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## An Analysis of the Articles "A" and "AN" Usage at the Sixth Semester Class B of English Education Study Program at The University of Nias

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis penggunaan artikel "a" dan "an" oleh mahasiswa semester enam di kelas B Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Nias. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mengidentifikasi kesalahan umum dan memahami penyebabnya. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian campuran, menggabungkan data kuantitatif berdasarkan tes isian dan tes benar-salah dengan data kualitatif dari hasil wawancara. Analisis kuantitatif mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun banyak siswa memahami aturan dasar, kesalahan sering kali muncul dari kesalahpahaman fonetik. Data kualitatif dari wawancara menyoroti perlunya pelatihan fonetik yang lebih baik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun tingkat pemahaman yang tinggi, penggunaan artikel yang tidak tepat masih sering terjadi. Kesimpulannya menunjukkan bahwa strategi pengajaran yang ditargetkan yang berfokus pada aturan fonetik sangat penting. Studi ini menyiratkan pendekatan pengajaran, termasuk latihan tambahan dan metode inovatif untuk memperdalam pemahaman siswa dan penerapan artikel yang benar.

Kata Kunci: *Penggunaan Artikel, Fonetik, Kesalahan*

## Abstract

This study analyzes the usage of the articles "a" and "an" by sixth-semester students in class B of the English Language Education Study Program at the University of Nias. The primary objective is to identify common errors and understand their underlying causes. A mixed-method approach is employed, combining quantitative data from fill-in-the-blank and true-false tests with qualitative insights from interviews. The quantitative analysis reveals that although many students grasp the basic rules, errors frequently arise from phonetic misunderstandings. Qualitative data from interviews highlight the need for enhanced phonetic training. The findings indicate that despite a high level of understanding, instances of inappropriate article usage persist. The conclusion suggests that targeted teaching strategies focusing on phonetic rules are essential. The study implies a revised teaching approach, including additional practice and innovative methods to deepen students' understanding and correct application of articles.

Keywords: *Article Usage, Phonetic, Errors*

## INTRODUCTION

According to Sari, et al., (2023:2125), English is very important for everyone to master when communicating with foreigners. Mastery of grammar is a fundamental aspect in learning English as a foreign language. One grammatical element that is often a challenge for students is the use of the indefinite articles "a" and "an". The articles "a" and "an" are used to indicate singular nouns that begin with the consonant sound and vowel sound in a noun (Aldhawiyah, 2021:20; Wulandari, et al., 2023; Diffyanie & Ambalegin 2023:212). Although the rules are relatively simple, improper application can cause misunderstandings and reduce the quality of communication in English. This error often occurs because there is no concept of articles in the student's mother tongue or similarities in usage between the article "a/an" and certain demonstrative words in the mother tongue.

This research focuses on analyzing the use of the articles "a" and "an" among sixth semester students of class B in the English Language Education study program at Nias University. A good understanding of the rules for using these articles is very important for prospective English teachers because they will be models for their future students. Apart from that, mastery of the use of articles is also an indicator of fluency in English.

However, based on initial observations and teaching experience in this class, there are still many errors in the use of the articles "a" and "an" in students' writing and speech. These errors can be caused by several factors, such as the influence of the mother's tongue (language interference), lack of understanding of the rules for using articles, lack of practice, or even lack of attention to this aspect in previous learning. That is why when

using articles you must pay attention to the applicable rules (Sultan, 2022; Suharjati, 2011:91; Wulandari., et al., 2023:9)

Therefore, this research aims to analyze in depth the types of errors made by students in using the articles "a" and "an", as well as identifying the factors that cause these errors. By understanding the root of the problem and the pattern of errors that occur, it is hoped that the right solution can be found to improve students' abilities in this aspect. Apart from that, this research will also examine the extent to which errors in using articles have an impact on the quality of students' English fluency (Yusuf & Lestari, 2023:84)

It is hoped that the results of this research will provide valuable insights for teachers and curriculum developers of the English Language Education study program at Nias University. By identifying weaknesses and finding appropriate solutions, students can gain better mastery in the use of the articles "a" and "an", so that they can become more competent English educators in the future. Research findings can also be used as consideration for developing teaching strategies and teaching materials that are more effective in helping students overcome problems using this article. Based on the background above, the researcher will conduct the research by the title "An Analysis of the Articles "A" and "AN" Usage at the Sixth Semester Class B of English Education Study Program at The University of Nias".

