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**Improving EFL Learners' Essay Writing Through Teaching
Syntax: The case of Second Year Students at the Department of
English–Msila University**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree
in Linguistics**

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Abstract:

The current research aims at investigating the effect of teaching syntax on improving students' essay writing. To reach this aim, a questionnaire submitted to eight teachers of written expression at the department of English language and literature at Msila University was thoroughly analyzed. In addition, we have carried out an experimental study at the same department with 34 second year LMD students. The latter were divided into an experimental and a control group. Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested with the experimental group going through a treatment period. The obtained results have demonstrated that the quality of writing of the experimental group members who took intensive courses in syntax has remarkably improved. The findings of the present study can be implemented by university teachers to help their students overcome writing difficulties in the future.

Dedication

This work is dedicated:

To my parents, especially my beloved mother for her endless love, affection, care, and support.

To my best sisters Amel and Sara who were beside me in moments of difficulty and happiness.

To my dear friends and relatives for their encouragement in stressful times.

GHERABI

This work is dedicated

To the memory of my father,

To my loving mother and supportive brother,

To my wonderful friend Islam,

To my friends: Housseem, Rima, Chafia, Nadia and Imene,

To all my pupils.

KHELIFI

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To all my colleagues at Guechi El- Bachir Middle School: Mr. Lhachemi LAMINE, Mr. Houssef Eddine KADRI and Mrs. Fahima MEBARKI for their help and support.

List of Abbreviations

Adj: Adjectives

Adv: Adverbs

AdvPs: Adverb Phrases

CG: Control group

Conj: Conjunctions

D: Determiner

EFL: English as Foreign Language

EG: experimental group

N: Noun

NP: Noun Phrase

NPs: Noun Phrases

N': N-bar (Noun bar)

P: Prepositions

Pron: Pronouns

PP: Prepositional Phrase

PPs: Prepositional Phrases

V: Verb

VP: Verb Phrase

VPs: Verb Phrases

X': X-bar

X'': X double bar

XP: X Phrase

YP: Y Phrase

***:** Incorrect

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General Introduction

1. Background of the study

The view towards teaching the writing skill has tremendously changed through time. Each of the different teaching and learning approaches sought the mastery of the skill from a different angle. The move shifted from focusing on the mechanical aspects of writing to focusing on creative writing. According to Sárosdy et al. (2006),” in the middle ages, teaching writing and spelling could not be separated”. After the Second World War, audio-linguists thought of writing as only a practice of grammar (ibid). Byrne (1979) had a similar point of view. He favored sentence transformation, matching two halves of a sentence, extension and simplification of sentences.

By the end of the sixties, focus fell from the product of writing to the process of writing. As it can be noticed, the aim of teaching approaches is limited to description while investigating real-life writing- related problems is the job left for researchers. Since the focus is more on the process rather than on the linguistic competence, students need to have more than the linguistic knowledge in order to accomplish writing tasks. Investigation was mainly focused on difficulties facing novice or inexperienced writers.

In June 2017, a thorough study was conducted at Tlemcen University to identify EFL learners essay writing difficulties (International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research). The attained data revealed that students faced difficulties in both coherence and cohesion due to the lack of reading, first language transfer and lack of writing practice. In an earlier study conducted by Qaddumi (1995), results showed that EFL students face difficulties in finding ways to employ the different types of sentences and the ill use of some cohesive devices. The strongest cohesive devices include pronominal references, conjunctions, discourse markers

and connectives (Sárosdy et al., 2006). Thus, both studies came to the conclusion that student's poor performance was due to lack of cohesion. The remedy was previously given. To make a piece of writing cohesive and well-structured, both linguistic (Canale and Swain, 1980) and discourse competence are required. Since cohesion is defined as the relation that exists between lexis and grammar, addressing the latter during a syntax teaching course would make students' written pieces more cohesive. For this sake, the present study main objective is to replicate the research in a new environment using different methods to test the effect of teaching syntax to second year EFL students at the University of Msila as a possible solution to improve their essay writing performance.

2. Statement of the Problem

Writing essays is one of the main skills university students should develop. They should be able to write coherent meaningful essays to communicate their ideas effectively. A combination of their willingness to learn and a well designed teaching course will help them achieve the desired objective. This includes knowing about the form, the process, writing mechanics and traits of a good essay. However, this is not the case for many students at the University of Msila. Their poor writing performance reveals their ignorance of the basics of essay writing. The latter might even include sentence writing and combining. One of the most common difficulties students face in writing is that they cannot formulate correct and meaningful sentences, due to the fact that they do not understand the grammar of the sentence, that is to say the syntactic structure of the sentence. According to McLean (2012), writing in clear sentences is one way to ensure that you communicate well. Since an essay is composed of many paragraphs and each paragraph is composed of sentences, the best way to master essay writing is by starting to learn how to write well-structured sentences that provide clarity and cohesion to the written piece.

3. Objectives

Main objective:

To investigate the impact of teaching syntax on enhancing EFL students' performance in writing essays

Sub-objectives:

- To determine the relationship between sentence combining and cohesion.
- To test the effect of teaching syntax on second year EFL students' essay writing.
- To suggest and prove teaching syntax as one way to overcome writing difficulties.

4. Research Questions

- How does sentence combining relate to cohesion?
- What is the impact of teaching syntax on students' essay writing?
- How can teaching syntax help university teachers to develop their learners' writing skill?

5. Hypothesis

Teaching syntax would have a positive impact on improving EFL learners' essay writing.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Method

In this research, both a descriptive and empirical research methods were employed: We opted for the experimental design as it is the best way to determine the effect of teaching syntax on students' writing improvement; moreover, the descriptive method was employed through a questionnaire submitted to the teachers of written expression to investigate the different

teaching methods used to teach essay writing and the difficulties students face while accomplishing such assignments.

6.2 Sample of the Study

Our sample consists of 34 second year students of the Department of English language and literature at Msila University. This sample is randomly selected. These students are divided into an experimental group and a control group. In addition, we have opted for 8 teachers of written expression from the same department to answer the questionnaire.

6.3 Data Gathering tools

To meet the research aforementioned objectives, two research instruments were used: a teachers' questionnaire and a pre-test and post-test. The questionnaire which is meant for teachers of Written Expression module at the Department of English language and literature at Msila University is used to get insight about the way writing is taught in the department, the difficulties students face and solutions provided by teachers to solve the problem of “bad quality” essays. The pre-test and post-test, however, are used to test the reliability of our hypothesis.

7. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter basically, gives a systemic definition of syntax and how it differs from grammar. Then, we discuss the main aspect of the theory of syntax. Moreover, we are going to tackle the syntactic structure such as the simple clause, in addition to the effects of teaching syntax on learners' cognition. The second chapter deals with essay writing. We define writing; its aspects and types. Next, we tackle its process and stages. The last point is about the relationship between teaching syntax and essay writing. The third chapter presents the methods that are used by the researchers and gives a general

description of data analysis. A related part will be devoted to some ideas for EFL teachers at university to carry out teaching syntax for the sake of enhancing their students' writing skill. Finally, we conclude with some recommendations that are supposed to be the gist of our research work.

Chapter One: Teaching Syntax

Introduction

Syntax is the level that mediates between produced sounds and the meaning they convey. It is considered as the fundamental aspect of writing in which words and phrases are arranged to create clear and meaningful sentences in a language. It also helps writers to develop cohesion and coherence in a text. However, most EFL learners pay a little attention to this fact, and therefore, they are sometimes unable to produce good pieces of writing.

Hence, in this chapter we are going to provide vivid definition of syntax, how it differs from grammar and covering its main concepts and structure. Moreover, we are going to see the effect of teaching syntax on the students' perception, as well as the important role it plays in improving writing skill.

1. What is Syntax?

Syntax is a branch of linguistics that "is concerned with how a sentence is ordered and structured and involves the type of the sentence used" (Vappingo, 2011). This shows that English syntax is concerned with the way we make sentences. However, it is not only related to the structure of the sentence but also to the structure of phrases and clauses. As Van Valin and Lapolla (1997) claimed that human languages employed to put meaningful elements together to form words, these words are used to form phrases, phrases combined to form clauses, clauses together to form sentences and all together to produce coherent texts (p.01).

Moreover, in linguistics the word Syntax firstly comes from the ancient Greek "Syntaxis" divided into two syllables (syn= 'together', and taxis is 'an ordering'). Literally, it means "arrangement" or "setting out together". Technically, it refers to the field of grammar in

which words are grouped together to produce larger units and show the link within the meaning of the sentence Matthews (1982 as cited in Van Valin & Lapolla, 1997, p.01).

Additionally, the term syntax is also used to refer directly to the rules and principles that govern the structure of the sentence of any individual language. Modern research in studying syntax attempts to describe languages in terms of such rules i.e the rules which underline how words are combined to make sentences unique. Kim and Sells (2008) assert, “the study of English syntax is the study of rules which generate an infinite number of grammatical sentences” (p.11).

In fact, when we concentrate on the structure and ordering of the components within a sentence, we are studying the syntactic structure of a particular language, which allows us to discuss different issues such as the words order, the agreements (e.g, between subject and verb in English language) and the hierarchical structure (what modifies what in a sentence).

Briefly, in order to get clear idea about syntax, these are some different definitions given by the linguists bellow:

- Jim Miller (2002, p.xii) states, “Syntax has to do with how words are put together to build phrases, with how phrases are put together to build clauses or bigger phrases, and with how clauses are put together to build sentences.”
- Andrew Carnie (2006, p.04) says, “Syntax, then, studies the level of language that lies between words and the meaning of utterances: sentences.”

From the definitions above we conclude that there are multiple reasons behind studying syntax such as to help us clarify the patterns of English sentences more effectively, and to enable us to analyze the sentence structures in an explicit and particularly a systematic way.

Eventually, the ultimate goal of teaching syntax is to develop the students' writing performance through studying how sentences are structured and how they are well-formed, as well as to help them understand how to set the different rules in order to create coherent and grammatically correct sentences by focusing on the sequence of words, phrases, clauses and the relationship that exists among them.

1.1 The Difference between Syntax and Grammar

Syntax and grammar are considered as two overlapping disciplines that study the construction of words, phrases and sentences in a certain language. Many people think that grammar and syntax have the common area, they refer to the same notion and associate with the same function because both are dealing with rules and structure of the language. However, this concept may not be correct; there is a noticeable difference between them. Syntax is a field of linguistics that studies the structure of the sentence while grammar is a set of rules that determines the construction of sentences, clauses, phrases and words in a language (Hana, 2016). To be more distinct, grammar rules vary from the study of syntax in different fields as follows:

➤ Infographic:

On one hand, syntax is a part of linguistics that deals with the sentence structure (Hana, 2011, p.01). It refers to the arrangement of words and phrases that are used to create well-formed sentences in a particular language. Syntax also studies the rules, principles and processes that govern the structure of the sentence which determine its meaning, such as the following examples:

- a. Succeeded they happy because they were.
- b. They were happy because they succeeded.

When we focus on these two sentences, we notice that they contain the same words with different order. Moreover, in the first example (a), the sentence has no meaning because words are not well structured; whereas, the second example (b), the sentence has a clear meaning with the right order. That is to say the only difference between the two examples within these sentences is the order of words. Hence, we conclude that the word order is an important element in the structure of the sentence and is, in turn, a major component of syntax.

Subject and predicate are two main parts in sentence. Syntax usually studies sentences that have clear internal division between the subject and the predicate. It also, classifies words and phrases according to their function in sentence, such as (Noun= N, Verb= V, Determiner= D. Noun Phrase = NP, Verb Phrase = VP, and Prepositional Phrase = PP). This syntactical classification is called parts of speech which we are going to see later (Hasa, 2016).

On the other hand, Grammar is a system of rules for learning the right use of a particular language. It studies the classes of words, their functions and relations in sentence (morphology); and the structure of the sentence (syntax), all these are categories of grammar. Besides, Brown (1851) states that grammar deals with the different relationships that the words contain in a sentence and insists on learning to write these words with their appropriate letters and correct spelling.

