



AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS UNDERSTANDING OF BASIC GRAMMAR OF DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

English is used by more than 300 million people as a foreign language. There are 4 necessary skills in English such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Grammar is the center of learning English. In this study, the writer aimed to find out the 4th-semester students of Politeknik Tonggak Equator's understanding of definite and indefinite articles. This study used the descriptive qualitative method. The sampling technique is the purposive sampling method with 15 informants. The interview involves fifteen people aged 19-23 years old who are 4th-semester students of Politeknik Tonggak Equator. The data collection methods used were interviews and tests. Data analysis techniques were data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The results showed there are lots of different results of correct answers for each question. There are 3 choices of answers, which are "A", "An", and "The" for each question.

Keywords: *Article, Grammar, Definite and Indefinite Article*

INTRODUCTION

English is used by 300 million people as a foreign language. Grammar is one of determining points of mastering English. It refers to a set of structural rules of language which concern the grammar in any given natural language. Grammar becomes a basic thing that should be introduced to students in a school. Grammar also becomes the starting point to mastering English well. Since grammar is an important aspect of learning English, the students' learning method determined the students' success in learning the language. In this case, the approaches to learning grammar should be the main focus of the learning process. The students' way of receiving and processing also supports the students' effort in learning the language. In English, articles make a distinction between definite and indefinite (Ionin, 2006).

Definite articles and indefinite articles may lead to mistakes. There are specific rules for using definite and indefinite articles, which were explained specifically. According to Givo'n (as cited in Polite et al., 2011), there are three conditions under which a speaker might assume that a referent is accessible to the listener. First, the speaker and listener might be able to focus on the same referent during the act of speaking (e.g., Do you see the dog over there?). Second, a speaker might use the definite under the assumption that the referent is known and accessible to all members of the speech community (e.g., The moon will be full tonight). Finally, the definite might be used when the referent appeared in the preceding discourse and is thus still mentally accessible to the listener (e.g., My mother bought me a tie and a blazer. Unfortunately, the tie is hideous) (Polite et al., 2011).

Some of the features of English grammar for foreigners are the three articles: "a," "an," and "the". The English article system presents many problems for non-native speakers of English, particularly when they do not have an equivalent structure in their first language. Different approaches to the teaching of articles have attempted to overcome this problem by encouraging students to address the notion of countability and to identify specific uses of

articles in English (Miller, 2005). These three words are among the most common words in the English language. In fact, the word “the” is the single most common word in the entire language, while the word “a” is the fifth most common.

The writer intended to help the students to understand the usage of definite and indefinite articles. Since errors in the use of articles generally do not impede communication, many learners may feel that the effort involved in learning the system correctly is not proportionate to the benefits accrued. For academic writing, however, a greater level of accuracy is required, and the correct article becomes an indication not only of mastery of the language but of exactness in thought and expression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An article is a word used to modify a noun, which is a person, place, object, or idea. Technically, an article is an adjective, which is any word that modifies a noun. Usually, adjectives modify nouns through the description, but articles are used instead to point out or refer to nouns. There are two different types of articles used in writing and conversation to point out or refer to a noun or group of nouns, definite and indefinite articles. (Sharma, 2021)

Here are some more examples of the articles in use:

1. I fell over the chair again.
(The chair is specific. It is known to the audience.)
2. Can you pass me a chair?
(This means an unspecific chair, i.e., any chair.)
3. I loved the apple pie after the meal.
(In this example, the audience knows which apple pie is being praised, e.g., the one at last night's dinner.)
4. I love an apple pie after dinner.
(The audience understands that the speaker likes to eat an apple pie after dinner (any apple pie will do).)

Articles Go before Adjectives

An article often modifies a noun that is already being modified by an adjective. When this happens, the article goes before the adjective (or adjectives). For example:

1. Please open the small box first.
“(Here, the noun *box* is being modified by the adjective *small*. The definite article *the* sits before the adjective. Remember that the use of “*the*” tells us that we are talking about a box already known to the audience.)”
2. You will get an excellent pizza at Papa Antonio's.
“(Here, the indefinite article “*an*” sits before the adjective *excellent*.)”

When indicating an unspecified, limited amount of a **count** or **noncount** noun, use *some*. For example:

1. *My cousin was seeking some advice from a counselor* (not advice in general or advice about everything, but a limited amount of advice).
2. *I would love some coffee right now* (not coffee in general, but a limited amount of coffee).
3. *We might get rain tomorrow*. Some rain would be good for the crops (a certain amount of rain, as opposed to rain in general).
4. *There are some drops of water on the table* (a limited number, but more than one drop).

