

Original Article

Grammar Knowledge of English Education Majors: An Assessment of Grammatical Features

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Received: 03 June 2026; Revised: 11 July 2026;
Accepted: 15 July 2026; Published: 16 August 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66074/Z7Q4V1F6>

Abstract

Grammar knowledge is a fundamental component of communicative competence and effective academic writing, particularly among English education majors who are expected to understand and accurately apply grammatical rules and structures in various contexts. Despite continuous exposure to grammar instruction, many tertiary-level learners still experience difficulties in applying grammar accurately. Thus, this study aimed to assess the grammar knowledge of English Education major students across key grammatical features and identify their strengths and areas of difficulty. The study employed a quantitative research design involving 88 second-year, third-year, and fourth-year English major students from a state university in Davao Region during the Academic Year 2025–2026. Data were collected using a researcher-made survey questionnaire and a grammar knowledge test covering ten selected grammatical features. Mean scores and frequency counts were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that the overall level of grammar knowledge among the participants was moderate (2.90). Students demonstrated high to very high performance in pronouns, conjunctions, degree of adjectives, and voice of verbs, while low to very low performance was observed in subject-verb agreement, verbals, tenses of verbs, auxiliary verbs, and relative pronouns. The findings revealed varying levels in grammar knowledge across grammar features and highlighted the need for more responsive and focused grammar instruction among future English language educators.

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Keywords: assessment, grammar learning, grammatical features

1. Introduction

Grammar plays a vital role in language learning because it enables learners to construct meaningful, coherent, and grammatically accurate communication. In English language education, grammatical competence is considered a fundamental component of communicative proficiency, particularly among students majoring in English who are expected to demonstrate accuracy in both academic and professional communication. Although grammar instruction is continuously integrated into English subjects under the K–12 curriculum (Bautista & Del Valle, 2023), grammar is often taught incidentally through communicative and performance-based activities rather than as a focused area of assessment (Kabel et al., 2021). As a result, many college students demonstrate familiarity with grammatical rules yet continue to struggle in applying them accurately in authentic language use and academic writing contexts (Mandal, 2024).

Globally, grammatical difficulties among English learners remain a persistent concern. Studies conducted in Iraq revealed that university students commonly experience difficulties in sentence structure, tense consistency, determiners, and subject-verb agreement, which often result in disorganized writing outputs (Salman et al., 2022). Similar grammatical challenges were also reported among learners in Saudi Arabia, where students demonstrated weaknesses in written grammar application and sentence construction (Algarni et al., 2021). Likewise, studies in Nigeria identified recurring grammatical errors in tense usage, prepositions, concord, and sentence organization among tertiary learners, indicating continuing difficulties in grammatical competence despite prolonged exposure to English instruction (Maiguero et al., 2021).

Similar findings are evident in the Philippine context. In Zambales, college students were found to struggle with subject-verb agreement and sentence construction (Sahagun, 2021), while learners in La Union experienced difficulties in various grammatical features and sentence organization (Merza, 2022). In Davao de Oro, grammatical challenges were likewise observed among college students during speaking, reading, and writing activities (Raymunde & Mamonong, 2022). These recurring findings suggest that exposure to grammar instruction does not necessarily guarantee grammatical mastery, particularly in higher education settings where students are expected to demonstrate advanced language proficiency.

Despite the growing body of research on grammar, most existing studies focus primarily on primary and secondary education contexts, leaving limited evidence regarding the grammatical competence of tertiary-level English major students (Yusob, 2018). This gap is particularly important because English major students are expected to become future language educators who must demonstrate strong grammatical competence in both instruction and communication. However, grammar is often regarded as secondary to communicative performance and is typically

integrated indirectly into language instruction, with insufficient assessment of learners' actual grammatical understanding (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). Consequently, grammatical weaknesses may persist even among students who have already undergone formal grammar instruction.

The study is anchored on the Structuralist Grammar Theory proposed by de Saussure (1916), which views grammar as a system of structured linguistic rules that can be systematically learned, analyzed, and assessed. Supporting this perspective, Purpura (2004) emphasized that grammatical knowledge may be measured through structured grammar assessments that evaluate learners' understanding and application of grammatical forms. In this study, selected grammatical features served as indicators in assessing the grammar knowledge of English major students.

