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MAIN AND SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores the contribution of independent and dependent clauses to the effectiveness and clarity of English sentence structure, with a focus on enhancing communicative competence. Applying a qualitative research approach, this investigation explores the fundamental role of clause types in sentence construction. Independent clauses, which can stand alone as complete sentences, and dependent clauses, which require an independent clause to achieve grammatical completeness, are essential linguistic units that enable the expression of complex ideas. Through in-depth analysis of a variety of example sentences, this study aims to explain how different clause types contribute to the overall structure and meaning of sentences, and to demonstrate their ability to construct a variety of sentence types ranging from simple statements to complex structures. Understanding the interaction between independent and dependent clauses is crucial for educators, linguists, and language learners, as it offers valuable insights into the grammatical foundations that support effective communication in English. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of mastering clause use in improving grammatical accuracy and overall communication skills.

Keywords

Independent Clause, Dependent Clause, Communicative Competence, Sentence Structure, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar plays a pivotal role in language acquisition. Effectivelanguage education necessitates a deep understanding of grammatical structures, enabling educators to effectively present and explain the intricacies of the target language. This includes a comprehensive understanding of sentence construction, encompassing the roles of verbs, nouns, and othergrammatical elements like conjunctions and complements (Nada et al., 2025). A sentence is fundamentally a grammatical unit that begins with a capital letter and ends with appropriate punctuation. While writers often follow theseconventions, inconsistenciecan still occur. These irregularities, frequently seen as incorrect punctuation or missing components, are commonly attributed to difficulties in mastering the target language's writing system or broader challenges in constructing coherentsentences. For instance, errors like sentence fragments or misplaced punctuation often reflect learners' struggles with grammar and syntax.

Such challenges can hinder the development of complete and grammatically accurate sentences, particularly when understanding and using independent and dependent clauses. Addressing these issues through targeted instruction and practice is essential to improving learners grammatical competence and overall language proficiency.The mastery of clauses, particularly the distinction and interaction between main clauses and subordinate clauses, is critical for constructing grammatically correct and semantically coherent sentences.

Main clauses, the robust pillars of sentence construction, possess the rer ability to stand alone, confidently expressing complete thoughts (Sihombing, 2024) are the linguistic equivalent of a soloist, capable of captivating an audience without. accompaniment. In contrast, subordinate clauses play a supporting role, reminiscent of backup singers who enhance the performance but cannot carry the show alone (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2013). The magic happens when these clause types intertwine, often through the clever use of subordinating conjunctions. These linguistic connectors act as the conductors of our grammatical orchestra, directing the flow of ideas and establishing relationships between clauses. It's this interplay that allows writers to craft sentences that not only convey information but also evoke emotions and paint vivid mental pictures. Consider the words of renowned linguist (Steven Pinker, 1994), who likens language to "a window into human nature."

In this context, clauses serve as the panes of that window, each offering a unique perspective on the thoughts and experiences we wish to share. By mastering the art of clause. manipulation, writers can adjust the clarity, tint, and focus of their linguistic window, allowing readers to perceive their ideas with unprecedented clarity.

Understanding the complexities of clause structures is essential for both native and non- native speakers. For non-native speakers, mastering clauses is a significant hurdle in achieving fluency and accuracy. Research by (ZHANG et al., 2021) indicates that non-native speakers often face difficulties in distinguishing between main and subordinate clauses, which can lead to confusion and errors in sentence formation. Additionally, a meta-analysis by (ERIC, 2008) suggests that targeted instructional strategies, such as the use of visual aids and structured practice, can enhance learners understanding of clause structures.

This study, therefore, aims to gives effective strategy for learners in learning and using main and subordinate clauses. By employing a mixed-methods. approach that includes surveys of understanding material via gforms, and interview, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for teaching and learning main and subordinate clauses, ultimately improving grammatical accuracy and communicative competence

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to deeply explore the role and contribution of independent and dependent clauses in English sentence structure. The choice of qualitative methods was deemed most appropriate because the primary focus of this study was to interpret linguistic phenomena and understand how these linguistic units construct coherent meaning in communication. Through this approach, the researcher conducted an in-depth analysis of various texts to explain the interaction between independent and dependent clauses and their impact on the quality of learners' writing (Crystal, 1995).