Noncount nouns are those which usually cannot be counted. Following are some common examples:

Certain food and drink items: bacon, beef, bread, broccoli, butter, cabbage, candy, cauliflower, celery, cereal, cheese, chicken, chocolate, coffee, corn, cream, fish, flour, fruit, ice cream, lettuce, meat, milk, oil, pasta, rice, salt, spinach, sugar, tea, water, wine, yogurt

Certain nonfood substances: air, cement, coal, dirt, gasoline, gold, paper, petroleum, plastic, rain, silver, snow, soap, steel, wood, wool

Most abstract nouns: advice, anger, beauty, confidence, courage, employment, fun, happiness, health, honesty, information, intelligence, knowledge, love, poverty, satisfaction, truth, wealth

Areas of study: history, math, biology, etc.

Sports: soccer, football, baseball, hockey, etc.

Languages: Chinese, Spanish, Russian, English, etc.

Other: clothing, equipment, furniture, homework, jewelry, luggage, lumber, machinery, mail, money, news, poetry, pollution, research, scenery, traffic, transportation, violence, weather, work

Geographical names are confusing because some require the and some do not.

Use *the* with: united countries, large regions, deserts, peninsulas, oceans, seas, gulfs, canals, rivers, mountain ranges, groups of islands

the Gobi Desert

the United Arab Emirates

the Sacramento River

the Aleutians

METHODOLOGY

To find the information and how well students understand the article, the writer decided to use the descriptive qualitative method. The informants of this research are 15 people. The intended participants were semester 4th students of Politeknik Tonggak Equator. The writer interviewed 15 informants and observed the test of 20 questions as the primary data. The writer also used literature reviews such as journals, articles, books, and the internet. The activities are carried out interactively to examine the collected data and continue until the data is saturated. The activities for examining the data, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writer analyzed the data until the data was saturated. The following are the results of the test by the students:

The test started right after the interview of the interview participants. The participants were given 30 minutes to finish the test, and most of the participants finished before 30 minutes. The writer provided the result of the test from the participants.

Table 1 Participants' Answers to Question 1 "I bought ___ pair of shoes. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	85	88.5
An	8	8.3
The	3	3.1
Total	96	100

Source: Processed data, 2022

From Table 1, as a result from participants are mostly correct, 85 participants chose the answer "A" to which 88.5% of respondents and it is the correct answer. There were 8

participants who chose the answer "An" which was 8.3% of the response, and therefore 3 answers of "The" which was 3.1% of the total responses.

Table 2 Participants' answers to Question 2 "I saw ___ movie last night. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	56	58.3
An	3	3.1
The	39	38.5
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

As the data provided in Table 2, the result showed slight differences between the answer "A" and the answer "The". The difference is 19.8%, as the answer "A" was chosen by 56 participants, and the answer "The" by 39 participants. Answer "An" only 3 participants, which is the most unlikely to be the correct answer.

Table 3 Participants' answers to Question 3 "They are staying at ___ hotel. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	23	24
An	4	4.2
The	69	71.9
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

According to Table 3, the majority of participants chose the answer "The". Although the correct answer is "A", the writer believes the word "Hotel" led the participants to choose the wrong answer. The question mentioned a hotel but did not mention a specified hotel.

Table 4 Participants' answers to Question 4 "Look at ___ woman over there! She is a famous actress. (Correct Answer is "The")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	11	11.5
An	2	2.1
The	83	86.5
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 4 shows most participants choose "The" as the answer, which is the correct answer. The difference in responses between the answer "The" and other answers is significant, with 75% answering "A" and 84.4% answering "An".

Table 5 Participants' answers to Question 5 "I dribbled ___ basketball. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	71	74
An	4	4.2
The	21	21.9
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

From Table 5, most of the participants choose the answer "A" which is the correct answer, although 21.9% of participants choose the answer "The", and only 4 participants choose the answer "An", the most unlikely to be the correct answer.

Table 6 Participants' answers to Question 6 “That is ___ girl I told you about. (Correct Answer is “The”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	30	31.2
An	0	0
The	66	68.8
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

As a result of Table 6, participants only chose answers "A" and "The", which is obvious as explained in Chapter 2: “Use the article a before a consonant sound, and use an before a vowel sound”. The word "Girl" on question 6 is a consonant sound. It is the obvious answer "An" is not the answer.

