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Strategy-Pedagogy Mismatch in Teaching Grammar to Gen Z EFL Learners in West Sulawesi

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Abstract

Despite continuous pedagogical refinement and extensive use of multimedia resources, grammar learning outcomes among EFL learners often remain below academic expectations, particularly in higher education contexts where grammatical accuracy is essential for academic writing. This study aims to investigate the mismatch between grammar teaching strategies and grammar learning strategies among Gen Z EFL learners, and to examine how such mismatch influences grammar learning effectiveness. Employing an explanatory mixed-method design, quantitative data were collected through a grammar learning strategy questionnaire administered to undergraduate students and a grammar teaching strategy inventory completed by the lecturer, while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews and analysis of grammar-related writing tasks. The findings indicate that learners employ a range of grammar learning strategies, with a strong reliance on technology-mediated strategies. Grammar instruction is characterized by explicit explanation and intensive multimedia use; however, opportunities for interactive practice and application-oriented assessment remain limited. This condition generates strategy–pedagogy mismatch, manifested in instruction–practice mismatch, assessment–application mismatch, and strategy–cognition mismatch. Qualitative evidence shows that although learners perceive grammar instruction as clear and supportive, many struggle to retain grammatical knowledge and apply it independently in writing tasks. These conditions contribute to fragile grammar retention, limited grammar internalization, and cognitive passivity in grammar learning. The study concludes that persistent grammar learning difficulties are not caused by insufficient instructional effort, but by strategy–pedagogy mismatch. Pedagogically, the findings suggest the need for grammar instruction that integrates practice-intensive learning cycles, application-oriented assessment, and pedagogically guided use of digital tools to strengthen grammar retention and promote independent grammatical control among Gen Z EFL learners.

Keywords: *EFL; Gen Z; Grammar Instruction; Learning Strategies; Strategy-Pedagogy Mismatch*

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1. Introduction

Grammar has long been recognized as a foundational component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in higher education, where learners are expected to demonstrate accuracy, clarity, and coherence in academic writing. Grammatical competence plays a critical role not only at the sentence level but also in shaping the overall quality and credibility of learners' written discourse, including course assignments and undergraduate theses (Ellis, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2015). In the Indonesian EFL context, grammar remains a compulsory and highly emphasized subject across teacher education programs, yet learners' grammatical performance continues to fall short of institutional and academic expectations.

Previous studies consistently report that Indonesian EFL learners experience persistent difficulties in grammar mastery due to limited exposure, structural differences, and challenges inherent in instructional contexts. Research shows that Indonesian learners often struggle with applying grammatical rules in authentic tasks or writing tasks (Akmal et al., 2020; Listia & Febrianty, 2020; Mustakim et al., 2025; Nurhayati, 2019), and studies on grammar learning strategies highlight ongoing challenges in internalizing grammar structures despite instruction (Pawlak & Kruk, 2025). At the tertiary level, these challenges become more consequential, as inadequate grammatical control directly affects learners' ability to produce academically acceptable writing and to complete final undergraduate theses. Consequently, grammar instruction is often intensified through explicit explanation, repeated practice, and the integration of various instructional media (Rodríguez-Fuentes & Swatek, 2022).

At STAIN Majene, West Sulawesi, grammar teaching has undergone continuous pedagogical refinement. In the observed classroom context, lecturers implemented multiple instructional strategies, including YouTube-based explanatory videos, in-class clarification sessions, collaborative group tasks, contextual grammar projects, and field-based mini assignments related to grammatical topics. These efforts reflect an intentional attempt to improve instructional quality and respond to learners' learning needs. In fact, a prior mixed-method study conducted at the same institution systematically examined learners' grammatical difficulties and learning preferences (Nuralima et al., 2025). The study revealed that learners' grammar difficulties stemmed from environmental factors (limited opportunities for practice and instructional time), psychological factors (fear of negative evaluation and varying perceptions of grammar importance), and linguistic factors (complexity of grammatical forms and tense variation). Importantly, learners expressed strong preferences for active and interactive learning strategies, particularly video-based explanations and practical exercises.