Complementing this structural perspective, the present study is further informed by Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence, which emphasizes that effective language use extends beyond knowledge of grammatical rules to the ability to use language appropriately in different communicative contexts. Hymes argued that grammatical competence is a fundamental component of communicative competence, as learners must possess sufficient grammatical knowledge to produce meaningful and contextually appropriate language. In the context of this study, this framework underscores the importance of assessing learners' mastery of selected grammatical features as a foundation for effective communication. Together, Structuralist Grammar Theory and Hymes' theory of communicative competence provide complementary foundations for the present study by supporting both the systematic assessment of grammatical knowledge and its role in developing learners' communicative proficiency. The findings of the grammar assessment likewise serve as the basis for developing responsive game-based learning exemplars that aim to strengthen both grammatical competence and communicative language proficiency.

Moreover, previous studies commonly explored grammar teaching approaches and classroom interventions, yet limited research has specifically examined the grammar knowledge levels of English major students across selected grammatical features. Existing literature also provides insufficient evidence regarding which grammatical areas remain most difficult for tertiary-level English learners despite prior instruction. Identifying these grammatical strengths and weaknesses is essential in developing responsive instructional strategies and improving grammar instruction within teacher education programs.

While previous studies have examined grammatical difficulties among various learner populations, limited research has specifically assessed grammar knowledge levels of English major students across multiple grammar features. Furthermore, insufficient evidence exists on which grammar areas remain challenging for future English language educators despite prior instruction. This gap highlights the need to identify persistent grammatical difficulties among these students.

Hence, this study aimed to assess the level of grammar knowledge among English major students based on selected grammatical features, namely subject-verb agreement, verbals, tenses of verbs, auxiliary verbs, relative pronouns, conjunctions,

sentence patterns, voice of verbs, pronouns, and degrees of adjectives. Specifically, the study sought to determine the grammatical features in which students demonstrate strengths and difficulties. The findings of the study may contribute to improving grammar instruction, enhancing the curriculum, and developing more responsive language-learning interventions for English major students in higher education institutions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to determine the level of grammar knowledge among English major students based on selected grammatical features. The design was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researchers to systematically assess and describe the participants' grammar knowledge using numerical data obtained through standardized testing procedures.

2.2 Research Participants

The research participants consisted of 88 second-, third-, and fourth-year English major students enrolled at a state university in Davao Region. Total enumeration sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of all qualified students within the identified population.

The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (1) currently enrolled as an English major student, (2) enrolled in the second, third, or fourth year level during the conduct of the study, and (3) had completed the course, Structure of English. Students who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study. The participants represented learners who had already been exposed to formal grammar instruction and were therefore considered appropriate respondents for assessing grammar learning levels.

2.3 Research Instruments

The study utilized two researcher-made quantitative instruments: a survey questionnaire and a grammar knowledge test. The survey questionnaire was designed to identify the grammatical features commonly encountered by the participants in learning grammar. It consisted of items related to students' experiences and perceived difficulties with selected grammatical features.

The grammar knowledge test consisted of ten grammatical features, with ten items allocated to each feature. Participants' correct answers were used to determine the level of grammar knowledge among English major students across ten grammatical features, namely subject-verb agreement, verbals, tenses of verbs, auxiliary verbs, relative pronouns, conjunctions, sentence patterns, voice of verbs, pronouns, and

degrees of adjectives. The test items were designed using indicators modified from Kim and Bae (2017) and aligned with the Table of Specifications (TOS) to ensure content validity and consistency with the intended learning competencies.

Both instruments underwent expert validation by professionals in English language teaching and educational research to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. Pilot testing was conducted to determine the reliability and comprehensibility of the instruments.

