

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses about theoretical framework consisted of concept of grammar knowledge, concept of challenges in grammatical knowledge, students' challenges in grammatical knowledge, and broader categories of grammar learning challenges.

A. Theoretical Review

1. Concept of Grammar Knowledge

Grammar knowledge refers to a learner's understanding and internalization of the rules and structures that govern the correct formation of sentences in a language. According to Ur (1996, p. 75), grammar is "the way words are put together to make correct sentences." Mastery of grammar knowledge enables learners to produce coherent and meaningful sentences, both in spoken and written forms.

Grammar knowledge includes both explicit knowledge—conscious awareness of grammatical rules, and implicit knowledge—the ability to use grammar fluently without consciously thinking about the rules (Ellis, 2006). For effective communication, learners must develop both types of knowledge, as explicit knowledge supports conscious understanding of grammar rules (e.g., speaking correctly without thinking, such as saying '*She doesn't like broccoli*' naturally), while implicit knowledge allows for natural use (e.g. producing grammatically correct sentences such as '*She doesn't like broccoli*' without consciously thinking about rules like subject-verb agreement or verb forms).

Developing grammar knowledge is crucial for English learners because it provides the structural foundation necessary for conveying precise meanings and nuances. Without solid grammar knowledge, students often struggle to organize their ideas clearly, leading to errors in academic writing and everyday communication.

Research shows that grammar knowledge is not simply memorizing rules but involves comprehending how grammatical forms function within various contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). This understanding allows learners to apply rules appropriately depending on the communicative situation.

Additionally, the acquisition of grammar knowledge is influenced by factors such as motivation, learning strategies, and instructional methods (Ellis, 2006). Learners who actively engage with grammar rules through meaningful practice and receive explicit, contextualized instruction tend to develop stronger grammar knowledge.

In the context of English Education students at Baturaja University, grammar knowledge encompasses a range of topics, including sentence structure, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, passive voice, modals, conditionals, reported speech, relative clauses, and complex sentences. Mastery of these topics not only enhances academic writing and comprehension but also equips students to use English effectively in various real-life situations.

Understanding the nature and scope of grammar knowledge is therefore fundamental to identifying students' challenges and improving their overall English proficiency.

2. Concept of Challenges in Grammatical Knowledge

Challenges in grammatical knowledge refer to the specific obstacles, problems, or challenges students encounter when trying to understand, apply, and retain English grammar rules. These challenges are different from formal learning disabilities and often arise from cognitive, environmental, or emotional factors. According to Rezeki and Sagala (2021), academic struggles in language learning can be linked to internal issues such as low motivation, lack of confidence, and limited use of learning strategies.

In grammar learning, these challenges may appear as confusion about tense usage, problems constructing complex sentences, or misunderstanding the functions of grammatical elements within sentences. Such problems can obstruct students' ability to communicate accurately and fluently. Gabriel and Börnert-Ringleb (2023) highlight that behavioral and emotional challenges may further complicate learning challenges, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive academic support.

Furthermore, insufficient exposure to language-rich environments and inadequate instructional input can exacerbate grammar-related problems. Environmental factors, including a shortage of educational resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to English materials, can negatively affect cognitive development and grammar acquisition (Kim & Gattas, 2023). These external obstacles restrict students' chances to practice and internalize grammar, especially in low-resource contexts. Additionally, psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of errors, and low self-esteem may

discourage students from engaging in grammar activities, as noted by Ananda et al. (2024).

Recognizing these various factors is essential for accurately identifying and addressing students' grammatical challenges. This understanding helps educators create targeted interventions and supportive learning environments that promote students' grammar development.

3. Students' Challenges in Grammatical Knowledge

According to Akbari (2016, as cited in Nawira et al., 2019) identifies several common challenges among EFL learners. These include lack of motivation, living in rural areas with limited facilities, limited vocabulary knowledge, weaknesses in recognizing grammatical functions, and not knowing how to learn English effectively.

a. Lack of Motivation

Motivation plays a crucial role in grammar learning. Gardner (1985) defines motivation as a combination of effort, desire, and positive attitudes toward language learning. Highly motivated learners tend to be more persistent, engaged, and successful in acquiring grammar. In contrast, students with low motivation may struggle to retain or apply grammar rules effectively (Dörnyei, 2001; Rezeki & Sagala, 2021).

b. Living in Rural Areas with Limited Facilities

Environmental conditions also impact grammar acquisition. Students in rural areas often face challenges such as limited access to textbooks, internet, or multimedia learning tools (Kim & Gattas, 2023). These constraints reduce their

exposure to English input, which is essential for internalizing grammar structures. A lack of facilities, large class sizes, and limited resources can slow down grammatical development (Nunan, 1999; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

c. Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

A restricted vocabulary can hinder both comprehension and production of grammatically correct sentences. Students may rely on simple structures or repeat basic words, limiting their ability to form complex sentences. Vocabulary knowledge also supports the understanding of grammar rules, such as verb tenses or sentence patterns (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Richards, 1976; Snow, 2010). Without sufficient vocabulary, grammar learning becomes more challenging and less effective.

d. Weaknesses in Recognizing Grammatical Functions

Many EFL learners struggle to identify grammatical roles within sentences—such as subjects, verbs, and objects—which affects their sentence construction. Simbolon (2015) found that common errors in verb use, articles, and prepositions stemmed from this lack of awareness. Nawira et al. (2019) also reported that students struggled to construct coherent paragraphs due to limited understanding of grammar.

e. Not Knowing How to Learn English Effectively

Some students face challenges not because of a lack of effort, but because they lack knowledge of effective learning strategies. Tukan (2023) observed that many learners struggle with translation, pronunciation, and sentence construction due to poor strategy use. Similarly, Sebastian and Abrori

(2023) highlighted how fear of making mistakes and lack of practice also contributed to these challenges. Structured learning methods, such as collaborative tasks or digital tools, can improve grammar learning outcomes.

