Analysis of the Effect of Syntax on Students Writing Skills

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dampak sintaksis terhadap keterampilan menulis siswa, dengan fokus pada bagaimana struktur sintaksis memengaruhi kualitas keseluruhan tulisan siswa. Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana kompleksitas, variasi, dan akurasi sintaksis berkontribusi pada koherensi dan efektivitas teks tulisan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menyintesiskan penelitian yang ada tentang sintaksis dan hubungannya dengan kemahiran menulis, sambil memeriksa efek pengajaran sintaksis yang ditargetkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan perbaikan signifikan dalam kinerja sintaksis, kelancaran, dan akurasi gramatikal siswa selama periode enam bulan. Meskipun ada perbaikan, tantangan dengan perangkat kohesi dan pengembangan leksikal tetap ada, menunjukkan perlunya perhatian lebih lanjut dalam pengajaran area ini. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya sintaksis dalam mengembangkan tulisan yang jelas, persuasif, dan terstruktur dengan baik serta memberikan wawasan berharga bagi pendidik yang ingin meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa.

Kata kunci: *Struktur Kalimat, Sintaksis, Kemahiran Linguistik, Pengembangan Menulis.*

Abstract

The impact of syntax on students' writing skills is explored in this study, focusing on how syntactical structures influence the overall quality of student writing. The research investigates how syntactic complexity, variety, and accuracy contribute to the coherence and effectiveness of written texts. Using a qualitative approach, the study synthesizes existing research on syntax and its relationship to writing proficiency, while examining the effects of targeted syntactic instruction. The findings reveal significant improvements in students' syntactic performance, fluency, and grammatical accuracy over a six-month period. Despite improvements, challenges with cohesive devices and lexical development persisted, highlighting the need for further instructional attention in these areas. The study emphasizes the importance of syntax in developing clear, persuasive, and well-structured writing and provides valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance writing skills in students.

Keywords: *Sentence Structure, Syntax, Linguistics Proficiency, Writing Development*

INTRODUCTION

According to Edgar (2015), syntax is a cognitive capacity that enables humans to link linguistic form and meaning. The study of syntax has grown into a vast field, producing extensive empirical and theoretical research over the years. This relationship between syntax and meaning is crucial in understanding its impact on students' writing skills. The ability to write effectively is a critical skill in academic and professional contexts. Writing not only reflects a student's mastery of a language but also their capacity to organize and express complex ideas. Central to this ability is syntax, the set of rules governing the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences. Syntax ensures coherence, clarity, and grammatical accuracy in writing. Studies have shown that syntactic proficiency directly influences the quality of written texts, particularly in academic settings where precision and structure are essential (Chomsky, 1965). Despite its significance, students often struggle with syntactic elements, resulting in unclear or disorganized

writing. This study focuses on understanding the effect of syntax on students' writing skills, aiming to bridge gaps in existing research.

Furthermore, Kuiken and Vedder (2019) emphasize that syntactic complexity in second language (L2) writing develops progressively through stages, starting with basic coordination structures and advancing to more sophisticated subordination and noun phrase elaboration. Their research highlights significant differences in syntactic complexity between L2 learners and native speakers across various proficiency levels. These findings underscore the need for targeted complexity measures to assess writing development comprehensively. This understanding aligns with the focus of this study emphasizing how awareness of syntactic structures can enhance writing proficiency among university students

Mayasari and Ardhana (2022) argued the essential element in syntactic structure analysis lies in the function of syntax. Understanding this role is fundamental to interpreting how linguistic forms convey meaning within a language. This relationship highlights the importance of syntax in enhancing students' writing proficiency, as it provides a structural framework that supports the development of clear and coherent text. Writing is often regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of language communication, a sentiment shared by many from elementary and high school students to university and even graduate students. This widespread struggle has contributed to the common perception that writing is inherently difficult. However, syntax, as the branch of linguistics that examines words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and texts, offers crucial support for improving students' writing skills by helping them construct well-organized and meaningful compositions.