Of course, not all human languages have the same grammar. Grammar rules and structures differ from one language to another, for example English language follows the subject, verb while Arabic language starts with verb, subject.

➤ Focus:

Hudson (1992) considers syntax as the study of the choice of words and how these words are combined with one another, how they are ordered to create coherent and meaningful sentences. ‘‘The term syntax is also used to refer to the rules governing the behavior of mathematical systems such as formal languages used in logic’’ (Varalakshmi, 2012, p.168).

According to Brown (1851), grammar is the art of writing and even speaking any kind of language correctly and appropriately (p.45). It also related to the system of the language that deals with change in the form and indicates the relationship of words in the sentence. ‘‘Grammar is the science of letters, hence the science of using words correctly’’ Abbott (as cited in Varalakshmi, 2012, p.166).

➤ Content:

Syntax is about the order of words in sentence, the types of sentence (declarative sentence, interrogative sentence, imperative sentence, etc.), and the length of sentences (short Vs long sentences). Grammar, on the other hand, is about the rules that govern the use of a particular language, and control the way of how its communication system works, for instance; (tenses in English language).

➤ Areas:

Grammar includes: the analogy which deals with several parts of speech, their definitions and formations, syntax which treats the construction of words and their relations, orthography which studies the correct spelling, as well as the prosody of sounds and pronunciation (Brown, 1851, p.46). However, syntax is a subset of grammar which includes studying the structure of phrases and clauses.

➤ Usage:

Grammar is a general term used for both written and spoken language, consisting of a certain combinations of sounds and signs employed to express our ideas whereas syntax is a discipline of linguistics that can be used to apply correct words that are grammatically in order to convey their proper meaning.

In short, syntax always deals with how words are structured and how they are combined with one another whereas grammar explains why these words are structured in that way rather than the other way. Actually, even though syntax and grammar are two different scopes that can be easily confused in the process of writing, both reflect on how to make up words, phrases and sentences; and how the ideas can be arranged and understood in the use of a particular language.

2. Parts of Speech:

The basic unit of syntax is parts of speech (also known as lexical categories). Parts of speech show us the function and distribution of words in a sentence. Thus, we have two main kinds of distribution for determining the lexical categories: the morphological form and the syntactic structure. The former refers to the kind of affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and other morphological forms while the latter refers to adjacent e.g, determiners appear before nouns (Carnie, 2006, p.43). In addition to that, Miller (2002) has categorized parts of speech into two main classes:

2.1 Open classes: contain lexical categories that allow new members or words which have a denotation applied to people, places, things, actions, states and properties, they are nouns (N), verbs (V), adjectives (Adj) and adverbs (Adv), etc.

2.2 Closed classes: contain a small number of words known as grammatical or functional categories that do not allow new items, for example: determiners (D), pronouns (Pron), prepositions (P) and conjunctions (Conj), etc.

3. Phrases and Phrase Structure Rules:

As we have mentioned before, syntax is about the study of sentence structure. These phrase structure rules tell us about the basic rules for moulding well organized sentences, such rules also allow us to represent the constituent structure of a given sentence in terms of lexical categories and syntactical phrases such as NP, VP, PP, etc (Kim & Sells, 2008).

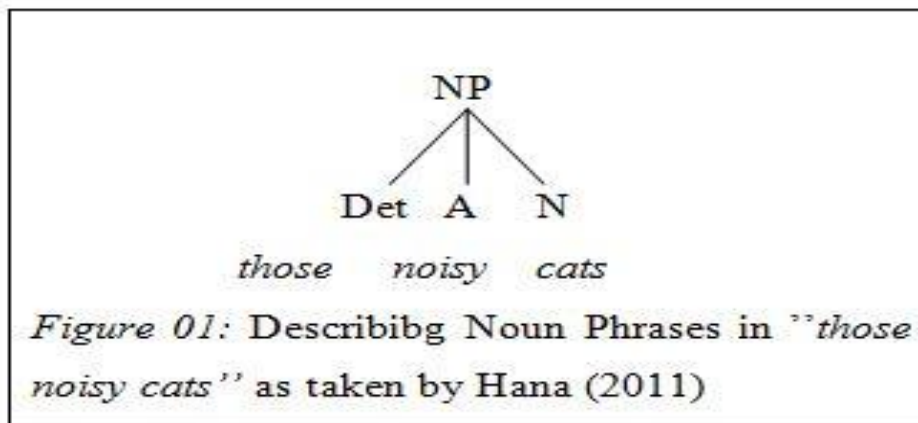
Describing Noun Phrases (NPs)

One important point in English is that, the simplest NP contains only N such as: a noun – John, pronoun –They, or plural nouns –Eggs.

1) NP \rightarrow N [John]

More complex NP contains a determiner followed by a noun, or determiner followed by an adjective followed by noun, or single noun (Hana, 2011, p.06). It leads us to posit the following rule: 2) NP \rightarrow (Det) (A) N [those noisy cats]

This can be represented by a tree structure like:

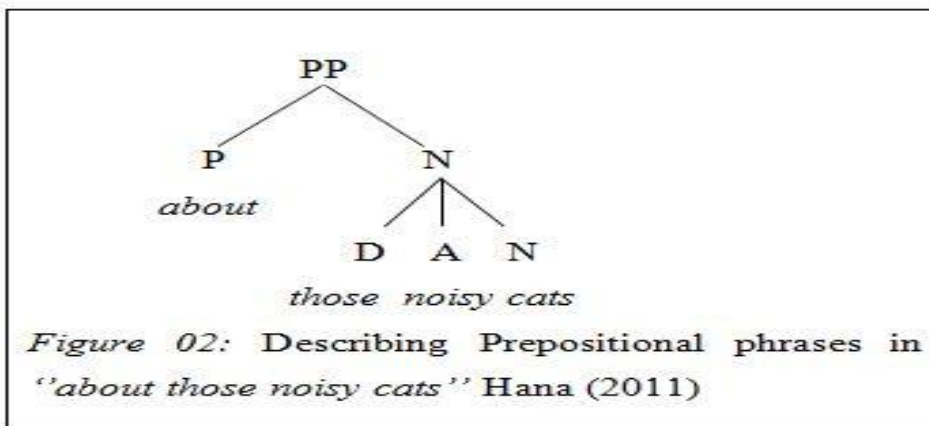


Describing Prepositional Phrases (PPs)

The next major kind of constituent we consider is the prepositional phrase. It consists of a preposition usually followed by a noun phrase (Kim & Sells. 2008).

2) $PP \rightarrow P (NP)$ [about those noisy cats]

From this general rule, the tree structure appears to be:



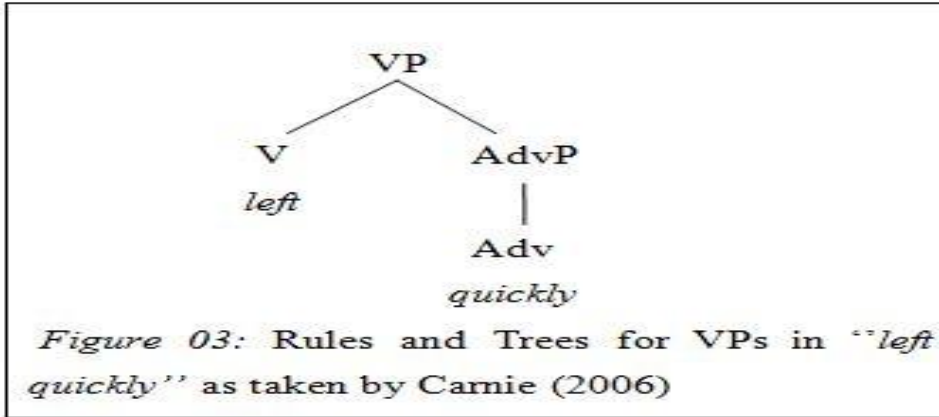
Describing Verb Phrases VPs

Then we have the verb phrase. Minimally a VP consists of a single verb in the case of intransitives, such as:

3) $VP \rightarrow V$ [left]

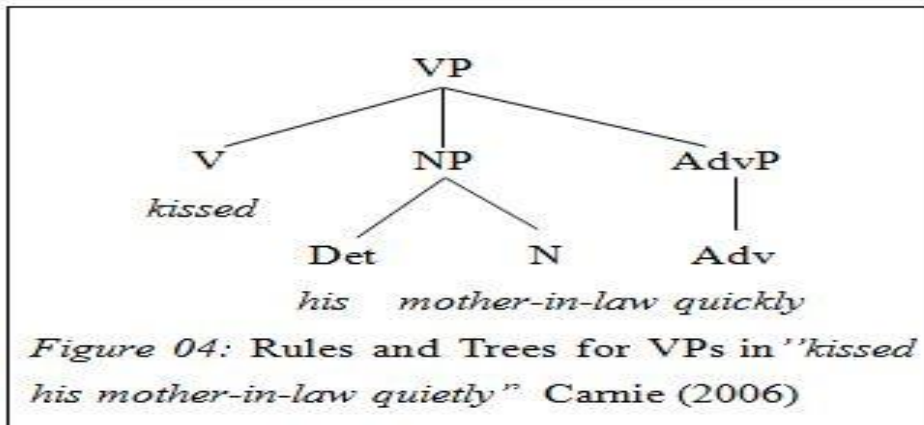
Verbs may be modified by an adverb or adverb phrases (AdvPs) which can be optional, for example:

4) $VP \rightarrow V (AdvP)$ [left quickly]



There is a subcategory of verbs that can take a NP as object in the case of transitive verbs, these NPs also appear after Verb and before any AdvPs (Carnie, 2006, p.71).

5) VP → V (NP) (AdvP) [kissed his mother-in-law quietly]



Phrase structure rules and tree diagram represent several aspects of how phrases are created from other phrases or words; how these words are put together in the sentence. In addition to their order and the different classes they belong to (parts of speech).

4. The Basic Concepts of Syntactic Theory

X-bar theory

According to Carnie (2006), the theory of X-bar idea firstly appeared in Chomsky (1970) further developed by Jackendoff's (1977). X-bar theory is a set of principles that tell us how to construct a particular phrase that has the same structure, internally. In fact, the way the phrase can be constructed is based on the choice of heads (Koopman et al, n.d, p.124).

In this theory, as we have mentioned before there are two types of lexical categories (N, V, A, P...), and (NP, VP, AP, PP...). The letter X is used to signify an arbitrary lexical category or (part of speech). When analyzing a specific utterance, specific categories are assigned. Thus, the X is a variable may become an N for noun, V for verb, P for preposition and so on. The term X-bar is derived from certain structures which are represented by X' (an x with bar over it) because this is mostly difficult to typeset; hence it is often written as X' using apostrophe ('). In English, however, this still read as (X-bar). The notion XP stands for X Phrase and is equivalent to X-bar-bar (X with double bar) written X'' and usually read as X double bar (Carnie, 2006).

An X-bar theoretical understanding of sentence structure claims that there are some general principles which determine the basic structure of phrases and sentences. Actually, this theory comes up with three different rules that define the nature of all structure in a language (Newson et al, n.d. p.87). These rules stand as follow:

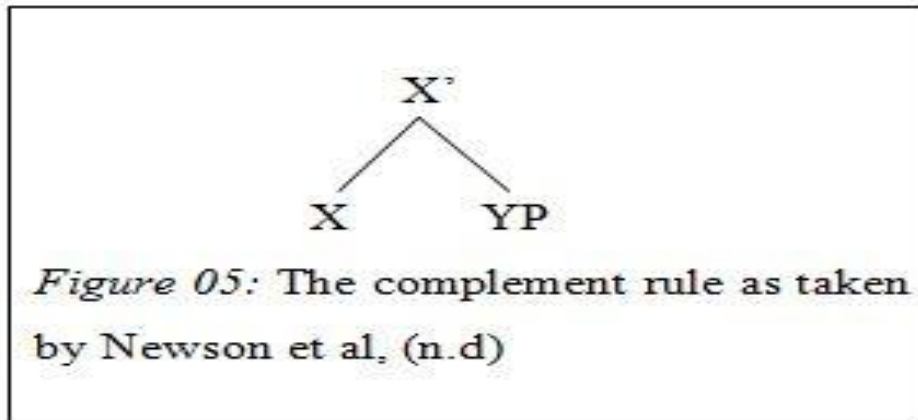
- 1) a. $X' \longrightarrow X \quad YP$
- b. $XP \longrightarrow YP \quad X'$
- c. $X' \longrightarrow X' \quad YP$

Note: X and Y stand for any possible category (N, V, P, A, etc).