In response to these findings, grammar instruction was deliberately adjusted to align with learners' stated preferences. However, despite sustained instructional effort and pedagogical adaptation, learners' grammatical achievement remained relatively low. Many learners continued to demonstrate limited accuracy in written tasks and showed minimal improvement in independently applying grammatical knowledge. This situation raises a critical pedagogical question: why does grammar instruction remain

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insufficiently effective even after it has been redesigned based on learners' reported learning preferences?

One plausible explanation lies in the notion of strategy-pedagogy mismatch, which in this study refers to the misalignment between grammar teaching strategies implemented by the lecturer and the grammar learning strategies actually employed by learners during the learning process. While lecturers may adapt instructional practices based on learners' expressed preferences, these teaching strategies do not necessarily align with the actual grammar learning strategies learners employ during real learning processes (Pawlak et al., 2023). Learning preferences reflect what learners like, whereas learning strategies reflect what learners actually do to process, practice, and internalize grammatical knowledge. This distinction is crucial but often overlooked in grammar pedagogy.

The issue of strategy–pedagogy mismatch becomes particularly salient when teaching Gen Z learners. As digital natives, Gen Z learners are shaped by constant online connectivity, rapid access to information, multimodal content consumption, and socially mediated learning practices (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). These characteristics may influence how grammar is learned, practiced, and monitored, often in ways that differ from traditional instructional assumptions. While lecturers may implement interactive media and collaborative tasks, learners may simultaneously rely on self-directed, technology-mediated, or peer-based strategies that are not explicitly supported or recognized in classroom instruction.

Research on language learning strategies has traditionally focused on identifying the types of strategies learners use and their relationship to language achievement (Griffiths, 2013; Oxford, 1990). In grammar learning, these strategies include cognitive processes such as rule analysis and pattern recognition, metacognitive regulation, social interaction, and affective control. However, much of this research treats learning strategies and teaching strategies as separate domains. Studies that explicitly examine the relationship between how grammar is taught and how learners strategically engage with grammar learning remain limited, particularly in EFL higher education contexts.

Moreover, in contemporary EFL context, grammar learning among Gen Z learners increasingly takes place within technology-rich environments, where digital tools mediate practice, feedback, and self-regulation. Recent research highlights how digital platform, automated feedback systems, and AI-supported learning tools are reshaping the ways learners engage with language learning process and strategies (Pawlak et al., 2023; Ranalli & Yamashita, 2022). This context highlights the importance of examining not only individual grammar learning strategies, but also how instructional practices align with learners' strategic engagement in contemporary, technology-mediated learning settings.

In Indonesian TEFL research itself, investigations into grammar instruction have predominantly emphasized learners' difficulties, attitudes, or preferences, as well as the effectiveness of specific instructional techniques (Nuralima et al., 2025; Nurhayati, 2019). While such studies provide valuable insight into common challenges faced by EFL learners, they largely focus on describing learning problems or evaluating particular teaching methods. Fewer studies have explored the relationship between pedagogy and

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learner strategy use, particularly within higher education context where grammar plays a crucial role in academic writing. As a result, there is limited empirical evidence explaining why grammar instruction, despite being intensive, multimodal, and preference-informed, may still fail to produce optimal learning outcomes in university-level EFL settings.

This study addresses that gap by explicitly conceptualizing grammar learning as an interaction between instructional strategies and learners' grammar learning strategies. Drawing on theories of language learning strategies (Griffiths, 2013; Oxford, 1990), pedagogical alignment (Biggs, 1996), and Gen Z learning characteristics (Seemiller & Grace, 2018), this study proposes that the effectiveness of grammar instruction depends not only on what is taught or how it is delivered, but also on how well teaching strategies align with learners' strategic learning behaviors.

Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the alignment and mismatch between grammar teaching strategies and grammar learning strategies among Gen Z EFL learners at STAIN Majene, West Sulawesi. Specifically, the study aims to identify the grammar learning strategies employed by Gen Z EFL learners, document the grammar teaching strategies implemented by the lecturer, examine areas of alignment and mismatch between the two, and explore how such mismatch influences learners' perceived effectiveness of grammar learning.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method explanatory design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the mismatch between grammar teaching strategies and grammar learning strategies among Gen Z EFL learners. The quantitative phase was used to identify patterns of grammar learning strategies and instructional practices, while the qualitative phase provided deeper insight into learners' experiences of alignment or mismatch in grammar learning. This design was selected to address the pedagogical problem identified in the introduction, namely why grammar instruction remains ineffective despite sustained instructional effort and pedagogical adjustment (Creswell & Clark, 2017)

2.2 Research Site, Time, and Participants

The research was conducted at STAIN Majene, West Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 61 undergraduate learners enrolled in grammar courses, across the first, second, and third years of study, representing the Gen Z cohort, and one grammar lecturer who taught the course and implemented the instructional strategies under investigation. Learners were selected using random sampling, as all learners enrolled in the grammar course participated in the study. For the qualitative phase, 12 learners were purposively selected based on their questionnaire responses to represent diverse grammar learning strategy profiles and varying levels of perceived learning effectiveness.

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2.3 Data Collection Techniques

Before data collection, all research instruments below were reviewed for content validity by two TEFL lecturers with expertise in English language teaching and applied linguistics.

2.3.1 Grammar Learning Strategy Questionnaire (GLSQ)

The Grammar Learning Strategy Questionnaire (GLSQ) was adapted from Oxford's (1990) language learning strategy taxonomy and contextualized specifically for grammar learning. The questionnaire consisted of 30 Likert-scale items, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), covering five dimensions: cognitive grammar learning strategies, metacognitive grammar learning strategies, social grammar learning strategies, affective grammar learning strategies, and technology-mediated grammar learning strategies.

Learners were instructed to respond based on grammar learning strategies they used independently and without direct lecturer instruction, both inside and outside the classroom. The instrument was pilot-tested with a comparable group of EFL learners from the same study program who were not included in the main sample, and reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency.

2.3.2 Grammar Teaching Strategy Inventory (GTSI)

The Grammar Teaching Strategy Inventory (GTSI) was a self-developed instrument designed to document grammar teaching strategies implemented by the lecturer. The development of this instrument was theoretically informed by SLA perspectives on grammar pedagogy, particularly the framework proposed by Ellis (2006), which conceptualizes grammar teaching as a broad set of instructional techniques that draw learners' attention to grammatical forms through presentation, practice, input exposure, and corrective feedback. Based on this perspective, the GTSI was constructed to measure several core instructional components, including instructional delivery, learning activities, media integration, interaction, feedback, and assessment practices.

The inventory consisted of checklist and Likert-scale items. Data were collected through the lecturer's self-report and supported by lesson plans and instructional materials to ensure accuracy and minimize self-report bias.

2.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 selected learners to explore their experiences of grammar learning in greater depth. The interviews focused on learners' grammar learning strategies, perceived effectiveness of grammar instruction, experiences of alignment or mismatch between teaching strategies and learning strategies, and expectations toward grammar teaching. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

2.3.4 Document Analysis

To triangulate the questionnaire and interview data, learners' written assignments and grammar-related tasks were analyzed. The analysis focused on learners' application of grammatical knowledge, recurring error patterns, and indications of strategy use in authentic academic writing tasks.

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2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from the GLSQ and GTSI were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify dominant grammar learning strategies and instructional practices. Strategy-pedagogy alignment and mismatch were examined by comparing strategy dimensions across learner and lecturer data, supported by correlation analysis to explore relationships between teaching strategies and learners' perceived grammar learning effectiveness.

Qualitative data from interviews and document analysis were analyzed thematically following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred at the interpretation stage, allowing qualitative insights to explain patterns of alignment and mismatch identified in the quantitative analysis.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Grammar Learning Strategies of Gen Z EFL Learners

The grammar learning Strategies of Gen Z EFL Learners can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. The results of the Grammar Learning Strategy Questionnaire (GLSQ)

Strategy	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Cognitive	3.619	0.573	2.333	5.000
Metacognitive	3.658	0.595	1.500	5.000
Social	3.603	0.698	2.000	4.833
Affective	3.483	0.553	2.000	4.600
Technology-Mediated	3.798	0.549	2.143	4.857