The survey questionnaire demonstrated excellent internal consistency, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.990. The reliability analysis was conducted and verified by a statistician, who confirmed the accuracy and acceptability of the computed coefficient for the present instrument. Although Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.95 may indicate potential item redundancy, the result was carefully reviewed and deemed appropriate for the instrument used in this study. The grammar knowledge test demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) coefficient of 0.813. During pilot testing, the test was further evaluated using item difficulty analysis. Difficulty indices across the ten grammar domains ranged from 0.10 to 0.54 (Subject–Verb Agreement = 0.48, Verbals = 0.48, Tenses of Verbs = 0.31, Auxiliary/Modals = 0.25, Relative Pronouns = 0.42, Conjunctions = 0.54, Sentence Patterns = 0.10, Voice of Verbs = 0.48, Pronouns = 0.40, and Degrees of Adjectives = 0.53). These results indicate that the test included items with varying levels of difficulty and was generally appropriate for assessing students' grammar knowledge.

To ensure consistency between the online and face-to-face administration of the grammar knowledge test, both modalities used the same test items, standardized instructions, equal time allocation, and uniform scoring procedures under supervised conditions. Stable internet access was ensured during online administration, and all participants completed the test individually following the same testing procedures. These measures were implemented to minimize potential differences between the two testing modalities and ensure the comparability of the results.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The study was conducted at a state university in Davao Region during the Academic Year 2025–2026. The researchers obtained approval from the appropriate university authorities before administering the instruments. The researchers then coordinated with the instructors to arrange the data collection.

The participants were first oriented regarding the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights as respondents. Informed consent was secured before data collection. The researchers assured the participants that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality and that anonymity would be maintained throughout the study. Participation in the study was voluntary.

The grammar knowledge test was administered using both online and face-to-face modalities. Online responses were collected using the Kahoot! platform, while

face-to-face administration was conducted during scheduled classroom sessions. Standardized instructions were provided to ensure consistency in the administration process. The researchers observed the test process to eliminate distractions and ensure accuracy of responses.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were encoded, organized, and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. Descriptive statistics, particularly mean scores and frequency counts, were utilized to determine the level of grammar learning of the participants in each grammatical feature. Verbal interpretations ranging from very low to very high were used to describe the participants' performance levels.

Range of Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Meaning/Description
4.51-5.00	Very High	The student demonstrates a very high level in grammar learning with a score of 9-10 out of 10 items in the grammar test.
3.51-4.50	High	The student demonstrates a high level in grammar learning with a score of 7-8 out of 10 items in the grammar test.
2.51-3.50	Moderate	The student demonstrates a moderate level of grammar learning with a score of 5-6 out 10 items in the grammar test.
1.51-2.50	Low	The student demonstrates a low level of grammar learning with a score of 3-4 out of 10 items in the grammar test.
1.00-1.50	Very Low	The student demonstrates a very low level of grammar learning with a score of 0-2 out of 10 items in the grammar test.

The statistical analysis was conducted using appropriate data analysis software. The results of the analysis served as the basis for determining the grammatical features in which the participants demonstrated strengths and difficulties.

3. Results

The results of the study revealed that the English major students demonstrated varying levels of understanding of grammatical features.

Table 1. Mean scores of BSEd English students in grammar learning.

Grammar Feature	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Subject-Verb Agreement	1.15	Very Low
Verbals	1.03	Very Low
Tenses of Verb	1.61	Low
Auxiliary (Modals)	1.95	Low
Relative Pronoun	2.13	Low
Conjunction	4.31	High
Sentence Patterns	3.39	Moderate
Voice of Verbs	3.74	High
Pronoun	4.94	Very High
Degree of Adjectives	4.43	High
Overall	2.90	Moderate

As shown in Table 1, the students obtained an overall mean score of 2.90, which is described as Moderate. The findings indicate that students do not have equal understanding across all grammar features. Specifically, students performed highest in pronouns (4.94), degree of adjectives (4.43), conjunctions (4.31), and voice of verbs (3.74). In contrast, students obtained low to very low mean scores in subject-verb agreement (1.15), verbals (1.03), tenses of verbs (1.61), auxiliary verbs or modals (1.95), and relative pronouns (2.13). Overall, the findings reveal marked differences in students' grammar knowledge across the assessed grammatical features. Although the participants demonstrated strong performance in several grammar areas, the very low scores in fundamental features such as Subject–Verb Agreement and Verbals highlight significant deficiencies in essential grammatical competencies, raising concerns about the preparedness of future English language teachers.