Table 7 Participants' answers to Question 7 “___ night is quiet. Let’s take a walk. (Correct Answer is “The”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	14	14.6
An	2	2.1
The	80	83.3
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 7 shows that 80 participants chose the answer "The" Question 7 mentioned the word "night" and the additional "Let's take a walk" which explains what happens now or tonight, still 16 other participants chose the answer "A" or "An" which is the wrong answer.

Table 8 Participants' answers to Question 8 “___ price of gas keeps rising. (Correct Answer is “The”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	11	11.5
An	0	0
The	85	88.5
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

From Table 8, most participants chose the answer "The", which is obviously the correct answer because the question mentioned "price of gas". Therefore, it is a *Definite Article*.

Table 9 Participants' answers to Question 9 “John traveled to ___ South of Mexico. (Correct Answer is “The”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	12	12.6
An	6	6.3
The	77	81.1
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

According to Table 9, the answer chosen by most of the participants is "The". It is mentioned in the question, specifically "south of Mexico". Therefore 81.1% of participants

chose the correct answer. There were 18 participants who chose the wrong answer, and 1 participant did not pick an answer.

Table 10 Participants' answers to Question 10 "Juan is ___ Spanish. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	83	86.5
An	9	9.4
The	4	4.2
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

From Table 10, there are less than 10% for each answer "An" and "The" 4.2% for the answer "The" and 9.4% for the answer "An" and 86.5% of participants chose the answer "A" which is the correct answer. There is a specific condition to use *Indefinite Article* "A" or "An" to indicate one in number.

Table 11 Participants' answers to Question 11 "I read ___ amazing story yesterday. (Correct Answer is "An")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	8	8.3
An	79	82.3
The	9	9.4
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

The correct answer for question 11 is the answer "An" and the majority of participants chose the correct answer. 82.3% of participants chose the correct answer, and 17.7% chose the wrong answer. The writer believes 17.7% of participants expected the word "amazing" story was *Definite Article*. Unfortunately, it is not. Answer "The" was the correct answer if there is a support sentence before or after the "I read ___ amazing story yesterday". For example, "There was a firefighter who saved a cat from falling off a building last night. I read ___ amazing story yesterday". In this condition, the answer "The" was the correct answer.

Table 12 Participants' answers to Question 12 "The test was ___ piece of cake. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	80	83.3
An	10	10.4
The	6	6.2
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

For question number 12, the writer uses the common phrase "a piece of cake". Therefore, the correct answer is "A". There were 80 participants who chose the right answer, and 16 participants chose the wrong answer. As the condition is to indicate one number, therefore, use "A" or "An" as the answer.

Table 13 Participants' answers to Question 13 "Sunrise is ___ beautiful thing. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	78	81.2
An	3	3.1
The	15	15.6
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 13 as it is shown that the majority of participants chose the answer "A", there were 78 participants, or 81.2% of participants. The main word to aid participants in choosing the answer "A" on question 13 was the word "beautiful thing" as "thing" indicate one number and question 13 does not have any support sentences.

Table 14 Participants' answers to Question 14 "I live in ___ apartment. ___ apartment is new. (Correct Answer is "An, The")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
An, The	79	82.3
The, The	11	11.5
The, An	6	6.2
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Question 14 provided a condition to aid participants in answering question 14, such as it is indicating one number and then it does not specify which apartment. The 2nd part of the question is "___ apartment is new" the question specifically lets the participants know the mentioned apartment in the question is new. The majority of participants chose the correct answer, and there were 17 participants who chose the wrong answer.

Table 15 Participants' answers of Question 15 "I would like ___ slice of pizza. (Correct Answer is "A")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	91	94.8
An	1	1
The	4	4.2
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

From table 15, we can conclude that 91 participants (94.8%) chose the answer "A" as the correct answer, the word "slice of pizza" indicates one number, and it does not mention the specific flavor of the pizza, and the word after the answer is "slice" which indicates consonant vowel, the answer should be *Indefinite Article* "A".

Table 16 Participants' answers of Question 16 "I was in ___ Japanese restaurant. ___ restaurant served good food. (Correct Answer is "A, The")"

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A, The	75	78.1
The, A	9	9.4
The, The	12	12.5
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

According to question number 16, there are two answers for each option. The correct answer for question number 16 is answered "A" and "The", 75 participants (78.1%) chose the correct answer, and 21.9% of participants chose the wrong answer.

