

## **Indonesian Students' Comprehension Of The French Articles (*Les Articles*): The Case Of Manado State University French Language Education Program**

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**Abstract.** In French language, articles play an important role and one of the basic French skills is mastery of article usage. The objective of this study is to describe students' performance and mastery of French articles. The research used descriptive research method. Data of the study were obtained by giving written tests of French language articles to French Language Education Program students enrolled in the 2018/2019 school year. The research instrument consisted of questions in the form of loose questions and questions in the form of text / short discourse. Data analysis used descriptive statistics analysis. Study result shows that students' mastery of French article is quite low (Mean=48.28). However, there is difference in performance of each article type. Mastery of definite article is the highest (Mean=60.78)

**Keywords:** definite article; indefinite article; partitive article; performance; mastery

### **1. Introduction**

One group of words included in French basic vocabulary is article. Article is a group of words that have no lexical meanings. It has grammatical meanings only. Articles accompany nouns and have the function to indicate gender and the number of nouns. In other words, article has the function of limiting and modifying nouns.

In French textbook articles are usually placed in the first lessons. For example, in *Espace* published in Hachette in 1990, definite and indefinite articles are taught in lesson 1 and positive articles are taught in lesson 7. In *Café Creme*, also published in Hachette in 1997, definite article is put in unit (lesson) 1, indefinite article in the unit 2, and partitive article in unit 5. Whereas in *Initial* published by CLE International in 1999 definite article is found in lessons 3 and 9, indefinite article in lessons 5, 6 and 9. Thus, it can be said that the understanding and mastery of articles is part of basic French language skills. This means that mastery of articles is mandatory for learners at the basic level of French. It also means that mastery of articles functions as an indicator of the mastering of basic French, and in turn is an indicator of the success or failure of a basic level of French language teaching.

In Indonesian articles do not have a big role in both the vocabulary and the grammar. Therefore, in Indonesian grammar articles usually do not get special attention or treatment. That is why Indonesian speakers tend to pay no special

attention to this class of words. On the other hand, articles in French are important elements both in vocabulary and in grammar. Articles in French are divided into 3 types, i.e. *articles définis* (definite articles), *articles indéfinis* (indefinite articles) and *articles partitifs* (partitive articles). There are also rules of omission of the articles. There are certain cases where articles are not allowed to precede a noun. French language classifies words in two types of gender namely masculine and feminine. Accordingly, articles have a masculine form that must be paired with masculine nouns and feminine forms that must be paired with feminine words. Differences in the role and importance of articles in Indonesian and French can be a source of difficulty in mastering articles in French by Indonesian speakers.

## 2. Review of Literature

Article is “unsur yang dipakai untuk membatasi atau memodifikasi nomina”. (elements used to specify or modify nouns.) (Kridalaksana, 1984:16). Articles have no lexical meaning. They have only grammatical meaning. Articles are determiner (French.*determinant*) i.e words preceding or following nouns and function as modifier of the noun. In French language, articles are mandatory. Articles generally precede nouns. Together with nouns they form nominal phrase. Nouns not preceded by articles usually make a sentence ungrammatical.

(1) *Il plonge dans la piscine.*

(He dives into the pool.)

The following sentence is ungrammatical because there is no article in the front of word *piscine*.

(2) *Il plonge dans piscine.*

However, there are instances when articles are dropped as there are no articles in the front of word *femmes* and *enfants* in the following sentence.

(3) *Femmes et enfants couraient sur le port.*

(Women and children ran to the harbor)

Articles are always placed in front of nouns. However, between the particle and the noun, one or several other words can be inserted as attributes of the noun.

(4) *Les superbes chevaux galopaient dans l'immense prairie.*

(The beautiful horses galloped in the vast meadow.)

Articles in French are divided into 3 groups namely article definite (*article défini*), indefinite article (*article indéfini*) dan partitive article (*article partitif*).

### Definite Articles

Definite article is “artikel yang membatasi nomina yang telah diketahui sebelumnya” (articles that specify nouns that have been previously known.) (Kridalaksana, 1984:16).

