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Misconstructing Pseudo-Complement Clauses and Extraposition in English Writing by Elementary Students: A Cognitive Syntax Lens

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A B S T R A C T

This research examined systematic errors in pseudo-complement clauses and extraposition. The errors included subject-raising issues, verb-complement mismapping, nominalization drift, and filler-gap confusion. These were found in the English writing of Indonesian elementary school students in Medan, North Sumatra and Manado, North Sulawesi. The research used a cognitive syntax framework and applied a qualitative multiple-case study design. Data were collected through free-writing prompts. The findings revealed frequent clause misformations. Common patterns included overuse of "It is + Verb + That/To" constructions, blending of that/to clauses, mislearned subject raising, and poor control of nonfinite clauses. These errors reflected deeper cognitive struggles. Students had difficulty managing clause control, syntactic focus, and verb-complement alignment. The issues were partly influenced by L1 transfer and rote use of lexical chunks. Many students tried to express abstract ideas without sufficient syntactic mastery. These were not isolated mistakes, but signs of developing syntactic representation. The research emphasized the need for clause-based instruction. Such instruction can support both conceptual understanding and grammatical development. The implications for early writing pedagogy and future developmental studies in bilingual contexts were also discussed.

Keywords: *Pseudo-complement clauses, Extraposition, Cognitive syntax, Elementary school writing, English as a foreign language (EFL).*

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INTRODUCTION

Complement clauses are essential for expressing stance, causality, belief, and evaluation (Opoku, 2024), even at early stages of English learning. However, Indonesian elementary students often struggle to construct them accurately. Despite formal English instruction, their writing frequently includes clause combinations that deviate from standard patterns. These are not random mistakes, but systematic forms shaped by their first language (Bahasa Indonesia), limited input, and developing cognitive-linguistic abilities. For instance, students may write "It is happy I playing" (Itu senang saya bermain) or "My teacher tell for me to go" (Guru saya bilang untuk saya pergi). Although these forms are grammatically incorrect in English, these sentences reflect consistent internal logic based on L1 conceptualization of meaning and structure. These are examples of what this research refers to as pseudo-complement clauses: syntactic hybrids that imitate the function of English complementation but violate its structural rules. These constructions often arise from L1-influenced clause organization, particularly the tendency to front ideas for emphasis. The focus on pseudo-complement clauses and extraposition is crucial because these structures

demand abstract syntactic manipulation, including the ability to embed clauses, manage control and raising verbs, and handle syntactic displacement such as subject extraposition. These constructions do not exist in the same form in Bahasa Indonesia, making them especially challenging and cognitively significant for young EFL learners. Understanding how students misconstruct these patterns sheds light on their interlanguage development and reveals the transitional strategies they use when working with unfamiliar grammatical systems.

In elementary EFL classrooms based on the researchers' observation, pseudo-complement clauses often appear when elementary students express experiences, commands, or feelings using abstract verbs (e.g., tell, like, happy, want) that require clausal embedding in English. Instead of using correct patterns such as "I want to play" or "It is fun to read," students often rely on constructions transferred from L1 or formed through analogy, resulting in mixed forms like "It is want I to play" or "That I reading is fun it is." These errors stem from L1 transfer and analogical reasoning, not from carelessness. Such patterns reflect early-stage cognitive strategies to convey meaning with limited linguistic resources. They indicate a developing interlanguage, where students attempt to apply Bahasa Indonesia's clause logic often emphasizing topical elements at the beginning of sentences and then to English structures that require abstract subject positioning, particularly in it-extraposition and infinitival complements.

Findings from recent studies support this characterization. In a corpus-based analysis of 120 elementary and secondary school essays, Tran (2024) found that 67% of students used incorrect complementation patterns, particularly with verbs of mental process and evaluation. Similarly, Sun et al. (2025) reported that over 60% of university EFL students exhibited clause-level errors involving misplaced expletives and syntactic blending between finite and non-finite clauses. A more targeted study by Rahayu et al. (2025) on elementary EFL writing revealed that 73% of students showed consistent use of L1-influenced clause sequencing, particularly in extraposition and stance constructions.

