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Relevance of Grammar among Gen Z College Students Using Social Learning Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Students develop their understanding by engaging in discussions, observing peers or mentors, and participating in group activities, which foster critical thinking and communication skills. Social learning not only enhances cognitive development but also cultivates empathy, cooperation, and the ability to deal with complex social dynamics. This exploratory study analyzed the relevance of grammar among Gen Z college students in terms of academic and social media interactions. The study purposively selected 16 Gen Z college students using an open-ended online sampling process. Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews, allowing for the collection of coded narratives and experiences. The findings highlighted that social learning could facilitate grammar acquisition and language adaptation among Gen Z college students. Students unconsciously adopted grammatical structures and language patterns by observing influencers and social media interactions, emphasizing clarity and tone over strict grammar rules. Conversely, formal classroom settings reinforced the importance of proper grammar, promoting linguistic credibility and accuracy. Students adapted their language use to meet academic

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and social expectations, demonstrating observational learning and linguistic imitation. While formal settings provided structured guidance, informal environments influenced grammar use through social norms and the desire for effective communication. The influence of formal and informal settings emphasized the importance of social learning in language acquisition, suggesting that grammar mastery depends on both structured feedback and adaptive social interaction. Future research could examine the long-term effects of social dynamics on grammatical retention and academic outcomes.

Keywords: English as Second Language; Grammar; Linguistic Adaptation; Linguistic Imitation; Social Learning

1. Introduction

Proficient communication in the English language is highly dependent on a thorough understanding of grammatical principles. Grammar forms the cornerstone of English language communication, encouraging logical and critical thinking and enabling more accurate language use^[1]. Whether in speech or writing, proper grammar is essential for delivering clear and effective communication. Accurate grammar, vocabulary, and spelling in written communication are critical to ensuring messages are understood without confusion or ambiguity^[2]. Strong grammar skills enhance verbal competence, as grammar forms the foundation of language, providing the structural framework for effective communication^[3]. Essentially, clear communication between the sender and receiver requires careful attention to sentence structure and grammatical functions.

Grammar helps in language learning, directly influencing language mastery^[4]. Developing grammatical proficiency presents challenges categorized as linguistic, environmental, and psychological. Linguistic factors include understanding grammar structures, environmental elements involve the frequency of language input, and psychological aspects relate to learning capacity^[5]. Despite completing formal grammar courses, students often encounter persistent difficulties in mastering grammar^[4].

This paper explored the potential of social learning in both academic and online environments, examining how interactions and peer-driven learning can develop knowledge acquisition through adaptation, imitation, and conditioning. Social language learning involves acquiring language through communication with others, including conversations, group activities, and interactions with native or proficient speakers^[6]. It highlights the importance of social factors, such as collaboration and cultural understanding, in

language acquisition. To effectively learn English, especially oral communication, it is vital to employ strategies that integrate cognitive, affective, and social elements, with social strategies playing a crucial role in speech proficiency^[7].

Sani and Saidu^[8] further explained that social strategies involve using speech functions like asking, directing, and responding, essential for effective communication. Halliday's identification of four core speech functions—offering, questioning, stating, and commanding—supports the integration of social learning strategies in classroom discussions. Studies also emphasize the role of social interaction and collaboration in enhancing learning outcomes^[9, 10], while others demonstrated the link between effective social learning strategies and increased student motivation in English language classrooms^[11].

There is more to explore about how social learning shapes the competence of students in the English language. For example, Leki^[12] asserted that grammar is a complex and dynamic structure, not merely a set of rules. Ndlovu^[13] highlighted that students in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, encounter difficulties in correctly applying language structures and norms, which affect their writing. Consequently, emphasizes that extensive reading, both inside and outside the classroom, is crucial for teaching grammar and expanding vocabulary^[14]. To address the emerging challenge, Yulia et al.^[15] propose that social interactions in natural settings can serve as a supplementary method alongside traditional classroom instruction to enhance second language acquisition for English as Secondary Language (ESL) students. Language acquisition can be strengthened through exposure to the target language in various environments^[16], including informal contexts. Thus, this study advocates for incorporating social interaction as an alternative approach to conventional classroom teaching for undergraduate ESL students.

2. Literature Review

Foreign language learning pertains to the process of learning a language that is neither an individual's native tongue nor their first acquired language, typically outside the linguistic and cultural environment where it is predominantly spoken^[17]. In the contemporary multicultural and multilingual landscape, the study of foreign languages has evolved from being merely a popular trend to a widely practiced endeavor worldwide^[18].

In the Philippines, for instance, foreign languages like English are integrated into the curricula of primary and secondary schools, as well as universities^[19]. Even preschoolers as young as five years old are introduced to a language other than their mother tongue^[20]. The motivations for learning a foreign language include academic pursuits, cultural integration, developing cultural identity, facilitating intranational communication, and enhancing international communication with individuals from other nations^[21]. Moeller and Catalano^[22] assert that mastering another language enables speakers not only to communicate effectively and creatively but also to engage meaningfully in real-world interactions through the language.

Language learning involves the development of skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, alongside a clear understanding of cultural diversity^[23]. Like acquiring any new skill, it requires consistent practice, memorization, and constructive feedback for consistent improvement^[24]. Learners may pursue language mastery through formal instruction, independent study, experiential learning, or by immersing themselves in environments where the target language is spoken^[25]. Mastery of English grammar, a fundamental aspect of effective communication, relies on a solid grammatical foundation. Grammar serves as the structural framework governing the form and meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, enabling clear and precise communication^[26]. Competence in grammar is vital for both oral and written expression, promoting logical reasoning and accuracy in conveying ideas. Adherence to proper grammar is indispensable for avoiding ambiguity and ensuring clarity in written discourse^[27].

Studies discovered that social interactions could help in learning the English grammar^[28, 29]. For example, the

pair-interaction model significantly improved Indonesian EFL learners' grammar knowledge and speaking skills compared to the traditional Grammar-Translation Method^[29]. In addition, some studies reviewed the potential of social media in influencing the grammar competence of students. Laabidi and Ouahbi^[30] discovered a relationship between social media use and students' grammatical competence, and participants who acknowledged learning English through social media demonstrated strong grammatical skills, confirming its role in language and grammar acquisition.

Constructivist teaching practices, inspired by Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in learning and development, facilitate learners' ability to internalize and reinterpret new information^[22]. Vygotsky^[31] framework highlighted contextualized input through cooperative and meaningful social interactions, serves as the foundation of sociocultural theory. As Lantolf and Pavlenko^[32] note, the primary objective of sociocultural theory is to understand how individuals organize and utilize their cognitive processes in daily life. From a sociocultural perspective, language acquisition transcends the mere mastery of linguistic forms; it involves a dialectical relation between two modes of constructing meaning. The interaction between an expert (teacher) and a novice (learner), particularly during problem-solving tasks (scaffolding), exemplifies this dynamic.

Although stemming from constructivist perspectives, the social learning process in the context of foreign language acquisition remains insufficiently understood. Social learning theory emphasizes the significance of observing, imitating, and replicating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses of others in the learning process^[33]. Developed by Albert Bandura, this theory builds on behavioral learning principles but places greater focus on the influence of environmental cues and internal cognitive processes^[34, 35]. In social learning, individuals acquire knowledge by observing others or learning about the consequences of specific actions^[36].

The application of social learning strategies is not limited to developing language skills but also extends to language systems, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. A quantitative study by Božinović and Sindik^[37] involving 201 second-language learners of German, Spanish, French, and Italian in Croatia revealed that most participants

did not practice grammar forms with peers, indicating generally low social learning strategy use. Similarly, Al Haq^[38] found that 60% of high school learners in Saudi Arabia preferred studying grammar independently, showing limited peer interaction. Pronunciation also presents challenges for some second-language learners, in Saudi Arabia^[39] and in Ukraine^[40], where 119 out of 186 participants favored group activities to enhance English pronunciation.

In Indonesia, Antara and Anggreni^[41] observed that second-language learners in a tourism faculty improved their vocabulary and pronunciation by practicing with family members or more knowledgeable individuals, demonstrating the value of social learning strategies. Interestingly, Al Zahrani^[42] reported that 52.40% of Saudi learners preferred seeking help from peers, while only 33.30% turned to teachers for vocabulary-related difficulties, highlighting a preference for peer support over teacher assistance in learning contexts. Rajagukguk and Subekti^[43] suggested undertaking a qualitative study within a physical second-language instructional setting, where the application of social learning strategies can be directly observed, may prove to be a strategic approach.

While significant progress has been made in understanding foreign language acquisition, several research gaps remain. The social learning process in foreign language acquisition, particularly in its application to grammar and pronunciation, has not been fully explored, as studies often emphasize individual learning approaches over peer or group interactions^[44, 45]. In addition, while social media and other informal learning contexts have been linked to enhanced grammar skills, their specific mechanisms and long-term impact on language acquisition require further investigation^[30, 46]. Lastly, the relation between cultural context (in-group activities) and the effectiveness of social learning strategies in developing grammar learning remains insufficiently addressed^[42]. This paper addressed these gaps by identifying mechanisms for social learning process and how this impacts students' social engagement and learning possibilities. This paper explored the perceptions of Filipino Gen Z students regarding the importance of grammar in academic and social communication, emphasizing how social learning shapes their attitudes toward grammar accuracy and usage.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This paper explored the perceptions of Gen Z college students regarding the importance of grammar in academic and social context. Exploratory studies investigate topics that are either underexplored or experiencing rapid evolution^[47]. These studies emphasize adaptability and open-ended approaches, allowing researchers to gain initial insights about a phenomenon without relying on rigid hypotheses or strictly defined variables^[48]. This methodological flexibility is vital for examining emerging social, psychological, or technological trends, as it facilitates the identification of patterns, themes, and participant experiences that might otherwise remain overlooked^[49, 50]. Typically employing qualitative methods like interviews and open-ended surveys^[51], exploratory research generates rich contextual data that helps form preliminary understanding^[52, 53]. While sometimes criticized for lacking scientific precision, their structured yet flexible nature provides valuable preliminary data, enabling researchers to design more focused and comprehensive future studies^[54]. Using explorative methods, this paper answered one critical question about social learning: *how young individuals perceived grammar in academic and social settings?* This understanding opened a new discussion concerning the role of social environments in shaping language learning and education.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

Exploratory research often prioritizes depth and nuance over broad generalization, which explains why sample sizes in such studies are typically small^[55, 56]. Thus, having only 16 participants—GenZ college students—was deemed appropriate for this study. Smaller samples allow for a detailed exploration of participants' experiences and viewpoints, enabling researchers to thoroughly examine key variables and interactions within a specific context^[49, 57]. Common qualitative approaches in exploratory research, such as phenomenology, case studies, and narrative analysis, rely on purposive, non-random sampling to ensure the data gathered is both relevant and rich in context^[19, 58]. In selecting the participants, an online purposive sampling process^[59] was conducted using open-ended questionnaires

distributed via Google Forms.

There were five major sampling criteria was used: (1) age range (18–24 years old), (2) actively enrolled as college students during the study period, (3) completed at least one semester in both social and academic writing courses, (4) regular use of social media platforms, and (5) willingness to participate in open-ended interviews. There were 126 who responded to the open-ended questions, but only 16 participants were selected for interviews. While this sample size may be considered small, the primary aim of the study was to explore their perspectives and ideas rather than to generalize their experiences to a broader population. This method allowed researchers to select participants whose perspectives

aligned with the study’s objectives, ensuring the relevance and credibility of the findings^[60, 61]. The flexibility inherent in purposive sampling was a fundamental characteristic in this study, as it allowed for essential changes to participant selection criteria to address emerging themes or newly identified research questions^[20]. With the collection of rich, contextually specific data, purposive sampling established a foundation for formulating hypotheses and guiding subsequent investigations in dynamic and developing fields^[54, 62]. **Table 1** presents the summary information of the 16 selected Gen Z students, including students’ sex, age, type of school (public or private), course, hours spent in social media, and perceptions about grammar relevance.

Table 1. Summary information of selected participants.

Participant	Sex	Age	Institutional Setting	Course	Social Media Use (Hours)	Perception of Grammar Relevance
Anna	F	19	Public	Education	4	Essential for academic success
Ben	M	21	Private	Engineering	3	Critical in academic communication
Carla	F	20	Public	Psychology	5	Necessary in both social and academic
David	M	22	Private	Mathematics	2	More important in academic settings
Emma	F	18	Private	Biology	6	Important for social clarity
Felix	M	24	Public	Language	3	Crucial for academic writing
Grace	F	23	Public	Education	4	Relevant in professional communication
Henry	M	21	Public	Engineering	5	Vital for academic presentations
Ivy	F	20	Private	Psychology	6	Important for formal interactions
Jack	M	22	Private	Mathematics	2	More significant in academia
Kate	F	19	Public	Language	4	Essential for effective communication
Liam	M	18	Public	Biology	3	Important for writing research papers
Mia	F	24	Private	Education	4	Necessary for clear academic output
Noah	M	23	Private	Engineering	5	Critical for technical reports
Olivia	F	21	Private	Psychology	6	Valuable in professional contexts
Paul	M	20	Public	Language	3	Key to maintaining formal standards

3.3. Instrumentation

An interview guide was developed to facilitate the collection of participant responses during the interview process. Exploratory studies frequently relied on semi-structured interviews rather than structured questionnaires due to the flexibility necessary for thoroughly examining participant perspectives and uncovering emerging themes^[47, 63]. Semi-structured interviews allowed interviewers to elicit participants’ responses, providing a basis for exploring participants’ beliefs and ideas in greater detail^[64]. This adaptability was particularly critical in this study, where interviews followed a loose framework, enabling researchers

to address unforeseen themes as they surfaced^[65, 66]. The development of a semi-structured interview guide involved defining the study’s objectives and incorporating relevant background information to inform the development of interview questions^[67]. Researchers drafted an initial set of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, narrative responses, ensuring that the guide prompted participants to share ideas^[64, 68]. This draft was then pilot-tested to assess the questions based on participant feedback, enhancing clarity and relevance^[69, 70]. After thorough examination, a final interview guide was developed (**Table 2**) and was used during the interview process.

Table 2. Final interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions	Probing Questions	Thematic Dimension
To explore the perceptions of Gen Z learners regarding the importance of grammar in their academic and social communication.	1. How do you perceive the role of grammar in your academic writing and communication? Can you share specific instances where grammar influenced your academic performance?	- Can you give an example of when poor grammar impacted your academic success? - How do you think grammar influences your credibility in academic settings?	Grammar in Academic Communication
	2. In social settings, such as chats or social media, how important do you think proper grammar is? Why do you think people your age may or may not prioritize grammar?	- Do you feel there's a difference between formal and informal grammar usage? - How do you respond when others use improper grammar in informal contexts?	Grammar in Social Communication
	3. Do you feel that the importance of grammar has changed over time for your generation? If so, how do you think these changes have impacted the way you communicate academically and socially?	- Can you think of any factors (like technology or social media) that may have influenced how your peers view grammar? - How have the shifts in grammar perception affected your own approach to grammar?	Perception towards Use
To analyze the role of social learning in shaping Gen Z learners' attitudes toward grammar accuracy and usage.	1. Can you describe how you learn grammar from observing others, such as your peers, teachers, or influencers on social media? How does this affect your own grammar usage?	- Can you describe how you learn grammar from observing others, such as your peers, teachers, or influencers on social media? - How does this affect your own grammar usage?	Learning Grammar through Observation
	2. Have you ever received feedback from others (e.g., friends, teachers, or online communities) about your grammar? How did that feedback influence your attitude or approach to grammar?	- Have you ever received feedback from others (e.g., friends, teachers, or online communities) about your grammar? - How did that feedback influence your attitude or approach to grammar?	Feedback and Grammar Usage
	3. In your opinion, how do group interactions, such as collaborative school projects or online discussions, impact your awareness and practice of grammar rules?	- In your opinion, how do group interactions, such as collaborative school projects or online discussions, impact your awareness and practice of grammar rules?	Impact of Group Interactions on Grammar

