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**EFL LEARNERS' ABILITY IN IDENTIFYING INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY AT UMMY SOLOK****Dimas Bambang Sadewo<sup>1</sup>, Yuli Herman<sup>2</sup>, Riyen Permata<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Clauses are one of the basic elements in English grammar. Identifying independent and dependent clauses helps students write correct and complete sentences. However, many EFL students still struggle to distinguish these clause types, especially dependent clauses. Previous studies mostly examined clause identification in general, without focusing on each dependent clause type separately. This study aimed to describe fourth-semester students' ability in identifying independent and dependent clauses at the English Education Department of FKIP UMMY Solok in the 2024/2025 academic year. This study used a descriptive quantitative design with 15 students selected through total sampling. Data were collected using a 20-item grammar test covering independent clauses, noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverb clauses, then analyzed using percentage and mean score formulas. The results showed that students scored highest on independent clauses (mean: 7.06), followed by noun clauses (5.53), adverb clauses (4.80), and adjective clauses (4.46). Students had more difficulty with dependent clauses, particularly adjective and adverb clauses. Lecturers are encouraged to give more focused practice on dependent clauses to improve students' grammatical ability.*

**Keyword:** *Clause identification, dependent clause, EFL learners, grammatical competence, independent clause*

**INTRODUCTION**

Grammar plays an essential role in English language learning because it supports learners in constructing meaningful and grammatically accurate communication. In academic contexts, grammatical competence contributes significantly to students' writing quality, reading comprehension, and overall communicative ability. Permata (2022) explains that grammar involves important components such as subject verb agreement, verb tense, conjunctions, and sentence construction, all of which influence students' ability to produce coherent academic writing. Similarly, Herman (2022) emphasizes that grammar competence supports the development of the four major language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and

writing. However, grammar instruction is often still dominated by rule memorization rather than meaningful language application, causing many students to experience difficulties when applying grammatical knowledge in authentic contexts.

One important aspect of grammar learning is syntactic awareness, particularly the ability to recognize sentence structure and clause relationships. Recent international studies have shown that syntactic awareness contributes significantly to academic writing development and reading comprehension among EFL learners. Zhang and Zou (2022) found that students with stronger syntactic awareness demonstrated better performance in sentence construction and grammatical accuracy. Likewise, Deacon and Kieffer (2023) explain that learners' understanding of clause structure supports higher level language processing and improves their ability to organize complex ideas in academic writing. These findings indicate that clause identification is not merely a theoretical grammar exercise but an important pedagogical skill that supports effective communication.

In English grammar, clauses function as the core elements of sentence construction. Independent clauses express complete thoughts and can stand alone as sentences, whereas dependent clauses rely on independent clauses to complete their meaning. Dependent clauses may function as noun clauses, adjective clauses, or adverb clauses within sentence structures. The ability to distinguish these clauses is important because academic writing frequently requires students to produce complex and compound complex sentences that involve hierarchical relationships between ideas. Students who fail to recognize dependent clause functions often produce unclear, fragmented, or grammatically inaccurate sentences.

Several previous studies have investigated students' ability in identifying clauses. Lubis (2020) reported that most students were able to identify independent and dependent clauses, although dependent clauses remained more difficult for learners. Similarly, Sariakin and Anwar (2020) found that university students still showed only sufficient ability in identifying clause types, indicating weaknesses in grammatical analysis. Nasir et al. (2022) also revealed that students experienced difficulties distinguishing main clauses and subordinate clause in reported speech structures. Although these studies provide useful insights into students' grammatical competence, most of them focus only on general clause identification without examining the specific difficulties students face in recognizing different types of dependent clauses.

Furthermore, previous studies tend to emphasize descriptive results without critically analyzing why dependent clauses are more difficult for students. Most studies also focus on

secondary school learners or analyze clause identification in limited grammatical contexts such as reported speech. In addition, little attention has been given to syntactic awareness as a pedagogical issue in higher education grammar learning, especially among university students learning advanced grammar. Therefore, there remains a need for research that investigates clause identification more comprehensively by classifying dependent clause into noun clauses, adjectives clauses, and adverb clauses while examining which clause type creates the greatest difficulty for learners.