4. Discussion

Apparently, many students demonstrated an understanding of basic grammar rules, but some areas remained challenging. The results indicate that students grasp certain grammatical features better than others, particularly those they use more frequently, while more complex grammatical rules are harder for them to comprehend. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies conducted in Iraq, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines, which similarly reported that English language learners continue to experience difficulties in grammar despite years of instruction. This suggests that grammar learning remains a common challenge across different educational contexts.

Specifically, the very low performance in Subject–Verb Agreement and Verbals may be attributed to the complexity of these grammatical features, while Pronouns are more frequently encountered in everyday communication and classroom activities, making them easier to master through repeated exposure. This supports Ellis' (2019) view that grammar knowledge is strengthened through meaningful and frequent language use rather than rule memorization alone.

Notably, the mean score of 1.15 in Subject–Verb Agreement falls within the Very Low category, indicating that students answered only 0–2 out of 10 items correctly. Considering that the participants were second- to fourth-year English major students preparing to become English language teachers, this finding highlights a substantial deficiency in one of the most fundamental components of English grammar.

According to McManus (2020), this inconsistency indicates that students' grammar learning is fragmented and largely dependent on how specific grammar features are encountered, practiced, and reinforced during instruction. Consequently, grammar concepts with more exposure and repeated use are more likely to be understood by students, while less emphasized grammar features remain difficult.

Similarly, Ellis (2018) indicates that understanding grammar involves more than simply memorizing rules; it requires integrating form, meaning, and use. This study revealed that students performed better in grammar features they often use in communication, while they struggled in areas that are not frequently practiced in real contexts.

Additionally, the findings suggest that grammar instruction should provide learners with more opportunities to apply grammatical concepts through contextualized and communicative activities rather than focusing solely on memorizing rules. The results highlight the importance of reinforcing difficult grammar areas through consistent practice, guided exercises, and authentic language use, as this may help students improve their grammar knowledge.

However, the study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The findings are based on a specific group of English major students, which limits the generalizability of the results. Thus, the use of mean scores alone may not fully capture deeper aspects of grammatical understanding. These constraints suggest caution in interpreting the findings as representative of all English students.

Future research is recommended to expand the sample size and include more diverse groups of students from different institutions. Further studies may also explore the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies and interventions designed to improve weak grammar areas identified in this study. Qualitative or mixed-methods approaches may likewise provide deeper insights into students' grammar learning experiences and difficulties.

5. Conclusion

This study assessed the grammar knowledge of English major students to determine their level of understanding of selected grammatical features. The findings revealed that while students demonstrate familiarity with basic grammar rules, several areas still require improvement. Specifically, students showed higher performance in pronouns, conjunctions, degree of adjectives, and voice of verbs, while they experienced difficulties in subject-verb agreement, verbals, tenses of verbs, auxiliary verbs, and relative pronouns. These results indicate that students' grammar knowledge remains inconsistent across different grammatical features.

The study highlights the need for more focused and responsive grammar instruction to address learners' weaknesses and strengthen their grammatical competence. Providing students with meaningful practice and contextualized learning activities may help improve their understanding and application of grammar. The findings may serve as a basis for enhancing grammar instruction and developing interventions that support the language development of future English educators.

Furthermore, this study highlights the need for more focused grammar instruction to improve students' grammar knowledge. Teachers may begin by giving grammar assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Based on the results, remedial grammar classes and focused practice on difficult grammar topics may be provided. Teachers are also encouraged to use contextualized grammar activities and simple grammar materials to help students apply grammar in real communication. Thus, the findings of this study may serve as a guide for improving grammar instruction and developing appropriate learning activities for future English teachers.

Acknowledgment

The researchers would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the successful completion of this thesis. To our panel members valuable feedback provided and suggestions, which greatly enhanced the quality of our study. To God be all the glory.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to this study and its intended publication.

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Author Contributions: Matildo, A.D.; Marcos, J.R.; Dequia, J.J.; Fuerzas, A.; Marikit, D.; and Matildo, J.; Study design, method conception, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing.