AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING NOUNS AND PRONOUNS FOR GRADE VIII STUDENTS AT SMP MUHAMMADIYAH 12 PERUMNAS MAKASSAR

Uzlifatil Jannah Binti Samir
Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar
105351102520@bg.unismuhmakassar.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the difficulties of Grade VIII students at SMP Muhammadiyah 12 Perumnas Makassar in learning nouns and pronouns and the factors influencing them. Using a descriptive quantitative design, 18 students from class VIII A participated. Data were collected through a grammar test and a questionnaire. Results show that students struggle to distinguish nouns and pronouns, identify their types, and use them correctly in sentences, except for reflexive pronouns. Contributing factors include neutral motivation, grammatical complexity, limited practice, and lack of learning support. Project-based, interactive, and technology-assisted strategies are recommended to enhance understanding and engagement.

Keywords: Nouns and Pronouns, English Grammar, Students' Difficulties

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis kesulitan siswa kelas VIII di SMP Muhammadiyah 12 Perumnas Makassar dalam mempelajari kata benda dan kata ganti serta faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya. Menggunakan desain kuantitatif deskriptif, 18 siswa dari kelas VIII A berpartisipasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes tata bahasa dan kuesioner. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa siswa kesulitan membedakan kata benda dan kata ganti, mengidentifikasi jenisnya, dan menggunakannya dengan benar dalam kalimat, kecuali kata ganti refleksif. Faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi meliputi motivasi yang netral, kompleksitas tata bahasa, latihan yang terbatas, dan kurangnya dukungan pembelajaran. Strategi berbasis proyek, interaktif, dan berbantuan teknologi direkomendasikan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterlibatan.

Kata Kunci: Nouns dan Pronouns, Tata Bahasa Inggris, Kesulitan Siswa

A. Introduction

English plays a crucial role as a global language and is widely used in various fields such as education, communication, technology, and commerce (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Akram et al., 2021). In today's globalized world, learning English has become increasingly important, particularly for students who aim to

pursue higher education and academic success (Cancino, 2023; Wang, 2023). Since English is commonly used as the language of instruction in higher education institutions worldwide, students are required to have adequate English proficiency to meet academic demands and access broader educational opportunities (Shahnazari, 2023).

Grammar is one of the most essential components of English language learning. A strong understanding of grammar enables students to construct sentences accurately and express ideas clearly in both written and spoken communication. According to Su and Lu (2022), grammatical knowledge is fundamental for effective communication, especially in academic writing, as it helps learners organize ideas logically and produce coherent texts. Without sufficient grammatical competence, students may face difficulties in completing academic tasks such as writing essays, summaries, and research papers (Ayton et al., 2022).

Among grammatical components, nouns and pronouns are considered basic but crucial elements in English learning. Nouns function as the main building blocks of sentences, while pronouns help avoid repetition and improve sentence clarity. Proper mastery of nouns and pronouns allows students to communicate ideas more effectively and efficiently (Jayanti, 2019). Furthermore, grammar learning helps students identify sentence patterns and minimize errors in both writing and speaking (Fahruddin & Nurhidayat, 2020).

However, many EFL students still experience difficulties in learning and using nouns and pronouns correctly. One common problem is confusion in the use of personal pronouns, particularly possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns. Incorrect use of pronouns may lead to ambiguity and miscommunication in both spoken and written texts (Swan, 2016). According to Nokas (2021), personal pronouns are frequently misused because students do not fully understand their grammatical functions and references.

Based on preliminary studies and interviews conducted in previous research, students at the junior high school level continue to make errors in distinguishing between possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns

(Ramayanti et al., 2023). These difficulties may be caused by limited grammatical understanding, lack of practice, and ineffective teaching methods. Traditional grammar instruction that relies heavily on verbal explanations and textbooks often makes students feel bored and less motivated to learn grammar (Ali, Ali & Amin, 2020).

Considering the importance of grammar, particularly nouns and pronouns, and the persistent difficulties faced by students, it is necessary to analyze these problems in depth. Therefore, this study focuses on Grade VIII students at SMP Muhammadiyah 12 Perumnas Makassar to identify their specific difficulties in learning nouns and pronouns and the factors contributing to those difficulties. The findings of this research are expected to help teachers improve grammar instruction and support students in achieving better English proficiency.