3.4. Data Collection

Narrative data were obtained from participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of the topic under investigation. To ensure effective interviews, a structured yet adaptable approach was designed, allowing researchers to gather detailed accounts while actively engaging with participants' narratives. The process started with clearly defining the research objectives and selecting participants who met specific inclusion criteria to ensure the sample was reflective of the phenomenon being explored^[71, 72]. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researchers provided a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, confidentiality protocols, and the intended use of the data, ensuring transparency and trust^[73]. This step helped establish a clear direction and encouraged participants to feel at ease and willing to share openly^[68, 74]. The interviews were designed to feel conversational, as a relaxed tone often promotes a natural flow of dialogue and elicits rich, descriptive responses^[75–78]. Despite the conversational style, the interviews adhered to a carefully developed interview guide that included thematic questions aligned with the study's objec-

tives^[79]. These questions steered the discussion toward key topics, while follow-up probes allowed the interviewer to explore participants' answers further, clarify meanings, and enrich the data^[64, 80]. The participants were encouraged to use the language they felt most comfortable with during the interview. Finally, the entire data collection process was recorded via phone, and notes were documented and stored in an Excel spreadsheet.

3.5. Data Analysis

Narrative data from the interviews were analyzed to identify recurring patterns using reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis followed a structured yet flexible approach to identify and interpret patterns within qualitative data. This method is commonly used in exploratory research to understand participants' experiences, opinions, and behaviors^[81, 82]. It enables researchers to uncover underlying themes related to participants' perspectives by coding data in a way that moves from descriptive to more interpretative levels^[83, 84]. Reflexive thematic analysis, particularly suited for exploring subjective experiences, empha-

sizes the researcher's active role in interpreting the data. Unlike methods that strive for complete objectivity, reflexive thematic analysis recognizes the researcher's influence in the analytical process, ensuring that the findings are closely aligned with the context of the study^[85, 86]. With inductive method, where themes and codes are derived directly from the data, researchers can reduce preconceived notions and focus on meanings that authentically reflect participants' experiences^[81]. This bottom-up method allows for the discovery of themes that emerge naturally from the data, rather

than imposing predefined ideas, making it especially useful for exploratory research^[47, 87, 88]. In reflexive thematic analysis, the coding process, as outlined by Braun and Clarke^[89], involves six iterative phases (**Figure 1**): familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing those themes, defining and naming them, and finally, producing the report. These phases allow researchers to thoroughly engage with the data, ensuring that themes emerge naturally through ongoing interaction and refinement^[81].

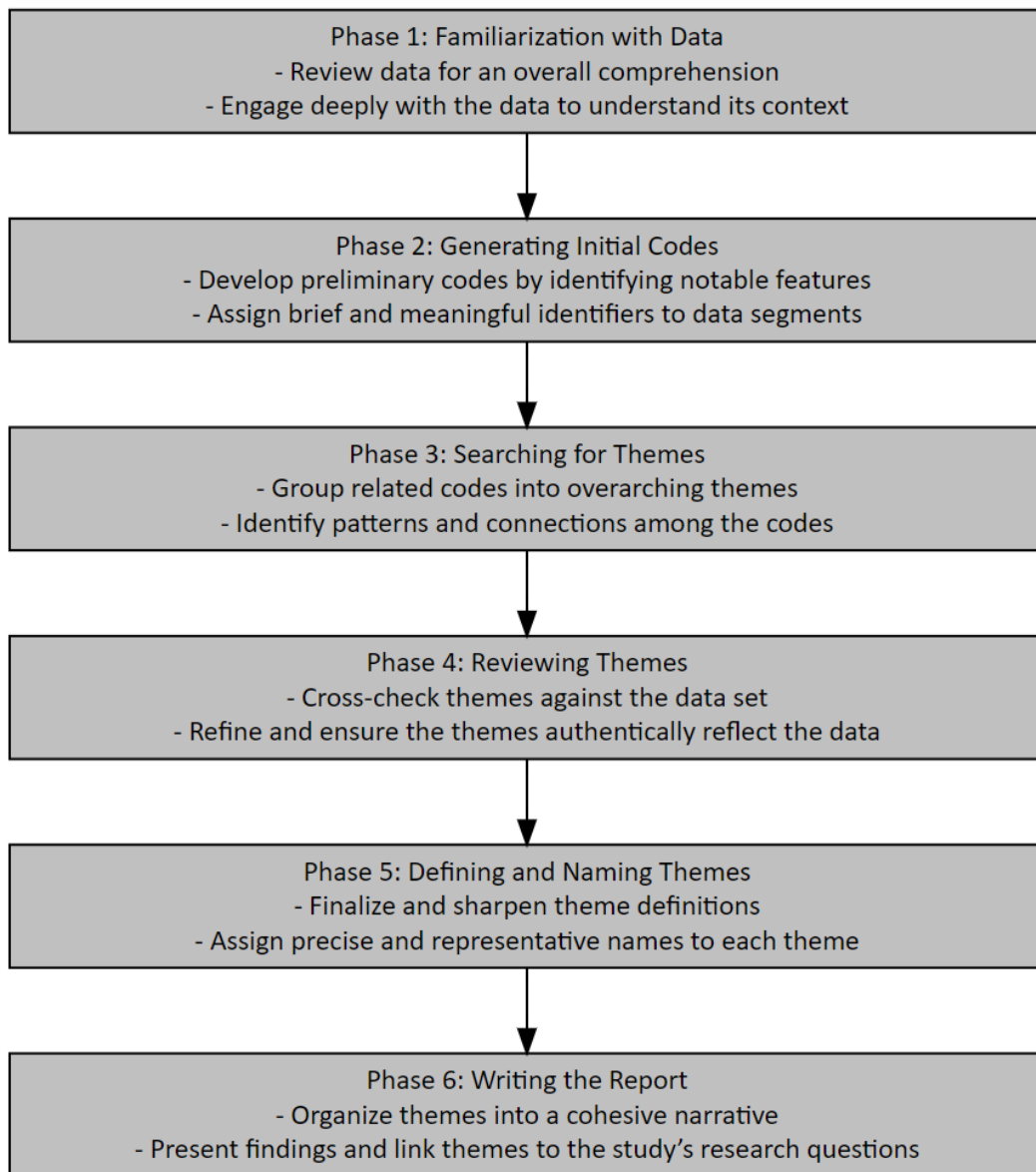


Figure 1. Workflow of data analysis process.

