

**AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ABILITY IN CONSTRUCTING
CONDITIONAL SENTENCES (AT THE ELEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS OF
SMA NEGERI 1 WARINGINKURUNG)**

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Khusnul Khotimah Faisal,¹ Ila Amalia,² Afif Suaidi³
Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten^{1,2,3}
khusnulfaisal01@gmail.com¹
ilaamalia0401@gmail.com²
afif.suaidi@uinbanten.ac.id³

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***Abstract:** Today, many students struggle to construct proper English sentences, particularly in conditional sentences. The teaching methods teachers used failed to engage students. Also, some experts believe that the difficulties students face with conditionals arise from the interaction between meaning and form. So, understanding this relationship and how it frequently appears in conditional sentences is crucial. To address this issue, a study was conducted to assess the proficiency of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Waringinkurung in constructing conditional sentences. The research involved 32 students, and the methodology used was qualitative content analysis, which included test and interview. The students' sentences were coded and sorted using a method called summative content analysis. This method involves identifying and measuring specific words or material in the text to understand how they are used. The researcher used various categories like formula of conditional sentences, main and if clauses, modal verbs, verb tense, and word order for further analysis. This analysis helped the researcher evaluate the students' understanding and proficiency in constructing conditional sentences. The study found that students commonly made mistakes in verb tenses and the use of modal verbs. Interview with the students also confirmed that verb tenses were the most challenging aspect for them. In summary, the research findings demonstrate that students exhibit a good ability to construct conditional sentences, consistent with established classifications in the literature (Arikunto, 2013). Findings showed student challenges with verb tenses and modal verbs, offering*

valuable insights for educators to enhance conditional sentence proficiency.

Keywords: *Content Analysis; Conditional Sentences; Verb Tense; Students' challenges; Constructing sentences*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of grammar as a fundamental language component for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to focus on. It highlights that students often struggle with tenses and language structure, making it necessary for teachers to teach grammar rules to help students build grammatically correct sentences. Effective grammar competency is critical because it allows learners to communicate effectively with grammatical precision.

By using proper grammar, students can express themselves more passionately and meaningfully. Good grammar allows students to convey their ideas more effectively. On the other hand, students who lack grammar expertise can not construct sentences correctly, and they may not understand the meaning of sentences either. This can lead to communication breakdown and impact their ability to effectively interact with others (Cam, 2017).

Grammar holds significant importance as a language skill and plays a vital role in enhancing students' proficiency in English by enabling them to utilize the language accurately. If students want to create a good sentence, they must understand how to grammatically arrange and form the words.

Nowadays, many students struggle with constructing correct sentences in English, particularly in the case of conditional sentences. The complexity of learning conditional sentences has garnered significant attention. Several factors contribute to students' lack of understanding, including the intricate nature of English conditionals, which encompass both cognitive and linguistic aspects and involve a wide range of interpretations expressed through various linguistic structures. The difficulties primarily arise from the forms,



meanings, and time-tense relationships inherent in conditional sentences.

In recent years, studying conditional sentences has gained popularity. Previous research focused on errors in constructing such sentences by Arab EFL learners (Al-Saidat, 2021). These learners struggled with form and meaning, often making mistakes in word order and verb tense. Another study aimed to assess students' grasp of conditional sentences, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. The research found that the main proficiency category among eleventh-grade students at State Islamic Senior High School 2 Pekanbaru was "type I" conditional sentences, with an average score of 0.88 (38%) (Azzali, 2019).

However, the inadequacy of teaching methods exacerbates these difficulties, as traditional approaches fail to engage students and establish meaningful connections to real-life situations. Employing effective teaching strategies that bridge the gap between abstract concepts and practical application is vital to improving students' understanding and proficiency in conditional sentences.

With 32 eleventh grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Waringinkurung as a sample of research, three different types of conditional sentences will be produced as a result of the writing assessments used in this study. In the test, students are shown 20 pictures and asked to compose conditional phrases based on the situation described. The test is intended to address the frequent corrections that students make while generating conditional phrases, which the researcher will categorize and record in a table. Students' understanding and ability to create conditional sentences will be demonstrated by identifying these common modifications.

Not only that, in this study, students will have interviews to gain more information about what the most difficult part of constructing conditional sentences is and the reasons that lie behind some of the difficulties they faced in constructing conditional sentences. Based on the condition above, the researcher is interested in conducting the research titled "An Analysis of Students' Ability in Constructing Conditional Sentences (At The



Eleventh Grade Students of SMA Negeri 1 Wariginkurung)."