B. Methods

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design aimed at describing and analyzing the difficulties of Grade VIII students in learning nouns and pronouns without manipulating any variables. This design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to present data in numerical form, such as percentages and frequencies, to clearly illustrate the types and levels of difficulties experienced by the students. The study did not aim to test a hypothesis or establish cause-and-effect relationships, but rather to provide a factual and systematic description of the students' learning challenges.

The population of this study consisted of all students at SMP Muhammadiyah 12 Perumnas Makassar, which included four classes: VII A, VIII A, IX A, and IX B. The research sample was taken from class VIII A, consisting of 18 students, as six students in this class were Tahfidz students who did not participate in general subjects. The study used total sampling, meaning that all students in the selected class were included as participants.

The research instruments consisted of a grammar test and a questionnaire. The test was designed to measure students' understanding and correct usage of nouns and

pronouns through multiple-choice questions, completion items, and short sentence construction tasks. The results provided quantitative data on students' accuracy and common errors. The questionnaire was used to collect supporting data on the internal and external factors contributing to the students' difficulties. It included closed-ended items using a Likert scale to measure students' perceptions and attitudes, as well as open-ended items for further explanations or personal experiences. By combining these instruments, the researcher obtained comprehensive data on both performance and perception aspects, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data were collected in two stages. First, the students completed the grammar test, which consisted of 15 items and was administered during a regular English lesson for 30–37 minutes under the supervision of the researcher and the classroom teacher. Correct answers were scored, and constructed responses were evaluated using a rubric to maintain objectivity. Second, the students filled out the questionnaire, which contained 15 items coded

numerically from 1 to 5 for Likert-scale responses. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns. All data were coded, entered into a spreadsheet, and double-checked to prevent input errors. Confidentiality was maintained by not recording student names, and participation was voluntary.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative methods. The students' test scores were calculated using the formula:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{x}{N} \times 100$$

where x is the student's score and N is the maximum score. The mean score was calculated using:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Percentages were also calculated to determine the proportion of students who made specific errors. The questionnaire data were analyzed based on the Likert-scale responses to determine students' perceptions and identify internal and external

factors contributing to their difficulties in learning nouns and pronouns. The results were tabulated and presented in percentages for clear interpretation.

C. Results and Discussion

This study investigates the difficulties of eighth-grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 12 Perumnas Makassar in learning nouns and pronouns, using a quantitative descriptive approach through tests and questionnaires. The findings reveal that students face challenges in distinguishing between nouns and pronouns, recognizing their types, and applying them correctly in sentences, although they perform well with reflexive pronouns. Questionnaire results indicate that students' motivation is generally neutral, yet they appreciate clear explanations from teachers, sufficient examples, exercises, and support from textbooks. The discussion below integrates these results with relevant contemporary (2021–2026) and classic theories, while also comparing findings with similar studies in Indonesia.

1. Difficulty Distinguishing Between Nouns and Pronouns and Their Types

Test results show that students often answered questions about nouns and pronouns incorrectly, with only a few correct responses. Mistakes were prevalent in identifying proper nouns (e.g., "Makassar"), abstract nouns (e.g., "love," "happiness"), and collective nouns (e.g., "family," "team"). Pronouns posed additional challenges, particularly subject pronouns (I, you), possessive pronouns (mine, yours), object pronouns (me, him), and interrogative pronouns (who, what). Reflexive pronouns were the exception, with almost all students responding correctly.

These results align with Sparks Education (2025) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes functional communication over grammatical memorization, and the 2025 Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes the Pancasila learner profile. Students memorized forms but struggled to apply them contextually, lacking exercises such as role-plays that clarify the functional distinction between nouns and pronouns. Conversely, Deep Learning Training and Workshop (DLTW) TEFLIN (2025) suggests that adaptive AI-based apps accelerate grammar

mastery; the findings in Makassar contradict this, as such tools are unavailable.

This study also extends Quirk et al. (1985), highlighting that in the digital era, excessive pronoun uses in informal messaging increases overlap confusion between nouns and pronouns. A comparable study in Dompu (JIIP, 2024) similarly reported difficulty with noun types due to limited visual media, reflecting a regional pattern.

2. Challenges in Using Nouns and Pronouns in Sentences and Basic Concepts

Students struggled with completing sentences using pronouns, especially objects of prepositions (e.g., "to me"), subject and object pronouns, and interrogative pronouns. Questionnaire data support this: item 10 (26.67% agreed/neutral) showed confusion distinguishing subjects from objects, item 11 (53.33% agreed) reflected uncertainty between possessive pronouns and adjectives (mine vs. my), and item 13 (53.33% neutral) indicated frequent forgetting of plural or singular nouns.