➤ **The first rule is called the complement rule :**

2) a. $X' \longrightarrow X \quad YP$

The structure is given bellow

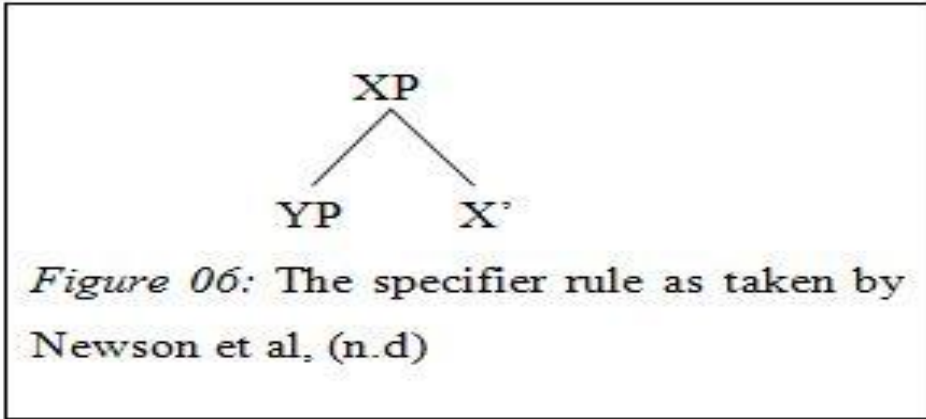


This structure has its own characteristics, first X' is pronounced as (x-bar). Then, it contains two constituents: X is called the head of the phrase and YP is the complement which represents a phrase of any possible category and follows the head. Besides, the head is the main element of the phrase it has the same category as X' . That is, if the head is a noun (N) the X' will be N' and so on.

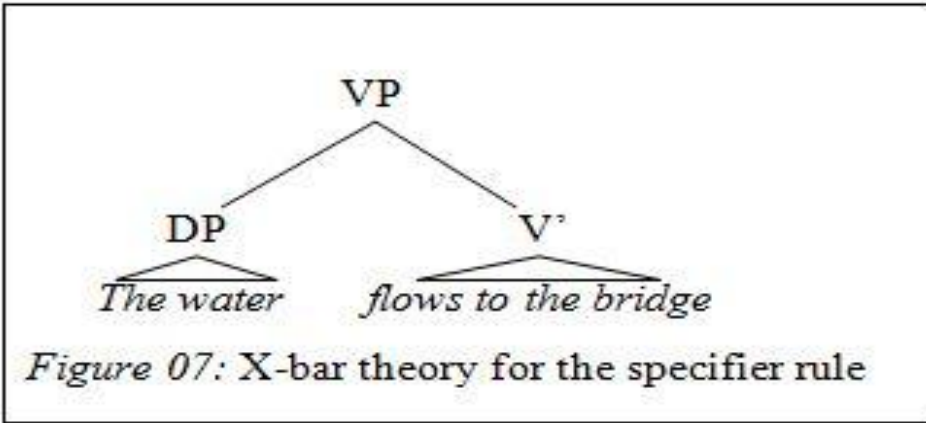
➤ **The second rule is called the specifier rule:**

3) b. $XP \longrightarrow YP \quad X'$

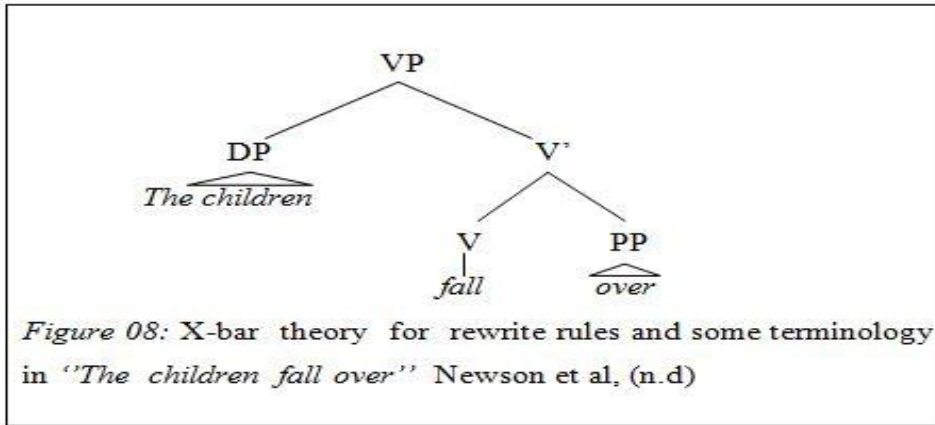
The structure appears like:



In this structure we observe that there are two constituents of phrase: the specifier or the YP of this rule which is a phrase of any category precedes the X' which contains the head and the complement. Specifiers are more complex than complements because they are occupied by certain arguments of predicate or by elements which are related to the head with some specified property (Newson et al, p. 88). For example, in the sentence, the water flows to the bridge



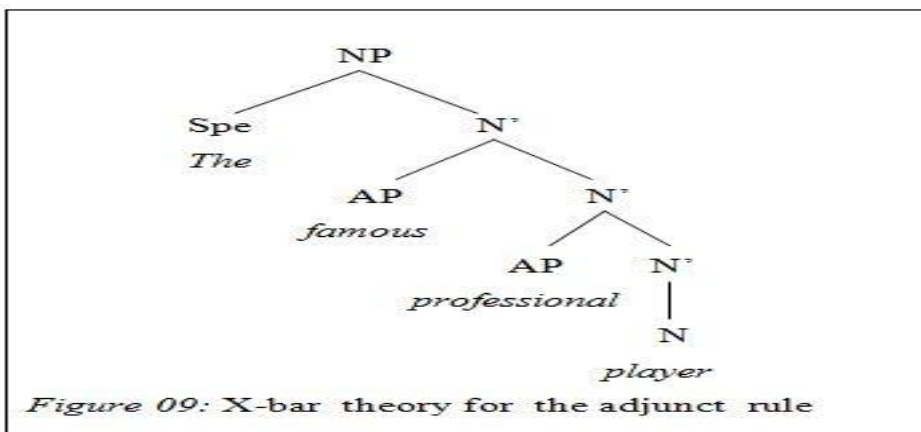
In this case, (the water) occupies the specifier position of the VP and the argument of such specifier tends to be a subject. Moreover, we can notice that the head determines the whole category of the phrase. Therefore, all phrases have head which can be surrounded by a specifier to its left and a complement to its right. See the example below: The children fall over



➤ **The last rule we need to deal with is the adjunct rule:**

4) c. $X' \rightarrow X' (YP)$ or $X' \rightarrow (YP) X'$ (to be revised)

Adjunction rule was proposed by Carnie (2006). Its structure takes an X' level category and generates another X' category. Adjunct differs from previous two rules. It may precede or follow the head depending on different conditions whereas most of the time complement follows the head and specifier precedes it. Adjunction rule is recursive, that is an X' may also contain another X'. See the example below: The famous professional player

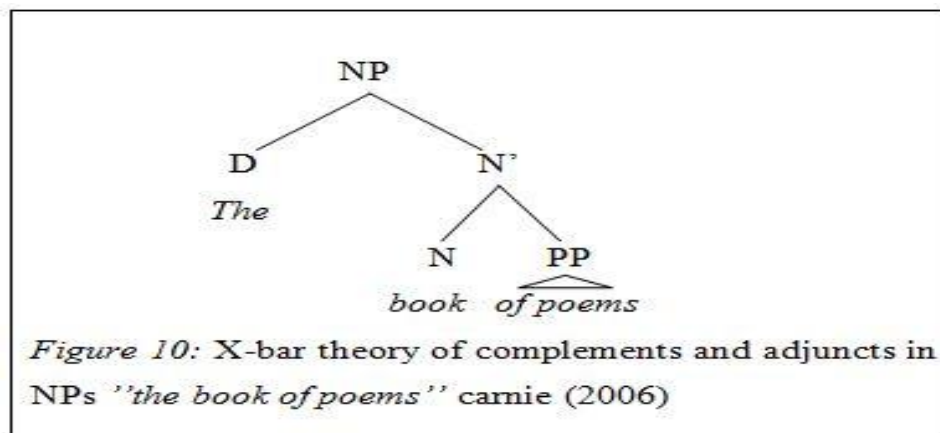


Obviously, the head is the noun *player*. Since we know that the adjective modifies a noun, it therefore can be an adjunct to the noun. We can also see that the structure contains a recursive AP with N' as a mother and another N' as one of the daughters.

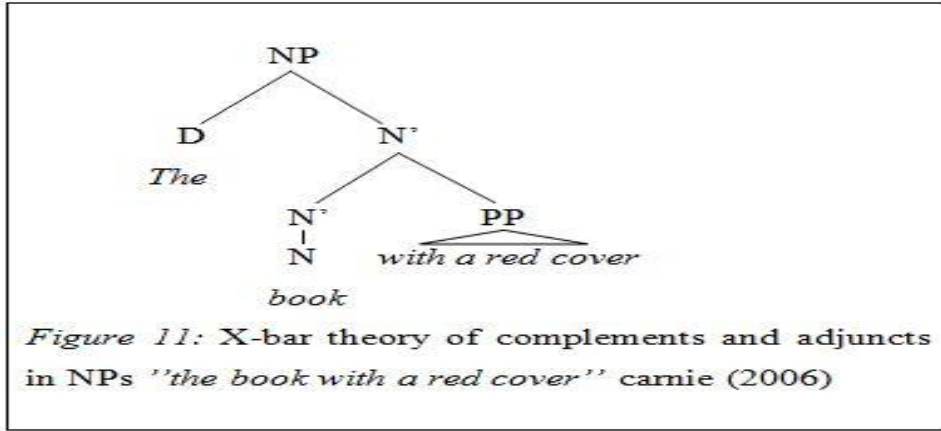
Carnie (2006) has made some specific differences among the three previous rules these differences are displayed in the following examples:

- a. The book of poems
- b. The book with a red cover

These two sentences seem to have the same surface structure i.e the noun phrase followed by a prepositional phrase, but in reality they do not. In sentence (a) the prepositional phrase [of poems] is the complement and takes the form below:



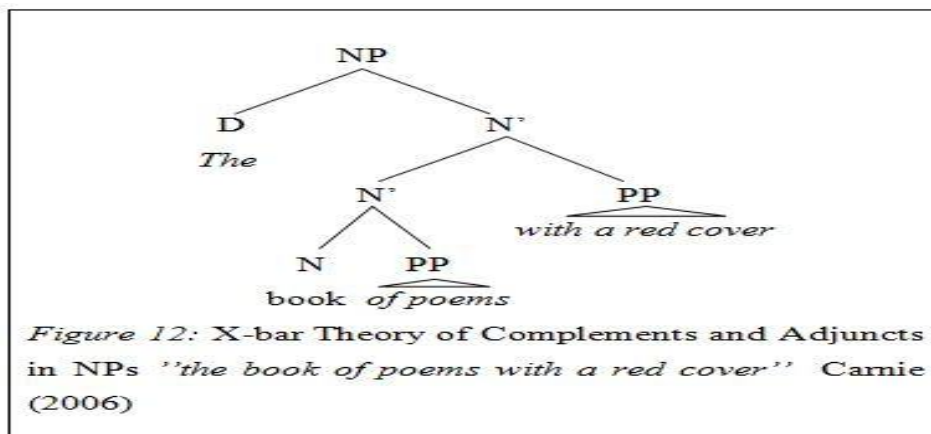
The second prepositional phrase [with a red cover] in sentence (b) is an adjunct and has the following structure:



In fact, the two phrases can be combined into one sentence and become as follows:

- The book [of poems] [with a red cover].