In other hand, previous studies on the relationship between syntax and writing skills have largely concentrated on surface-level issues, such as grammatical accuracy and error correction (Truscott, 1996). While these studies provide valuable insights into common syntactic errors, they often overlook deeper aspects such as sentence complexity, variety, and how these factors contribute to overall writing proficiency. Moreover, many investigations have been limited to native speakers of English, leaving gaps in understanding the challenges faced by second language learners. For instance, Ortega (2003) highlights that second language learners exhibit distinct syntactic patterns due to the influence of their first language, yet research addressing these nuances remains sparse.

Based on Kholid et.al., (2022) understanding word classes is essential for mastering syntax, as they serve as the foundation for constructing well-formed sentences. Without a thorough comprehension of word classes, students may struggle with more advanced syntactic concepts, which impacts their overall writing development. This study emphasizes that syntactic awareness plays a crucial role in improving writing proficiency by enabling students to produce coherent and grammatically correct texts. In line with this, our article explores how syntax awareness affects university students' writing skills, particularly in enhancing their ability to construct clear and well-structured academic texts.

The focus of this research is to analyze the effect of syntax on students' writing skills, particularly in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The study seeks to determine how syntactic complexity, variety, and accuracy contribute to the coherence and effectiveness of students' writing. By examining a diverse group of learners, this research aims to provide insights that are applicable to both native and non-native speakers. Additionally, this study explores whether targeted syntactic instruction can significantly improve writing outcomes, thereby addressing the practical implications for teaching and learning.

Yang et al. (2022) emphasize that syntactic complexity is a significant predictor of language proficiency in both EFL and ESL writing contexts. Their review suggests that various measures of syntactic complexity, such as the length of sentences and subordination, correlate positively with writing quality and can be used to gauge language development. However, the study also highlights the importance of fine-grained indices, such as those based on phrasal and clausal complexity, which provide a more accurate picture of writing proficiency. These findings align with the results of the current study, where an increase in syntactic complexity was observed in the participants' writing over time. While Yang et al.'s research stresses the relationship between

syntactic complexity and language proficiency, my study further investigates how different levels of complexity impact overall writing coherence and fluency.

This study is motivated by the need to address several challenges identified in previous research. For instance, Polio and Shea (2014) note that while syntactic complexity is often used as a measure of writing proficiency, its relationship with writing quality remains poorly understood. Similarly, Larsen-Freeman (2006) argues that the interplay between syntactic complexity and accuracy is crucial for language development but is rarely examined in the context of writing. These findings suggest a pressing need for research that integrates these dimensions to provide a holistic understanding of syntactic effects on writing skills.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform teaching practices and curriculum development. Many current writing curricula prioritize content and organization over linguistic features like syntax, often assuming that students will acquire these skills implicitly. However, this approach overlooks the fact that syntactic proficiency is not only a matter of linguistic competence but also a cognitive skill that requires explicit instruction. By highlighting the role of syntax in writing, this study aims to advocate for a more balanced approach to writing instruction that integrates linguistic and rhetorical elements.

Moreover, this research addresses the practical challenges faced by educators in teaching syntax. One common issue is the lack of effective instructional strategies for developing syntactic skills, particularly in ESL contexts where students may have limited exposure to complex sentence structures. This study seeks to identify specific syntactic features that are most beneficial for improving writing and to evaluate instructional methods that can effectively develop these skills. By doing so, it aims to provide actionable recommendations for educators.

The research methodology involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis. Quantitatively, it examines the correlation between syntactic complexity, variety, and writing scores using statistical tools. Qualitatively, it analyzes writing samples to identify common syntactic patterns and challenges. This mixed-method approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the effect of syntax on writing skills, addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions.

