



THE IMPACT OF SYNTAX MASTERY ON STUDENTS' WRITING ACCURACY

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menyelidiki pengaruh penguasaan sintaksis siswa terhadap akurasi menulis dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Akurasi menulis sangat berkaitan dengan penerapan aturan sintaksis yang benar, termasuk struktur kalimat, urutan kata, dan hubungan gramatikal. Desain penelitian eksperimen digunakan dengan melibatkan sepuluh mahasiswa EFL semester pertama. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes penguasaan sintaksis dan tugas menulis yang dirancang untuk mengukur akurasi siswa dalam membangun kalimat yang gramatikal. Skor pre-test dan post-test dianalisis untuk mengkaji hubungan antara penguasaan sintaksis dan performa menulis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa dengan tingkat penguasaan sintaksis yang lebih tinggi memperoleh akurasi menulis yang secara signifikan lebih baik dibandingkan siswa dengan penguasaan rendah. Siswa tersebut menunjukkan kemampuan lebih besar dalam menghasilkan kalimat yang gramatikal dan tersusun dengan baik. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pembelajaran sintaksis dalam meningkatkan akurasi menulis siswa EFL. Oleh karena itu, integrasi strategi pengajaran yang berfokus pada sintaksis direkomendasikan untuk mendukung pengembangan keterampilan menulis yang akurat dalam konteks kelas EFL.

Kata Kunci: *Penguasaan Sintaksis, Akurasi Penulisan, Pembelajar EFL, Struktur Kalimat*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effect of students' syntax mastery on writing accuracy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Writing accuracy is closely related to the correct application of syntactic rules, including sentence structure, word order, and grammatical relationships. An experimental research design was employed involving ten first-semester EFL students. Data were collected through a syntax mastery test and a writing task designed to measure students' accuracy in constructing grammatical sentences. Pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed to examine the relationship between syntax mastery and writing performance. The results indicate that students with higher levels of syntax mastery achieved significantly better writing accuracy compared to those with lower mastery. These students demonstrated greater ability to produce grammatically correct and well-structured sentences. The findings underscore the importance of syntax instruction in enhancing EFL learners' writing accuracy. Consequently, the integration of syntax-focused teaching strategies is recommended to support the development of accurate writing skills in EFL classroom contexts.

Keywords: *Syntax Mastery, Writing Accuracy, EFL Learners, Sentence Structure*

INTRODUCTION

Syntax is one of the core components of linguistic knowledge and plays an essential role in determining how words combine to form meaningful and grammatically acceptable sentences. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, syntax is not only a theoretical construct but also a practical foundation that shapes students' ability to produce coherent and



accurate written texts. According to Chomsky (2020), syntax governs the arrangement of linguistic units in a hierarchical structure, and mastery of these structures is crucial for functional communication. For EFL learners, who often struggle with the complexity of English sentence formation, syntactic mastery becomes a major determinant of writing proficiency.

Writing accuracy, defined as the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences with proper structure, has been widely recognized as a significant indicator of learners' overall writing development. Previous studies indicate that students with weak syntactic knowledge tend to produce frequent grammatical errors, such as incorrect word order, incomplete clauses, subject-verb disagreement, and misuse of conjunctions (Dzakiah, 2023; Kim, 2021). Alisha et al. (2019) further emphasize that these difficulties are common among EFL learners and significantly hinder their ability to express ideas clearly in written form. Such errors not only reduce textual clarity but also disrupt coherence and overall writing quality.

From a second language acquisition perspective, syntactic competence plays a vital role in how learners process and produce written language. Research suggests that syntactic knowledge supports learners in organizing ideas, connecting clauses, and expressing complex meanings through well-formed sentences. Hopp (2022) explains that learners with stronger syntactic awareness are better able to process sentence structures efficiently, which positively affects their written production. Without sufficient syntactic control, EFL learners' writing often remains fragmented, structurally inconsistent, and limited to simple sentence patterns, particularly in academic contexts.

However, many EFL learners continue to face persistent difficulties in mastering English syntax due to structural differences between English and their first language. Fitria (2024) notes that contrasts in word order patterns, tense usage, and clause construction frequently lead to writing inaccuracies among Indonesian EFL learners. This challenge is further compounded by first language interference, where learners transfer native language structures into English writing (Islam, 2020). As a result, syntactic errors remain prevalent and difficult to overcome. Therefore, investigating the relationship between syntax mastery and writing accuracy is essential to better understand learners' writing problems and to inform more effective instructional strategies in EFL classrooms.