Not only that, In this study, the research is distinct from the previous studies as it provides new and more specific insights into students' ability to construct conditional sentences in a particular context. While the previous studies focused on identifying the types of errors or dominant types of conditional sentences mastered by students, this study delves deeper into the factors that contribute to students' mistakes and provides specific examples of issues related to conditional sentence formulas, main clauses, if clauses, verb tenses, modal verbs, and word order.

Moreover, the inclusion of interview with students provides a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences and challenges faced while constructing conditional sentences. Therefore, this study can be considered more comprehensive and valuable in contributing to the literature on students' ability to construct conditional sentences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Constructing Conditional Sentences in Language Proficiency and Written Expression

The ability to construct conditional sentences is crucial for language proficiency and effective written expression. Grammar knowledge serves as the foundation for coherent and meaningful sentences, influencing students' writing skills. Understanding grammar allows students to focus on generating and organizing ideas, improving the overall quality of their writing. Integrating grammar instruction with writing helps students comprehend its impact on clarity and coherence, supporting their proficiency (Sweller, 1988).

However, constructing sentences can still be challenging, especially with complex structures like conditional sentences. Mastery of these sentences requires a nuanced understanding of verb forms, tense usage, and conditional markers. Proficiency in constructing conditional sentences reflects language competence and the capacity for



nuanced communication (Debata, 2013).

Grammar liberates cognitive resources, allowing students to focus on higher-order aspects of writing like generating and organizing ideas (Traugot, 1986). Additionally, understanding grammar empowers students to identify and rectify errors, thereby enhancing the overall quality of their writing. By integrating grammar instruction within the writing process, students can comprehend how grammar directly influences the clarity and coherence of their written expression.

This integration of grammar and writing instruction supports students in becoming proficient. Constructing sentences involves the logical arrangement of words and phrases while adhering to grammar rules. It necessitates a firm grasp of subject-verb-object placement to convey accurate meanings, thus forming the cornerstone for clear and coherent written communication.

Conditional sentences, in particular, introduce complexity to sentence construction as they articulate hypothetical or contingent relationships through "if-then" structures. The process of constructing conditional sentences demands a nuanced understanding of verb forms, tense usage, and conditional markers. Mastery in this realm empowers writers to convey varying degrees of certainty, possibility, and hypothetical scenarios with precision.

The ability to construct conditional sentences is reflective of one's competence in grammar structures, vocabulary, and logical connections. Proficiency in this skill not only showcases an understanding of the language but also demonstrates a capacity for nuanced communication, allowing writers to express themselves effectively in a wide range of contexts.

IF Conditional Sentences

Conditional sentences are important grammatical structures that express a relationship between a condition (or hypothetical situation) and its potential consequence.



These sentences consist of two clauses: the "if clause" and the "main clause." They are used to convey ideas of possibility, hypothetical scenarios, cause and effect, or logical implications (Graves, 1983).

There are two main types of conditional sentences: Real conditional (also known as conditional sentence Type 1) and Unreal conditional (which includes conditional sentences Type 2 and Type 3) (Yule, 1998). The relationship between the "if" clause and the main clause depends on the type of conditional sentence being used. It's important to note that the subject between the "if" clause and the main clause can vary depending on the situation being described.

Real conditional sentences (Type 1) are used to talk about situations that are possible or likely to happen in the present or future. On the other hand, Unreal conditional sentences (Type 2 and Type 3) are used to express situations or conditions that are contrary to reality or highly unlikely. Type 2 conveys a desire or expectation that contradicts the current or future reality, while Type 3 refers to imaginary previous events, situations that have already happened, or could have happened but will not anymore, making them impossible. Understanding conditional sentences is crucial for effective communication, as they allow us to express various degrees of certainty, possibility, and hypothetical scenarios precisely.

In this study, the analysis of data collected from students' tests serves as a fundamental component of the research, and it also plays a crucial role in understanding the functions of conditional sentences. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, the researcher will provide a detailed examination of sample test questions and their corresponding answers, shedding light on how students navigate conditional sentence constructions while unraveling the intricacies of their functions.

Conditional sentences, which are a central focus of this study, add depth and complexity to sentence construction. These sentences serve distinct purposes and reveal the intricacies of language usage (Duncan, 1989). For example:



1) Conditional sentence type 1 highlights potential future events or situations and focuses on the likelihood of something happening based on a specific condition. Take, for instance, "if it rains, I will wear a raincoat while playing in the rain." This construction demonstrates the role of Type 1 in expressing possibilities based on certain conditions.