Head Complement Adjunct



We note that the complement is closer to the head than adjuncts. And adjuncts are higher in the tree than the complement, because adjunct rule takes an X' level and generates another X' category, while the complement rule takes an X' and generates X (Carnie 2006, P.165).

Another difference between adjunct and complement is that we may have a number of adjuncts with one complement (a). Also, complements are always closer to the head (b).

Furthermore, adjuncts can be reordered with one another (a) but the complement can never be reordered with adjuncts (c). Let us consider the following example:

- a) The minister of higher education in press conference at the university.
- b) The minister of higher education and of scientific research in press conference at the university.
- c) *The minister at the university in press conference of higher education.

The final distinction between adjunct and complement is that the former can conjoin with other adjuncts but cannot conjoin with complement, and yet the latter can be conjoined with other complements (b).

Now we move to the specifier, Carnie (2006) defines specifiers as a constituent which is a part of XP and a sister to X'. Let us keep the same example given by Carnie in **Figure 12**:

- [The] [book] [of poems] [with a red cover].
- Specifier head complement adjunct

We note that specifiers differ from adjuncts, they are not recursive and phrases can have only one specifier such as: *the city*. But not **the this city*. Moreover, unlike the complement, specifiers can always be in the left or at the top of the sentence structure. As the last difference among them, specifiers conjoin only with other specifiers not with complements or adjuncts, for example we say: *four or five days*, but not **four or hard days*.

In short, X-bar theory is a system designed to deal with three different rules in the sentence and clauses. These rules are summarized by Carnie as follows:

- Complement is defined as the sister to the head X and a daughter of single bar level X'.

- Specifier is defined as an XP that is sister to an X' level and daughter of an XP.
- Adjunct is more general, it consists of an XP that is sister to a single bar level X' and a daughter of a single bar level X'.

Finally, X-bar theory is a very important aspect in the syntactic structure of sentence because it seeks to identify intermediate levels of phrase structure and assumes that syntactic categories are projected from lexical heads. It can include several levels of structure such as the surface structure of the phrase.

5. Deep Structure and Surface Structure

The concept of deep and surface structure theory firstly proposed by Noam Chomsky in 1969, from the phrase marker (tree diagram) of grammatical function based on several different rewriting rules. Chomsky points out that there are two levels of analyzing the syntactic structure of any sentence. One of which is about the underlying structure of a sentence that conveys its meaning; It is the basic structure of sentences and called a Deep structure or D-structure. The other is about the apparent or superficial organization of sentences and reflects the external order in which the word is pronounced, known as Surface structure or S-structure (Newson et al, n.d., p.105).

The syntactic components in every sentence must have deep and surface structure with their differences as well as the relationship between them. Just like the case of passive and active sentences, they have the same deep structure but different surface structure for example we can take the following pair of sentences:

- a. John buys a camera.
- b. A camera is bought by John.

In traditional grammar, the first sentence (a) is called an active sentence, focuses on what *John* does and the second one (b) is a passive sentence, focuses on the *camera* and what happens within it. Therefore, the difference between them occurs at the level of the surface structure i.e the form. In fact, the two sentences are closely related even though they have a different surface structure (in sentence (a) *John* acts as a subject and *Camera* as an object; whereas, in sentence (b) is the opposite, the subject is *Camera* and the object is *John*) both sentences have the same meaning. "It meant that in active and passive sentence the surface is different but the deep structure is the same" (Murni, 2017. p.76).

We take another example of English language sentences that have the same surface structure:

- a. The mother is easy to please.
- b. The mother is eager to please.

Syntactically, both sentences seem to have the same surface structure but different deep structure. So concerning the meaning implied in these sentences, we find the function of *mother* is that of object in the first case i.e the *mother* is able to be pleased, and that of subject in the second case i.e the mother always tries to satisfy the others. The two sentences have an identical surface structure but different deep structure.

From the above examples we notice that sentences of different surface structures can have the same deep structure, and oppositely, those of the same surface structure can have different deep structure (Murni, 2017, p. 77). For example; "I cannot understand her message". This sentence has one surface structure but it might have different meaning such as "I cannot mentally understand what she is attempting to convey", or "I can barely read the message she is writing".

We conclude that the deep structure expresses the semantic content of the sentence that allows the native speaker of a language knows what it means, by semantic rules, whereas the surface structure of a sentence determines its phonetic form by phonological rules (Chomsky, 1969).

6. Sentence Structures:

A sentence is an important part of the language defined as a group of words expressing a complete thought. In order to analyze sentence structure, we have introduced specific methods and symbols; this is where tree diagram is used. Also, we have discussed the deep and surface structure relations in sentence, but it is now the appropriate point to discuss the basic concepts of sentence organization which make up an effective written text, we can usefully begin by reviewing the major properties of clauses (Miller, 2002). A clause may be defined in the same way as a sentence it is a group of words which contains a subject and predicate with a finite verb (Lincoln University, 2016). There are two kinds of clauses:

- Independent clause can stand alone as a sentence and express a complete thought such as: “Learning a new language is useful”.
- Dependent clause cannot stand alone as a sentence and it needs to join a main clause to express a complete thought such as: “Although learning a new language is useful”.

It is known that ‘‘A main clause combines with one or more subordinate clauses to form a sentence’’ (Miller, 2002, p. 85). Thus, there are four types of English sentences classified as: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences.

6.1 Simple Sentence

A simple sentence has only one independent clause with no dependent clause, it contains a subject and a verb, and can stand alone as a complete thought e.g. the baby cries.

6.2 Compound Sentence

It is composed of two or more independent clauses but no subordinate clauses. These clauses are joined together using semicolon, transitional words (however, therefore, thus...etc.) or coordinate conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so). Examples of compound sentences are given below:

- a. Marry travelled to Europe last week; Joe stayed in his hometown.
- b. Marry travelled to Europe last week, but Joe stayed in his hometown.
- c. Joe stayed in his hometown; however, marry traveled to Europe.

6.3 Complex Sentence

Complex sentences consist of one independent clause with at least one or more dependent clauses. The independent clause contains the main idea while the dependent clause adds only extra information, they are linked by subordinate conjunctions such as: because, when, who, although, as, and so that, etc. subordinate clauses may occur before or after the independent clause. Examples:

- a. She was very sad because she left her university.
- b. When I checked the phone, I see the message that you typed.
- c. Although he was not very good, he really enjoyed playing football.

6.4 Compound-Complex sentence

The last type of sentence composed of two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses such as: “Because David studied hard, he got the best mark, and he was very proud”.

Generally, the use of these types in the syntactic structure of the sentence allows the writer to highlight different relationships between ideas and add variety to his writings as well as to help him construct sentences accurately.

7. The Effects of Teaching Syntax on Students’ Cognition:

Syntax is the cognitive ability of human being that has been used to link the form of the language with its meaning. It has been said: ‘one important goal of teaching English syntax to undergraduate students is to help them enhance their understanding of the structure of English in a systematic way’ (Kim & Sells, 2008, p. xi).

Basic scientific investigation has proven that syntax allows students to be able to perform linguistic analysis for both simple and complex English language, in other words syntax helps them develop their abilities to think, reason and analyze the structure of English sentences in a very systematic and explicit way. For example; we know that sentences of human languages have a particular structure and they are not only related to the set of words but also to structure with the relation to the meaning of the sentences, take the following English sentences:

- a. The man kills a lion.
- b. A lion kills the man.

Notice that sentence (a) does not have the same meaning as (b), though both expressions consist of the same structure and the same words; Thus, students who study syntax can understand that the systematic structure of the sentence is not about words order, it is also about the relationship between the meaning and the form of the language (Adgar, 2013, p.1).

Linguistically speaking, the pronouns *she* and *her* refer to the same person and have the identical semantic role in the sentence, but differ in their function and pronunciation such as

- a. The teacher thinks her question is vague.
- b. The teacher thinks that she asked a vague question.

In this case what matters is just the order and perhaps the local context of words and this might be enough to determine the meaning and the form of the sentence (Adgar, 2013, p.02). According to Adgar, a speaker of a language who has acquired a finite set of words in that language can be able to connect the form of the sentence with its meaning (p.07). Let us consider how the syntactic notion of head could be used since we know that it is the essential element of the sentence; the following sentences represent the English rule of subject-verb agreement:

- a. The report commissioned by the United Nations includes some areas of development.
- b. The recent strike by workers have cost the company big financial losses.

Once we have structural knowledge of such sentences we could notice that the essential element of the subject in the first sentence is *report* and has agreement with the verb *includes*, unlike the second, the essential element of the subject is *strike* not *workers* this is why the main verb should be the auxiliary verb *has* but not *have* (Kim & Sells, 2008).

Moreover, Sag and Wasow (1997) argue that students who study syntax can explore the structure of the language in intellectual challenging way and very fascinating activity. They have mentioned two interrelated reasons that one might give for the value of studying human language and its effect on student's cognition.

First, syntax can be a window on the structure of the mind: for Chomsky the grammatical organization of language can provide a clear window on the structure of human mind, he states that human language has a noticeable fact of contradiction between its complexity and simplicity such as learning a computer language requires intensive instruction, while children can acquire at least one natural language easily through exposure. This means that most of the complexity of languages is not necessary to be learned, because we are born know about it, and our brains are designed to learn certain types of languages innately. Chomsky (as cited in Sag & Wasow, 1997, p.13).

Second, syntax can be a window on the mind's activity: this refers to how students succeed using language accurately, for example in the case of words that have a numbers of meanings not just one, as illustrated in

- a. She used a pen. [writing implement]
- b. You should pen the letter today. [To write]

In the case of ambiguous sentences, not because they contain ambiguous words, but rather because those words can be related to one another in more than one way as in the following famous example: *Lee saw the student with a telescope*. This sentence can be explained by given information about which student *Lee* saw, may be the one *with a telescope* or about what tool *Lee* used to see the student (Sag & Wasow, 1997, p.17).

Summing all this up, what we have just seen is that the message conveyed by sentences can be complex, ambiguous or even vague, but in spite of this, students who know the language and its syntactic structure are able to use it accurately and produce well-formed written texts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, a clear definition of syntax was given and an important distinction has been drawn between syntax and grammar. Then, we have talked about two main classes of words and this is not just about what a specific word refers to but also about what writers can do with it, whether to predicate, assert, or modify in the text. Additionally, we explained the X-bar theory which has three levels of structure: specifier, adjunct and complement. In response to this, we identified two levels used to describe any sentence: the deep and surface structure. After that, we introduced four different patterns of the sentence structure in English language. The remaining of the chapter provided an overview of the impact of syntax on students' cognition in order to help them develop their writing, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Teaching Essay Writing

Introduction

In the field of EFL teaching and learning, and when it comes to mastering the four skills, writing seems to be the most difficult skill to master. It requires satisfactory knowledge of many language aspects such as vocabulary, grammar and spelling. It also requires brainstorming good ideas and using the right patterns of organization specific to different kinds of written pieces. Pedagogically speaking, the most common assignment given at university is writing essays. The latter is considered to be a very difficult task to handle by students due to many reasons.

This chapter is mainly divided into two sections. The first section is concerned with writing, its definition and stages of development. The second section deals with five paragraph essays. First, the definition of an essay is given then the main points of teaching essay writing are tackled. These include the structure and the process to write a basic essay. The last element in this chapter is concerned with the relationship between teaching syntax and improving writing in which a review of the main previous studies is given.