Table 3 presents the sample of thematic analysis conducted in this study. Using an inductive method, themes and codes are developed directly from the data, minimizing biases and authentically reflecting participants' perspectives. This bottom-up approach uncovers naturally emerging themes, making it ideal for exploratory research.

Table 3. Structured thematic analysis process.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Findings	Supporting Quotes
Develop Credibility	Grammar and Perception of Professionalism	Participants highlighted the importance of proper grammar in academic and professional settings, noting that errors can negatively impact the credibility of their work.	"Even small things like punctuation or using the wrong word can make a difference in how your ideas are perceived." "Having too many errors decreases the value of a formal paper."
	Credibility in Creative Fields	While creative fields allow for some flexibility, participants noted that grammatical errors could still weaken arguments or analyses, impacting their credibility.	"If the grammar's off, it can make an argument or analysis feel less credible."
	Accuracy on Digital Platforms	Participants emphasized the importance of accuracy in both content and grammar on platforms like social media to maintain trustworthiness and avoid loss of professional reputation.	"Even small grammatical or factual errors on social media could lead to a loss of credibility."

4. Results

Objective 1: To explore the perceptions of Gen Z learners regarding the importance of grammar in their academic and social communication.

This study explored the perceptions of Gen Z college students regarding the importance of grammar in their academic and social communication.

First, learners acknowledged the role of grammar in academic and business contexts, emphasizing that proper grammar ensures clarity, precision, and effective communication of ideas. Even minor grammatical errors, such as misplaced words or phrases, were seen as capable of distorting the intended message. While some fields, like engineering or business, prioritize logic and accuracy over style, grammar was still viewed as essential for maintaining clarity. In contrast, in informal settings like text messaging or social media, learners reported a more relaxed approach to grammar, although some still adhered to basic rules for professionalism and clarity in serious conversations.

Second, participants recognized the importance of grammar in establishing credibility. Grammatical errors were viewed as detrimental to the perceived credibility of academic work, leading to embarrassment or a diminished sense of trustworthiness. In professional settings, improper grammar was seen as unprofessional and potentially harmful to one's image, while in social media contexts, mistakes were also acknowledged as damaging to credibility, especially when misinformation was involved.

The findings suggested that grammar is considered a key factor in conveying ideas clearly, ensuring credibility, and presenting oneself as reliable, though its significance varies across different communication contexts, with more relaxed standards in informal social interactions.

Theme 1: Convey Ideas

College students emphasized the centrality of grammar in ensuring the clear and precise communication of ideas, particularly in academic and professional settings. Participants believed in the importance of *clarity* in conveying *arguments*, noting that even small errors, such as a misplaced *word* or *phrase*, could fundamentally alter the meaning of the message.

"For me, grammar is absolutely essential in academic writing. It's not just about being correct but about conveying my ideas clearly and precisely. I've noticed that when I use proper grammar, my papers get better feedback."

"There's little room for ambiguity in terms of syntax, because one misplaced word or phrase could change the meaning of a whole argument."

The role of grammar was viewed as essential in *business* and academic writing, where the *accuracy* of language could influence the *interpretation* of ideas and impact the quality of feedback received. Several participants highlighted that grammar was crucial for maintaining *profes-*

sionalism in written communication, especially in contexts where decisions or outcomes could be affected. Despite these concerns, some learners acknowledged that while grammar was important, the *logical* coherence of their arguments was prioritized in fields such as *engineering*, where *data* and *reasoning* were also important.

“In business write-ups, I’ve learned that even something as simple as using the wrong word can change the meaning of a message, and I’ve made it a point to proofread everything to ensure it’s clear and professional.”

“In business writing, grammar is crucial because you’re often communicating ideas in a way that could affect decisions or outcomes.”

“I totally get this. In engineering, the emphasis is on presenting clear data and logical reasoning. I’m not always worried about having perfect grammar as long as the math and results are solid.”

“It’s not a huge focus in my field, but I know it’s something I need to keep working on, especially when writing lab reports or research papers.”

This focus on *clarity* over style was also observed in informal communication settings such as *social media* and *text messaging*. While some participants adapted to more casual language, including the use of *emojis*, *shorthand*, and *intentional grammar mistakes*, others emphasized that in more serious discussions or professional spaces, they still adhered to better grammar to maintain a sense of *seriousness* and *credibility*.

“Honestly, I think grammar still matters in social settings, especially when you’re trying to express yourself clearly. I tend to use proper grammar in texts or on social media because it feels like a reflection of how seriously I take communication.”

“Emojis, shorthand, and even intentional grammar mistakes can make messages feel more casual or friendly. But when it’s a more serious discussion, like in group chats or professional spaces, I try to maintain better grammar.”

“Grammar doesn’t really matter in social me-

dia chats, especially since people are usually just sharing thoughts or jokes. If I’m texting friends or posting on Facebook, I’m not worried about perfect grammar.”