2) Conditional sentence type 2 portrays future events or situations that are highly unlikely to happen, delving into unreal or contrary-to-fact scenarios. For instance, "if I had much money, I would buy anything I wanted." Here, the condition "If I had much money" indicates an unreal situation, and the result "I would buy anything I wanted" delves into the hypothetical choices in such a scenario.

3) Conditional sentence type 3 expresses hypothetical situations in the past, introducing a layer of complexity to understanding temporal relationships. An example, "if I had listened to the doctor earlier, I would have been this bad," reveals how this type discusses contrary-to-fact past scenarios and their imaginary outcomes. The condition "If I listened to the doctor earlier" suggests an alternate past reality.

By exploring these conditional sentence types in the context of students' tests, this study not only uncovers the challenges faced by students but also delves into the intricate functions of conditional sentences in language usage. This nuanced analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of both student proficiency and the broader application of these grammatical structures.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a method that focuses on understanding the meaning and interpretation of experiences, behaviors, and phenomena from the perspective of the participants. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and written texts, to identify themes, patterns, and relationships. In this study, the research employed Qualitative Content Analysis (CA) research method.



Qualitative content analysis research focuses on the features of language as communication, with emphasis on the content or contextual meaning of the text (Smith, 1996). In any sort of communication, content analysis is used to establish objective judgments about a topic of interest. CA is the process of coding raw messages (textual content, visual images, graphics) according to a classification (Foley & Hall, 2003). The coding process is primarily one of structuring communication content in a way that enables for easy identification, indexing, or retrieval of content relevant to research issues (Shepherd, 1992).

Content components might be words, phrases, theories, subjects, concepts, or other features. The basic coding method in content analysis is to classify enormous amounts of text into considerably fewer topic categories (Berg, 1998). Categories are patterns or topics that are either explicitly represented in the text or generated from analysis. Afterwards, relationships between categories are identified. Throughout the coding process, researchers utilizing content analysis design or build a coding scheme to aid coders in making decisions in content analysis.

The coding scheme used by researchers who employed the summative approach began by identifying and measuring specific words or materials in the text, with the goal of understanding how the words or content were used in context (Kondracki, 2002). This quantification aimed to study usage rather than infer meaning. It consisted of several categories: Formula of Conditional Sentences (FCD), Main Clause and If Clause (MIC), Modal Verb (MV), Verb Tense (VT), and Word Order (WO). These categories were then applied to the sentences, and the sentences were coded and categorized accordingly. This approach enabled the researchers to conduct further analysis, facilitating the evaluation of students' comprehension and proficiency in constructing conditional sentences..

In this study researcher used a combination of a test and in-depth interviews to investigate the construction of conditional sentences among students. The test aimed to identify common mistakes made by the students in constructing conditional sentences.



For this purpose, the participants were presented with 20 pictures and instructed to create conditional sentences based on the depicted situations and clues.

To gather detailed and reliable data, in-depth interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants. The interviews focused on eight main points related to the construction of conditional sentences. A representative sample of 12 participants was systematically selected to ensure the qualitative research yielded valid and dependable results.

The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews in this study was to understand the challenges students face when constructing conditional sentences and provide insights into effective strategies for improving their proficiency. Participants shared specific difficulties, techniques for grammatical correctness, preferred and challenging sentence types, and the challenges of using conditionals in conversation and writing..

The interviews also explored helpful patterns for constructing conditional sentences. The gathered data will inform targeted language instruction, leading to improved accuracy and proficiency in using conditional sentences. Since the results of the data showed that students' most challenging parts of constructing conditional sentences were First Conditional (FCD) and Verb Tenses (VT), the researcher posed some questions aimed at understanding the reasons behind their difficulties.

For example, the question, "When do you use conditional types 1, 2, and 3?" was designed to assess whether students clearly understood the differences in the use of these three types of conditionals based on their formulas and in what situations they should be applied. The results of this question indicated that all participants recognized that type 1 was used for possibilities, type 2 for imagination, and type 3 for past events. However, the test results revealed that many of them struggled to construct sentences with the appropriate formulas, even though they had knowledge of when to use each type of conditional.

Another question directly asked, "What is the most difficult part about



constructing conditional sentences?" to determine the specific challenges students faced when constructing sentences. The results of this question indicated that six participants admitted they were confused about how to begin constructing English sentences due to their limited knowledge of English, particularly in grammar, which is the verb tenses used in conditional sentences and the past form of the verb.

Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. Specifically, the researcher utilized multiple sources of data, including test results and interviews with students, to provide a diverse range of data for analysis (Nekouizadeh, 2013). By utilizing a combination of tests and interviews, this research methodology allowed for a comprehensive investigation into the construction of conditional sentences. The results obtained from both the test and interviews were crucial in identifying common mistakes, patterns, and challenges faced by students, which can contribute to enhancing their proficiency in using conditional sentences in conversations and writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research assessed the ability of 32 eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Waringinkurung to construct conditional sentences. The overall findings indicate that the students demonstrated a good ability in constructing conditional sentences, with an average score of 71.75. However, areas for improvement were identified in specific categories.

In this study, the researcher conducted data analysis through content analysis, a method that involves organizing and labeling text data to identify patterns or themes (Krippendorff, 2013). The researcher categorized student mistakes using predefined codes, which included Formula of Conditional Sentences (FCD), Main Clause and If Clause (MIC), Modal Verb (MV), Verb Tense (VT), and Word Order (WO).

To assess the students' abilities, the researcher employed test scores as the primary



measure. The students' scores were determined based on the total number of correct answers they achieved. Each question on the test was assigned 5 points, and the test comprised 20 items, resulting in a total score of 100.

The analysis process involved identifying sentences using the five predefined codes, with each code representing one point. In a sentence, it was assessed according to these five categories and assigned a value of 5 points. For instance, if a question on the test asked, "If ...celebrity, award events," and a student's response was, "If I celebrity, I would attend to award event," it indicated that the student had missed using "Verb 2" in the if clause. Since the correct sentence should have been, "If I were a celebrity, I would attend award events," the student received a score of 4 points only. The researcher marked "VT" on the student's paper to indicate the mistake made and the specific difficulty in constructing the sentence.

After collecting all the scores, the mean score for the students' conditional sentence ability was calculated (Linn, 2000). Subsequently, the results of the data analysis were classified according to predefined score levels (Arikunto, 2013).

Table 1 Classifications of Students' Score

Category	Score
Very good	(80-100)
Good	(66-79)
Enough	(56-65)
Less	(40-55)

Referring to the classification in Table 4.1, despite the difficulties, 12 out of 32 students scored exceptionally well (80 to 93), while 10 students classified as good (67 to 79), 8 students classified as enough (58-65), and 2 students calssified as less (26 & 30). Overall, the students' ability to generate conditional sentences was good, with an average



score of 71.75.

Furthermore, based on the data results, it became evident that the most challenging aspect for students in constructing conditional sentences was related to verb tenses, with a total of 272 mistakes. The second most problematic area was the use of modal verbs, with 128 mistakes recorded. The formula of conditional sentences and the main clause/if clause structure appeared to pose fewer difficulties, with only 7 mistakes each. Additionally, students made 20 mistakes related to word order. Overall, it was clear that students struggled the most with choosing the correct verb tense in conditional sentences.

The study findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students in constructing and using conditional sentences through in-depth interview. The participants in the study, consisting of 12 students who served as representatives with diverse backgrounds in terms of gender and grade scores, acknowledged the difficulties they encountered when constructing conditional sentences in English.

One of the major challenges identified by the participants was their lack of knowledge in English grammar, particularly in the use of verb tenses. This aligns with the theory that the acquisition and understanding of verb tenses are crucial for overall language proficiency. To construct grammatically correct sentences, learners need to comprehend the meaning and use of different verb tenses.

The participants openly shared their challenges in learning and comprehending tenses, bringing attention to their insufficient mastery in this particular area. One participant, expressed their reliance on Google Translate by stating, "I often resorted to using Google Translate to ensure the grammatical correctness of the sentences I made." (SM)

This direct statement highlights the participants' dependence on external tools and emphasizes the difficulties they encountered. Furthermore, the participants' limited vocabulary proficiency complicated the process of translating sentences into Indonesian, further contributing to their overall struggles. These insights underscore the significance



of providing explicit instruction and ample practice opportunities in verb tenses to foster independent language production among the students.

The participants also mentioned that they found it difficult to identify the types of conditional sentences and determine the correct situations for the story. However, the participants in the study expressed their difficulty in identifying the types of conditional sentences and determining the appropriate situations for the given stories. However, they acknowledged that although the questions were somewhat challenging, the presence of pictures provided assistance. One participant stated, "However, I acknowledged that I found the questions somewhat challenging but were aided by the presence of pictures." (GS).

The inclusion of pictures in the questions proved helpful for the participants as it enhanced their understanding of the context and requirements of the conditional sentences. This finding suggests that incorporating visual aids, such as pictures or diagrams, can play a beneficial role in facilitating comprehension and supporting learners in constructing conditional sentences accurately.

