

Syntax Course Impacts On Students' English Language Skill: Students' Perspective

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Abstract. This study aims to find out and understand students' perspectives regarding the impact of syntax courses on their ability to speak English. This is motivated by the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application of syntax in the real world. To answer these problems, this study used a descriptive qualitative case approach to capture the comprehensive picture needed to answer the research questions. The data collection technique used interviews, by interviewing a number of students by asking 3 questions regarding the impact of syntax courses on their English language skills. The research was conducted at one of the Islamic Universities in Medan. The researcher interviewed 10 students who had studied the syntax course. The findings of the interviews are described descriptively. From the 3 questions asked, the results showed that: 1) During studying syntax in one semester, students can improve their knowledge of grammar and basic rules of English sentence structure: motivating them to better understand tree diagrams. 2) The impact of syntax course on students' language skills is the impact on writing, reading, and listening skills but the greatest impact on writing skills. Thus, syntax courses have a very positive impact on students' English language skills, not only in theoretical understanding but also in practical application.

Keywords: English skill, impact, students' perspective, syntax course

INTRODUCTION

In the era of advanced globalization, the ability to speak English is a very important skill in various aspects of life. Students as parties involved in the higher education process need to have good English language skills to face academic challenges and competition in the world of work. One of the important components in learning English is understanding syntax or grammar.

The importance of syntax courses in influencing students' English language skills can be understood from a broader educational perspective. Understanding syntax allows students to master the correct sentence structure and organize ideas more regularly in English. Thus, students' ability to express ideas clearly and effectively in writing and conversation will improve. In addition, understanding syntax also helps students in understanding more complex English texts, such as academic reading materials and literature.

However, there is a debate involving syntax teaching approaches and their impact on students' English proficiency. Some previous studies have revealed that English teaching approaches should be improved in terms of methods so that there are not many syntax errors in writing (Farah Z, 2020). Syntax that focuses too much on grammatical rules can make students feel burdened and find it difficult to apply the knowledge in everyday life such as

writing. For example, students tend to have difficulty in applying the syntax rules they learn in writing paragraphs in English. Although the intention of the writing can still be understood, there are errors in applying syntax in writing (Citra, et al, 2017). This shows a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application of syntax in the real practice.

Based on this background, the problem formulation of this study is as follows: "How does syntax course affect students' English proficiency from the perspective of the students themselves?" This question will be the main focus of our research, with the aim of understanding students' perspectives regarding the impact of syntax courses on their English proficiency.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of syntax courses on students' English proficiency from the students' perspective. This research will help expand our understanding of effective syntax teaching and how it affects students' English proficiency. In addition, the results of this study can also make a significant contribution to the development of English curriculum at the higher education level. With a better understanding of students' perspectives, we can identify shortcomings in current teaching approaches and seek better solutions to improve students' English proficiency in understanding and using syntax appropriately.

Thus, this study has important significance in improving English language education at the tertiary level as well as providing practical benefits for students in developing their English language skills for a more successful future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Syntax, a fundamental part of linguistics, plays an important role in forming the structure of a language. A number of studies have investigated complex syntactic patterns and rules, contributing to a deeper understanding of how words combine to form meaningful sentences. This syntactic perspective has been applied to cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991), applied grammar (Shaumyan 1987), and systemic functional grammar (at least the standard version of Halliday - Halliday 1985 3rd ed.). (Halliday 2004) and Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995). (The theories differ, however, in what they think of syntactic signs and in what they call them.) But the seeds of the semiotic perspective have been there for a long time, and perhaps of course it was Saussure's (1959/1959) 1974 work, the first published in 1916).

Syntacticians and theorists also differ on other dimensions. Most syntacticians now agree that the range of possible syntactic differences between languages is limited. Some take a strong universalist position, arguing that there is one abstract universal system underlying the syntax of all languages. There are differing opinions regarding the nature of this universal grammar. Other linguists believe that there is a universal syntax, although there is not necessarily a universal syntactic system. Word Grammar (Hudson 1984; Hudson and Langendonck 1991) and Lexicase (Starosta 1988) state that there is no unit of phrase size. According to these theories, syntax can only be explained through words and the relationships between them. This is a dependency, where one word, the dependent word, is subordinate to another word, the subject. Usually an addict changes his mind and states his type. A typical sentence begins with a verb and has subordinate words such as determiners, nouns, prepositions, or postpositions.

These dependent elements can have their own dependent elements. In short, the syntactic literature contains a variety of theories and approaches. From basic generative grammar to innovative perspectives such as dependency and functional grammar, researchers continue to deepen our understanding of how language constructs meaning through syntax. Advances in cognitive neuroscience have also helped decipher the neural basis of syntactic processing. Apart from that, in understanding English, mastering and understanding English language skills is also one of the main things, therefore English syntax and English language skills are interrelated because syntax is the grammatical rules used in constructing sentences and phrases in English.

English language skills include understanding and correct use of the syntax. The English language skills are (1) Reading Skills. Proficient readers can comprehend written texts, understand main ideas, infer meanings, and analyze information. Developing vocabulary and comprehension strategies is essential for strong reading skills. (2) Writing Skills. Writing skills involve expressing thoughts, ideas, and information coherently and grammatically. Proficiency in spelling, grammar, and organization is vital for effective written communication. (3) Listening Skills. Being able to understand spoken language, identify key information, and follow instructions are components of strong listening skills. Active listening is crucial in both academic and social contexts (4) Speaking Skills. Proficient speakers can articulate thoughts clearly, engage in conversations, and present information effectively. Pronunciation, fluency, and the ability to express ideas cohesively contribute to strong speaking skills. These skills are interconnected and form the foundation for language proficiency in various contexts, including academic, professional, and social communication.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach to capture the comprehensive description needed to answer the one research question. In this research, the researcher collected data by interviewing 10 students who had studied the syntax course. This interview was conducted without any coercion on the part of the researcher, thereby making the students burdened. We asked 3 questions about the impact of syntax on their English language skills. Because the goal of this study is to investigate the impact of syntax courses on students' English proficiency from the students' perspective, a descriptive case study is needed to approach and serve to describe the context.