1. Writing

1.1 Definition of Writing:

In its simplest form and definition, writing is defined as “a system of graphic symbols that can be used to convey meaning” (Nordiques, 2019). This is the way writing is viewed in isolation of any context or setting. It is the concrete representation of abstract human thoughts using signs (letters) that were conventionally agreed on by users of a particular language. Writing can also be a representation of spoken words. In this regard, Rivers sees writing as “the act of putting in conventional graphic form what has been spoken” (1968, p. 242).

Hinting to longer pieces of writing, Byrne (1988) claims that writing involves the conventional arrangement of letters into words, and words into sentences that need to flow smoothly to form a coherent whole. Evidently, for a written piece to have meaning, it should be smooth and coherent. To be able to write efficiently, not only organization and syntax are important, but also content, grammar, mechanics and word choice. The six aforementioned concepts are identified by Raimes (1983) as writing components. For Bader (2007), “writing is a complex skill that engages the writer in a physical as well as mental effort.”(p.7) According to her, it is the most difficult skill to master and which requires formal instruction.

In White and Arndt’s view, writing is a thinking process which demands conscious intellectual effort (1991). In line with this definition which emphasizes the difficulty of acquiring the writing skill, Collins and Genter (1980) relate this difficulty to the large number of constraints that must be satisfied at the same time. These constraints include four structures: overall text structure, paragraph structure, sentence structure (syntax), and word structure. Since accuracy is highly emphasized as one characteristic of good writing, the latter requires focusing on structures which are not less important than the content.

In a foreign language learning context, Lado (1983) views writing as, ”the ability to use structures, the lexical items, and their conventional representation in ordinary matter of fact writing” (p.248). Similarly, Widdowson (1981) relates the act of writing to the activity of producing correct sentences and “transmitting them through the visual medium as marks on paper” (p. 26). For Bell and Barnaby (1984), writing is a cognitive ability in which the writer is required to control the content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation at the sentence level.

1.2 Stages of Development in Writing according to Rivers:

Like any other systematic process, learning to write goes through different stages. The widely known model of these stages was presented by Rivers (1968) in which he claims that there are five main stages which mainly include: copying, reproduction, recombination and adaptation, guided writing, and finally composition.

1.2.1 Copying:

Copying, as the first stage in the process, is the reproduction of a previously written piece. It might seem an easy task which requires no effort from the part of the learner, yet it definitely helps in learning the right spelling of words, the right association of words and sounds and even handwriting. Rivers (1968) argues that students start by copying what they learned orally or read with the teacher. In this way, s/he would get familiarized with the sounds the symbols represent.

1.2.2 Reproduction:

After being taught how to copy accurately, learners are asked to rewrite what they have listened to or read in books, but without originality (Rivers, 1968). Dictation, as a classroom technique, can be used to practice reproduction. Furthermore, learners would be developing the listening skill at the same time. The main aim at this stage is for students to be aware of the learnt structures, phrases and vocabulary items.

1.2.3 Recombination and adaptation:

The task at this stage might include substituting, transforming, expanding or contracting sentences. In Bader's words, Learners can "substitute or replace nouns with pronouns, transform or turn sentences from the active to the passive form, turn direct speech into indirect speech, or change words from singular to plural" (Bader, 2007, p. 12). Syntax, at this stage, is mostly the main focus in order to produce correct sentence structures. Students might be asked to reorder words to get coherent sentences or rearrange a dialogue.

1.2.4 Guided writing:

At this stage, learners have lexical and grammatical freedom, yet they are restricted by the framework to assure the reliability of the task which should not be too demanding. As an example of the techniques used in the classroom, Kroll (1990) suggests the production of a text by answering questions. The teacher's guidance and monitoring is important. Students are not totally free yet. They may rewrite a short story in their own words but still keep the same theme and genre.

1.2.5 Composition:

The last stage in the process is known as "composition". Given a topic, learners employ the previously learnt structures to write a composition on their own. In this scope, Heaton states that a composition involves the student in manipulating words in grammatically correct sentences which are linked to form a continuous piece which successfully communicates the writer's ideas on a certain topic (1975 as cited in Bader, 2007). Students should be sufficiently trained in the four previous stages in order to perform well in the last one. They would be able to develop and defend their own ideas through narrating or arguing. At university, students should have reached both guided writing and composition stages.

2. Writing a Five Paragraph Essay:

2.1 Definition of an essay:

An essay, in general, is defined as a short piece of writing outlining the writer's perspective or story. It presents the writer's view in a logical and factual manner. Yet, it may also have other forms and definitions depending on the context. Concerning the word origin, it is said to be derived from a Latin word 'exagium', which roughly translates to 'presenting one's case.'

UKEssays (2019) gives two major definitions of the term. As a literary genre, the word essay derives from the French word "essayer" which means 'to attempt'. The Frenchman

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was the first author to describe his works as essays whereas in English, Francis Bacon's essays, published in book form in 1597, 1612, and 1625, were the first works that described themselves as essays. Notable English essayists include Virginia Woolf, Voltaire, Adrienne Rich, George Orwell, George Bernard Shaw and many others. In an academic context, most likely that of University, Essays which are used as a pedagogical tool are independent pieces of work, which involve the use of taught materials as well as students research into the question in order to achieve the highest marks. Students try to answer the question they were given by bringing their ideas, arguments and evidence all together. In other words, teachers use essays to judge students' mastery and comprehension of material.

Another definition was given by Frederick Crews, professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, who defines an essay as "a fairly brief piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way." The two key words in this definition are "brief" which means that an essay is usually a short piece that might be published in a magazine or newspaper and the word "nonfiction" which distinguishes an essay from a short story.

The most important and most challenging aspect of an essay is that it tries to make a point. It doesn't just have a topic; it also has a thesis. An essay doesn't just give information about a subject; it supports a statement, a claim. The main goal of a good essay is to interest its readers, to change their thinking, to get them involved in the ideas it presents and ultimately get them to adopt those ideas (Tagg, 2000). A similar definition states that "an essay is a piece of writing from a personal point of view that methodically examines and evaluates a topic or issue....an essay describes, clarifies and analyses a subject" (Oxbridge, 2019).

Our current study is concerned with essays as an assignment given at university either as a continuous assessment or in quizzes and exams. It is an issue of great importance for students since it decides about their grades and academic reputation. “Essays are written by students to show their teachers their understanding of issues in their subject; in the field of Applied Linguistics they are the most common means of assessment on Masters Courses” (Hunston and Oakey, 2010, p. 217). As second years students at university of M’sila find it difficult to write a good essay, the next part of the chapter will tackle the main points that should be considered while teaching essay writing.

2.2 Teaching Essay Writing:

When it comes to teaching essay writing, there are many elements that teachers need to take into consideration to easily move with their students from a beginner to a proficient level avoiding some difficulties that they may face such as the process of writing an essay, its different types, and its basic structure.

2.2.1 Structure of a basic essay:

According to Oxbridge (2019), Essay writing is an essential component for academic success. It is, essentially, the way in which people within the academic community communicate with each other.” This certainly implies that there is a common essay structure used by academics. Students should know that an appropriate and effective essay structure is essential so that to avoid losing valuable marks. An essay which respects the norms of an essay format has three basic parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. No matter what the purpose of the essay is, the basic structure is always the same (Livingston, 2012). In the same light, Taylor (2009) clarifies the roles of each part in the essay. The introduction includes the claim. The latter is justified in the middle while the conclusion restates and summarizes.

Highlighting the importance of a good essay structure, (Hunston and Oakey, 2010, p. 217) confirm:” An essay containing poor work will get a low mark, but an essay containing strong work will also get a low mark if it is poorly organized”. Basically, a common five paragraph essay structure is described in detail by (Rolls & Wignell, 2013, p 55):

Table 01

An academic essay structure (Rolls & Wignell, 2013, p 55)

Introduction	General statement
	Thesis statement
	Outline of main ideas you will discuss

Body of essay	Paragraph A
	Topic sentence
	Supporting evidence
	Supporting evidence
	Supporting evidence
	Concluding sentence

	Paragraph B
	Topic Sentence

Supporting evidence

Supporting

evidence

Supporting evidence

Concluding sentence

Paragraph C

Topic Sentence

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence

Supporting evidence

Concluding sentence

Conclusion Summary of main points; final comment.

(Paraphrase what is in the introduction).

For more explanation, the different constituents of the essay will be discussed thoroughly.

2.2.1.1 The introduction:

It is obviously the first paragraph in the essay. It gives the reader the first impression about the essay and its writer. It gives an overview about the topic, the thesis and the arguments.

The introduction, according to Taylor (2009) is best seen as a microcosm of the essay as a whole.

It gives an answer to the question, the reasons for the answer, or an indication of the criteria according to which the judgment has been made. The introduction tells the reader enough to decide whether to stop or continue reading. Most introductions end with a statement known as “the thesis statement”.

The introduction usually takes the form of a funnel. It moves from general to specific. In other words, it starts with a hook. The latter is used to grab the reader’s attention and should be an interesting one. To make an interesting introduction, the student can use interesting facts or statistics, a personal story or example or an interesting quotation (Zemach and Rumisek, 2005). The hook is followed by background information in which the writer introduces the topic in general. Before stating the thesis statement, a bridge should be included to smoothly narrow the scope of the essay. By the end of the introduction, the students state the thesis statement which is the main and the most specific sentence in the introduction.

- **Thesis statement:**

It is the most important sentence in the introduction. It restricts the scope of the essay and signals the writer’s position.

Creating a thesis statement is usually the first step students make when given an assignment or an exam question. It simply gives their answer in one direct complete sentence and guides their thoughts throughout the essay. In evaluating essays, it is considered as an important criterion. Teachers look for thesis statement to detect the students’ opinion and the essay type and scope. If students, for instance, are given the following question: “What are the main effects of globalization? The answer would be given in one complete clear sentence which will be the thesis statement. An example of the answer can be:” This essay will discuss the positive and

negative effects of globalization in relation to international relations, trade and business”. The writer of the essay should focus on supporting the thesis statement in the coming part of the essay which is the body.

2.2.1.2 The body

It is the longest part in an essay. It usually includes three paragraphs or more. Each paragraph includes one argument that supports the thesis statement mentioned in the introduction. Body paragraphs, like the essay overall, also have their own structure. A paragraph basically starts with the topic sentence in which the argument is stated. To support the argument, the topic sentence is followed by supporting sentences. The latter back the argument in greater detail and with relevant examples. Each paragraph deals with only one idea. Irrelevant examples or details are not accepted.

- **Writing a body paragraph:**

Body paragraphs are the building blocks of an essay. Each paragraph should introduce only one main idea and provide supporting evidence to this main idea. This supporting evidence can take the form of arguments, examples, statistics, or details. The main idea is often stated in the topic sentence. A body paragraph should include a topic sentence in which the main idea is given and which provides the reader with a map of what is coming next in the paragraph. It also includes supporting sentences, and a summary or concluding sentence at the end. Students are encouraged to use linking words and sentence to associate paragraphs and sentence within paragraphs together. The use of sequence words will guarantee an easy flow between ideas.

2.2.1.3 The conclusion

It is the last paragraph in the essay. It summarizes the main points covered throughout. The role of the concluding paragraph, according to Zemach and Rumisek (2005), is:

- Summarizing the main points of the essay.

- Restating the thesis using different words
- Making a final comment about the essay's main idea
- Emphasizing an action that the writer would like the reader to take

A conclusion should not introduce new ideas. It only restates ideas discussed in the essay.

2.3 Stages of writing an essay:

Throughout time, the view of writing has changed tremendously. The shift moved from a product approach which believes that the final result is the most important part after going through a linear process to a process approach which takes both the writer's interests and the process s/he goes through while writing. The process approach, in combination with the communicative approach, highlights the importance of following certain stages to arrive to a satisfying final product. Unlike the product approach, the process approach describes these stages as being "recursive" or cyclic. The writer can go back and forth in the process to refine his/her work as the stages can overlap. Composing, according to Ouskourt (2008), involves the activities of pre-writing where the students get prepared to draft, then drafting, after that revising and finally editing.