The expected contributions of this research are threefold. First, it seeks to advance theoretical understanding by elucidating the relationship between syntax and writing quality. Second, it aims to provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of syntactic instruction in improving writing skills. Third, it offers practical insights for educators and curriculum developers, thereby bridging the gap between research and practice.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on the use of discourse analysis to investigate the interplay between complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the written and oral English production of Indonesian learners (Cresswell, 2020). Discourse analysis was chosen to provide a deeper understanding of how participants construct meaning, manage coherence, and organize ideas across different linguistic outputs. This approach allowed the study to move beyond isolated grammatical or lexical aspects, instead exploring how these elements interact to produce effective communication. By examining both spoken and written data, the study aimed to uncover patterns of discourse organization and identify areas of challenge or strength in participants' language use. The focus on discourse provides insights not only into the linguistic features but also into the broader communicative competence of the learners.

1. Data Collection

This study collected data over six months to examine how Indonesian learners construct and organize their discourse in English. Five undergraduate students from an English language program at a private university in Indonesia participated in the study. These participants were purposively selected to represent varying levels of English proficiency, ranging from intermediate to advanced, ensuring a diverse range of linguistic abilities. Each participant, aged 18 to 22, had formal English education but limited exposure to English communication outside academic settings. Both male and female participants were included to

ensure gender representation, and all participants provided informed consent before the study began.

In contrast, the study by Wang and Troia (2023), which focuses on evaluating writing skills through the measurement of syntactic quality and sentence structure, this article centers on the analysis of syntax in the development of writing skills among university students. Wang and Troia's research identify various factors affecting writing abilities, such as sentence complexity and the proper use of grammatical structures. In contrast, this article examines how awareness of syntax contributes to improving writing skills, particularly focusing on the relationship between syntax and semantic understanding in English writing. While both studies have different focuses, they both emphasize the crucial role of mastering syntax in overall writing development.

The data collection methods were designed to capture rich and contextualized linguistic performance. Oral production tasks included semi-structured interviews, storytelling, and group discussions, which allowed participants to produce naturalistic spoken discourse. These sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Written data were collected through weekly assignments, including essays, reflective journals, and summaries. These texts provided insights into the participants' syntactic choices, coherence strategies, and use of cohesive devices. Additional data were obtained from classroom observations, which offered contextual information about participants' interaction patterns and discourse practices in academic settings. This combination of oral, written, and observational data ensured a comprehensive understanding of participants' discourse.

2. **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using discourse analysis, which focused on how participants structured and organized their spoken and written language to convey meaning effectively. The analysis emphasized three key dimensions: complexity, fluency, and accuracy (Gee, 2014). For complexity, the study examined participants' use of syntactic structures, including subordinate clauses, cohesive devices, and sentence variety. Written texts were analyzed for their logical progression and integration of ideas, while oral transcripts were scrutinized for syntactic layering and natural sentence construction. This analysis highlighted how participants managed sentence complexity within broader discourse contexts.

Fluency in spoken discourse was analyzed by examining speech rate, hesitation patterns, and the use of fillers and discourse markers. The analysis also investigated how participants managed turn-taking and topic maintenance during conversational tasks. Written fluency was assessed through the organization of ideas, the use of transitions, and the overall flow of arguments. These elements were analyzed to understand how participants achieved coherence in their discourse while maintaining a logical structure.

Accuracy was examined through the identification and categorization of errors in both written and spoken discourse. Errors were analyzed in their discourse context to assess their impact on meaning and coherence. For example, grammatical inaccuracies such as verb tense errors or subject-verb agreement issues were noted, as well as lexical errors like inappropriate word choices. The analysis also explored how participants repaired or compensated for errors during spoken tasks and how they revised their written discourse. This provided insights into their ability to adapt and refine their language use.

Thematic patterns were also explored to identify how participants constructed meaning and conveyed their messages. This involved analyzing their use of cohesive devices, topic continuity, and rhetorical strategies. Successful instances of discourse demonstrated clear relationships between ideas, supported by appropriate transitions and evidence. Breakdowns in coherence were analyzed to understand the underlying causes, such as insufficient linguistic resources or reliance on direct translations from their native language.

