

ABSTRACT

Grammatical Complexity as a Hidden Barrier Shaping Junior High School Students' Willingness to Communicate in English. A Thesis. English and Literature Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Medan, 2026.

This study investigates grammatical complexity as a hidden barrier shaping students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among seventh-grade students at SMPN 17 Medan. The study aimed to explore how grammatical complexity influences students' communication behavior and willingness to participate in English-speaking activities. A descriptive qualitative design with an interpretive phenomenological approach was employed. The participants were 33 students of class VII-1 at SMPN 17 Medan. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a Likert-scale questionnaire, and documentation. Five students were selected for in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), while questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and mean scores. The findings revealed that grammatical complexity functions as a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral barrier to students' willingness to communicate. Students experienced difficulties in using tenses, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and word order during speaking activities. These difficulties increased cognitive load and caused students to focus more on grammatical accuracy than on expressing their ideas. The findings also showed that fear of making grammatical mistakes, anxiety, and concern about negative evaluation reduced students' confidence and participation in classroom communication. Consequently, many students hesitated to speak, overthought grammatical rules, and sometimes avoided communication altogether. Grammatical complexity significantly influences students' willingness to communicate in English by affecting their confidence, anxiety levels, and speaking behavior. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to create supportive learning environments and communication-oriented activities that help students overcome fear of grammatical mistakes and improve their confidence in using English.

Keywords: *Grammatical complexity, Willingness to communicate, Grammar anxiety, Communication avoidance, English learning*