“Social media and texting are all about speed, so we’ve adapted to that. I don’t stress about grammar in personal messages or social media posts.”

In summary, grammar was recognized as integral in ensuring the *effective transmission* of ideas and the *professionalism* of communication, with varying standards applied depending on the context.

Theme 2: Develop Credibility

The college students highlighted the significant role that *grammar* plays in shaping perceptions of professionalism and trustworthiness. Participants emphasized that even minor grammatical errors, such as *punctuation* mistakes or *misused words*, could diminish the credibility of academic papers or formal reports, leading to negative perceptions of their work.

“I’ve had to submit group reports, and when there were grammar mistakes, the whole group’s work seemed less credible. I’ve learned that even small things like punctuation or using the wrong word can make a difference in how your ideas are perceived.”

“When writing my academic papers, I need to find grammatical errors because they can reduce the credibility of my paper. I feel that having too many errors decreases the value of a formal paper.”

Many expressed that poor grammar could undermine their *professional image*, especially in formal communications such as emails or reports, and also in creative fields where incorrect grammar could weaken the *credibility* of an argument.

“I’ve been told that, in my field, precision and clarity matter a lot. Whether it’s in a research paper or a LinkedIn post, accuracy enhances your credibility. If your statements aren’t factual, your professional reputation could suffer.”

“I remember once my professor pointed out

grammar mistakes in my assignment, and I felt embarrassed. It made me realize that even though my ideas were good, the grammar affected how seriously my work was taken.”

“When sending formal emails or reports, I always double-check for grammatical mistakes. I know that poor grammar can make me seem unprofessional, and I don’t want to give that impression.”

“I also think that in more creative fields, like English literature, there’s some room for bending rules to achieve a specific voice. Still, if the grammar’s off, it can make an argument or analysis feel less credible.”

Further, college students noted that on platforms such as *social media*, even small *grammatical or factual errors* could lead to a loss of credibility, with participants acknowledging the critical importance of *accuracy* in both content and language to maintain trustworthiness and *professional reputation*.

“On platforms like Twitter or Facebook, it’s so easy to share information quickly, but if you make a grammatical or factual error, people immediately question your credibility. It’s important to be precise because once a mistake is out there, it’s hard to take it back.”

“I try to be very careful with what I post online. It’s not just about grammar but also about the content. A post with misinformation can hurt your credibility more than a typo. It’s all about presenting yourself as trustworthy and reliable.”

Essentially, grammar was seen as an essential component in presenting oneself as *reliable*, *trustworthy*, and *competent* in both academic and social media contexts.

Objective 2: To analyze the role of social learning in shaping Gen Z learners’ attitudes toward grammar accuracy and usage.

This paper analyzed the role of social learning in shaping Gen Z learners’ attitudes toward grammar accuracy and usage, revealed three key themes: *Imitation*, *Conditioning*, and *Adaptation*.

It was found that Gen Z learners adapted their grammar use according to the context, with social media encouraging creative, fluid grammar that prioritized tone and relatability. Participants noted that while they imitated grammar patterns from social media influencers and peers, they also drew from formal academic writing models, such as those of their professors, to improve their grammar in assignments and essays.

Some highlighted the influence of formal education and social media on learners’ grammar habits. Students reported being conditioned by their professors to correct grammatical errors through repeated feedback, which instilled the importance of grammar for academic credibility. Additionally, social media exposure conditioned participants to be mindful of their grammar when posting publicly, as they learned that poor grammar could harm their online reputation.

Finally, students also recognized the need to adjust their grammar depending on the medium. While social media encouraged informal, flexible communication, academic settings required adherence to proper grammar rules for clarity and professionalism. Participants acknowledged that effective communication on social media often prioritized efficiency and tone over grammatical perfection, reflecting the evolving nature of language use in different contexts.

Theme 1: Imitation

Gen Z learners closely observed and replicated the grammar styles of those around them, adapting their language based on situational contexts. Participants stated that grammar on social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, was perceived as *creative and fluid*, often influenced by *relatable communication styles*.

“I think grammar is a bit more fluid for Gen Z. Like, we imitate people based on the situation. On social media, it’s definitely all about tone and creativity. People use grammar like an art form sometimes it’s choppy, sometimes it’s super clean, but it all feels like it has a purpose.”

They unconsciously adopted *grammar patterns* from these platforms while maintaining a balance between *formal grammar* for academic purposes and *informal grammar* for casual interactions.

“But outside of class? I definitely pick up in-

formal slang and grammar from social media and my friends. I think balancing both worlds formal grammar for school and casual grammar for social media or conversations is part of the challenge.”

“On TikTok or Instagram, you see influencers posting and talking in a way that’s natural and relatable, and it just clicks. You start picking up little grammar patterns without realizing it.”

Some also acknowledged being influenced by *professors’ writing styles and feedback*, which motivated them to enhance their grammar in academic tasks.

“I see the way my professors write papers and give feedback, and it pushes me to use proper grammar in my essays and assignments.”

Theme 2: Conditioning

Conditioning was also an essential component of social learning process. College students highlighted how conditioning developed a heightened awareness of grammatical accuracy through consistent feedback and practice. They recalled being *trained by teachers* to correct errors, with *mistakes frequently marked in red*, developing an instinct to review and refine their work before submission. This process instilled the understanding that *formal grammar* was crucial for *academic success* and *professional credibility*.

“Since high school, I’ve been conditioned to correct my grammar whenever I write. Teachers would always circle mistakes in red, and I’d have to fix them. Over time, I started noticing the difference it made in how my work was received. Now, I automatically check for errors before submitting anything.”