METHODS

This study employed a quasi-experimental quantitative design to examine the relationship between students' English syntax mastery and writing accuracy. The participants were ten first-semester students of the English Education Department at the State Islamic University of North Sumatera, selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected in a single session using two instruments: a syntax mastery test and a writing accuracy task. The syntax test consisted of twenty items measuring students' understanding of basic syntactic structures, while the writing task required students to produce a descriptive paragraph of approximately 150 words. Writing accuracy was assessed using a rubric focusing on grammatical correctness and sentence structure. Data analysis was conducted descriptively by comparing syntax mastery scores with writing accuracy results to identify patterns between the two variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The results of this study present a comprehensive overview of the relationship between students' syntax mastery and the accuracy of their writing. Data were obtained through two

primary assessments: the syntax mastery test and the writing accuracy task. The analysis focuses on score distributions, observable performance trends, recurring error patterns, and the overall correspondence between syntactic competence and writing outcomes. This section provides both numerical and qualitative interpretations of the findings.

Table 1. Students' Syntax Mastery and Writing Accuracy Scores

Participant	Syntax Mastery Score	Writing Accuracy Score (%)
P1	90	92
P2	78	80
P3	88	90
P4	75	78
P5	68	70
P6	85	89
P7	72	76
P8	60	65
P9	92	94
P10	79	82
Mean	76.7	79.6

Based on Table 1, the syntax mastery scores and writing accuracy percentages show a consistent positive pattern. Participants with higher syntax mastery generally achieved better writing accuracy. For example, P1 and P9 obtained the highest syntax scores, 90 and 92, respectively, and also reached the highest writing accuracy scores of 92% and 94%. A similar pattern can be seen in P3 and P6, who scored 88 and 85 on syntax and achieved 90% and 89% in writing accuracy. In contrast, participants with lower syntax mastery tended to demonstrate lower writing accuracy. P8, who obtained the lowest syntax score (60), achieved only 65% accuracy, while P5, with a score of 68, reached only 70%. Overall, the mean score of syntax mastery was 76.7, and the mean writing accuracy was 79.6. These findings indicate a positive relationship between students' syntax mastery and their ability to produce accurate written texts.

The syntax mastery test revealed varying levels of student proficiency in understanding and applying fundamental syntactic principles. Scores ranged from 60 to 92, with an overall average of 76.7, indicating that while most students possessed a moderate understanding of basic syntax, a significant gap still existed between high- and low-performing learners. Students with high scores demonstrated a stronger comprehension of sentence patterns, clause structures, and transformations, which aligns with the fact that students with higher levels of syntactic competence showed noticeable advantages in organizing sentence structure, distinguishing clause boundaries, and producing complex constructions. In contrast, students with lower levels of syntactic mastery demonstrated difficulties in identifying where clauses begin and end, forming complex sentences, and differentiating dependent clauses from independent ones, which reduced the overall accuracy of their written work.

In contrast, the writing accuracy test yielded an overall average score of 79.6%, slightly higher than the average syntax score. However, this higher mean does not necessarily indicate stronger writing performance, as the writing test evaluated accuracy rather than complexity. Students performed better on simpler sentence constructions but encountered noticeable difficulty when attempting to produce complex or compound-complex sentences. These issues



mirror that EFL learners at early stages often display limited syntactic expansion in writing despite basic grammatical awareness.

A more detailed comparison between individual syntax and writing scores reveals a clear pattern. Students with higher syntax mastery, specifically S1, S3, S6, and S9, consistently produced writing samples with fewer grammatical errors, more accurate sentence boundaries, well-structured clauses, and smoother transitions between ideas. Their paragraphs exhibited appropriate sequencing, effective use of subordinating conjunctions, and minimal misordering of elements. For example, students who scored above 85 in syntax typically achieved writing accuracy scores above 88%, demonstrating a strong connection between syntactic knowledge and writing precision. This finding reinforces the conclusion that better syntactic awareness contributes directly to greater clarity and cohesion in students' written texts. On the other hand, students with lower syntax mastery, particularly S5 and S8, demonstrated a high frequency of writing errors. Their paragraphs contained recurring problems in integrating clauses correctly, using appropriate connectors, maintaining consistent verb forms, and avoiding run-on sentences. These errors indicate that limited syntactic knowledge affects sentence construction and reduces overall writing accuracy, an argument that insufficient syntactic understanding often manifests in fragmented or structurally flawed writing. Students with syntax scores below 70 tended to rely on overly simple sentence structures, avoiding complex forms altogether, which limited both the richness and accuracy of their writing.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide a meaningful contribution to the understanding of how syntax mastery influences writing accuracy among EFL learners, particularly first-semester university students. The results demonstrate a strong and consistent relationship between students' syntactic competence and their ability to produce grammatically correct, structurally coherent, and communicatively effective written texts. This discussion elaborates on the significance of these findings, connects them with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, and identifies pedagogical implications for EFL classrooms.