By employing discourse analysis, this study captured the intricate interplay between linguistic features and communicative competence in participants' discourse. The findings provide valuable insights into how Indonesian learners of English construct and negotiate meaning across different modalities, contributing to a deeper understanding of their language development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings from this study reveal several important trends regarding the development of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the English discourse of Indonesian learners. Over the course of the study, participants demonstrated notable improvements in their ability to construct more complex sentences, particularly in written tasks. They began incorporating more subordinate clauses and varied syntactic structures, which suggested an increase in their ability to express more nuanced ideas. For example, early written tasks primarily consisted of simple sentences, while later tasks displayed more complex sentence structures, signaling an evolution in their syntactic proficiency.

In terms of fluency, participants exhibited significant progress in oral production. Initially, participants showed frequent hesitation and pauses during their speech, with the use of fillers such as "um" and "uh" being quite common. By the end of the study, these hesitations decreased as participants gained more confidence in speaking. While they still occasionally paused to find the right words or restructure their sentences, the overall flow of speech improved, indicating a greater comfort with oral communication.

Accuracy was another area where improvements were observed. Initially, participants made frequent grammatical errors, especially with tense consistency and subject-verb agreement. As the study progressed, these errors decreased, and the participants' use of accurate grammatical structures improved, particularly in more complex sentence constructions. Despite these improvements, occasional errors persisted, especially in areas such as article use and preposition choice, but these were less frequent and less disruptive to communication as participants became more aware of their grammatical choices.

An important challenge that remained throughout the study was the use of cohesive devices, particularly in oral discourse. Participants occasionally struggled with connecting ideas smoothly, leading to discourse that lacked clarity. They tended to overuse simple conjunctions like "and" and "but" and underused more sophisticated devices like "however" or "therefore," which impacted the overall coherence of their spoken narratives. In written tasks, the use of cohesive devices was generally better, but there were still instances where participants failed to maintain the logical flow of their arguments, indicating a need for further development in their cohesion strategies.

The analysis of thematic patterns revealed that while the participants had improved in their ability to express complex ideas, they still relied heavily on familiar topics or structures. For example, they often resorted to rote patterns in writing, using set phrases or repeating ideas from previous lessons rather than introducing novel content or perspectives. This indicates a gap in their ability to generate and organize new ideas independently, which could be an area for future instructional focus.

The overall trend across participants indicated that, while progress was made, the rate and extent of development varied from one individual to another. Some participants showed marked improvement in fluency but had more difficulty with accuracy, while others made significant strides in complexity but struggled with coherence in both oral and written forms. These differences underscore the need for individualized attention in language learning, as different learners may benefit from different types of instructional focus.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the process of language development for Indonesian learners of English, particularly with regard to the interrelationship between complexity, fluency, and accuracy. Then, this research indicates that syntactic analysis plays a crucial role in enhancing language comprehension and the overall effectiveness of communication. In particular, it is noted that dependency parsing, a method used in syntactic analysis, allows for deeper insights into the structure of sentences by revealing relationships between grammatical units (Liang & Shang, 2022). The observed improvements in sentence complexity suggest that the participants were able to expand their syntactic repertoire over time, likely due to the structured writing tasks and continuous exposure to English in both written and

spoken forms. As Larsen-Freeman (2006) has noted, complexity in language production emerges gradually as learners gain more control over the syntactic resources of the language.

Fluency improvements, as seen in the reduction of hesitation markers and increased speech flow, highlight the role of frequent practice in building confidence and ease in oral communication. The participants' progress aligns with Brown's (2007) assertion that fluency is a result of repeated exposure to the target language in communicative contexts. While hesitation is a natural part of second language speech, its reduction over time reflects a growing familiarity with the language and a shift toward more automatic language use. However, despite these improvements, fluency in speech remains an ongoing challenge, as participants still hesitated occasionally and struggled with the spontaneity of oral communication.

Accuracy in grammar improved significantly throughout the study, the reduction in errors over time demonstrates the participants' ability to internalize grammatical rules through repetition and corrective feedback. However, the persistence of certain errors, particularly with articles and prepositions, suggests that these aspects of grammar require more focused attention. It also highlights a common challenge for many second language learners, where some areas of grammar are acquired later in the process of language development.