“I feel like formal grammar is a skill I’ve had to develop in school because of all the assignments and professional settings I’ll eventually be in. My professors are super big on correct grammar, and I’ve learned that it’s important for my grades and my credibility.”

Feedback from professors and group assignments further emphasized how *poor grammar could obscure clarity*, prompting participants to prioritize grammatical correctness in their written outputs.

“During group assignments, our professor would give us feedback on how poor grammar could undermine the clarity of our points. That really made me realize how much conditioning I needed to improve in this area, and now I instinctively check my grammar before turning in anything.”

“I’ve received feedback where grammar issues made some of my explanations unclear. I’ve learned that even in technical fields, good grammar helps make complex ideas more understandable. It’s definitely something I’m actively trying to improve.”

Similarly, *social media platforms* also helped in conditioning participants to be more *conscious of language use*. They became aware that *spelling or grammar mistakes* in public posts could affect their *perceived professionalism*, leading them to adopt more precise and polished communication habits.

“I’ve definitely been conditioned by social media to be more mindful of my language.”

“When I started posting for an audience, I noticed how people would comment on spelling or grammar mistakes. Over time, I learned that if I want to be taken seriously, I have to make sure my posts are well-written and professional.”

Theme 3: Adaptation

Gen Z college students adjusted their language use depending on the context, balancing *flexibility and creativity* on *social media* with the need for *formal and professional grammar* in academic settings. They acknowledged that *effective communication required situational awareness*, with social media emphasizing *relatability and brevity*, while classroom environments demanded *clear and precise writing*.

“When I’m posting on social media or texting, I’m more focused on being relatable and engaging.”

“I think social media kind of trains us to communicate in a more flexible, creative way, but in class, I know I need to present myself more seriously. It’s all about knowing which envi-

ronment you're in and adapting your language accordingly."

In academic setting, Gen Z students adapted their grammar practices to meet *professorial expectations* and ensure that their *arguments were effectively conveyed*.

"When I'm writing for class, I know I need to stick to the rules because my professors expect clear, professional writing. Grammar can make or break how your argument comes across in academic settings, and I've learned that it's important to take the time to get it right."

Gen Z students prioritized *clarity and tone* over strict adherence to grammatical rules, particularly in informal settings like *social media* and *group chats*. For example, the use of *gender-neutral pronouns* such as '*they*' was perceived as *normalized* and reflective of evolving linguistic practices. Participants emphasized the importance of *efficiency* and *brevity* in digital communication, where adhering to *perfect grammar* could potentially appear *out of touch* with the *informal and authentic tone* expected on platforms like *Twitter* and *TikTok*.

"For instance, I'm a stickler for using '*they*' as a pronoun now, because it's normalized everywhere. It also helps me when I see how my peers express themselves in group chats or posts. We don't always stick to perfect grammar, but it's more about clarity and tone."

"People my age care more about efficiency and how quickly we can communicate, especially on platforms like Twitter or TikTok where brevity is key. I think using perfect grammar can even make you seem out of touch with the informal vibe of social media."

Finally, linguistic adaptation was a shift from viewing grammar solely as a set of rules to recognizing its role in *cultural fit* and *effective self-expression*. They perceived *language adaptability* as essential for maintaining *credibility and authenticity* across different communication platforms.

"I guess you could say, grammar isn't just about rules it's about fitting in and sounding authentic."

5. Discussion

Human learning is described as the process by which individuals acquire new knowledge and skills. While it is possible for individuals to gain information independently, such as by memorizing historical events through reading, learning frequently takes place in collaboration with or through the influence of others^[90]. When knowledge is transferred within a social group, this process is referred to as social learning^[91].

Notably, social learning can manifest in various forms, depending on the role played by the social agent(s) in facilitating the individual's learning process. Consequently, it involves diverse types of learning—such as motor, verbal, and cognitive learning—within a social framework, including methods like observing others^[92, 93], imitating behaviors^[94], and engaging in interactive learning^[95, 96].

Despite the ongoing debate surrounding the role of grammar instruction in EFL learning, it continues to be practiced due to its perceived benefits in enhancing learners' linguistic proficiency^[97]. Krashen^[98] asserted that second language acquisition can only occur through exposure to comprehensible input. For example, the use of mobile devices and social media platforms facilitates grammar learning while simultaneously boosting learners' motivation^[97]. Similarly, having a positive classroom environment boosts students' competence in grammar and language learning^[99]. This paper further looked on this through the lens of social learning perspective, with emphasis on linguistic conditioning, imitation and adaptation.

Figure 2 presents the thematic codes of the findings. Social learning process involved in grammar use can be associated to concepts like formality, engagement, feedback, expression, adaptation, standards (or norms), imitation, and socialization. In social setting, observing influencers who communicate in a natural and relatable manner, students unconsciously adopt grammatical structures and linguistic patterns. One student believed that in social media, people do not always stick to perfect grammar, but it's more about clarity and tone. In contrast, teachers who emphasize proper grammar in the classroom instill its importance in students, especially in the context of language credibility and accuracy. Observational learning involves acquiring knowledge or skills by watching another individual's actions or

by listening to information they provide^[90]. With exposure to communication styles, Gen Z college students not only observe but also adapt grammar usage to fit varying social and academic contexts. With a strong emphasis on proper grammar use in academic settings, Gen Z college students have adapted by incorporating these standards into their own language practices, i.e., imitating the dominant language model present in the environment. Imitation specifically involves replicating someone else's behavior or speech^[94] is

an important component of social learning^[90]. Consequently, grammar becomes relevant depending on the social contexts that students are exposed to, especially when dealing with the social needs (like the use of formal or informal words). This falls under the idea of internalization in social interaction. For Wells^[100], internalization describes the relationship between an individual and their environment, wherein all advanced cognitive functions are internalized through social interactions.