French definite articles are:

	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	<i>le, l'</i>	<i>la, l'</i>
Plural	<i>les</i>	<i>les</i>

The form *l'* is used in front of noun beginning with voiceless [h] (*h muet*). When used with the prepositions *de* and *à* the article merges with the preposition into new form of *du* and *au*.

preposisi	Maskulin		Feminin	
	Tunggal	Jamak	Tunggal	Jamak
<i>de (+ le, la)</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>des</i>	<i>de la</i>	<i>des</i>
<i>à(+ le, la)</i>	<i>au</i>	<i>aux</i>	<i>a la</i>	<i>aux</i>

*Article défini* is used with:

- a) Specific objects (thing, animal, people etc).  
*Voici le cheval* (This is the horse), *l'auto de Pierre* (Pierre's car)
- b) Particular objects.  
*le vent* (wind), *le soleil* (sun), *la mer* (sea).
- c) Nouns indicating types or classes.  
*Le cheval est un animal domestique* (Horse is domestic animal).
- d) Abstract nouns.  
*La liberté* (freedom), *la justice* (justice), *la politesse* (politeness)
- e) Proper names.  
*La Seine* (The Seine), *la Méditerranée* (Mediterranean Sea)

### Indefinite Article

Indefinite article is “artikel yang membatasi nomina yang belum diketahui sebelumnya” (Articles modifying already known noun) (Kridalaksana, 1984:16)

The use of definite articles in French is as follows:

- a) When a noun indicates someone or something that is not specified.  
(1) *Nous avons invité des amis à dîner.*  
(We invited friends to dinner.)
- b) When a noun modified by an adjective.  
(2) *C'est un paysage magnifique.*  
(It's a beautiful landscape.)
- c) When a noun modified by another noun.  
(3) *C'est un paysage d'hiver.*  
(It's a winter landscape.)
- d) When a noun modified by a subordinate clause.  
(4) *C'est un paysage qui fait rêver.*  
(It's a landscape that makes you dream.)

### Partitive Article

Partitive articles is “” (used in front of nouns to express parts of the whole.) (Kridalaksana, 1984:16). Partitive articles indicates that the object or something in question is in a certain amount.

French partitive articles are:

	Masculine	Feminine
Single	<i>du, de l'</i>	<i>de la, de l'</i>
Plural	<i>des</i>	<i>des</i>

The form *de l'* is used in front of nouns which begin with voiceless [h] (*h muet*).

Examples: *de la* → *de l'* : *de l'argent* (money)

*de l'eau* (water)

*de l'huile* (oil)

### The Objective of The Research

This study aims to provide a description of:

1. The mastery of French language articles by students of the French Language Education Program FBS Manado State University.
2. The best mastered articles among the three French articles.
3. The relationship between the numbers of hours of learning French with mastery of French language articles.
4. Factors that play a role in the emergence of errors in the use of French language articles by students of the French Language Education Program FBS Manado State University i.e. the factors that are the source of difficulties in mastering French articles.

The outcome of the research is useful in the following ways.

1. To improve the comprehension and mastery of French language articles by learners of French, especially students of the French Language Education Study Program FBS, Manado State University.
2. To clarify the difficulties faced by Indonesian in learning French articles.
3. To improve the quality of French language teaching based on the review using the findings of the research.

### 3. Research Methods

The research used descriptive research method. This method is used because the objectives of the study is to describe students' mastery of French language articles, without giving any treatment or intervention in the teaching and learning process of French language articles. The data of this study were obtained by giving written tests of French language articles to French Language Education Program students enrolled in the 2018/2019 school year. The research instrument consisted of questions in the form of loose questions and questions in the form of text / short discourse. Data analysis used descriptive statistics analysis.

### 4. Result

The result of the study is presented in frequency distribution and central tendency and variability measures.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of students' performance on definite article usage

Class Interval	Fre q	Rel.F req	Cum. %
76 - 80	3	0.18	100%
71 - 75	2	0.12	82%

Table 2

Frequency distribution of students' performance on indefinite article usage

Class Interval	Freq.	Rel.Fr eq	Cum. %
69 - 73	1	0.06	100%
64 - 68	0	0.00	94%

66 - 70	1	0.06	71%
61 - 65	3	0.18	65%
56 - 60	2	0.12	47%
51 - 55	3	0.18	35%
46 - 50	1	0.06	18%
41 - 45	1	0.06	12%
36 - 40	0	0.00	6%
31 - 35	0	0.00	6%
26 - 30	1	0.06	6%

59 - 63	0	0.00	94%
54 - 58	0	0.00	94%
49 - 53	2	0.12	94%
44 - 48	3	0.18	82%
39 - 43	0	0.00	65%
34 - 38	3	0.18	65%
29 - 33	1	0.06	47%
24 - 28	3	0.18	41%
19 - 23	1	0.06	24%
14 - 18	2	0.12	18%
9 - 13	1	0.06	6%

Table 3  
Frequency distribution of students' performance on partitive article usage

Class Interval	Freq.	Rel.Freq	Cum. %
55 - 59	2	0.12	100%
50 - 54	2	0.12	88%
45 - 49	1	0.06	76%
40 - 44	4	0.24	71%
35 - 39	3	0.18	47%
30 - 34	2	0.12	29%
25 - 29	0	0.00	18%
20 - 24	1	0.06	18%
15 - 19	0	0.00	12%
10 - 14	2	0.12	12%

Table 4  
Frequency distribution of students' performance on article dropping

Class Interval	Freq.	Rel.Freq	Cum. %
32 - 35	1	0.06	100%
28 - 31	1	0.06	94%
24 - 27	0	0.00	88%
20 - 23	0	0.00	88%
16 - 19	0	0.00	88%
12 - 15	0	0.00	88%
8 - 11	0	0.00	88%
4 - 7	2	0.12	88%
0 - 3	13	0.76	76%

The students' overall performance of French particle usage is as follows.

Table 5  
Frequency distribution of students' overall performance on article

Class Interval	Freq	Rel.Freq.	Cum. %
54-57	1	0.06	100%
50-53	5	0.29	94%
46-49	1	0.06	65%
43-46	4	0.24	59%
39-42	0	0.00	35%
35-38	3	0.18	35%
31-34	1	0.06	18%

27-30	1	0.06	12%
23-26	0	0.00	6%
19-22	0	0.00	6%
15-18	1	0.06	6%

Graph 1  
Frequency polygon of students' overall performance on article

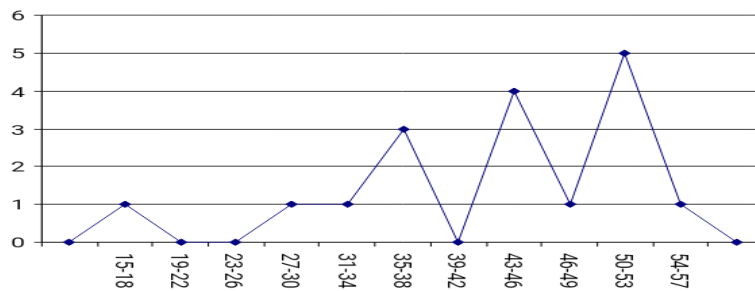
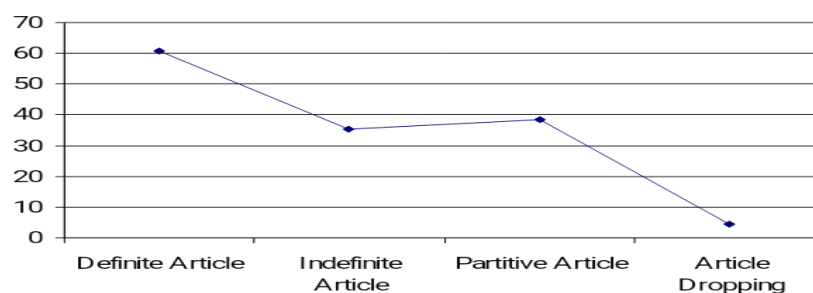


Table 6  
Central tendency and variability

	Definite Article	Indefinite Article	Partitive Article	Article dropping	Overall Performance
Mean	60.78	35.29	38.34	4.50	42.28
Standard Deviation	13.58	15.61	14.10	10.71	10.57