2.3.1 Pre-writing

Also known as planning or brainstorming and outlining, pre-writing is the phase where the writer generates new ideas and details and connects between them. S/he clarifies the topic, the form and the purpose and thus, starting the writing process confidently. The writer starts by jotting down ideas related to the topic. These ideas can be background knowledge or based on notes taken from a lecture or a similar source. Although it is the first step, pre-writing is an essential step that ensures efficiency and productivity. "Pre-writing activities generate ideas,

encourage a free flow of thoughts and help students to discover both what they want to say and how to say it on paper”(D’Aoust,1986, p.7).

2.3.2 Drafting

Drafting, also known as crafting, is the stage where the writer develops ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure. S/he connects notes and ideas generated in the pre-writing stage to make a meaningful construction by referring to the outline. From separated words and chunks of sentences, the writer makes use of connectors and sequencers to write complete thought. The reader at this stage is taken into consideration. Not all the generated ideas will be integrated, only relevant and convenient ones. The writer needn’t worry about mistakes at this stage since there will be a reviewing and editing stages.

2.3.3 Reviewing/revising

It is the stage before the final. It focuses on the feedback given by peers or teachers to make the necessary changes. Writers check for any inaccuracies and find the right solution or substitution. A checklist can be used to check vocabulary, grammar, syntax, writing mechanics and even ideas. Starkey (2004) claims that having a great essay does not come from the first writing, and the writer’s goal is to know how to do this task not what to get by the end. In the same line, Brown and Hood (1989) defined revising as the stage where you check that you have said what you wanted to say and said it in a clear and appropriate way. This stage should be given much attention due to its importance.

2.3.4 Editing

“Editing involves the careful checking of the text to ensure that there are no errors that impede communication.” (Ouskourt, 2008,p. 97). In other words, the writer edits his/ her production for any mistakes in terms of grammatical accuracy and correctness of form as well as

spelling and punctuation. An example of a checklist suggested by Balley (2006) looks as follows:

Table 02

Editing checklist (Balley, 2006)

Criteria	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did I get my spelling right? • Did I use the right punctuation? • Is each paragraph indented the same amount of space? • Have I begun my dialogue with a new paragraph? • Have I kept to the same tense throughout? • Have I kept to the same ‘person’ throughout? • Have I used colloquial language? • Can I replace any words with better ones? 		

The aim of the check list is to serve as a guide and reminder. The student should not miss any criteria before submitting his work to the teacher.

3. The Relation between Teaching Syntax and Improving Writing

Throughout the history of EFL teaching and learning, many studies were conducted to either confirm or reject the effect of teaching grammar on writing quality. As a starting point, in their extended research paper, Andrews et al. (2006) reported the results of two international systematic research reviews which were meant to focus on the different grammar aspects that might have an effect on writing. The results were briefly and clearly stated: “there is little evidence to indicate that the teaching of formal grammar is effective; and that teaching sentence-

combining has a more positive effect” (ibid). That is, grammar in general proved to have no effect on writing, yet syntax, which is part of grammar concerned with sentence combining, made an exception and proved to be effective. To get more insight into the matter, a review of the two previous researches and many others will be discussed to answer the question of whether teaching sentence combining (syntax) has a positive effect on writing development.

To start with, in their paper, Andrews et al. (2006) reported the results of many previous studies investigating the way teaching grammar affects writing. The reported results are summarized in the following table:

Table 03

Previous studies on the effect of teaching grammar on improving writing (Andrews et al., 2006)

Research	Result
Perera (1984)	Decontextualized grammar teaching that was unrelated to pupils' other language work was likely to do more harm than good
Asker, 1923; Macaulay, 1947; Robinson, 196	training in formal grammar does not improve pupils' composition
Boraas, 1917; Segal & Barr, 1926	Grammar proficiency is mainly related to composition in other subjects than in English
Catherwood, 1932; Benfer, 1935	a knowledge of grammar is of no general help in correcting faulty usage

Symonds, 1931; Macaulay, 1947

grammar is often taught to children who have not the maturity or intelligence to understand it

Macaulay, 1947

teaching grammar may actually hinder the development of children's English

The results of the 20th century studies summarized in table 03 are opposed to the possibility of teaching grammar as one way to improve writing. However, a new approach was adopted by the National Literacy Strategy in England and Wales. The new approach encompasses three integrated means to help pupils to write better English: the improvement of sentence structure and uses extensive 'knowledge about language' and increased language awareness. It represents a middle ground between traditional grammar teaching and language awareness. This choice of the process is supported by a research result done in 1966 by Bateman and Zidonis. They suggest that high school students can learn the principles of generative grammar; which would enable them to increase the proportion of well-formed sentences and reduce the occurrence of errors in writing (Andrews et al., 2006). At this point, a distinction between grammar and syntax should be made. According to Andrews et al. (2006), sentence-combining is practical while traditional formal grammar is abstract and formulated into rules. In the same line, another comprehensive study with high degree of reliability and validity (O'Hare's, 1973) concludes that teachers of writing surely ought to spend more time teaching students to be better manipulators of syntax. The results of the study were surprising as eighth graders were writing at the same syntactic maturity level as twelfth graders.

Based on the assumption that facility in generating sentences should make available more cognitive resources for other aspects of composition, Saddler and Graham's study (2005) concluded that sentence-combining skills were effectively improved by sentence-combining instruction and thus, the writing quality was positively affected in its turn (as cited in Andrews et al. 2006). Similar studies are described in the following table:

Table 4

More studies on to effect of teaching grammar (Andrews et al., 2006)

Research	Result
Combs (1976, 1977)	'sentence-combining practice seemed to affect more than syntactic gains, indeed, gains that were incorporated in what teacher-raters consider improved quality of writing' (p. 321)
Hunt and O'Donnell (1970)	gains were two grade levels for the experimental groups, with particular gains in syntactic maturity for black students

Unlike studies mentioned in table (3), studies in table (4) done by Combs (1976, 1977) and Hunt and O'Donnell (1970) resulted in proving the positive effect of teaching sentence combining on improving writing quality although it is worth noting that Combs distinguished between syntax which is descriptive and sentence combining which is generative.

In Andrews et al. words, the 18 studies review came to a clear conclusion that sentence-combining is an effective means to students' syntactic maturity (Andrews et al., 2006).

To approach the relation between teaching sentence structure and improving writing from another angle, cohesion serves as a logical link between the two ends. One of the major works that influenced studies on cohesion is the one conducted by Halliday and Hasan (1976) on their book "Cohesion in English". According to them, there are two ways by which cohesive ties are created: lexical and grammatical cohesion. While lexical cohesion is affected by vocabulary selection, grammatical cohesion refers to the structural content. It is fulfilled using four cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. The three last categories are closely related to syntax. Substitution and ellipsis are used to avoid repetition while conjunction is mainly concerned with combining two textual elements into a coherent complex semantic unit. To achieve unity in a text, writers make use of coordinating conjunctions, subordinating conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs. Cohesion plays an important role in essay writing in that it maintains unity, coherence and focus. According to Zamel (1983, p. 22), "cohesive devices are crucial in writing". Similarly, it was emphasized by Bailey (2003) that text cohesion refers to the clarity and readability in which the writer needs to establish a link through the use of various cohesive devices. The aim of tackling the issue of cohesion in this context is to shed light on the transitive relation between syntax, cohesion and writing. To put it simply, if syntactic features are used to maintain cohesion between text element and cohesion, in its turn, is related to clear writing, syntax is, by a transitional relation, related to writing and can have a remarkable effect on its quality.

As a conclusion, many previous similar studies support the claim of our research. Investigating difficulties of writing in EFL context and for Arab students in particular, Kharma

(1986) claims that those students who have the problem with sentence structures are unable to produce longer sentences requiring subordination and coordination. In line with the previous study, a study undertaken by Qaddumi (1995) shows that EFL students face difficulties in finding ways to employ the different types of sentences and the ill use of some cohesive devices.

Conclusion

When it comes to teaching essay writing, there are many ways to do it depending on the area of difficulty students are facing. Some teachers choose to focus on vocabulary and grammar while others may choose to focus on extensive reading as a way to develop students thinking and enriching their knowledge. However, if the teacher is supposed to start from scratch, teaching sentence structure would be the best way to start. “Syntax is the cognitive capacity of human beings that allows us to connect linguistic meaning with linguistic form” (Adger, 2015). In other words, ideas are easily found in the current age of technology, yet what makes a difference is the way we put these ideas in a creative clear form. Here comes the role of syntax. To test the effect of teaching syntax on students’ writing performance at Msila University, a field work will be realized with second year LMD students at the department of English language and literature. The results will either contradict the hypothesis or confirm it and become part of existing literature.

Chapter three: Field Work

Introduction

This chapter deals with the most part of our work which is the implementation of an experiment on students' writing. The aim of this research study is to investigate the efficiency of teaching syntax as one way to improve students' essay writing. For this purpose, a teachers' questionnaire and a pre- and post test were administered. The questionnaire aims at gathering data about teachers' opinions of the best techniques to teach essay writing while the pre and post-test design is meant to assess the way students structure their sentences while writing essays and to what extent learning syntax would bring more variety, clarity and creativity to their writing.

1. Participants:

Second year LMD students at the Department of language and English Literature at the University of M'sila during the academic year 2018-2019 were purposefully chosen to be the population of our study. Out of four groups, 17 students were taken as the controlled group while 17 others were chosen as the experimental group. Due to many factors such as strike and the students' unwillingness to participate, these students were randomly taken from different groups. In addition to subjects of the experiment, eight teachers of written expression at the same department were chosen to answer a questionnaire

This sample was chosen for many reasons. To start with, second year students have already been in a situation where they were asked to write essays and hence, they are aware of the importance of mastering such a skill. Unlike second year students, first year students need to know first about grammar and the different parts of speech which make a sentence before knowing how to put them in a complex and compound complex sentences. Second, and since we are investigating students' essay writing, the best qualified teachers to answer our questionnaire are teachers of written expression.

2. Teachers' Questionnaire:

2.1 Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was submitted to eight teachers of written expression at the Department of English Language and Literature in the University of M'sila. It was meant to gain an insight into teachers' opinions about their students' essays and how essay writing is and should be taught.

2.2 Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see appendix A) contains twenty-four questions divided into three sections. The first section is concerned with background information questions about teachers. The second section is devoted to teaching essay writing. Teachers give some information about the way they teach essay writing. Concerning the third section, it is entitled "teaching syntax" and is devoted to the view of syntax as one way to improve students' essay writing.

The main aim of the first section is to collect data about teachers' background. Teachers are asked to fill in with information about gender, the degree held and professional experience. The second section on the other hand contains eleven questions. It aims at eliciting information about teaching essay writing to EFL students. Teachers are asked the most common mistakes students make, the different types of essays are asked to write and the right level for students to start learning writing essays. Concerning section three which is mainly devoted to teaching syntax, it includes two questions which are directly related to the importance of teaching syntax. Question 3 is about the necessity of teaching sentence writing before moving to paragraph and essay writing while question nine stresses the importance of both the form and the content of the sentence to help students improve their writing.