The results of the Grammar Learning Strategy Questionnaire (GLSQ) indicate that learners employed all five categories of grammar learning strategies at a moderate to high level. Among these, technology-mediated strategies were the most frequently used, suggesting that learners heavily relied on digital tools and online resources in learning grammar. Metacognitive and cognitive strategies were also commonly used, indicating active monitoring and rule-based processing of grammar, while social strategies played a comparable but slightly less prominent role in supporting peer-assisted learning practices, with noticeable variation among learners in their reliance on these strategies

This finding is consistent with Oxford's (1990) assertion that effective language learning involves strategic choice based on learner needs and learning context. However, the dominance of technology-mediated strategies suggests a shift in strategy use patterns that is not fully captured by classical strategy taxonomies. Recent studies have similarly reported that Gen Z learners rely heavily on digital platforms, short-form explanations, and AI-supported learning to manage complex linguistic input (Godwin-Jones, 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2018).

In grammar learning contexts, this reliance on technology is often driven by the need for immediate clarification and reduced cognitive load. Ellis (2006) argues that grammar

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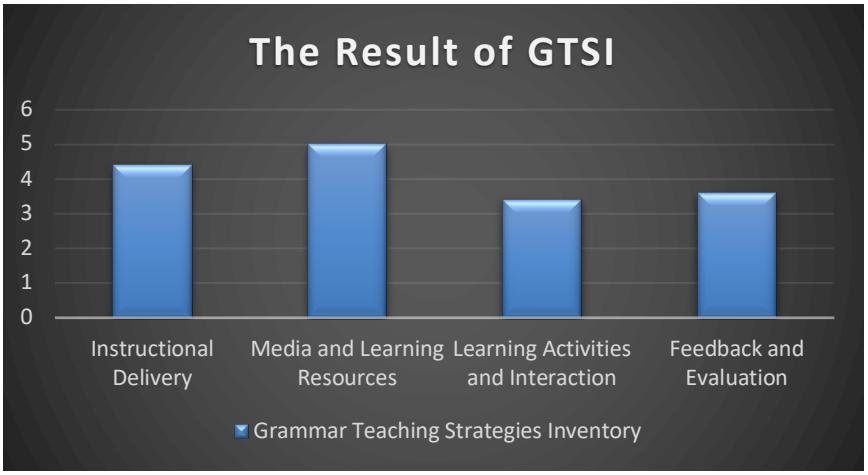
learning requires both noticing and repeated exposure, yet learners may bypass deeper processing when quick digital solutions are available. The relatively lower use of affective strategies further suggests that learners may not systematically regulate anxiety or confidence when engaging with grammar production, which can negatively affect long-term internalization.

In sum, these findings indicate that while Gen Z learners demonstrate strategic awareness and autonomy, their heavy reliance on technology-mediated strategies may support short-term understanding rather than sustained grammatical competence unless explicitly integrated into pedagogical design.

3.2 Grammar Teaching Strategies Implemented by the Lecturer

Figure 1: The Result of GTSI



The GTSI results indicate that grammar instruction was delivered with strong pedagogical commitment. Instructional delivery was rated high, and media integration was strongly emphasized, indicating that grammar teaching incorporated videos, visual aids, authentic examples, and accessible learning resources to support clearer explanation and understanding of grammar concepts. Such practices align with contemporary grammar pedagogy, which emphasizes explicit explanation combined with contextualized input (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). Prior studies in Indonesian EFL contexts also report that multimedia-assisted grammar instruction can enhance learners' engagement and comprehension (Nurhayati, 2019)

However, the findings also reveal a critical imbalance. Learning activities and interaction were only moderately implemented, and feedback and evaluation practices were present but unevenly emphasized across instructional components. The lecturer consistently provided grammar feedback and discussed errors constructively with timely and clear feedback. However, encouraging self-correction was moderate, and the assessment focusing on application was low. This pattern suggests that although grammar input is strong, opportunities for productive practice and applied performance are limited. This phenomenon reflects what (Ellis, 2006) describes as an input-heavy but output-light instructional model, in which learners understand grammatical explanations but struggle to apply them independently. In other words, the findings indicate that strong media use may create an illusion of pedagogical sufficiency, masking

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the absence of sustained practice and application-oriented assessment needed for grammar internalization.

3.3 Strategy-Pedagogy Mismatch

The comparison between GLSQ and GTSI results reveals several forms of mismatch between instructional practices and learners' actual grammar learning processes. The thematic synthesis of questionnaire results, interview data, and document analysis indicates three key dimensions of mismatch: instruction-practice mismatch, assessment-application mismatch, and strategy-cognition mismatch.