These findings align with Project-Based Learning (PBL, Sparks, 2025), which emphasizes sentence production through authentic projects. In the current school, exercises focus on memorization rather than production, explaining low sentence-completion scores. Transformation of Teaching via Technology (JIIP, 2024) suggests that interactive apps improve pronoun usage, but the absence of technology in Makassar hinders learning.

Contrary approaches such as Total Physical Response (TPR, Sparks 2025) and the Silent Way (2025) were ineffective in this context, as evidenced by neutral questionnaire responses regarding materials and practical activities. The study develops Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), showing that large class sizes and limited teacher feedback reduce "pushed output" opportunities. Gadget distractions exacerbate difficulties, adding a new factor to Pienemann's Processability Theory (1998). Similar findings were reported by Rasya et al. (JPDP, 2025) in Jambi, where feedback scarcity hindered sentence construction.

3. Student Motivation to Learn Nouns and Pronouns

Questionnaire results indicate mixed motivation. Item 1 (80% neutral) suggested moderate enjoyment of

grammar, item 2 (46.67% neutral) reflected limited extra practice, item 3 (40% agreed) showed awareness of grammar's usefulness, and item 12 (73.33% neutral) indicated that nouns and pronouns were perceived as difficult. Students showed occasional enthusiasm when recognizing practical importance but were often demotivated by repetitive memorization.

These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT, adapted JIIP, 2024), highlighting intrinsic motivation driven by competence, autonomy, and relatedness. While item 3 reflects instrumental motivation, neutral responses on enjoyment and extra practice indicate frustration. Sparks (2025) CLT emphasizes interactive, engaging methods, yet item 6 (66.67% neutral) demonstrates conventional teaching limits engagement. This contrasts with Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), which predicts strong instrumental motivation in developing countries; here, neutrality indicates that students recognize importance but lack engagement. Sparks (2025) also suggests digital gamification to enhance motivation; the lack of such

tools in Makassar contributes to stagnation.

4. Student Assessment of Teachers, Classes, and Resources

Overall, students gave positive feedback about teachers and resources. Item 4 (53.33% strongly agreed) indicated clear explanations, item 5 (53.33% agreed) showed sufficient examples and exercises, item 7 (46.67% strongly agreed) reflected freedom to ask questions, and item 15 (73.33% agreed) highlighted the usefulness of textbooks. Neutral responses appeared for teaching interest (item 6, 66.67%), peer discussions (item 8, 46.67%), practical activities (item 9, 66.67%), and adequacy of learning materials (item 14, 53.33%).

These findings correspond with the Silent Way (Sparks, 2025) and Merdeka Curriculum (Attasyrih, 2025), emphasizing facilitation and autonomy, and textbooks align with Richards' task-based learning (2014, updated 2024). However, PBL (Sparks, 2025) requires collaborative projects and extensive discussion, which were limited, while JIIP (2024) highlights the need for technology, lacking in Makassar. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, 1978)

is partially evident: teachers provide support (item 4), but neutral engagement with practical activities (item 9) restricts full ZPD benefit.

5. Overall Implications

In summary, nouns and pronouns are "easy but tricky" for Indonesian EFL learners. Students performed poorly on tests except for reflexive pronouns. Questionnaire results show moderate satisfaction with teaching methods and neutral motivation, indicating that learners recognize grammar's usefulness but struggle with engagement and sentence production. These findings suggest that traditional memorization-based approaches are insufficient; project-based, interactive, and technology-assisted methods are necessary to improve understanding and motivation.

D. Conclusion

Students face various difficulties in learning nouns and pronouns. They often cannot distinguish between nouns and pronouns, do not yet understand the differences between types of nouns, and have difficulty understanding the different types of pronouns. In addition, students struggle with the basic concepts of nouns and pronouns, still have trouble completing sentences using pronouns, and continue to face challenges in answering questions related to nouns and pronouns.

Students' difficulties in understanding and using nouns and pronouns are influenced by several factors. These include neutral learning motivation, the complexity of grammatical concepts—especially in distinguishing types of pronouns and forms of nouns—and limited opportunities for practice and learning support. Although teachers provide clear explanations and exercises, these factors continue to hinder students' mastery of nouns and pronouns.

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