In terms of the specific types of conditional sentences, the participants in this study perceived type 1 conditional sentences as the easiest to construct, while types 2 and 3 presented greater challenges. Moreover, the students expressed that learning English is a formidable task. They encountered difficulties in memorizing the various forms of tenses and faced struggles in accurately applying these forms within sentences, particularly when dealing with verb 2 and verb 3. One student articulated his experience, stating, "I encountered difficulties in remembering the forms of tenses and struggled with applying these forms correctly in sentences, particularly when it came to verb 2 and verb 3." (GAP).

Type 3, in particular, was identified as the most difficult due to the requirement of knowledge regarding the third form of the verb. This aligns with the theory that learners may encounter difficulties with more complex verb forms and highlights the need for

targeted instruction and practice on type 3 conditional sentences.

Furthermore, the study uncovered that the participants faced difficulties when it came to expressing conditional sentences in their daily conversations. They lacked a comprehensive understanding of how conditionals are relevant to real-life situations. Moreover, the students encountered confusion and found it challenging to navigate the stark disparities in sentence structures between English and Bahasa Indonesia. As one participant stated, "I was not fully aware of the relevance of conditionals to daily life situations" (MI).

However, despite their ability to understand how to construct conditional sentences in writing, there appears to be a disconnect between the learners' proficiency in using conditional structures across various communicative contexts. This finding highlights the significance of offering opportunities for meaningful and authentic practice to bridge this gap. In support of this notion, one participant shared their personal experience, stating, "I also encountered confusion and encountered challenges due to the notable differences in sentence structures between English and Bahasa Indonesia." (CAT).

Incorporating the formula of conditional sentences as a criterion in the research helps gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' difficulties in constructing conditional sentences. The formula provides a framework that encompasses verb tenses, auxiliary verbs, and word order, which are crucial elements for constructing grammatically correct and meaningful conditional sentences.

By investigating the students' knowledge and understanding of the formula, common errors, misconceptions, and challenges can be identified. This information is valuable in designing effective instructional strategies and interventions to address these difficulties and enhance students' proficiency in constructing accurate and appropriate conditional sentences.

Discussion

Exploring the students' grasp of the formula allows for an assessment of their overall language proficiency and competence in manipulating verb forms and sentence structures. It provides insights into their ability to express hypothetical situations, make predictions, and convey conditional relationships, which are important skills for effective communication in English.

Therefore, including the formula of conditional sentences as a criterion in the research helps to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' difficulties in constructing conditional sentences. This, in turn, can inform the development of targeted pedagogical approaches and materials to support their language learning needs, promote their confidence in using verb tenses, and improve their overall proficiency in constructing accurate and appropriate conditional sentences.

Overall, the study findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by students in constructing and using conditional sentences, especially in the use of verb tenses, and their low confidence in their English skills. Nonetheless, the students' overall performance in generating conditional sentences was considered good, with some scoring exceptionally well, suggesting that the provided materials were helpful.

The interviews with the participants provided valuable insights into their experiences and difficulties. Lack of knowledge in English grammar, especially in using verb tenses, was acknowledged as a challenge. Participants admitted to relying on external resources like Google Translate to ensure grammatical correctness. Additionally, their low confidence in English skills and limited understanding of the relevance of conditionals to everyday life affected their ability to express conditional sentences in real-life conversations.

Implications for teaching and further research include the need for targeted instruction, practice exercises, and opportunities for meaningful language use to enhance students' understanding and application of conditional sentence structures. The incorporation of visual aids, such as pictures, can be beneficial in helping students grasp



the concepts of conditional sentences. Further research could focus on developing effective instructional strategies and materials to improve students' performance in constructing and using conditional sentences.

CONCLUSION

This study on students' proficiency in constructing conditional sentences aligns closely with Al Rdaat's (2019) analysis of how Arab students of English use conditional sentences in semantic and syntactic situations. It highlighted the challenges students face in constructing conditional sentences, specifically concerning the use of verb tenses and modality. The findings of this study then add to the existing body of knowledge by examining specific challenges related to verb tenses, modal verbs, and word order. The insights gained from this research contribute to a better understanding of students' struggles in constructing conditional sentences and can inform the development of effective instructional strategies to enhance their language skills and confidence in English.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing the challenges students encounter when constructing conditional sentences. By focusing on specific areas of difficulty, such as verb tenses and modal verbs, teachers can assist students in overcoming these challenges, leading to improved understanding and application of conditional sentence structures and ultimately enhancing students' overall language proficiency.

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