3.3.1 Instruction-Practice Mismatch

The first mismatch emerges between the strong instructional delivery and the limited opportunities for sustained grammar practice. Quantitative results indicate that grammar instruction was delivered clearly and supported by multimedia resources, while learning activities and interaction were only moderately implemented. Although learners acknowledged that lecturers explained grammar concepts clearly, many reported that understanding did not always translate into stable mastery because practice opportunities were insufficient.

Several students described grammar instruction as informative but cognitively demanding when not reinforced through repeated use. As one learner explained:

> "*Learning grammar is fun, but sometimes it's still difficult to remember what you've learned when you don't repeat the material because it's quite complex.*"

Similarly, another student emphasized that explanation alone was not enough to ensure comprehension:

> *"I can follow the lecturer's explanation, but I always feel confused because there are too many formulas."*

These responses suggest that while instructional explanations were generally clear and well-structured, learners still required repeated practice and guided application to consolidate grammatical knowledge. Without such reinforcement, grammatical understanding tends to remain temporary rather than internalized. Students also emphasized the need for more interactive and engaging activities that could support practice in a low-anxiety learning environment. As one student noted:

> *"More practice, quizzes, and games would help us understand grammar better."*

This finding resonates with sociocultural perspectives on language learning, which emphasize interaction, scaffolding, and collaborative meaning-making (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). When grammar learning is embedded in interactive tasks, learners can actively apply grammatical rules, negotiate meaning, and receive feedback during communication. In the absence of such interaction, grammar instruction may remain largely procedural and limit opportunities for meaningful language practice.

3.3.2 Assessment-Application Mismatch

The second mismatch relates to how grammar mastery is assessed. While grammar instruction emphasizes rule explanation and examples, assessment practices appear to provide limited opportunities for learners to demonstrate independent grammatical application. This creates a gap between conceptual understanding and productive language use.

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Interview data show that learners value grammar knowledge but still struggle when they need to produce language independently. As one student explained:

> *"I know what the correct sentences are, but sometimes what makes it difficult for me is putting the words together for my writing."*

Another learner also reported:

> *"Learning grammar helps me understand sentence structure, but I still have trouble constructing sentences myself."*

These responses indicate that although students recognize the usefulness of grammar instruction, the transition from understanding rules to applying them in authentic writing tasks remains challenging. This suggests that grammar learning may benefit from more application-focused assignments and assessment activities that require learners to actively produce language rather than primarily recognize grammatical forms.

3.3.3 Strategy-Cognition Mismatch

The third mismatch concerns the relationship between learners' strategy use and the cognitive processes required for grammar internalization. While classroom instruction provides structured explanations, many learners rely heavily on external technological tools to resolve grammatical difficulties. Although such tools provide immediate support, they may reduce opportunities for deeper grammatical processing. Interview responses repeatedly indicate that students turn to AI tools or online platforms when encountering grammar difficulties:

> *"When I don't understand grammar, the first thing I do is ask ChatGPT or look for a simpler explanation on YouTube."*

Another learner similarly stated:

> *"I usually open ChatGPT to ask for explanations and make sure my sentences are correct."*

These patterns suggest that learners often prioritize immediate correction rather than engaging in sustained cognitive processing of grammatical structures. As a result, grammar knowledge may remain externally supported rather than internally controlled. Similar patterns have been reported in recent EFL research, where learners compensate for limited classroom practice by constructing personalized learning paths through digital platforms (Godwin-Jones, 2020; Lee & Drajati, 2019); While such strategies reflect learner autonomy, they may also lead to fragmented learning if not pedagogically scaffolded (Ranalli & Yamashita, 2022).

Taken together, these findings indicate that the mismatch between instructional practices and learner strategies occurs not because instruction is ineffective, but because classroom pedagogy and learners' self-regulated learning practices operate through different mechanisms. While instruction emphasizes explanation and conceptual clarity, learners frequently rely on technology-mediated shortcuts to resolve grammatical uncertainty. This mismatch contributes to the persistence of grammar learning difficulties despite strong instructional support.