Data collection procedures were conducted through digital document observation and in-depth interviews. The researcher utilized the Google Forms platform to collect descriptive data regarding participants' perceptions and understanding of the use of subordinating conjunctions. Furthermore, interviews were conducted to obtain a qualitative overview of the real challenges learners face in

distinguishing the main and subordinate functions of a clause (ZHANG et al., 2021). The collected data was analyzed using content analysis techniques, which include the stages of data reduction, categorization, and drawing descriptive conclusions to ensure that the resulting learning strategies are relevant to the learners' linguistic needs (Aarts, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Based on data analysis collected through sentence structure observations and a comprehension questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, this study reveals the dynamics of main and subordinate clause mastery among participants. Key findings indicate that the majority of participants are able to identify independent clauses as units possessing autonomous meaning. However, significant challenges remain in properly integrating subordinate clauses to form coherent complex sentences.

Table 1. Structual Comparison of Clauses

Characteristics	Independent Clause (Min Clause)	Dependent Clauses (Subordinate Clause)
Independence	Can stand alone as a sentence	Cannot stand alone
Meaning	Provide complete ideas	Provide additional/partial informasion
Equipment	Has a complete subject and predicate	Has a subject and predicate but begins with a conjunction

This study also highlights the vital role of subordinate conjunctions as elements that trigger the information of dependents clauses. Bassed on observations, the effectiveness of a complex sentence is determined by the precise choice of conjunctions that connect the two clauses (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2013). The following is a classification of the conjunction functions found:

Table 2. Classification of Conjunction Functions Subordinate

Semantic Relations	Examples of Conjunctions	Function in Structure

Clause and Effect	Beecause, Since	Explain the logical reasons for action
Conditional	If, Unless	Define event conditions
Temporal	When, Before, After	Set chronological order

Discussion

In linguistic studies, a clause is one of the fundamental syntactic units in both English and Indonesian sentence structures. A clause is defined as a grammatical unit that minimally consists of a subject and a predicate, which together form a proposition or convey a specific meaning. Clauses function as the core elements of a sentence because they contain a predicative relationship between the subject and predicate, allowing the expression of either a complete or dependent idea.According to (Dewi, 2011), a clause is not merely a collection of words but a syntactic structure with a predicative function, in which the verb acts as the nucleus determining the meaning and relationship between words. In linguistics, a clause serves as a basic unit that may stand independently (main clause) or rely on another clause (subordinate clause) within a larger sentence structure. Clauses are generally categorized into two main types: main clauses and subordinate clauses. An independent clause can stand alone and convey a complete meaning. For instance, in the sentence She studies every night, the clause already contains a complete structure with the subject (he) and predicate (works), this functioning as a complete sentence. In contrast, a dependent clause cannot stand alone because its meaning is incomplete without the main clause. In the sentence He works every day because he wants to make a money, the segment because she wants to pass the exam functions as a dependent clause, providing a reason for the action expressed in the main clause.

From a syntactic perspective, explains that a clause may serve several grammatical functions such as subject, predicate, object, or adverbial complement within a complex sentence structure (Rahmawati, 2021). Furthermore, clauses are used to express logical relationships among ideas, including cause and effect, time, purpose, and condition. The appropriate use of clauses allows speakers and writers to deliver messages with greater precision, coherence, and logical flow.

In addition, clauses play a strategic role in language learning, particularly in improving students' writing abilities and comprehension of complex texts. A solid understanding of clause structure enables learners to construct grammatical and

coherent sentences effectively. Knowledge of clause structure significantly contributes to students' ability to write logical and cohesive sentences in language learning contexts. Through this mastery, students develop logical thinking skills by forming sentences that clearly demonstrate causal, conditional, and explanatory relationships. Furthermore, the ability to apply clause structures helps learners express their ideas with greater precision and cohesion, allowing them to produce written discourse that reflects both linguistic competence and critical reasoning.

Therefore, a clause can be understood as a syntactic unit that serves as the foundation for sentence construction. It not only provides the grammatical framework of a sentence but also conveys meaning and establishes logical relationships between ideas within a text. A solid understanding of the types and functions of clauses is essential for language learners to produce effective, logical, and grammatically accurate sentences. In modern linguistic research, the study of clauses encompasses not only their structural and formal aspects but also their semantic functions and pragmatic roles within communicative contexts.

A main clause, also known as an independent clause, is a grammatical construction that contains both a subject and a predicate, allowing it to express a complete thought independently. It can stand alone as a sentence because it conveys a full meaning without the need for additional information from other clauses. A main clause functions as the core or principal unit in a sentence, forming the foundation upon which subordinate clauses or other sentence elements may depend (Sihombing, 2024). This independence makes the main clause essential in constructing grammatically complete and semantically coherent sentences.