Graph 2  
Polygon of mean of students' performance According to article type



The results of the study indicate that students' performance in French language article usage is quite low (Mean=48.28). However, there is difference in performance of each article type. Mastery of definite article is the highest (Mean=60.78)

## 5. Discussion

The results indicate that the form of question did not affect the test results, because the mean does not show a large difference between the results of sentence questions (39.37) and text / discourse questions (44.05). Likewise, standard

deviation shows almost the same value, 11.07 for sentence questions and 11.32 for text/discourse questions. On the cumulative frequency graph, the curve rises parallelly. This is understandable because the use of articles has more to do with vocabulary than in the context of a speech. It means that mastery of French language articles is more related to vocabulary mastery.

The scores of definite article questions show a fair mastery of French articles. All measures of central tendency show fair values, namely Mean 60.78, Median 60.78, and Modus 72.55. On the other hand, the distribution of scores is quite loose with a measure of variability, namely standard deviation of 13.58 and distance of 52.94. Meanwhile, the scores of the indefinite article questions shows lower comprehension of this article. The three measures of central tendency show lower values, namely Mean 35.29, Median 37.78 and Mode 37.78. The distribution of the values of these indefinite article questions is quite loose with the standard deviation values of 15.61 and a distance of 60.00.

The mastery of partitive articles is also lacking as can be seen from the test scores. The measures of central tendency are Mean 38.34, Median 40.74 and Mode 37.04. The distribution of the value is quite loose with a standard deviation value of 14.10.

As is clear from the value of variability in the distribution of test scores in the three types of articles, there was a considerable variation in the mastery of French language articles by students of French Language Education Program FBS Manado State University. The highest scores of definite article is 80.39 and indefinite article is 73.33. The lowest score of definite article is 27.45, indefinite article is 13.33 and partitive article is 11.11.

There are differences in mastery of the three types of articles. Definite article is the most mastered. This may be related to the characteristics of French language that requires noun to be accompanied by articles. In teaching French vocabulary, the definite articles usually accompany the noun. For example, when teaches the French word for train, a French teacher will not just say “train”, but will say “le train”; or when he teaches the French word for “vehicle”, he will not just say “voiture”, but he will say “la voiture”.

Thus, French learners are most likely encounter definite articles more often than the other articles. It can be said that the input and the take-in of definite is larger. Therefore students are more likely to master definite article more the indefinite and partitive articles. On the contrary, the input of indefinite article and partitive article are less frequent which results in a lesser take-in. The problems in mastering the use of lapses of articles is probably derived from instructional implementation. In Indonesian, which is the mother tongue or at least the second language of the students, the rules and usage of article (kata sandang) is different. When the use of articles in French language teaching is overemphasized then the rule of article lapses may be ignored.

One of the factors that may cause difficulties is gender classification in French vocabulary. Such gender classification is unknown in Indonesian or regional

languages in Indonesia. Moreover, even in French there is no rule that governs the gender of words either masculine or feminine. Consequently, the gender of each word must be memorized by the learner. However, the result of the analysis of error of articles use indicate that the difficulty does not come from the gender but from the article itself. This can be seen in the mean of students' mistakes, i.e. the mean of mistakes of the article (69.29) far beyond the mean of mistakes in gender (8.94).

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis it can be concluded that :

1. To know the mastery of articles by French learners any form of question can be used. Also in teaching French articles any kind of examples, either in separate sentences or in discourse, can be used.
2. The scores of test of indefinite articles show lower mastery degree. Central tendency values are low. The standard deviation value is also high (15.61).
3. Mastery of partitive articles is also low as indicated by Mean (38.34) with a standard deviation value of 14.10.
4. The less frequent input of indefinite article and partitive article result in a low rate of take-in. Therefore, both of these articles are less mastered. Meanwhile the mastery of the use of lapses of articles is probably derived from instructional implementation.

## 7. Suggestion

One of the factors that might cause difficulties for Indonesian in French learning is the gender classification in French vocabulary. To reduce the difficulties in learning French language articles, it is necessary that students became familiar with the articles in French. One way to do that is by providing as many exercises as possible.

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