Based on preliminary classroom observations and informal interviews conducted on March 19, 2025, involving five fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok, several problems were identified. The students reported difficulties in distinguishing independent and dependent clauses within complex sentences, identifying clause markers, and recognizing the grammatical function of noun, adjective, and adverb clauses. Since these interviews were informal and exploratory in nature, the findings were used only as preliminary indications of students' grammatical difficulties and not as formal research data. Nevertheless, these preliminary findings support the assumption that students still experience challenges in syntactic analysis despite having completed Advanced Grammar courses.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the ability of fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok in identifying independent and dependent clauses in English sentences. Specifically, this research investigates students' performance in recognizing noun clause, adjective clauses, and adverb clauses to determine which type of dependent clause is most difficult for learners.

This study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to grammar instruction in higher education. Theoretically, it enriches discussion on syntactic awareness and clause identification in EFL learning contexts. Practically, the findings may help lectures develop more effective grammar instruction strategies that emphasize contextual clause analysis and sentence structure awareness. In addition, this study may serve as a reference for future researchers investigating grammatical competence and syntactic development among university students.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design. According to Creswell (2018), descriptive quantitative research aims to describe existing phenomena objectively using numerical data without manipulating variables. The present study focused on describing students' ability to identify independent and dependent clauses based on their performance on a grammar test. The study did not seek to establish causal relationships but rather to provide a detailed description of students' clause identification ability.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study were fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok in the 2024/2025 academic year. The total population consisted of 15 students. A total sampling technique was employed because the entire population consisted of only fifteen students. Sugiyono (2022) states that total sampling is appropriate when all members of a relatively small population are included in the study. Furthermore, descriptive studies primarily aim to describe characteristics of a specific group rather than make statistical generalizations (Creswell, 2018; Grimes & Schulz, 2002).

Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledges that the small sample size constitutes a significant limitation. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized beyond the investigated group and should be interpreted only within the context of fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok. The fourth semester students were selected because they had completed the Advanced Grammar course and had previously studied independent and dependent clauses, making them appropriate participants for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The research instrument was a grammar test consisting of 20 short answer items designed to measure students' ability to identify independent clauses, noun clauses, adverb clauses, and adjective clauses. The test blueprint was developed based on theories of English clause structure proposed by Eastwood (2002), Yule (1998), Hewings (2013) and other grammar references used in the Advanced Grammar course. The indicators and scoring rubric are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Indicator of Test in Independent and Dependent Clause**

Indicator	Item Number	Scoring Rubric
Identifying Independent Clauses Correctly	1-5	0=Incorrect, 1= Partially, 2= Completely
Identifying Noun Clauses Correctly	6-10	0=Incorrect, 1= Partially, 2= Completely
Identifying Adverb Clauses Correctly	11-15	0=Incorrect, 1= Partially, 2= Completely
Identifying Adjective Clauses Correctly	16-20	0=Incorrect, 1= Partially, 2= Completely

### *Validity*

Content validity was established using the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) proposed by Lawshe (1975). The CVR method is widely used to evaluate the relevance and essentially of instrument items through expert judgment and remains an accepted approach for content validation. Content validity is essential to ensure that the instrument adequately represents the construct being measured and is aligned with the objectives of the study. The validation process involved three expert lecturers from the English Education Department who have expertise in English grammar and language assessment. The validators evaluated each test item based on its relevance, clarity, representativeness, and appropriateness in measuring students' ability to identify independent clauses and dependent clauses. Each validator classified every item as either "essential" or "not essential". The Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated using the following formula:

$$CVR = \frac{ne - \left(\frac{N}{2}\right)}{\frac{N}{2}}$$

Where:

ne = number of validators who stated that the item was "essential"

N = total number of validators

The validation results showed that all three validators rated all twenty items as essential, consequently, all items obtained a CVR value of 1.00. According to Lawshe (1975), a CVR value of 1.00 indicates that all experts agreed on the essentiality of the items. Therefore, all twenty items were considered valid and suitable for measuring students' ability in identifying independent and dependent clauses.