2.3 Analysis of the Questionnaire

Section One: General information

Q2: The degree held

Table 05

The degree held by teachers of written expression

	Number	Percentage
Bachelor	1	12,50%
Master	1	12,50%
Magister	3	37,50%
PhD	3	37,50%

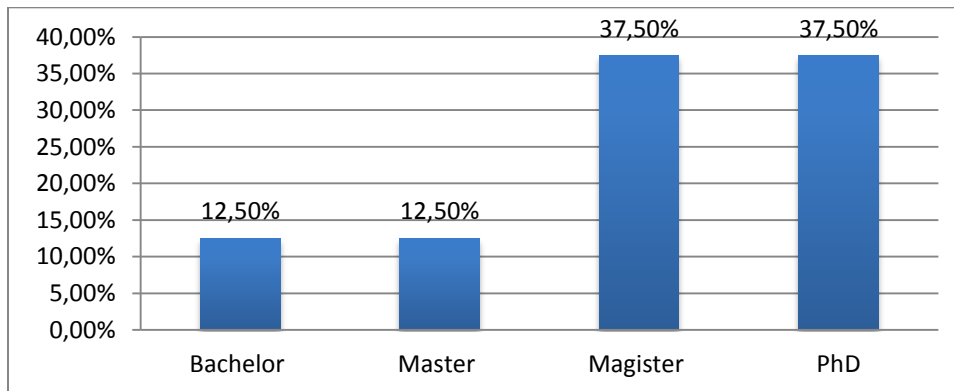


Figure 13: The degree held by teachers of written expression

From the table and figure shown above, it is noted that most teachers with the rate of (75%) hold either a magister or a PhD degree. The degree held by teachers of written expression proves their proficiency and ability to provide reliable data. It also helps in gathering different opinions from different levels of expertise.

Q 3: Professional experience

Table 06

Number of years taught by teachers of written expression

	Number	Percentage
From 2 to five years	4	50%
From 6 to ten years	0	0%
More than ten years	2	25%
Did not answer the question	2	25%

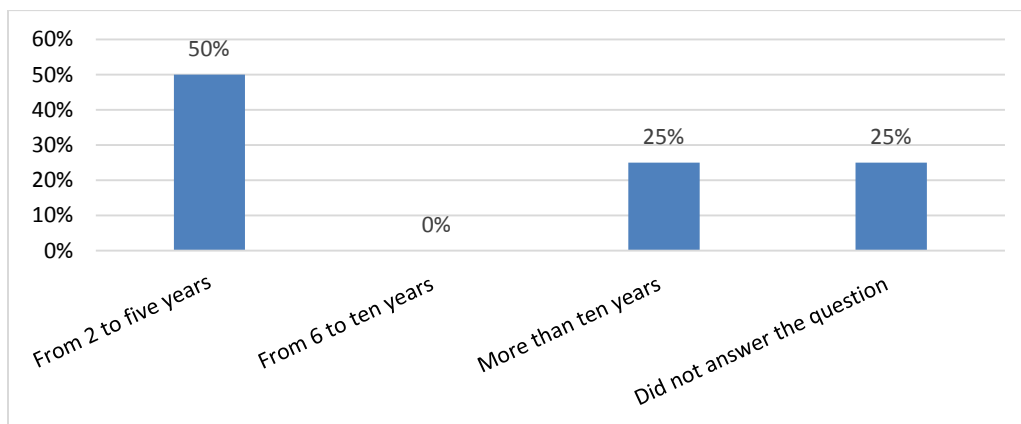


Figure 14: Number of years taught by teachers of written expression

The results in Table 6 above show that 50% of the questioned teachers have been teaching English for less than 5 years; 25% have been teaching English for more than 10 years, whereas 25% of teachers did not even answer the question. This implies that the acquired experience is to some extent reliable to rely on as far as the analysis of the designed questionnaire is concerned.

Section Two

Q2: Is time allocated to “written expression” module enough to improve students’ writing?

Table 07

Sufficiency of time allocated to “written expression” module

	Number	Percentage
Yes	1	12,50%
No	7	87,50%

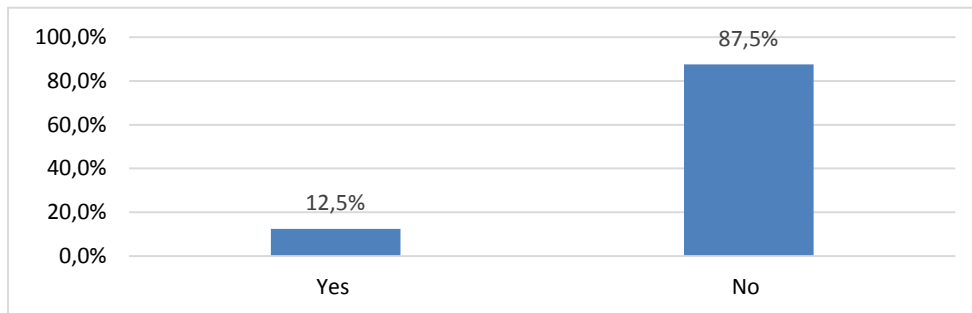


Figure 15:
Sufficiency of
time allocated to

“written expression” module

The results of Table 7 show that almost all the teachers (87, 5%) believe that time allocated to “written expression” module is not enough. This leads us to think that this module should be given more time. Time allotted to "Written Expression" should be enough to cover all the aspects students need to master the writing skill.

Q3: if yes, how often do you teach essay writing?

Table 08

Time allocated to “written expression” module

	Number	Percentage
One session a week	5	62,50%
Two sessions a week	3	37,50%
More	0	0%

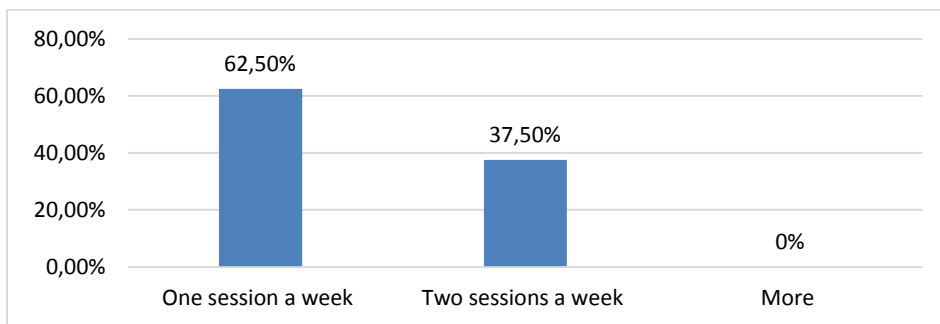


Figure 16: Time allocated to “written expression” module

As it is revealed in Table 8 above, most teachers (62, 50%) teach only session per week while 37, 50% teach two sessions a week. Unfortunately, none of them teaches more than two sessions a week. Considering the importance of the written expression module, it is necessary to

allocate more time for this module as it requires appropriate presentation, more practice and reflection on the feedback.

Q4: Do you think it is necessary to include essay writing in EFL syllabus?

Table 09

Including essay writing in EFL syllabus

	Number	Percentage
Yes	8	100%
No	0	0%

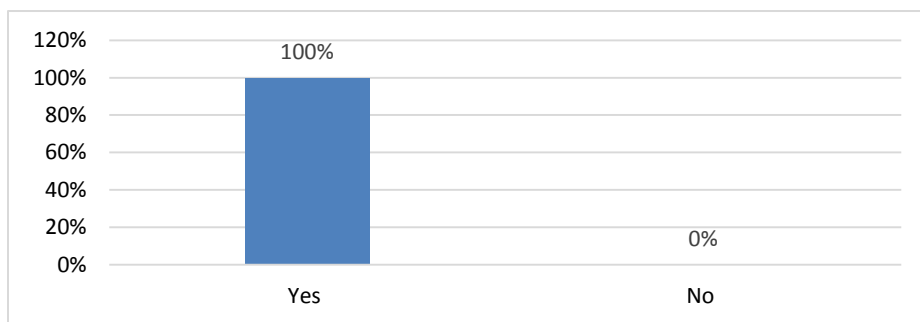


Figure 17: Including essay writing in EFL syllabus

The results of Table 9 show that all the teachers (100%) believe that it is important to include essay writing in the EFL syllabus. The given data reflects teachers' awareness of the importance of mastering essay writing and how it affects students' performance in the target language.

Q5: If the answer is yes (it is important to teach essay writing to EFL students), can you explain why?

While two teachers did not answer the questions, the rest of teachers (06) who believe that it is important to teach essay writing to EFL students assumed that:

- Essay writing is the core to other modules. If you master it, you master everything.

- If students cannot write essays, they cannot write articles, dissertations, etc.
- The writing skill is so important and so is essay writing as one genre.
- It will definitely develop their writing skill in future essays, articles, dissertations, etc.
- They need to master essay writing as they need it later to write their dissertations.
- It's the most important skill that academics should master.

In their justification of their answers, three teachers focused on the fact that mastering essay writing will help students write their dissertations later. Another important argument given by one of the teachers is that essay writing is the core to other modules. Students are asked to write different kinds of essays in different modules. Being able to write good essays will give them the opportunity to get good marks and hence to excel in their studies. One last opinion emphasizes the importance of good essay writing for academics who are constantly asked to write essays for different purposes even after finishing their studies.

Q6: at which level should learners start learning essay writing?

Table 10

The right time to learn essay writing

	Number	Percentage
1 st year	3	32,50%
2 nd year	5	67,50%
3 rd year	0	0%
Master 1	0	0%
Master 2	0	0%

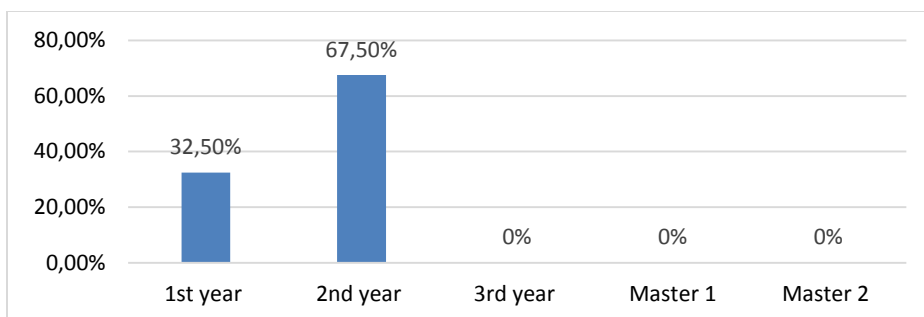


Figure 18: The right time to learn essay writing

Most teachers (67, 50%) claim that the right time to teach essay writing is for second year students. We were expecting such a result for two reasons. First, second year students have already been in a situation where they were asked to write essays and hence, they are aware of the importance of mastering such a skill. Unlike second year students, first year students need to know first about grammar and the different parts of speech which make a sentence before knowing how to put them in a complex and compound complex sentences.

Q7: what is the general evaluation of your students' essays?

Table 11

Students' essays evaluation

	Number	Percentage
Very good	0	0%
Good	1	12,50%
Average	5	67,50%
Bad	1	12,50%
Very bad	1	12,50%

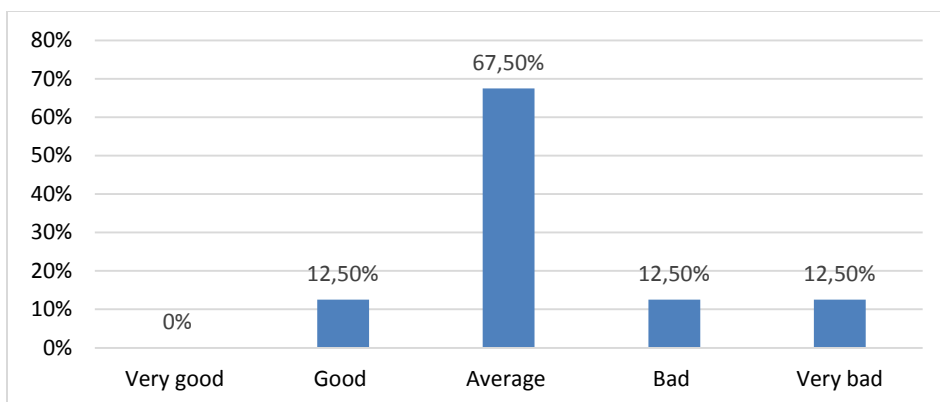


Figure 19: Students' essays evaluation

Most teachers (67, 50%) describe their students' level in writing in writing as "average". Only 12, 50% of teachers describe their students' level as good. The same percentage of teachers thinks of their students' writing as bad or very bad. This means that the writing skill is really a troublesome skill for most students who cannot produce acceptable compositions.