4. Broader Categories of Grammar Learning Challenges

While Akbari (2016, as cited in Nawira et al., 2019) identifies five specific challenges faced by EFL students in grammar learning—namely: (1) lack of motivation, (2) living in rural areas with limited facilities, (3) limited vocabulary knowledge, (4) weakness in recognizing grammatical functions, and (5) not knowing how to learn English—this study further organizes these issues into broader analytical categories.

The broader categories are adopted from the thematic analysis used by Mustakim et al. (2025), which classify grammar learning challenges into cognitive challenges, environmental constraints, instructional shortcomings, and extended in this study to include psychological factors, as supported by Horwitz (2001) and Rezeki and Sagala (2021). According to Rezeki and Sagala (2021), “the cause of the students’ challenges in learning can be influenced by students’ low learning motivation... The main factors affecting learning challenges of the students come from internal factors of themselves,” where “internal factors emphasize affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and attitudes” (pp. 32–33). Similarly, Horwitz (2001) explains that “foreign language communication entails risk-taking and is necessarily problematic... any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual’s self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence,

self-consciousness, fear, or even panic” (p. 114). The broader categories are explained below:

- **Cognitive challenges** involve challenges in understanding and applying grammar rules such as tenses, sentence structure, and subject-verb agreement.
- **Psychological factors** cover issues like low motivation, anxiety, and lack of confidence, which may hinder students’ engagement and persistence in grammar learning.
- **Environmental constraints** refer to factors such as limited exposure to English, lack of support from family and peers, and resource-poor rural settings.
- **Instructional shortcomings** include problems with how teachers teach, how the learning is organized, monotonous teaching methods, lack of meaningful feedback, and minimal practical application.

These categories serve as a framework to group the more specific challenges cited by Akbari, thereby allowing for a more systematic and holistic analysis of the challenges that students face.

B. Review of Relevant Studies

Based on this study, there are several previous studies related to the topic. The researcher used these earlier works as references;

The first relevant study was conducted by Nawira, Anugrawati, and Muhsin (2019) entitled “*Analyzing Challenges in Grammatical Knowledge for EFL Students*” at the English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Makassar.

This descriptive quantitative study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by EFL students in acquiring grammatical knowledge. The study focused on fourth-semester students, with a sample of 50 participants selected through accidental sampling.

Data were collected using a questionnaire as the primary instrument. The findings revealed several significant challenges experienced by the students in developing their grammatical knowledge, including challenges in organizing sentences into coherent paragraphs, lack of self-confidence, limited vocabulary, and insufficient mastery of verb tenses.

Furthermore, the study underscored the impact of external factors on students' grammatical development. The most prominent challenges reported were related to the learning environment, such as overcrowded classrooms, limited time for practice, and inadequate learning facilities. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of grammatical challenges, involving both cognitive and contextual elements.

This study offers valuable insights that can guide further research and inform educational strategies aimed at enhancing grammatical knowledge among EFL learners in comparable university settings.

The second research, "*Challenges in Grammar Learning Among EFL Students: A Case Study of an Indonesian University*" was conducted by Mustakim, Jaya, and Jabri (2025). The research employed a qualitative study to explore the grammar learning challenges faced by first-semester English Education students at Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang. The research revealed that students

commonly experience grammar-related challenges which can be categorized into cognitive, instructional, and environmental factors.

This study is highly relevant to the current research on students' grammatical knowledge because it highlights how multiple interconnected factors—internal, pedagogical, and environmental—can hinder grammar acquisition. It supports the notion that improving grammar instruction requires not just better teaching techniques, but also consideration of students' learning environments and psychological readiness. Mustakim et al. recommend interactive, student-centered approaches, use of grammar-based digital tools, and project-based learning to make grammar more practical and engaging. The findings strongly suggest that grammar should not be taught in isolation but integrated into real communication contexts to enhance retention and application.

The third research was written by Sandy (2020) entitled “*Students’ Challenges in Learning Basic Grammar*” at Satya Wacana University. Focused on the Basic Grammar course for students in the English Language and Education Program. This course aims to equip students with foundational knowledge and skills in English grammar. Despite this, many students still experience challenges in mastering second language (L2) grammatical forms.

This descriptive study involved 50 students enrolled in the Basic Grammar course. Data were collected through close-ended questionnaires designed to assess students' perceptions of the difficult level of various grammar items included in the course tests. The questionnaire covered grammar topics from all the tests administered during the course. The findings revealed that most students perceived

the grammar items as easy or relatively easy, with only a small portion considering them difficult. However, despite these perceptions, the overall test scores indicated unsatisfactory performance, suggesting a gap between students' perceived understanding and actual mastery of the grammatical content.

This study highlights the importance of addressing both students' self-assessment and objective performance when evaluating grammatical knowledge challenges and can provide useful insights for improving grammar instruction in EFL contexts.