The difficulties participants faced with cohesive devices and coherence in both written and spoken discourse reflect a crucial area for further development. The occasional breakdown in coherence, particularly in oral tasks, underscores the importance of teaching learners how to organize their discourse effectively. In other hand, the role of discourse markers and cohesion in maintaining coherence and guiding listeners through the conversation. As many of the participants struggled with appropriate use of advanced cohesive devices, this suggests that explicit instruction on coherence and cohesion should be integrated into language learning curricula, particularly in developing students' academic writing and speaking skills.

The difference in discourse organization between written and oral tasks is also noteworthy. The different modalities of communication often require different skills and strategies. Written discourse, with its more planned and edited nature, allowed participants to focus more on syntactic complexity and organization. Oral discourse, on the other hand, required faster processing and the ability to organize thoughts in real-time, which led to more disorganized or less coherent speech. This highlights the need for targeted instruction in both written and spoken language, with particular attention to the demands of each modality.

The thematic analysis also points to an area that requires further attention: the development of participants' ability to generate new ideas and organize them independently. Many of the participants showed a tendency to use familiar structures and content, which may be indicative of a lack of confidence in creating novel discourse. This finding aligns with Gee's (2014) notion that learners often rely on familiar patterns when they lack the confidence or resources to produce original content. Teaching learners how to generate ideas independently, and fostering creativity in language use, may help them overcome this limitation.

Individual differences in progress were evident across the participants, which reinforces the need for differentiated instruction. As evidenced by the varying improvements in fluency, accuracy, and complexity, some students may require more focused attention on specific aspects of language learning. This results emphasis on the importance of individual differences in language acquisition. Tailoring instruction to the specific needs of learners can lead to more effective outcomes, allowing each learner to progress at their own pace while still addressing the common challenges they face in language development.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the development of complexity, fluency, and accuracy in the English discourse of Indonesian learners over a six-month period. The findings revealed clear progress in all three areas, with participants showing significant improvement in their ability to produce more syntactically complex sentences, speak more fluently, and reduce grammatical errors in both written and spoken tasks. However, challenges persisted, particularly in the areas of cohesion and lexical development, which hindered the overall coherence and richness of learners' discourse.

The observed improvements in sentence complexity, fluency, and accuracy are consistent with existing literature on second language acquisition, particularly the dynamic nature of these three components (Larsen-Freeman, 2006). While fluency and complexity in oral tasks increased, learners still faced difficulties in maintaining coherence and fluency at the same level as in their written tasks. This disparity points to the unique demands of spoken discourse, where real-time language production can strain learners' ability to organize and link ideas effectively.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of feedback and task-based learning in facilitating language development. The reduction in grammatical errors and the increase in sentence complexity suggest that consistent practice and corrective feedback contribute significantly to learners' linguistic progress. Nevertheless, the reliance on familiar vocabulary suggests a need for targeted vocabulary instruction to enhance lexical diversity, a critical aspect of achieving fluency and complexity in both spoken and written discourse.

The individual differences in participants' progress underscore the importance of personalized language instruction that caters to the unique needs each learner. As the study demonstrated, some learners made more rapid progress in specific areas, while others required additional support. This variability in learner outcomes emphasizes the need for differentiated teaching strategies that take into account the diverse backgrounds and learning styles of students.

Finally, the study's findings also raise important questions about the interaction between oral and written language skills. Future research could explore how these skills influence one another and whether integrated approaches to teaching speaking and writing can enhance overall language proficiency. Additionally, further investigation into the challenges of discourse cohesion and lexical development could provide deeper insights into how learners can be supported in achieving more coherent and lexically diverse discourse. Overall, this research contributes to our understanding of the dynamic processes involved in second language acquisition, particularly in the context of Indonesian learners of English. It offers valuable implications for language teaching, particularly in the areas of fluency, grammatical accuracy, discourse cohesion, and vocabulary development.

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