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3.4 Impact of Strategy-Pedagogy Mismatch on Grammar Learning Effectiveness

The thematic analysis of interview data revealed three major themes explaining how the identified strategy–pedagogy mismatch affects grammar learning effectiveness among Gen Z EFL learners: (1) fragile grammar retention, (2) dependence on external technological support, and (3) the need for practice-intensive and interactive learning environments.

3.4.1 Fragile Grammar Retention due to Technology Dependence

Students' responses indicate that although grammar instruction provided foundational knowledge, many learners experienced difficulty retaining grammatical knowledge over time. This fragile retention appears closely related to students' reliance on technological tools when completing academic tasks. Instead of recalling previously learned grammar rules, students frequently turned to AI-based tools or online platforms to check or generate grammatically correct sentences. As one student explained,

> *"I usually ask ChatGPT whether my sentence is correct and ask why it is like that."*

While such tools provide immediate assistance, they may reduce opportunities for learners to actively recall and apply grammatical knowledge. Consequently, grammar knowledge tends to remain superficial and easily forgotten once classroom instruction ends. Previous research cautions that while automated feedback can enhance immediate textual accuracy, excessive reliance on such tools may limit the development of internal grammatical monitoring and self-regulation (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Ranalli, 2018). In academic writing contexts, this may result in surface-level correctness, texts that appear grammatically accurate but are produced without sustained internal control over grammatical structures.

One participant also stated,

> *"Sometimes I understand it during the lesson, but later I forget because I don't use it often."*

This pattern suggests that grammar knowledge is not consistently reinforced through active use, contributing to fragile retention. This supports cognitive load theory, which suggests that complex rule systems require repeated practice and gradual automatization (Sweller, 2011). From the cognitive load perspective, the absence of repeated retrieval and production tasks may increase extraneous load, resulting in fragile grammatical knowledge.

3.4.2 Limited Internalization of Grammar through Authentic Language Use

Another impact of the strategy–pedagogy mismatch is the limited internalization of grammar for authentic language use. Although students acknowledged that grammar instruction helped them understand sentence structure, many reported difficulties applying these rules when producing their own sentences. This indicates that grammatical knowledge often remains at the level of recognition rather than spontaneous use. One student noted,

> *"Grammar helps me understand sentence structure, but I still find it difficult to create my own sentences."*

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Similarly, another student explained,

"I understand the formula, but I am still confused about when to use the tense."

These responses suggest that while learners can recall grammatical forms during exercises, transferring this knowledge to real communication remains challenging.

3.4.3 Increased Cognitive Passivity in Grammar Learning

Many students reported that when encountering grammatical difficulties, their first response was to consult digital tools rather than attempting to analyze the structure themselves. For example, one student stated,

"When I don't understand grammar, I usually search for the explanation directly on the internet or ask AI."

Another participant explained,

"Sometimes I just use ChatGPT to correct my sentences."

While technology offers convenient support, over-reliance on such tools may reduce opportunities for learners to engage in deeper grammatical processing. As a result, students may become less accustomed to independently analyzing grammatical structures, which limits the development of stronger grammatical competence.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that persistent grammar learning difficulties among Gen Z EFL learners are not caused by insufficient instructional effort, but by mismatch between grammar teaching strategies and learners' actual grammar learning strategies, manifested in instruction-practice mismatch, assessment-application mismatch, and strategy-cognition mismatch. While grammar instruction was strongly supported by explicit explanation and multimedia resources, learners relied heavily on technology-mediated strategies, resulting in fragile grammar retention, limited grammar internalization, and cognitive passivity. The findings indicate that grammar understanding gained during instruction often remains temporary due to insufficient opportunities for sustained practice, interactive engagement, and application-oriented assessment. To enhance grammar learning effectiveness, grammar pedagogy should prioritize practice-intensive learning cycles, strengthen assessment that emphasizes independent grammatical use, and integrate technology as pedagogical scaffolding rather than as a substitute for internal grammatical control. Nevertheless, this study was conducted within a single instructional context and relied primarily on self-reported learner data, which may limit the broader generalizability of the findings. Future research may therefore employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how aligned instructional practices and guided technology use influence long-term grammar retention and transfer across language skills.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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