The study revealed that students with higher syntax mastery consistently produced writing with fewer errors, clearer sentence structure, and greater control over clause combination. This confirms the theoretical assumption that syntactic competence serves as a foundation for accurate writing, as argued by Chomsky (2020), who describes syntax as the central system that shapes how linguistic elements combine into interpretable structures. In practice, writing accuracy cannot be achieved merely by knowing vocabulary or basic grammar; rather, it emerges from the writer's ability to manipulate syntactic forms in order to encode meaning effectively. The results of this research reflect this theoretical position.

Error analysis provided further insight into student performance. Across all writing samples, the most common syntactic errors included: (1) incorrect word order, particularly in adjective + noun and adverbial positions; (2) run-on sentences resulting from lack of subordination; (3) omission of subjects or verbs, leading to sentence fragments; (4) incorrect use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions; and (5) tense inconsistency. These findings align with Aliti (2024), who notes that EFL learners frequently experience difficulty in constructing multi-clausal sentences due to limited exposure to authentic syntactic structures.

Interestingly, even students who performed moderately in the syntax test (scores between 72–80) showed a mixed pattern in writing. While they could manage basic grammatical structures effectively, their accuracy decreased when constructing longer or more complex sentences. This suggests that basic syntactic knowledge is insufficient for producing



sophisticated writing, supporting Fitria's (2025) argument that advanced writing requires explicit mastery of clause relationships, subordination, and syntactic hierarchy.

In addition to the numerical results, qualitative analysis of students' written paragraphs revealed differences in syntactic confidence. High-performing students tended to vary their sentence structures, combining simple, compound, and complex forms. This variation indicates a deeper internalization of syntactic rules. In contrast, lower-performing students relied predominantly on simple sentences, demonstrating limited syntactic flexibility. This observation mirrors the conclusion of Sidabalok et al. (2025) that sentence variety is a reliable indicator of syntactic development in EFL writing.

Moreover, the relationship between syntax mastery and writing accuracy exhibited consistency across all participants. Every student who demonstrated strong syntactic competence produced higher levels of writing accuracy, while those with weaker syntactic understanding produced writing containing more structural errors. Although the sample size was small, the uniformity of this pattern suggests a strong positive relationship between the two variables, reinforcing the claim made by Bochari & Hastini (2025) that explicit syntactic awareness plays a central role in improving writing quality.

Overall, the results of this study clearly indicate that syntax mastery significantly influences writing accuracy among first-semester EFL learners. Students who possess a higher level of syntactic understanding are better able to construct coherent, grammatically correct sentences, while those with limited syntactic knowledge struggle with clause integration, connector usage, and sentence boundaries. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature affirming the importance of integrating explicit syntax instruction into EFL writing curricula (Fajrin et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the strong similarity between syntax scores and writing accuracy scores supports the idea that writing performance is a reflection of underlying linguistic competence. Müller (2024) notes that learners who understand phrase structure and the hierarchical organization of sentences typically internalize rules that help them avoid errors such as misplaced modifiers, incorrect clause embedding, and run-on structures. These types of errors appeared primarily in the writing of students with lower syntax mastery in this study, indicating that syntactic weaknesses manifest clearly in written output. This reinforces the perspective that writing is a productive skill that activates deeper layers of a learner's grammatical system, making it an appropriate medium to observe syntactic understanding.

The error patterns observed in this study also align with broader findings in recent EFL research. For instance, frequent clause fragments, misordered elements, and incorrect conjunction use among lower-performing students reflect similar trends identified by Khaksar & Khaghaninejad (2024), who argue that many Indonesian EFL learners struggle with English clause structure due to differences from their L1. Indonesian syntax is less rigid in word order and does not require the same hierarchical clause marking found in English. As a result, students often transfer L1 syntactic patterns into L2 writing, producing structurally incomplete or ambiguous sentences. The presence of these errors in the present study suggests that syntactic transfer continues to be a major factor affecting writing accuracy in early-level EFL learners.