Table 17 Participants' answers of Question 17 “Sara can play ___ guitar. (Correct Answer is “A”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	74	77.9
An	1	1.1
The	20	21.1
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 17 shows there are two answers that have more than 1 response which answers "A" and "The". Therefore, 20 participants chose the answer "The" as the writer believes participants were led by the sentence "can play ___ guitar". Unfortunately, the question does not mention any type or other guitar, so it is not a *Definite Article*.

Table 18 Participants' answers of Question 18 “See ___ yellow car over there! (Correct Answer is “The”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	24	25
An	5	5.2
The	67	69.8
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

From table 18 there are 24 participants, or 25% of participants, chose the answer "A", 5 participants or 5.2% of participants chose the answer "An" which is the least likely to be the correct answer, 67 participants or 69.8% of participants chose the answer "The" and it is the correct answer, as the question 18 mentioned the words "yellow car".

Table 19 Participants' answers of Question 19 “___ whale is swimming. (Correct Answer is “A”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	37	39.4
An	5	5.3
The	52	55.3
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Question number 19 is tricky, but if participants can spot the difference between *Definite* and *Indefinite Article*, question number 19 does not specifically mention which whale. It does not mention any specific type of color, size, uniqueness or any other specific differences. Therefore the answer "A" is the correct answer because "whale" is a consonant vowel, and it indicates only one whale.

Table 20 Participants' answers of Question 20 “I found ___ uniform in this class last week! (Correct Answer is “A”)”

Option	Participants	
	Response	Percentage (%)
A	36	37.5
An	42	43.8
The	18	18.8
Total	96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 20 shows there's a slight difference between the two most answered options. It answers "A" and answers "An". This is the ultimate challenge to participants' understanding of *Definite* and *Indefinite Article*. The main condition is "indicates one number" and then participants still have two answers to pick, which are "A" or "An". The word "uniform" starts with a vowel alphabet, but it is a special case for the word "uniform" since it is pronounced "yoo-nuh-form". Therefore, the correct answer is "A".

Table 21 Distribution category of test participants' score

No	Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	$T < 20$	Bad	0	0
2	$20 < T \leq 39$	Below Average	2	2.1
3	$40 < T \leq 59$	Average	12	12.5
4	$60 < T \leq 79$	Well	39	40.62
5	$T \geq 80$	Very Well	43	44.8
Total			96	100

Source: Processed Data, 2022

Table 21 shows that there are 2 participants who finished below average or interval scores between 20 and 39, there are 12 participants who finished average, 39 participants who did well in the test, and 43 participants who scored more than 80 points on the test. There were 14 participants who did not pass the test, and there were 82 participants or 85.42%. As we can conclude that most participants understand *Definite* and *Indefinite Article*.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of researching the 4th semester students of *Politeknik Tonggak Equator* understanding towards *Definite and Indefinite Article*, the writer draws some conclusions as follows:

1. *Definite and Indefinite Article* is used to modify a noun, which is a person, place, object, or idea. Technically, an article is an adjective, which is any word that modifies a noun.
2. 14 of 15 interviewed participants were aware of *Definite and Indefinite Article*, and there are 13 interviewed participants who finished the test above 60 points, meaning 86.6% of interviewed participants passed the test.
3. A lot of participants were mistaken to spot the main situation by using *Definite and Indefinite Articles*.
4. *Definite and Indefinite Articles* are mostly used in writing, such as *formal letters, newspapers, magazines, news, etc.*
5. 86.6% of interview participants passed the test, and compared to the result of the whole participant's test, 85.42% of participants passed the test, therefore a slightly different of 1.18%, which is a low percentage.

Therefore, from the research, students' understanding affected the students' results of the test. There are 14 interviewed participants aware of *Definite and Indefinite Article*, and 13 interviewed participants passed the test.

The writer would give some suggestions that might be useful for further research: students who study *Definite and Indefinite Article* as follows:

1. For further research, the writer suggests asking permission to the place of research first and making sure you have made an appointment for the research time so that the two parties have the same time availability. Choose the right time to do the research, so get an apparent certainty to avoid changes in time when going to do research.
2. Suggestion for students who studied *Definite and Indefinite Article* is to focus on the keywords to analyze whether it is something specific or it is something general. Therefore it will be a lot easier to pick which article to use properly regarding the questions.

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