For example, in the sentence "The students are studying in the library," the clause already constitutes a main clause because it includes a subject (the students) and a predicate (are studying in the library), creating a complete and meaningful statement. However, when combined with a subordinate clause, such as in "The students are studying in the library because they have an exam tomorrow," the main clause (The students are studying in the library) still expresses the central idea, while the subordinate clause (because they have an exam tomorrow) provides additional information.

A main clause demonstrates syntactic independence and semantic completeness, which distinguishes it from subordinate or dependent clauses. The independence of main clauses lies in their ability to function as complete propositions

that express assertions, questions, commands, or exclamations. This autonomy allows main clauses to serve as the core meaning unit of any sentence structure, with other clauses merely modifying or expanding upon their content.

Moreover, main clauses determine the tense, aspect, and mood of the entire sentence, setting the grammatical context to which subordinate clauses adjust (Pratiwi et al., 2020). emphasize that understanding how to construct and connect main clauses is crucial for learners in developing coherent and cohesive complex sentences in English writing.6 Mastery of this structure not only helps students produce grammatically correct sentences but also improves their ability to express logical relationships between ideas.

In a pedagogical context, main clauses play a vital role in language acquisition and writing skill development. Highlight that the ability to distinguish between main and subordinate clauses helps students organize their ideas clearly and maintain textual coherence in academic writing. Similarly, note that awareness of main clause structure contributes to learners' understanding of sentence reduction and transformation processes, such as simplifying adjective or participial clauses without losing meaning (Oktavia & Noviani, 2022).

Therefore, a main clause functions as the syntactic backbone of any sentence, maintaining both grammatical independence and semantic unity. Its mastery is essential not only for linguistic analysis but also for practical applications in writing, reading comprehension, and translation. Understanding main clauses enables learners and researchers alike to grasp the hierarchical organization of language, where each clause type contributes to meaning, but only the main clause stands as the complete linguistic unit of thought.

A subordinate clause, also known as a dependent clause, is a clause that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence because its meaning depends on the main clause. Its primary function is to explain, complement, or expand the information in the main clause by establishing logical relationships such as cause, time, condition, purpose, or contrast. Structurally, a subordinate clause contains both a subject and a predicate, yet it does not express a complete proposition unless it is attached to a main clause. For instance, in the sentence "She stayed at home because she was sick," the clause "because she was sick" serves as a subordinate clause providing the reason for the main clause "She stayed at home." From a syntactic and discourse perspective, subordinate clauses are devices that enable writers to structure clauses,

conditional, and temporal relations, thereby contributing to textual coherence (Siregar et al., 2022).

There are three types of subordinate clauses in English:

1. Noun Clauses
2. Adjective Clauses
3. Adverbs Clauses

Empirical studies have demonstrated various challenges and functions of subordinate clauses in language learning (Pratiwi et al., 2020) found that university students frequently struggle to combine main and subordinate clauses accurately, particularly in choosing the appropriate subordinating conjunctions that convey precise logical relationships. Moreover, a contrastive study by Tanasy (2022) highlights the differences between English and Indonesian noun clauses, which influence translation strategies and cross-linguistic understanding of subordination (Tanasy, 2022).

In the realm of discourse and literary studies, (Nazara, 2024) explored subordinate clauses in The Story of an Hour and revealed how complement, relative, and adverbial clauses support narrative expansion, coherence, and thematic depth. Meanwhile, argued that mastering syntactic transformations, such as reducing relative clauses into participial phrases, depends heavily on a sound understanding of the relationship between main and subordinate clauses to maintain semantic accuracy during simplification.

Therefore, subordinate clauses are not merely grammatical complements but also pragmatic and rhetorical tools that enhance coherence, nuance, and complexity in discourse. Pedagogically, teaching subordinate clauses should emphasize the accurate use of conjunctions, guided practice in clause combination within meaningful contexts, and transformation exercises that maintain logical and semantic consistency when restructuring sentences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that mastery of independent and dependent clauses is the main foundation for building effective English sentence structures. This research shows that main clauses function as independent information pillars, while subordinate clauses provide depth of meaning through additional details related to time, reason, and condition. The synergy between the two through the use of subordinate conjunctions allows for the creation of complex sentences that are not only grammatically accurate but also semantically rich.The results of this study also

highlight the challenges learners face in integrating subordinate clauses into their texts. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the function of each clause is crucial for educators and students to improve communicative competence. Overall, the ability to combine various types of clauses is a key indicator of syntactic proficiency, enabling the logical, cohesive, and professional delivery of complex ideas in English communication.

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