Advanced English syntactic constructions such as extraposition, clefts, and nominalizations (Montgomery et al., 2024) pose significant challenges for Indonesian elementary students, as they require cognitively demanding clause manipulation that does not exist in the structural system of Bahasa Indonesia. In students' writing, these challenges often appear as pseudo-complement constructions: structurally incompatible clauses combined based on analogy and limited exposure to English. For example, "It is necessary that to study" (Penting bahwa untuk belajar) reflects a fusion of a that-clause and a to-infinitive (Uhrig & Herbst, 2024) not due to random error, but to schema-based overgeneralization. Bahasa Indonesia's topic-prominent structure, which lacks expletive subjects and extraposition, encourages students to interpret complement clauses as semantically driven. This results in nonstandard constructions like "That he sick is sad it is" (Bahwa dia sakit itu sedih itu), which reflect L1 conceptual ordering but violate English syntactic norms. Such patterns are better viewed as evidence of L1 conceptual transfer, not simply instructional gaps, as students rely on familiar linguistic to express abstract meanings with limited English resources.

Several recurring error types illustrate specific students' difficulties. With that-clauses, students may misplace auxiliaries or verb forms, producing sentences like "It is made sure that the test will hard" instead of "Make sure that the test will be hard." In to-infinitive structures, errors like "It is suggested to not skip the class" reflect confusion between modals and infinitival control. In cleft constructions, attempts at emphasis produce forms such as "It is making me happy that students active," showing issues with verb agreement and clause focus; the correct version is "What makes me happy is that the students are active." In nominalizations, students write "The decide of teacher is final" instead of "The decision of the teacher is final," indicating limited awareness of verb-to-noun transformations. More complex examples like "That to learn is important it is," "He seems that to enjoy it," and "It might can that the students late" demonstrate problems with clause stacking, raising verbs, and modality. These constructions reflect students' attempts to build meaning-rich sentences

using familiar strategies, revealing an interlanguage phase in which they approximate English syntax while still shaped by first-language patterns (Stevani et al., 2025).

Cognitive Grammar according to Langacker in 2008 (Kim et al., 2024) views grammar as emerging from meaning-based constructions grounded in experience, not memorized rules. In elementary school writing, errors like "It is decided that important" (Itu memutuskan bahwa penting) show a form-meaning mismatch, where learners treat verbs like decide as stative or adjectival by analogy, not syntactic rule. This shows that learners form grammar through abstraction not memorization, which challenges traditional error-based models and requires a focus on constructional logic in students' output. Using a cognitive syntax lens, this research analyzes how Indonesian elementary students misconstruct English complement clauses through overgeneralization of raising, control, and argument structures. In contexts like extraposition and stance, students confuse constructions, particularly in contexts involving extraposition and stance expression. For example, verbs like "seem", "appear", and "tend" require raising constructions, where the subject originates in the embedded clause, whereas verbs like "want" and "try" involve control constructions, where the subject semantically controls the action. Students often blur these distinctions, producing forms like "He seems that to enjoy it" (Dia tampak bahwa untuk menikmatinya) or "She wants that to go" (Dia ingin bahwa untuk pergi), which reveal processing strategies based on surface similarity rather than accurate argument mapping.

Based on a Generative Grammar according to Chomsky in 1995 (Dragoi, 2024), errors in elementary students' English writing often stem from failures in clause projection, syntactic movement, and dependency assignment. For example, extraposition involves moving a complement clause (CP) rightward and inserting "it" as a subject placeholder, as in "It is clear that she lied" (Jelas bahwa dia berbohong). Students often misproject this pattern, producing "That she lied it is clear," which shows unresolved clause boundaries and incomplete syntactic representation. Moreover, usage-based psycholinguistics according to Ellis in 2015 (Tariq, 2024) explains that students rely on surface frequency, salience, and analogy when constructing meaning. Common input patterns such as "It is ADJ to VP" or "Verb that S" may lead to hybrid clauses like "It is suggested that to go" (Disarankan bahwa untuk pergi), which reflect analogical chunking and processing shortcuts not mere ignorance but efforts to economize cognitive load.

Ultimately, this research reframes students' errors not as failures, but as transitional cognitive strategies. Misconstructed complement clauses reveal how elementary students attempt to handle syntactic abstraction (Stevani, 2024) using limited L2 input and L1-based reasoning. By identifying the patterns of misconstructed complement clauses, educators and researchers can better support the progression from semantically driven phrase-building to syntactically accurate writing. Rather than treating such errors merely as grammatical faults, such forms should be recognized as indicators of interlanguage growth in early EFL literacy. Specifically, this research investigates: (1) How do Indonesian elementary students construct pseudo-complement clauses, and what syntactic, semantic, and cognitive patterns underlie their misrepresentation of extraposition? (2) What underlying syntactic strategies and cognitive heuristics (e.g., raising, control, filler-gap resolution) shape their clause construction and how they diverge from standard English structures?

METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative multiple-case study design with embedded micro-syntactic and cognitive-linguistic analysis (Liu & Qin, 2024) to analyze how Indonesian elementary school students constructed pseudo-complement clauses in English writing, particularly those involving extraposition. The investigation focused on identifying the syntactic forms, semantic functions, and cognitive strategies underlying misconstructed clause patterns in early-stage EFL writing. Rather than quantifying error frequency alone, this research emphasized the internal processing logic and representational systems students activated when producing complex clauses.

A total of 28 students participated in this research, consisting of 18 students from Grades 3 and 4 at Singapore International School (SIS) Medan in North Sumatra, and 10 students from Grades 3 and 4 at Manado Independent School (MIS) in North Sulawesi. The participants were selected purposively, based on their exposure to English instruction from early grade levels and their multilingual backgrounds, primarily Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Mandarin. These linguistic environments allowed this research to investigate how interactions among multiple language systems shape early English clause development. All participants had received at least two years of formal English instruction, ensuring the emergence of clause-level syntax beyond rote phrases. The writing tasks were designed to elicit spontaneous, non-formulaic responses involving stance, desire, evaluation, and judgment contexts in which complement clauses and extraposition typically occurred. Prompts such as "Write about something important you hope will happen" or "Tell a story that made you feel proud or happened in the past" were used to elicit spontaneous constructions without overt grammatical framing.

Data collection proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, students completed free-writing tasks under classroom conditions, supervised by their teachers to preserve ecological validity and minimize anxiety. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted to provide qualitative insight into each student's English instruction, exposure, and usage patterns. These interviews served to contextualize clause production within instructional input, language modeling, and student engagement. All writing outputs were anonymized and manually segmented at the clause level. Each clause was coded inductively and deductively based on its syntactic form (e.g., that-clause, infinitive clause, pseudo-cleft, nominalization), semantic function (e.g., stance, causality, evaluation), and observable processing markers such as clause stacking, L1-mirroring, or misprojection (Haselow, 2024). Clauses showing structural conflict, such as mixed use of finite and non-finite constructions or unlicensed expletive-it insertions, were flagged as pseudo-complement errors.

The analytical process was guided by three theoretical frameworks. First, Cognitive Grammar (Kim et al., 2024) guided interpretation of mismatches between conceptual meaning and grammatical realization, such as agent-patient misalignment or schematically distorted clause embedding. Second, Generative Syntax by Chomsky in 1995 (Dragoi, 2024) supported the identification of feature-checking failures, movement violations, and misprojected CP layers using X-bar and CP-tree models. Third, Usage-based Linguistics by Ellis in 2015 (Tariq, 2024) revealed chunking effects and analogical overgeneralization driven by high-frequency input forms, especially when hybrid or ungrammatical constructions (e.g., "It is believe that to help") reflected fossilized interlanguage routines. The analysis was conducted through a sequence of methodical stages designed to ensure consistency, clarity, and theoretical alignment in identifying pseudo-complement clause constructions based on the analytical table:

Table 1. Analytical Stages of Students' Writing Sample

	Stages	Descriptions	Indicators/Examples
	Clause Identification	Student texts were scanned to identify all relevant complement clause forms.	Expletive-it constructions, cleft sentences, extraposed clauses.
	Error Flagging	Errors were marked when clause forms violated syntactic rules or blended incompatible grammatical structures.	Mixing of finite and non-finite forms (e.g., "It is need to explain."), syntactic flattening.
	Typological Classification	Each pseudo-complement clause was categorized according to structural form.	That-clauses, to-infinitives, pseudo-clefts, nominalizations.
	Functional Coding	Clauses were analyzed based on semantic function or communicative purpose.	Stance, evaluation, causality, attribution.
	Cognitive Strategy Mapping	Cognitive mechanisms underlying clause misconstruction were traced to reveal processing limitations or interlanguage	Raising, control, filler-gap resolution, thematic misassignment, schematic mismatches.

patterns.

To ensure validity, an English linguist, an experienced lecturer in the field of English language, and an experienced lecturer in the field of early childhood education conducted inter-rater validation on 30% of the data. Discrepancies were discussed until 85% agreement was achieved. Disagreements were resolved through joint analysis and coding calibration (Shirinova, 2025). Teacher interviews and writing instruction records were used to triangulate interpretations. Ethical protocols were observed throughout, with institutional approval secured and informed consent collected from all participants. Thus, this method was used to move beyond surface error analysis and to reveal the cognitive architecture of early syntactic development, with emphasis on how mental schemas, syntactic awareness, and processing shortcuts interacted during clause production.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Patterns of Mislearned Complement Clauses
Pattern A: Stacking of "It is + Verb + That/To" Constructions

Students often produce double-verb or verb-clause stackings that do not conform to English syntax. However, these reflect a real conceptual effort to express stance, emotion, or causation.

Table 2. Patterns of Syntactic Overload in "It + Verb + Clause" Structures

Students' Errors	Intended Meaning	Clause Type	Cognitive Struggle	Linguistic Problem	Interpretation
It is make me happy to go to zoo.	Going to the zoo makes me happy.	Extraposed Infinitive	Emotion expression through "it"	Verb stacking and faulty expletive	Emotion misexpressed via stacked "it + verb" form.
It is need that I study hard.	I need to study hard.	Expletive + "that"	Stance declaration via "it"	Redundant expletive and wrong clause	Student blends stance with obligation syntax.
It is go to Bali that we plan.	We plan to go to Bali.	Extraposition attempt	Goal framing	Stacked clause misordered	Intended purpose coded in reversed order.
It is tell to my mom that I win.	I told my mom that I won.	That-clause	Cause-effect stance via "it"	Double complement	Overloaded syntax to emphasize pride.
It is feel great that I make my own robot.	I feel great because I made my own robot.	Expletive + "that" clause	Emotion emphasis	Misplaced dummy subject	Overuse of "it" masks real subject.
It is love to play with my cat.	I love to play with my cat.	Infinitive complement	Stance overload	Redundant infinitive	Emotion is overpacked in dummy-it structure.
It is hard that I lose the game.	I feel bad because I lost the game.	That-complement	Emotion reanalysis	"That" after adjective misuse	Emotion framed but with mislinked clause.
It is enjoy that I swim every Sunday.	I enjoy swimming every Sunday.	Gerund or to-infinitive	Stance coding through expletive	Wrong verb control	Student splits evaluation and action via "it."
It is walk to school that I do every day.	I walk to school every day.	Cleft clause error	Habitual emphasis	Reversed focus	"It is" used for emphasis, not correctly clefted.
It is happy to see my sister come home.	I am happy to see my sister come home.	Infinitive subject	Feeling projection	Missing subject identity	Predicate happiness framed impersonally.

Pattern B: That/To Clause Blending in Verb Complements

Students confuse *that*-clauses with *to*-infinitives, especially after cognitive or emotive verbs.

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Table 3. Syntactic Interference in Verb Complementation "That–To" Clause

Students' Error	Intended Meaning	Clause Type	Cognitive Struggle	Linguistic Problem	Interpretation
I hope to my mom is happy.	I hope that my mom is happy.	That-clause	Emotion + clause confusion	"To" + finite clause	Verb complementation is blended.
I want that go to Korea.	I want to go to Korea.	To-infinitive	Mislinked intention	"That" instead of "to"	Subordinating particle misused.
I like that to swim in lake.	I like to swim in the lake.	To-infinitive	Activity desire	Double complement marker	That + to-infinitive conflated.
I wish to my father will come.	I wish that my father would come.	That-clause	Hope + agent projection	Preposition insertion error	Lexical interference causes preposition intrusion.
I try that finish my homework.	I try to finish my homework.	To-infinitive	Intent formation	Wrong connector	Clause confusion from intention statement.
She ask to I come earlier.	She asked me to come earlier.	Infinitive complement	Reported request	Infinitive miscontrol	Subject mismanagement in verbal command.
I decide that to bring my toy.	I decided to bring my toy.	Infinitive	Verb + clause confusion	Dual linking	Overextended complementation.
They plan that to visit grandma.	They plan to visit grandma.	Infinitive	Future plan structure	Confused clause markers	Intent badly encoded using blended "that + to."
I tell that I to go now.	I said I will go now.	That-clause	Cognitive-verbal overlap	Blended future + structure	Confused sequence in report.
He want to that he be hero.	He wants to be a hero.	Infinitive	Projection of identity	"That" in predicate role	Identity misprojected through clause blend.

Pattern C: Mislearned Subject Raising and Extraposition

These errors reflect efforts to project subjects or move focus elements syntactically without grasp of the required structure.

Table 4. Errors in Subject Raising and Extraposition

Students' Error	Intended Meaning	Clause Type	Cognitive Struggle	Linguistic Problem	Interpretation
To win is difficult for me.	It is difficult for me to win.	Subject raising	Cognitive emphasis	Subject not extraposed	Real subject too early, sounds unnatural.
That my father angry is make me sad.	It makes me sad that my father is angry.	Extraposed that-clause	Emotion cause analysis	Subject misprojection	Logical cause misframed in subject slot.
To swim every day is feel boring.	It feels boring to swim every day.	Infinitive subject	Activity evaluation	Predicate structure error	Action-as-subject wrongly framed.
That I lose game is make me cry.	It makes me cry that I lost the game.	That-clause extraposition	Emotion explanation	Ill-formed subject clause	Focus reversed from main clause.
That he leave is sad me.	I feel sad that he left.	That-clause	Emotion miscentered	Wrong main verb	Improper focus on experiencer.
To play with friends is make happy.	Playing with friends makes me happy.	Infinitive subject	Stance toward activity	Predicate verb control error	Student omits real subject "it."
That my team win is good.	It is good that my team won.	That-clause	Outcome appreciation	Wrong clause subject	Student promotes embedded clause.
To help is important I think.	I think it is important to help.	Infinitive + opinion	Meta-cognitive framing	Subject misorder	Thought hierarchy misplaced.
That I go to school everyday is make smart.	Going to school every day makes me smart.	That clause	Habitual outcome	Improper causality	Overused clause form blocks naturality.

| That he forgot is bad to me. | It is bad for me that he forgot. | That-clause | Social-affective stance | Affective role error | Clausal structure cannot support stance projection. |

Pattern D: Miscontrol of Nonfinite Clause Roles

This pattern refers to errors where learners confuse, misplace, or blend nonfinite clause types (infinitives, gerunds, imperatives, and nominalizations), often disrupting the syntactic roles of subject, object, or complement due to L1 interference or incomplete mastery of verb control structures.

Table 5. Structural Errors in Infinitives, Gerunds, and Nominalizations

Students' Error	Intended Meaning	Clause Type	Cognitive Struggle	Linguistic Problem	Interpretation
She want me crying to win.	She wants me to cry in order to win.	Gerund/Infinitive	Goal-expression reanalysis	Wrong clause control	Action intention expressed through misused verb pattern.
I try play but the teacher not let to go.	I tried to play but the teacher didn't let me go.	To-infinitive	Blocking via auxiliary miscontrol	Infinitive without subject	Student omits control subject, misuses "let" + infinitive.
Is hard to speak English but I hope get better.	It is hard to speak English, but I hope to get better.	Subject extraposition	Clausal ellipsis + misplacement	Nonfinite clause dropped subject	Functional structure present, but clause lost controller.
He believe be famous make him happy.	He believes being famous makes him happy.	Gerund-subject	Misgrouping of clauses	Gerund phrase as unbound clause	Student turns nominalized action into uncontrolled subject.
The idea to going was not good.	The idea of going was not good.	Nominalized complement	Prepositional confusion	Infinitive replaces gerund/prep	Structure affected by L1 pattern: *ide untuk pergi*.
To fall from bike scared me a lot.	Falling from the bike scared me.	Infinitival subject	Gerund/Infinitive ambiguity	Agentless subject	Overuse of infinitive without agent or article.
My dad said me fix the door.	My dad told me to fix the door.	Imperative clause	Argument confusion	Missing "to" + verb control	Student substitutes "said" for "told" without verb pattern change.
Teacher make us to stand up everyday.	The teacher makes us stand up every day.	Causative clause	Causative construction mislearned	Overinsertion of "to"	Overregularization of causative verb.
To cry help me sleep.	Crying helps me sleep.	Subject clause	Infinitive/gerund confusion	Misassigned subject form	Direct transfer from L1 conceptual form *(berfungsi untuk)*.
Is easy eating rice with spoon.	It is easy to eat rice with a spoon.	Extraposition	Gerund insertion in extraposition	Misaligned subject clause	"Eating" used instead of "to eat" due to action-image priming.
They want not come home because play outside.	They don't want to come home because they're playing outside.	Reason clause	Fragmented clause	Subject/ tense drop	Simplification of subordinate clause.
Make happy see the cat again.	Seeing the cat again makes me happy.	Subject clause	Subject-agent confusion	No controller for verb	Verb lacks grammatical subject; emotional stance misdirected.
I am hope go to zoo tomorrow.	I hope to go to the zoo tomorrow.	Verb + infinitive	Aspect clash	Auxiliary + base verb overload	Copula overused to front all declaratives.
Wanting go fast make my	Wanting to go fast makes	Gerund subject	Gerund-stack overload	Verb chunk without article	Fusion of feeling + action becomes a

heart beat.	my heart beat.				pseudo-subject.
He try not speaking but the boy shout.	He tried not to speak, but the boy shouted.	Infinitive negation	Negative scope confusion	Verb stacking without coordination	Failure to assign subject scope across clauses.

Error Zones of Pseudo-Complement Clause Construction

This section categorizes core syntactic errors into five cognitive-linguistic "zones" where Indonesian elementary students commonly misapply English complement clause structures. Each zone reveals a distinct conflict between intended meaning and grammatical form, often reflecting overgeneralization, L1 influence, or structural overload. These zones help explain why clause roles, control, and complement types break down in student writing.

Table 6. Cognitive Zones of Grammatical Misalignment in English Clauses

Type	Description	Students' Errors	Struggle Core
Projection Misfire	Expletive overgeneralization	It is know I happy	Misassigned sentence subject
Verb-Control Collapse	Controller confusion	She want me crying to play	Clause dependency failure
Clause Hybridization	Mixing clause types	He try go and playing	Form conflict
Function-Form Dissociation	Word class mismatch	Hope for come soon	Lexical role confusion
Topicality Displacement	Cleft misuse	What I know is he go	Topic-focus misalignment
Gerund Fusion Overload	Gerund acts as noun/verb incorrectly	Playing fast make me sleepy	Nominal-verbal clash
Subjectless Construction	Missing subject in clause	Want to fix	Agent omission
Temporal Collapse	Tense and clause mismatched	I try fix yesterday	Temporal inconsistency
Overloaded Coordination	Two complements incorrectly linked	Try to singing and dance to fun	Structural stacking
Modifier Overextension	Clauses act as modifiers without structure	The thing go to play fun	Modifier without anchor
Purpose-Misaligned Clause	Infinitive misused as purpose	Run to tired	Goal-purpose collapse
Nominalization Drift	Verb turned noun without context	My do of homework late	Lexicalized nominal error
Interrogative Confusion	Wh-clause used without complementizer	I know where is he go	Filler-gap error
Modal-Auxiliary Conflict	Modal verb misorders structure	She can to happy go	Auxiliary overload
Pseudo-Argument Clause	Clauses act like NPs wrongly	This make that he smile	Argument misformation
Clause Blocking	Wrong connector blocks clause	Because playing to lost	Connector mismatch
Lexical Triggering	Word choices force clause mismatch	He decide by go home	Word-induced clause error
Reverse Complementation	Clause direction reversed	To eat want he	Order reversal
Dummy-Subject Flooding	Too many dummy subjects	It is I think it is want to go	Recursive expletive
Scope Ambiguity Explosion	Clause lacks clear scope	Try later when fix maybe come	Clause boundaries blurred

Grammar as Thinking: Strategic Instruction for Complement Clause Mastery

Complement clause instruction must reflect cognitive clarity, not rote grammar. This section offers child-friendly and cognitively aligned strategies for improving clause formation in English writing.

