12: Students' Answer for Question 9

The concept of question bar chart 10 was applying subject-verb agreement or related to the auxiliary verb where the subject should be followed by a verb. From the result shows that participants took the correct answer in general, however, the total of students who got wrong in answering incorrect answer were higher than the right answer chosen. This can be seen from the bar chart above, most of the respondents chose “receives” on the other hand, the least number of students chose to receive. Furthermore, the participants took “receive” and “received” were over doubled above the total number of students who chose “receiving”.

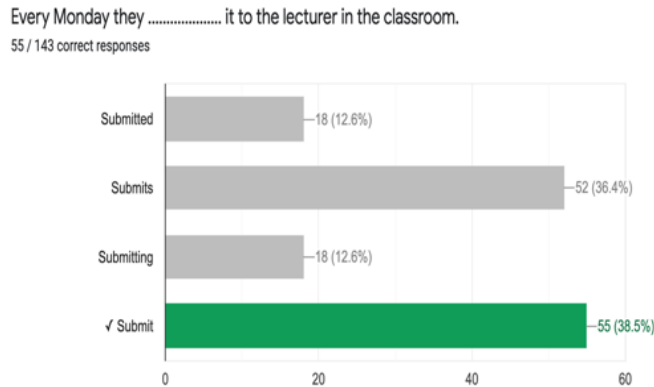


Chart 13: Students' Answer for Question 10

In this question, the subject-verb agreement was used to know the respondents' results. The data showed that the students who took "submit" as the correct answer was the biggest. The total number of learners who chose "submits" was slightly under the "submit" option. However, the total number of students who took "submit" was less than half of the total learners in answering this question as to the total number of students who chose "submitting", "submits" and "submitted" were still higher.

The bar charts which represent the result of each question show the students' skills in English grammar. Most of the students tended to take the incorrect answer as it can be seen the green color mentions the learners who answered the right option. The two numbers of simple past tense questions were answered correctly mostly by the students. However, the number of choosing the right answer was not reaching 70% of students. The topic of the rest questions was the subject-verb agreement, there were 5 out of 8 questions that showed under 50% of students who chose the correct answer. Based on these findings, a lot of students chose incorrect options, and the tendency of choosing the wrong answer was bigger than the correct options.

Similar to the previous study, in this research learners leaned to choose the wrong answer during the test as this can be seen from the result of the test given by the researchers. The learners tended to achieve a low score in answering the English structure. There were not only Senior High School and undergraduate learners but also the learners in the vocational education system faced a big problem in learning English structure. This means the English structure is still a big problem for young learners in some education systems.

CONCLUSION

Most of the participants' comprehension of subject-verb agreement and simple past tense was not satisfying as observable in the result and discussion section. Most of the students' answers indicate grammar defects. There are only a few learners who appear to have sufficient grasp on the structure in English. The number of learners who select the right answer was below 105. The topic of the rest questions was subject-verb agreement. 5 out of 8 questions showed that students who select the correct answer were below 71. More than half of the students had a problem with selecting the correct structure. In general, more students select the wrong than correct answer.

Some indications caused unexpected achievement in terms of answering subject-verb agreement and simple past tense problems, for instance, neglecting basic grammar. Besides that, learners prefer to learn more about speaking skills rather than grammar. Learning English is not only about speaking and writing but also reading and listening comprehension, hence deeper understanding of structure of English is needed. All English skills require structure in facilitating clear meaning to the hearer in communications.

The current study has gathered and outlined the students' grammatical skill, especially regarding subject-verb agreement and simple past tense. Further study can expand the current sample to confirm the current findings. The findings of the current study may also be used to inform further study in developing more effective methods in teaching subject-verb agreement and simple past tense in particular, and English grammar in general.

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