Another significant finding is the difference in sentence variation between high- and low-performing students. Learners with stronger syntax mastery produced writing that displayed more diverse sentence structures, such as the use of complex and compound-complex patterns, effective subordination, and smoother transitions between ideas. This supports Martinez's (2018) view that syntactic maturity is reflected not only in correctness but also in sentence variety. Students who understand syntax beyond a superficial level are better equipped



to use clauses strategically to express nuanced relationships between ideas, resulting in more cohesive and sophisticated writing.

On the other hand, weaker students relied heavily on simple sentence structures. While simple sentences may be grammatically correct, an overdependence on them often indicates limited syntactic awareness and restricts the expressive power of the writing. This aligns with the argument of Aliti (2024), who notes that beginners tend to avoid complex structures not because they lack ideas, but because they are unsure how to construct the necessary syntactic forms. The present study supports this interpretation, as weaker students attempted complex structures but produced a high number of errors, suggesting incomplete mastery.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that writing accuracy cannot be fully separated from broader linguistic competence. Writing is not just a mechanical skill but a cognitive process that demands the integration of syntactic, semantic, and discourse knowledge. When students possess strong syntactic foundations, they can focus more on content development and coherence, rather than expending cognitive effort on sentence formation. Conversely, limited syntax mastery forces students to divide their attention, often resulting in writing that is fragmented and structurally inconsistent. This aligns with Hassan (2024), who suggests that inadequate syntactic control can overwhelm cognitive resources during writing tasks.

Another critical implication arises from the observable consistency between the findings and previous EFL studies. Brown et al. (2023) emphasized that syntax instruction directly improves students' grammatical accuracy, a claim supported by the present study, which strongly indicates that advances in syntactic knowledge correlate with improved writing performance. Similarly, the results also confirm the perspective of Sidabalok et al. (2025), who assert that systematic teaching of clause structure and sentence combination enhances both writing fluency and accuracy. The high-performing students in this study likely benefited from prior exposure to grammar-focused instruction, which contributed to their stronger syntactic awareness.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings also highlight the need for more explicit and sustained instruction in syntax within the EFL curriculum. Many students in the lower proficiency group demonstrated persistent difficulties with clause relationships and sentence boundaries, indicating that traditional grammar instruction may not be sufficient. Fitria (2025) argues that EFL classrooms often emphasize memorization of rules rather than understanding syntactic relationships in context. The present study supports this critique because students who scored lower on the syntax test appeared to lack the ability to apply grammatical rules effectively in writing.

Finally, the results of this study have significant pedagogical implications. First, educators should integrate explicit syntax instruction into writing classes, using sentence-combining activities, transformation exercises, and guided error analysis. Second, writing assignments should be scaffolded to encourage students to gradually incorporate more complex syntactic structures. Third, feedback should not focus solely on correcting errors but should also highlight successful uses of complex syntax, reinforcing positive development. These instructional strategies align with Bochari & Hastini (2025), who emphasize the importance of tree-diagram-based instruction to help students visualize syntactic relationships, thereby strengthening understanding and improving writing performance.

Overall, the discussion reveals that syntax mastery plays a crucial, foundational role in determining writing accuracy among EFL learners. The results confirm theoretical claims, align with recent research, and offer practical implications for improving writing instruction. The



consistency between syntax scores, writing performance, and error patterns strongly suggests that enhancing syntactic competence should be a priority in early-level EFL education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that students' ability to write accurately is strongly connected to how well they understand English syntax. Students who have good syntax mastery can form sentences more clearly, avoid grammatical mistakes, and combine ideas in a more organized way. Their writing flows better because they know how to use clauses, connectors, and sentence patterns correctly. In contrast, students with weaker syntax skills often struggle to build proper sentences. They make more errors, rely mostly on simple structures, and have difficulty expressing ideas in a cohesive way.

The findings also make it clear that writing accuracy does not come from vocabulary alone. Even if students know many English words, their writing will still contain mistakes if they cannot use syntactic rules effectively. The errors that appeared in this research, such as incorrect word order, run-on sentences, or poor clause integration, show that limited syntactic knowledge has a direct impact on writing quality.

Because of this, the study highlights the importance of teaching syntax more explicitly in EFL classrooms. Students need regular practice with sentence building, combining clauses, and understanding how sentences work at a deeper level. With better guidance, their writing can become more accurate, more structured, and easier to understand.

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