Table 7. Scaffolded Syntax Activities for Building Competence in Complement Clauses

Strategy	Description	Learning Target
Clause Typing Drills	Distinguish types: to-infinitive, gerund, noun clauses. Example: "I hope to win" (to-inf), "That she won	Clause awareness

	surprised me" (noun), "Winning is hard" (gerund).	
Verb + Complement Mapping	Map which verbs allow what complement. Example: "enjoy" + gerund (enjoy playing), "expect" + to-inf (expect to win), "know" + noun clause (know that she left).	Control accuracy
Chunk Deconstruction	Break down memorized chunks. Example: "It is important to study" → Subject: it, Verb: is, Adj: important, Infinitive clause: to study.	Processing transparency
Visual Syntax Trees	Color/label subjects, verbs, complements	Visual scaffolding
Input Reconstruction	Rebuild broken inputs. Example: He suggested to go → correct: "He suggested going" or "It is believe that…" → "It is believed that…"	Repair strategy
Stance vs Action Task	Separate belief vs event clauses. Example: "He believes [that she is honest]" (stance) vs "He saw [her sad]" (event).	Semantic function clarity
Clause Reordering Game	Students reorder jumbled clauses. Example: That / important / is / he passed the test" → "That he passed the test is important."	Syntactic awareness
Paraphrasing with Structure Match	Rewrite using correct clause type. Example: "They made us to wait outside." → "They made us wait outside."	Syntactic flexibility
Cleft Correction Drill	Fix wrong cleft structures. Example: It is playing football that he enjoys" → Fix: "It is football that he enjoys playing."	Focus structure
Clause-Length Contrast	Compare long vs short complements. Example: I know [he left]" vs "I know [that he left without saying goodbye to anyone at the party]."	Load management
Guided Nominalization	Convert clause to noun phrase properly. Example: "That he won surprised us" → "His winning surprised us."	Noun-verb switching
Raising vs Control Sorting	Classify verbs into raising/control classes. Example: Raising: "seem, appear" → "She seems to open the door"; Control: "try, want" → "She tried to open the door".	Verb behavior awareness
Visual Flowcharts of Clause Flow	Flow from stance verb → clause → object. Example: "believe" → [stance] → noun clause; "want" → [agent control] → to-inf clause (e.g., I want to sleep).	Flow tracing
Cause–Effect Clause Chain	Build chains: verb → cause → result. Example: "He forgot [to lock the door] → The dog ran away → His mom got angry."	Clause logic building
Predict-the-Clause Game	Predict missing complement clause. Example: She pretended…" → Students guess: "to be sick", "that she knew the answer", etc.	Forward syntax planning

DISCUSSIONS

The present research explored the recurring patterns of clause-level misconstruction among Indonesian elementary school students, particularly in their attempts to produce pseudo-complement clauses and extraposed constructions in English. The findings indicate four dominant syntactic distortions, namely the stacking of "It is + Verb + That/To" constructions (Pattern A), blending between that-clauses and to-infinitives (Pattern B), mislearned subject raising or extraposition (Pattern C), and miscontrol of nonfinite clause (Pattern D). Each of these patterns reflects not only grammatical inaccuracy but also deeper cognitive struggles in conceptualizing clause relationships. These struggles are amplified by the students' transitional competence between Indonesian clause structures and English complement systems, often resulting in hybrid and grammatically incongruent constructions.

In contrast to previous studies that mainly addressed clause errors as surface-level performance issues (Ismahani et al., 2024; Ferin et al., 2025), this research reveals that the misconstruction of pseudo-complement clauses is cognitively driven. Unlike older learners who may see errors due to fatigue or negligence, young learners in this research consistently demonstrate clause confusion across writing prompts. This suggests that their clause errors

are not incidental but structurally systemic rooted in their ongoing development of syntactic awareness. The emergence of "stacked expletive-it" constructions such as "It is want to be a teacher that make me happy" evidences a conceptual overapplication of a learned formula, indicating overgeneralization rather than lack of knowledge.

Teacher interviews further affirmed these observations. Many teachers expressed that students often "reuse patterns from reading texts or class discussions without understanding where one clause ends and another begins." One Grade 4 teacher explained, "My students can say 'I want to be' or 'It is important to' fluently, but when they try to add more meaning, they just stack them, like blocks, into longer and longer sentences without clarity." Another teacher noted that while students appear fluent when speaking or copying, they become "syntactically lost" when creating independent written clauses. These comments underscore that clause misconstructions are not simply writing mechanics errors, but evidence of deeper representational gaps between form and function.