Figure 2. Thematic word cloud of the results.

Early scholars believed that social interaction encourages optimal cognitive and brain development^[101–103]. The effective development of cognitive functions depends significantly on child–carer interactions during early childhood^[104]. Studies emphasized the importance of *sensitivity* and *reciprocity* between the child and carer, highlighting the quality of interaction as a determinant of cognitive growth later in life^[105, 106]. This learning pattern was also evident among Gen Z college students when it comes to learning and using proper English grammar. For example, when teachers give feedback on how poor their grammar is, students realize how much conditioning they needed to improve in this area, and “*instinctively check [their] grammar before turning in anything.*” Therefore, social learning necessitates reciprocal feedback between the learner, who is acquiring knowledge, and the model, who provides the information. Regardless of the specific social context, effective social learning requires a lasting transformation in the learner's behavior or understanding, resulting from observation, imitation, or interaction

with others^[107].

This paper opened a discourse regarding the application of social learning paradigm in language learning and using grammar. Laabidi and Ouahbi^[30] found that students who acknowledged learning English through social media demonstrated strong grammatical skills. This might be possible as grammar use in social media encourages informality and spontaneity which caused the students to acquire and adapt to different linguistic norms through imitation, conditioning, and contextual adaptation. With observation and replication, Gen Z students adopt grammar patterns from diverse sources, including teachers, peers, and social media influencers, balancing the formal accuracy required for academic and professional settings with the creative fluidity often embraced in informal communication. Similarly, students adjust their grammar use to align with the expectations of different contexts—whether it be the precision needed in academic tasks, or the relatability sought in social media interactions. Finally, these mechanisms highlight the role of

the social learning process in shaping attitudes, promoting the contextual mastery of grammar, and influencing both academic and social communication practices.

While this paper did not quantify the impact of the social learning process on the effectiveness of grammar learning, it nevertheless highlighted its potential as a pathway for learning with social adaptation. In formal settings, the teachers actively monitor the learners' engagement and comprehension, adjusting their teaching methods based on the feedback received^[90]. However, in informal settings, the feedback provided is often ambiguous or inconsistent, making grammar learning more influenced by social norms and the desire to conform to socially acceptable communication styles. This is noteworthy, as earlier studies have also highlighted instances of individuals being criticized on social media for their lack of grammatical proficiency^[55]. Future studies could investigate the extent to which social learning influences the long-term retention of grammatical rules and its impact on academic performance and online engagement. Research could explore how varying levels of feedback in formal and informal settings shape students' grammatical proficiency.

6. Conclusion

This paper addressed how Gen Z students perceived the relevance of grammar in relation to social learning process. Gen Z college students emphasized the importance of grammar in presenting clarity, credibility, and professionalism. While grammar was deemed essential in academic and professional contexts, students adopted a more relaxed approach in informal social interactions, such as texting or social media. However, even in these settings, a level of grammatical correctness was maintained in serious discussions to preserve professionalism and credibility. With social interactions, Gen Z students demonstrated adaptive behaviors through imitation, conditioning, and contextual adaptation. They imitated grammar patterns from social media influencers and peers while incorporating formal writing models from their professors. Conditioning played a key role as repeated feedback from educators helped reinforce the importance of grammatical accuracy for academic success and professional credibility. They adjusted their grammar use according to the medium, balancing formal rules in academic tasks with

the more flexible, creative language styles of social media.

Key aspects of social learning, including observational learning, imitation, and linguistic conditioning, emphasize the significance of modeling proper language usage in both academic and informal settings. Reciprocal feedback, whether explicit in classroom settings or implicit through social interactions, has a role in internalizing grammar rules, with its effectiveness contingent on the quality and frequency of feedback. Therefore, educators should focus on providing constructive feedback, promoting contextual grammar instruction, and utilizing digital tools to create dynamic learning experiences, while also serving as models of effective language use. To address inconsistencies in informal feedback, institutions might consider offering workshops to help students identify credible language models. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of social learning on grammatical retention, academic performance, and the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms across diverse learning contexts.

There were several limitations that needed to be addressed in this study. With a limited number of participants from specific academic disciplines and educational backgrounds, the findings may not fully reflect the diversity of experiences and perceptions regarding grammar acquisition across different contexts. Similarly, the sample may not represent the experiences of all Gen Z learners, particularly those from varying educational institutions, such as those from rural or less resourced settings. This limitation may hinder the external validity of the findings, as they may not be applicable to all learners or all academic environments. The methods employed in this study, particularly the reliance on self-reported data through interviews, introduce the potential for bias, as participants may have overestimated or underestimated their social media use and perceptions of grammar relevance due to social desirability or memory recall issues. This reliance on subjective data also poses challenges for triangulation, as it does not account for other possible factors that might influence grammar learning, such as specific teaching methods or prior exposure to grammar instruction. Lastly, the findings must be considered within the context of these limitations, and further research with larger, diversified samples and complementary methods would be beneficial to validate and extend the results.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; methodology, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; software, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; validation, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; formal analysis, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; investigation, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; resources, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; data curation, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; writing—original draft preparation, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; writing—review and editing, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; visualization, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; supervision, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; project administration, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S.; funding acquisition, H.G.A., J.V.C., M.A.A.H., A.J.K., N.A.S. and A.A.M.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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