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Rofiqoh & Zulhawati (2020:3), mixed research methods is research that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Mixed research methods were chosen to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. A quantitative approach will be used to collect and analyze numerical data, while a qualitative approach will help explore participants' perspectives and experiences in more depth. This mixed type of research has greater power than quantitative and qualitative research because it involves the functions of both types of research collectively.

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire with two types of questions, namely fill-in-the-blank and true-and-false. Sugiyono (2017), defines a questionnaire as a data collection technique that is carried out by giving a set of questions or written questions to respondents. Fill-in-the-blank questions allow respondents to provide open-ended answers according to their understanding, while true-and-false

questions ask respondents to determine whether a given statement is true or false. Apart from that, interviews were also conducted to complete the data obtained from the questionnaire and obtain more in-depth information from the participants.

The data collection method used in this research is a survey. Babbie (2016: 174), defines the survey method as a data collection technique carried out by giving questionnaires or structured interviews to a population sample to obtain information about the characteristics of that population. The survey was carried out by distributing questionnaires to a representative sample of the population studied. Respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire voluntarily and independently, so that the data obtained naturally reflected their opinions and experiences. Next, interviews were conducted with several selected participants to explore additional information and gain a deeper understanding. By combining the two approaches, researchers hope to produce findings that are comprehensive and have strong validity.

Analysis of student grades will be carried out in the following way:

(i) Student grades:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Total correct of questions}}{\text{Total questions}} \times 100$$

(Arikunto, 2006)

(ii) Classification of student grades:

Tabel 1. Classification of student grades

No	Classification	Mark
1	Excellent	90-100
2	Very Good	76-89
3	Good	60-75
4	Fair	40-59
5	Poor	0-39

(Parengkuan, 2019:13)

(iii) Average student achievement score:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

Note:

$\bar{x}$  = Average value

$\sum x$  = Total score

N = Number of subjects (students)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

## Results

This research focuses on the use of articles "a" and "an". Students will take several tests which aim to measure their ability to use articles. In this study, the research participants were 38 sixth semester students, class B, English Education Study Program, The University of Nias. Based on the data collected, the following are the results of a test of students' ability to use the articles "a" and "an" in a noun:

Tabel 2. Test of students' ability to use the articles "a" and "an"

No.	Names	Fill in the blanks		True & False	
		Score	Classification	Score	Classification
1.	EL	67	Good	70	Good
2.	EJM	100	Excellent	80	Very good
3.	EMZ	47	Fair	70	Good
4.	EMZe	67	Good	50	Fair
5.	FRSZ	100	Excellent	100	Excellent
6.	FSZ	73	Good	60	Good
7.	FHZ	67	Good	60	Good
8.	GMW	73	Good	60	Good
9.	HGT	67	Good	50	Fair
10.	HG	80	Very good	80	Very good
11.	HBG	67	Good	70	Good
12.	IEZ	67	Good	50	Fair
13.	IYN	67	Good	60	Good
14.	JPH	60	Good	30	Poor
15.	JKT	73	Good	80	Very good
16.	JSL	67	Good	60	Good
17.	JH	47	Fair	40	Fair
18.	JHKH	87	Very good	70	Good
19.	LL	100	Excellent	90	Excellent
20.	LMG	73	Good	80	Very good
21.	LRZ	93	Excellent	80	Very good
22.	LAH	73	Good	60	Good
23.	MIZ	67	Good	70	Good
24.	NPEZ	93	Excellent	90	Excellent

25.	PFHG	87	Very good	70	Good
26.	RYL	100	Excellent	70	Good
27.	RMD	87	Very good	40	Fair
28.	RRL	93	Excellent	70	Good
29.	RDW	60	Good	40	Fair
30.	SDL	67	Good	70	Good
31.	SG	60	Good	70	Good
32.	THM	80	Very good	70	Good
33.	YH	73	Good	50	Fair
34.	YNT	80	Very good	70	Good
35.	YKG	87	Very good	100	Excellent
36.	YW	60	Good	50	Fair
37.	YTSL	80	Very good	70	Good
38.	YSZ	100	Excellent	90	Excellent

Based on the test results above, it shows that there are two types of tests applied to students, namely fill in the blanks and true and false. The fill in the blanks test shows that there are 8 students in the excellent category, 8 students in the very good category, 20 students in the good category, 2 students in the fair category, 0 students in the poor category. The following are the average student achievement scores:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

$$\bar{x} = \frac{2889}{38}$$

$$\bar{x} = 76 \text{ (Very good)}$$

Meanwhile, for the second test, namely true and false, it shows that there are 5 students in the excellent category, 5 students in the very good category, 19 students in the good category, 8 students in the fair category, 1 student in the poor category. The following are the average student achievement scores:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

$$\bar{x} = \frac{2540}{38}$$

$$\bar{x} = 67 \text{ (GOOD)}$$

Next, researchers will analyze the tests given to students. The following is a test table and the number of errors in the fill in the blanks test