Table 2: Summary of Content Validity Results

Number of Items	Number of Validators	CVR Value	Decision
20	3	1.00	Valid

### *Reliability*

After the instrument had been declared valid, its reliability was examined using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) following the guideline proposed by Koo and Li (2016). The ICC was used to determine the consistency and level of agreement among the expert validators in evaluating the instrument. The reliability assessment involved the same three expert validators who reviewed the instrument during the validation process. Their evaluations were analyzed using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) to determine the degree of consistency among the validators' judgments.

The analysis produced an ICC value of 1.00. According to Koo and Li (2016), an ICC value greater than 0.90 indicates excellent reliability. Therefore, the obtained ICC demonstrates perfect agreement among the validators and indicates that the instrument has a very high level of reliability. The result confirms that the instrument consistently measures the intended construct and is appropriate for data collection purposes.

Table 3: Summary of Reliability Results

Reliability Measure	ICC Value	Category
ICC	1.00	Excellent Reliability

### **Technique of Data Collection**

The data collection was conducted using a grammar test consisting of twenty short answer essay items covering independent clauses, noun clauses, adverb clauses, and adjective clauses. The essay format was selected because it allowed students to demonstrate their actual understanding and analytical ability in identifying clause types rather than merely selecting answers from predetermined options. Therefore, the test provide a more accurate representation of students' grammatical competence.

The test items required students to identify clause types within sentences and classify dependent clauses into noun clauses, adverb clauses, and adjective clauses. After the instrument had been established as valid and reliable, it was administered to fifteen fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok in the 2024/2025 academic year. Students were given sixty minutes to complete all test items.

After the test session, all answer sheets were collected and scored by the researcher using a standardized scoring rubric. To maintain scoring consistency, the same scoring criteria

were applied to all responses. The resulting scores were subsequently converted into percentages for further analysis.

### **Technique of Data Analysis**

The data obtained from students' grammar test were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistical techniques. According to Sugiyono (2022), data analysis in quantitative research involves organizing data systematically to produce meaningful conclusions related to the research objectives. Arikunto (2013) also explains that descriptive analysis aims to present numerical data in a clear and concise form to describe the observed phenomena without manipulating variables.

In this study, each students' score was calculated based on the total number of correct answer for all test items. The accuracy percentage for each type of clause was then determined using the formula proposed by Sudijono (2011):

$$p = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P= Percentage

F= Number of Correct Responses

N= Total Number of Responses

The resulting percentages were interpreted according to predetermined classification criteria to describe students' ability levels in identifying independent, noun, adverb, and adjective clauses. The analyzed data were then presented in tables and discussed in the finding and discussion section to interpret students' grammatical performance based on the quantitative results.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The findings of this research describe students' ability to identify independent and dependent clauses. The result showed different levels of achievement across the four clause type assessed in the test. The average scores for each clause type are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Students' Ability in Identifying and Dependent Clauses**

Clause Type	Average Score	Category
Independent Clause	66,67%	Good
Noun Clause	53,33%	Good
Adverb Clause	40%	Low
Adjective Clause	29%	Very Low

As shown in Table 4, students achieved the highest score in identifying independent clauses, with an average score of 66,67%, which falls into the good category. This result indicates that most students were able to identify clauses that express complete thoughts and function as independent sentences. The second highest score was found in identifying noun clauses, with an average score of 53,33%, which was also categorized as good. However, students experienced greater difficulty in identifying adverb clauses, achieving an average score of 40%, which falls into the low category.

The lowest performance was found in identifying adjective clauses, with an average score of only 29%, which was categorized as very low. This finding indicates that students had considerable difficulty recognizing adjective clauses and understanding their grammatical functions within sentences. Further analysis of students' responses revealed that many students confused adjective clauses with adjective phrases. For example, in the sentence:

“The book that you lent me was very interesting.”

Students were interested to underline the adjective clause, identify the noun modified by the clause, and explain the information added by the clause. The correct answer was:

Adjective clause: that you lent me

Modified noun : the book

Information added: identifies which book is being discussed

However, several students underlined only “very interesting” and did not identify the modified noun or explain the function of the clause. As a result, their responses were scored zero according to the scoring rubric. This error suggests that students had difficulty distinguishing adjective clauses from adjective phrases and recognizing the relationship between clauses and the nouns they modify. Overall, the findings indicate that students demonstrated better performance in identifying independent clauses than dependent clauses. The results also suggest that increasing sentence complexity contributed to students' difficulties, particularly in identifying adjective clauses embedded within larger sentence structures.