This finding supports syntax usage-based theory (Lam et al., 2025), which posits that students initially process syntax as memorized chunks before acquiring abstract grammatical categories. Many students appeared to internalize common English expressions (e.g., it is important to…, I want to…) as inseparable lexical bundles. When prompted to express desire, purpose, or hope, they grafted these chunks onto one another without clause boundary awareness. For instance, the phrase "It is hope to play that I do everyday" may syntactically fail but reveals student attempting to reconcile "hope," "routine action," and an "extraposed clause," all within one sentence framework.

Moreover, the interference of Indonesian syntax is nontrivial. In Bahasa Indonesia, clausal embedding often avoids overt complementizers such as "that" or infinitival markers like "to." Instead, nominal phrases or serial verb constructions dominate. A sentence such as "Saya ingin pergi bermain" (read: I want go play) involves no structural indicator of clause hierarchy, unlike English, which mandates clear markers "(I want to go play)". This L1 influence arguably shapes students' early English outputs, as seen in collapsed or flattened clause chains that disregard control structures, extraposition rules, or subject raising. This aligns with findings from Stevani (2024), who noted that beginner EFL students tend to misassign control verbs and omit infinitival markers due to lack of morphological cueing in their L1.

Another salient insight from this research concerns the emergence of "grammatical hybrids," where students blend incompatible clause forms such as "She like to happy that she win." Such structures reflect not random errors but ongoing hypothesis-testing by students. According to cognitive grammar, such constructions arise when students activate overlapping yet partial schemas, for example: "belief verbs + complement clauses, affective expressions + infinitives"; without having yet mastered their syntactic compatibility. In this light, students' clause misuses are epistemic reflections of their struggle to build mental representations of clause integration, a process crucial to academic writing.

The pedagogical implications are manifold. Given that writing instruction in Indonesian elementary curricula often emphasizes vocabulary and sentence-level structure rather than clause-level coherence, the findings suggest a critical need to reframe writing instruction to explicitly scaffold complement clause understanding (Stevani & Hidayat, 2024). Instead of relegating clause work to grammar worksheets, teachers could incorporate metacognitive writing strategies such as clause matching, verb-complement sorting, and guided reconstruction of broken inputs. Visual syntax trees and bilingual clause flowcharts could also help students visualize syntactic dependencies across languages.

Future research should expand upon these findings by integrating real-time classroom interaction data to trace how clause misformation evolves through instruction and correction. Moreover, comparative studies involving bilingual children who acquire English in immersive or dual-language environments may examine whether such clause mislearners persist across varied exposure contexts (Schlechtweg, 2025). Longitudinal studies tracking students' clause development over time would also illuminate how and when pseudo-complement patterns stabilize or disappear.

In conclusion, the misconstruction of pseudo-complement clauses among Indonesian elementary students is not a matter of random or shallow error, but a deep-seated cognitive issue shaped by L1 transfer, memorized input chunks, and the absence of syntactic clarity in early writing instruction. Addressing these issues requires not only corrective feedback but also a reorientation of how we teach grammar as a dynamic, meaning-driven system rather than a prescriptive list of rules. Such a shift is vital for enabling young learners to move beyond sentence assembly toward conceptual fluency in writing.

CONCLUSIONS

This research concludes that Indonesian elementary students systematically misconstruct pseudo-complement clauses and extraposition structures due to unresolved cognitive-syntactic mappings between English and their native language. Common errors include clause blending, control misassignments, and structural overextensions. Rather than viewing these errors as mere grammatical failures, they should be interpreted as evidence of students' emerging syntactic awareness, shaped by limited exposure to clause-focused instruction and interference from Bahasa Indonesia's clause. The analysis demonstrates that such clause-level inaccuracies are deeply rooted in students' cognitive attempts to express abstract meanings such as belief, intention, or causation without the syntactic precision required in English. However, this research is limited by its reliance on written data alone, without examining students' spoken language or their evolving syntactic strategies over time. Additionally, the findings are based on a single L1 background, which may restrict generalizability across diverse linguistic contexts. Future research should incorporate longitudinal, multimodal data and comparative cross-linguistic analyses to better understand complement clause development and instructional strategies in primary education.

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