Tabel 3. The number of errors of the fill in the blanks test

No	Questions	Answers	Total correct	Total wrong
1	He is.....honorable man.	An	26 students	12 students
2	She found .....cat in the garden.	A	37 students	1 student
3	He needs.....jacket for the trip.	A	35 students	3 students
4	I saw .....bird on the tree.	A	37 students	1 students
5	We bought ..... cake for the party.	A	33 students	5 students
6	They have ..... new car.	A	32 students	6 students
7	She eats ..... apples for lunch.	An	35 students	3 students
8	He has ..... interesting idea.	An	33 students	5 students
9	They saw ..... elephant at the zoo.	An	35 students	3 students
10	I need ..... eraser for my pencil.	An	29 students	9 students
11	She is reading ..... exciting book.	An	32 students	6 students
12	He is ..... unique artist.	A	21 students	17 students
13	She gave ..... useful tip.	A	23 students	15 students
14	They built.....European-style house.	A	9 students	29 students
15	They needed.....utility knife	A	16 students	22 students

Based on the data above, it shows that students made a lot of mistakes in number 14 with a total of 29 students who answered incorrectly. Question number 14 is "They built ..... European style house". In that case, the correct use of the article is article "a". The main reason is because the sound of the word European begins with a consonant sound with the pronunciation /jʊə.rə'pi:.ən/ (British accent) or /jʊr.ə'pi:.ən/ (American accent). Furthermore, question number 15 was in second place with a total of 22 students answering the question incorrectly, and question number 12 was in third place with a total of 17 students answering the question incorrectly. Questions number 12 and 15 have a similar case to question number 14 where you should use the article "a" because the sound of the word "unique & utility" begins with a consonant sound.

Next, here is the test table and the number of errors in the true and false tests:

Tabel 4. The number of errors in the true and false tests

No	Questions	Answers	Total correct	Total wrong
1	She found an unicorn toy	False	26 students	16 students
2	They rented a unit in the building	True	24 students	15 students
3	It was a honest mistake	False	18 students	21 students
4	My brother is an introvert person	True	33 students	5 students
5	I need an apple	True	32 students	6 students

6	My sister is an humorous person	False	27 students	15 students
7	I have a older brother	False	24 students	14 students
8	We are reading a book	True	33 students	5 students
9	She wrote an honest review	True	23 students	16 students
10	I need a umbrella because it's raining	False	24 students	14 students

Based on the data above, it shows that students made a lot of mistakes in number 3 with a total of 21 students who answered incorrectly. Question number 3 is "They It was an honest mistake". In that case, the correct use of the article is the article "an". The main reason is because the sound of the word honest begins with a vowel sound with the pronunciation /'ɒnɪst/ (British accent) or /'ɑ:nɪst/ (American accent). Furthermore, questions number 1 and 9 were in second place with a total of 16 students answering the question incorrectly, and in third place was question number 6 with a total of 15 students answering the question incorrectly. For questions number 1, 9, and 6, the case is similar to question number 3 where many students are fooled by words that should sound different from what is written.

To maximize the reasons why errors occur when answering the test, the researcher provides several interview questions that will be tested on 20 students as a sample of 38 students in semester 6, class B, English Education Study Program in accordance with Bloom's Taxonomy theory. The following are the interview questions and their categories:

Tabel 5. The interview questions and their categories

No.	Interview questions	Kategori
1	Have you ever studied articles A and An?	Knowledge
2	What do you know about the difference in the use of articles A and An?	Comprehension
3	Can you give an example of the use of articles A and An?	Application
4	Do you understand why the article A is used in words starting with a vowel, for example "a university", explain the reasons?	Analysis
5	Do you understand why the article An is used in words starting with a consonant, for example "a hour", explain the reasons?	

Based on the interview results, the following is a table listing the categories of 20 students:

Tabel 6. Listing the categories of 20 students:

No.	Names	Categories			
		Knowledge	Comprehension	Aplication	Analysis
1.	EL	✓	✓	✓	✓
2.	EJM	✓	-	✓	-
3.	EMZ	✓	-	-	-
4.	EMZe	✓	✓	✓	-
5	GMW	✓	✓	✓	-
6	HGT	✓	-	-	-
7	HG	✓	✓	✓	-
8	JSL	✓	✓	✓	-
9	JHKH	✓	-	✓	-
10	LL	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	LMG	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	MIZ	✓	-	✓	-
13	NPEZ	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	PFHG	✓	✓	✓	-
15	RYL	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	RRL	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	SG	✓	-	-	-
18	YNT	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	YKG	✓	✓	✓	-
20	YSZ	✓	✓	✓	✓
Total =		20 students	14 students	17 students	8 students

Based on the data above, it shows that 20 samples of students in class B semester 6, the University of Nias have studied the use of the articles "a and an". Meanwhile, a total of 14 students understood (comprehend) the use of the articles "a and an". Furthermore, 17 students were in the application category. Finally, in the analysis category there were 8 students from 20 samples. From the interview data above, the author draws the conclusion that the causes of errors in using the articles "a and an" are as follows:

1. Lack of understanding of the differences in the use of the articles "a and an"
2. Not analyzing the available questions, such as special rules that apply to some words, for example the word "hour" uses the article an because the sound of the word hour starts with a vowel.

### 3. Some students answer questions based on instinct alone

#### Discussion

The articles "a" and "an" are used to identify nouns that begin with a vowel and a consonant. The article "a" is used before nouns that begin with a consonant sound, for example "a car, a book, and a university". Meanwhile, the article "an" is used before nouns that start with a vowel sound, for example "an apple, an hour, etcetera" (Suharjati, 2011:90; Sepyanda, 2020). Therefore, the use of this article must really pay attention and analyze the type of initial sound of the noun, so that the use of the article is correct and appropriate.

This research focuses on analyzing the use of the articles "a" and "an" among sixth semester class B students in the English Language Education study program at The University of Nias. Test and interview results show that although the majority of students show good understanding, there are still several errors that often occur, especially when article selection is influenced by the sound of the initial letter rather than the written form. A summary of the main findings shows that of the 38 students, the majority have a fairly good understanding but some still often make mistakes in choosing the right article in a particular context.

The fill-in-the-blanks test results show that the majority of students get good grades, with an average score of 76 which is in the very good category. However, common errors occur in words that start with a letter that sounds different from the initial letter, such as "European" and "unique". On the true-and-false test, the most frequent errors occurred in phrases such as "an honest mistake", indicating that students often misinterpret vowel sounds. In addition, interviews with students revealed that although they had learned the rules for using articles, many were still confused when faced with exceptions to these rules.

Based on these findings, in teaching the articles "a and an" there is a need for teaching strategies that focus more on the phonetic aspects of article use. Lecturers should provide more exercises that emphasize words with unusual initial sounds and provide explicit explanations of exceptions to the general rule. With this approach, it is hoped that students can achieve better fluency and accuracy in the use of English articles. Teaching that focuses more on phonetic drills and explanations of exceptions can help reduce errors caused by the effects of writing letters that do not match the sounds they pronounce.

This study has several limitations, including a sample limited to only one class and a focus on specific types of errors. Further research is needed to generalize these findings to

a broader population and to explore other factors that may influence students' use of articles. Apart from that, limitations in data collection time and variations in English language skills between students can also influence research results. Therefore, research with a wider scope and longer duration can provide a more comprehensive picture.

In general, errors in the use of articles are often caused by a lack of understanding of phonetics and interference of the native language. Therefore, it is recommended for future research to explore more effective phonics teaching methods and expand the scope of research to cover students' various language backgrounds. Thus, these findings can be used to improve the quality of English education in the future. Previous research also supports the finding that a strong understanding of phonetics is essential for the correct use of articles, and this is in line with recommendations for teaching that focuses more on phonetic aspects (Yuliawati., et al., 2020; Derkach., et al., 2023) .

By implementing more effective teaching strategies based on the findings of this research, it is hoped that students can better understand and apply the rules for using the articles "a" and "an" correctly. Suggestions for future research include developing more innovative teaching methods, such as the use of technology in teaching phonics, and expanding the research to a larger population to ensure the generalizability of the findings. This is important to ensure that the results of this research can be widely applied and can provide real benefits in improving students' English language skills.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that although most of the sixth semester students of class B in the English Language Education study program at The University of Nias understand the use of the articles "a" and "an", they still make mistakes. This error mainly occurs due to a lack of understanding of phonetics, where students choose articles based on the written initial letter, not the initial sound. The most common errors are found in words such as "European," "unique," and "honest."

The results of this research emphasize the importance of teaching that focuses more on phonetic aspects. That way, additional practice and a more in-depth explanation of the general rules that apply to the use of articles are needed. Therefore, further research with a wider scope and the development of more innovative teaching methods are needed to increase the understanding and application of the use of articles among students.

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