## **Discussion**

The findings showed that fourth semester students of the English Education Department at FKIP UMMY Solok demonstrated better performance in identifying independent clauses, while adjective clauses were the most difficult clause type to identify. This findings suggests that students possess a basic understanding of sentence structures that express complete ideas, however, they experience greater difficulty when dealing with more syntactically complex structures that require them to analyze relationships between clauses.

However, one possible explanation for this result is the difference in syntactic complexity between independent and dependent clauses. Independent clauses can stand alone as complete sentences because they contain both a subject and a predicate and express a complete thought. In contrast, dependent clauses require students to identify grammatical markers, recognize clause boundaries, and determine the relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause. This process demands a higher level of syntactic awareness and grammatical analysis. According to VanPatten et al.(2020), second language learners often experience processing difficulties when they are required to at the same time recognize grammatical forms and interpret their functions within complex sentence structures. Consequently, students may find it easier to identify independent clauses than dependent clauses because dependent clause involve more complex syntactic processing.

The particularly low performance in identifying adjective clauses may be attributed to the complexity of relative clause structures. To correctly identify an adjective clause, students must recognize relative pronouns such as *who*, *which*, and *that*, determine the noun being modified, and understand the function of the clause within the sentence. These multiple analytical processes increase the cognitive demands placed on learners. VanPatten et al. (2020) argue that learners frequently encounter difficulties when processing syntactically complex structures because attention must be allocated to both form and meaning at the same time. The findings suggest that many fourth semester students at FKIP UMMY Solok experienced difficulties in recognizing the syntactic function of relative pronouns and distinguishing adjective clauses from other types of clauses. As a result, adjective clauses became the most challenging aspect of clause identification.

The findings are consistent with previous studies that reported students' difficulties in identifying subordinate clauses. Lubis (2020) found that students generally performed better in identifying independent clauses because these structures are more familiar and easier to recognize. Similarly, Nasir et al. (2022) reported that students frequently confuses clause

markers and clause functions when analyzing complex sentences. Furthermore, Sariakin and Anwar (2020) argued that students often possess partial grammatical knowledge but struggle to apply that knowledge in sentence analysis tasks. The present study supports these findings and further demonstrates that adjective clauses constitute the greatest area of difficulty among the clause types investigated. In addition, the findings are in line with Octasary et al. (2024), who emphasized that identifying relationships between clauses requires a higher level of grammatical awareness and syntactic processing.

Another possible explanation is that students may have had limited opportunities to practice clause analysis in meaningful contexts. Grammar instruction often emphasizes the memorization of grammatical rules and definitions rather than the analysis of sentence structures in authentic language use. As a result, students may understand grammatical concepts theoretically but experience difficulties when applying them to actual sentence analysis tasks. This explanation is supported by VanPatten et al. (2020), who emphasize that language acquisition develops more effectively when learners actively process linguistic forms within meaningful communicative contexts rather than relying solely on explicit rule memorization. This situation may explain why the students in this study were able to identify independent clauses relatively well but encountered challenges when analyzing dependent clauses embedded within more complex sentence structures.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that grammar instruction should place greater emphasis on developing students' syntactic awareness. Lecturers are encouraged to implement consciousness raising activities, sentence combining exercises, input enhancement techniques, and error analysis tasks to help students recognize clause structures more effectively. Particular attention should be given to adjective clauses and the functions of relative pronouns because these areas represented the greatest source of difficulty for the participants. Such instructional practices may help students develop a deeper understanding of clause relationships and improve their ability to analyze complex sentences accurately.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study found that fourth-semester students at FKIP UMMY Solok showed moderate ability in identifying English clauses. Students performed better on independent clauses than dependent clauses, with adjective clauses being the most difficult, followed by adverb clauses and noun clauses. These results indicate that students still lack understanding of how dependent clauses function in sentences. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to provide clearer

explanation and more practice activities focused on dependent clause types, especially adjective and adverb clauses. Due to the small sample size and single-institution setting, future studies should involve more participants from different institutions and consider using mixed methods, such as interviews or classroom observations, to better understand the factors behind students' difficulties.

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