This study was conducted at a college of education as a Islamic university in Medan, Indonesia. Several students across academic years were recruited as the participants or respondents for analysis about the impact of syntax from their perspective. Previously, research on syntax had been carried out by several researchers, one of which was Nur Lailiyah regarding the analysis of syntax on language acquisition of three year-old children in Perum Graha Mukti Regency Kediri, and the results of her research showed that the acquisition of syntax in children aged three years within a maximum of three months in the Graha Mukti Regency showed the average has a Mlu 2.327 is at stage v. Therefore, every study suggests that the impact of syntax can be a valuable resource for Indonesian students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After conducting the interview with the participants, the research finds out that students almost have similar answers. It turns out because they take the same class in learning Syntax during the semester. Furthermore, the interview results are divided into two parts. The first is about impacts that students get after having the course. Then, the second part will deliver about the impacts of the course on students' language skill.

1. What students got from the Syntax course in a semester

P. 1	<i>I have a development in understanding word position in English</i>
P. 2	<i>I know more about tree diagrams and enable to identify word groups in English sentences more easily</i>
P. 3	<i>The impact was positive, I felt I understood more about tree diagrams, and explored sentence structure more deeply. Even though there may have been some material that has been studied before, there is also new material and terms in this course</i>
P. 4	<i>After taking the Syntax course for one semester, I felt the impact in terms of a better understanding of sentence structure and grammar.</i>
P. 5	<i>The impact that I feel from studying syntax is that it can improve my ability to compose sentences and language structures correctly. I can understand the language as a whole. Understanding syntax also helps me in text analysis and developing better language skills.</i>
P. 6	<i>The impact I felt Learning Syntax was gaining a better understanding of how to write code correctly and efficiently, preventing syntax errors, and improving my ability to read</i>
P. 7	<i>I know about the definition of syntax, and how simple sentences are structured in syntax</i>
P. 8	<i>After taking the syntax course, I understand more about word/sentence structure</i>
P. 9	<i>I now know how systematic tree diagrams are in syntax</i>
P. 10	<i>I know the basics of grammar or parts of speech in English</i>

The data shows that the participants have two major impacts after enrolling the Syntax course for one semester. The first is, they improved their knowledge in grammar in which they become more understand about the basic rules in English sentence structure. Secondly, the participants know about tree diagrams in Syntax. For information, participants had a Linguistics course before, but tree diagrams were not specifically comprehended by them. It means that this course motivates them to understand tree diagrams more.

2. The impact of Syntax course for students' language skill

P. 1	Writing <i>When I was asked to decipher a sentence, after learning syntax, I felt more confident</i>
P. 2	Writing <i>When practicing TOEFL questions, because I will be able to know which part a word (in a sentence) belongs to</i>
P. 3	Writing <i>Doing questions like TOEFL, or maybe when teaching to other people, you will understand better how to explain them</i>
P. 4	Writing <i>I feel the impact especially when writing essays, articles, or other documents that require the use of English with proper sentence structure</i>
P. 5	Writing <i>When writing essays, reports, or other documents, where understanding syntax helps convey ideas clearly and effectively</i>
P. 6	Writing and reading <i>When writing a sentence and reading a sentence</i>
P. 7	Writing <i>In the situation of making a sentence where the sentence in the syntax does not emphasize grammar (grammatical) but on the form that is arranged into a sentence</i>
P. 8	Writing <i>In a writing situation</i>
P. 9	Writing and listening <i>Writing when doing exercises on the whiteboard. Listening when the lecturer explains the syntax learning material</i>
P. 10	Writing <i>When making sentences, and also a short story</i>

Participants' answers reveal that there are 2 of them that impacted on their writing and reading (P. 6) and writing and listening (P. 9) skills. Meanwhile, the remaining participants gained an impact on their writing skill the most. It turns out that the Syntax course helps them to work on their writing activities, such as making sentences, creating a short story, writing essays or articles, and practicing for the TOEFL tests. Moreover, there is also a participant who has increased reading skill and a participant with listening skill enhancement by the lecturer's explanation about the course materials.

CONCLUSION

Syntax in linguistics is the science of principles and rules that cover sentence structure in a language. Syntax is also one of the important components in learning English. The syntax course is so important, because it helps students understand the structure of English sentences correctly. The results of this study show that during one semester of studying syntax, students felt an increase in their knowledge of grammar and the basic rules of sentences in English. They were also motivated to know and understand more about tree diagrams. The syntax course also had an impact on their English language skills in writing, reading, and listening, but the most impact was on writing skills. Thus, it can be concluded that syntax courses have a very positive impact on students' English language skills, not only in theoretical understanding but also in practical application. This is evidenced by the increase in students' knowledge of the basic rules of English sentences and in practice helps students do writing activities such as creating sentences, short stories, writing essays or articles, and practicing for the TOEFL test. Other skills also improved such as reading and listening skills also improved due to understanding the basic rules of sentences in English.

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