Q 8: What are the most common mistakes students usually make when writing essays?

Table 12

Students mistakes when writing essays

	Number	Percentage
Form	4	25%
Content (ideas)	4	25%
Language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling)	8	50%

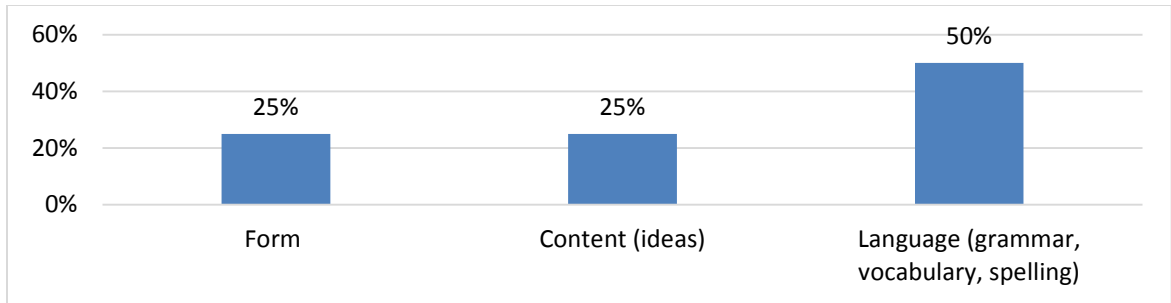


Figure 20: Students mistakes when writing essays

Unsurprisingly, when asked about their students' mistakes, 50% of teachers claim that most mistakes are related to language i.e to grammar, vocabulary and spelling. Thus, syntax and sentence structure are also included. Whatever the reason is, the right solutions should be provided by teachers to avoid these mistakes.

Q9: Do students usually respect the norms of the writing process?

Table 13

Respecting the norms of the writing process

	Number	Percentage
Yes	2	25%
No	6	75%

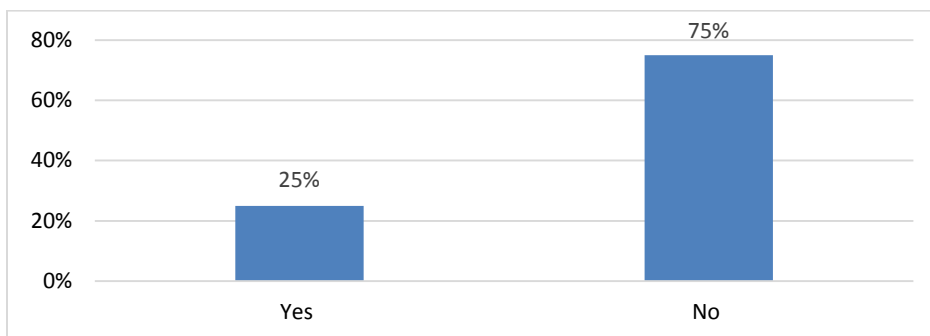


Figure 21: Respecting the norms of the writing process

Results in Table 13 show that 75% of teachers claim that their students do not respect the norms of the process of essay writing including: brainstorming, drafting, editing, and publishing. This might be due to their ignorance of these rules as it might be due to shortage of time especially the day of the exam. Whatever the reason could be, it is important to note that the different stages of the writing process should be followed for many reasons. First, it helps students present a better almost flawless work. During the editing stage, students will be able to correct most of their mistakes. Secondly, students will also be able to brainstorm variety of ideas and organize them into main ideas, details and irrelevant ones.

Q10: If no (they do not respect the norms), why can't they respect such norms?

Trying to explain why their students do not respect the writing process, teachers of written expression gave some hypotheses:

- The students have not yet mastered the basics of writing.
- They still make mistakes when it comes to language (grammar, spelling and vocabulary).
It is highly expected that they do not know about the writing process.
- Each year, we teach them (the students) about writing, but they forget about it easily.
Learners do not have a follow-up, so their level is always limited and the same mistakes are made".
- In spite of the efforts we make with them to improve their writing, my students still make mistakes.
- Before one can write s/he has first to master the language and most students have a very low level of English. The writing process comes at a later stage.
- Our students do not write in the proper sense. Not only is the writing process violated, but also the form and the content.

- Most students do not write essays outside the classroom. Most of their essays are written during exams. One hour and a half is not enough to go through all the stages of the process.

Summarizing the above hypotheses given by teachers in few points, we would say that students might underestimate some conventions of writing which badly affects their performance. The role of teachers is to raise students 'awareness of these conventions through correction and feedback

11: What is the most common type of essays students are usually asked to write?

Table 14

Types of essays students are asked to write

	Number	Percentage
Expository	2	11,11%
Descriptive	2	11,11%
Narrative	4	22,22%
Compare and contrast	3	16,66%
Argumentative	7	38,88%

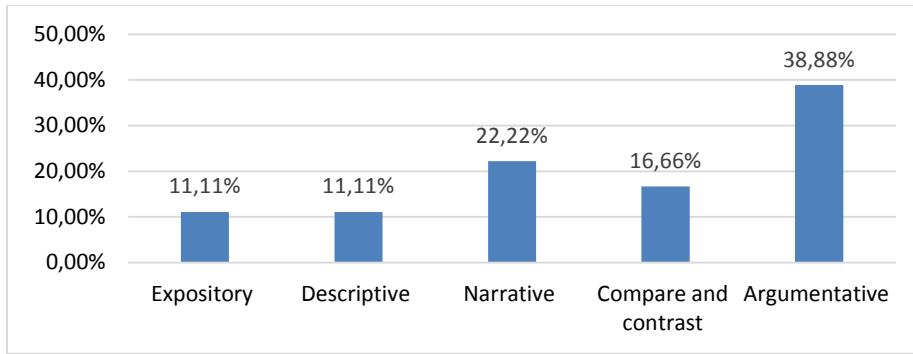


Figure 22: Types of essays students are asked to write

Table 14 shows that the most common type of essays they ask their students to write is the argumentative essay while the narrative essays come in the second place. The choice of such type is expected. First, writing argumentative essays develops both students' writing and critical thinking. Second, most topics represent some kind of the debate and hence an argumentative essay is the best way to deal with them.

Section three:

Q12: Do grammar and syntax have the same concept?

Table 15

The difference between grammar and syntax

	Number	Percentage
Yes	2	25%
No	6	75%

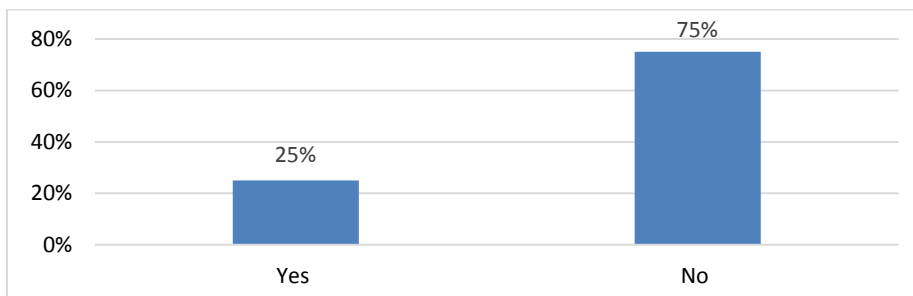


Figure 23: The difference between grammar and syntax

Six out of eight teachers are aware that there is a difference between grammar and syntax while only few think that they are the same. The difference might be confusing but it exists in fact. It is important for teachers of written expression to know about micro linguistics and the different disciplines related to language study in addition to its different aspects.

Q13: If the answer is no (grammar and syntax do not have the same concept), give your own view about syntax.

While three teachers did not give any definition for the concept of syntax, the rest of them gave different definitions:

- Syntax studies sentences structures grammar is more general.
- Grammar comes under the cover term syntax.
- Syntax is the study of sentences and their structure and the construction within sentences. Syntax tells us what goes where in a sentence. Grammar is the general term referring to the set of rules in a given language including syntax and morphology while syntax studies sentence structure.
- Grammar has to do with the structure of words and their tenses whereas syntax has something to do with the relationship between words in a given sentence. It has something to do with cohesion.
- Syntax has a wider concept than grammar. It deals with the unity of the whole text not just the words separately.

Looking closely at the above definitions, two of them which consider syntax as a wider concept than grammar are wrong while the other three definitions share the same idea. Syntax is

mainly concerned with the structure of sentences. It is part of grammar which is related to the nature and function of words separately.

Q14: Do you think it is necessary to teach writing at the sentence level before teaching paragraphs and essays?

Table 16

Importance of teaching sentence writing

	Number	Percentage
Yes	8	100%
No	0	0%

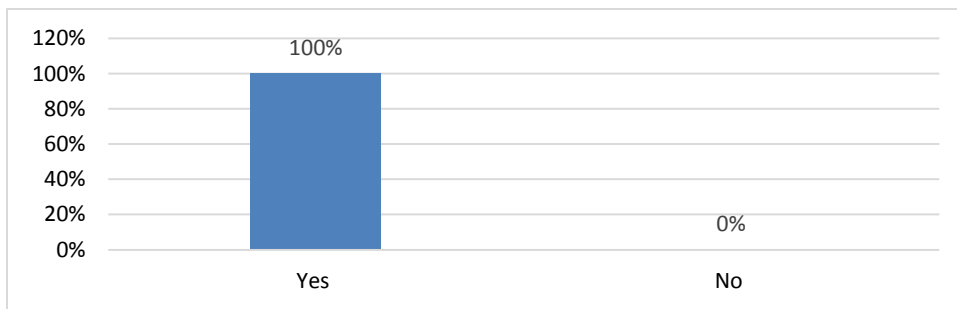


Figure 24: Importance of teaching sentence writing

Table 16 shows that 100% of teachers think that it's important to teach writing at the sentence level before moving to teaching paragraphs and essays. To make a coherent whole, students need to well-structure its parts.

Q16: What is the most frequent type of sentences students use while writing?

Table 17

Types of sentences students usually write

	Number	Percentage
Simple sentence	4	50%
Compound sentence	2	25%
Complex sentence	2	25%
Compound complex sentence	0	0%

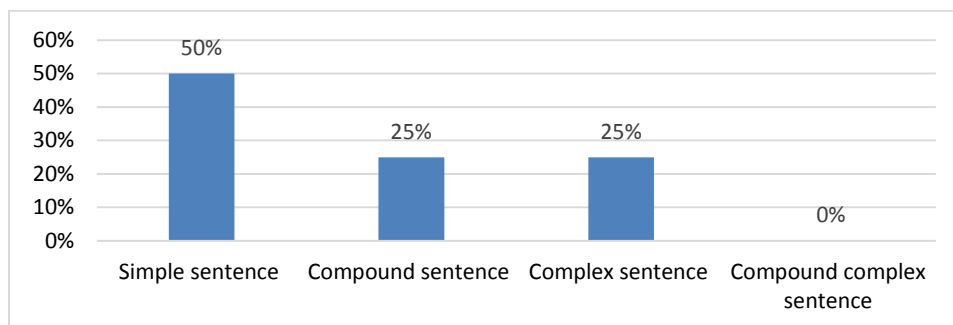


Figure 25: Types of sentences students usually write

According to the data given in table 17, 50% of sentences students write are simple sentences while compound and complex sentences are not that frequent. This might reduce creativity in students writing, but does not affect its quality. Simple sentences are considered one aspect of clear direct written messages.

Q 17: students usually use:

a: different kinds of conjunctions to make complex sentences

b: the same kind of conjunctions in a redundant way

Table 18

Variety of conjunctions used

	Number	Percentage
Different kinds of conjunctions	1	12,50%
The same conjunctions	7	87,50%

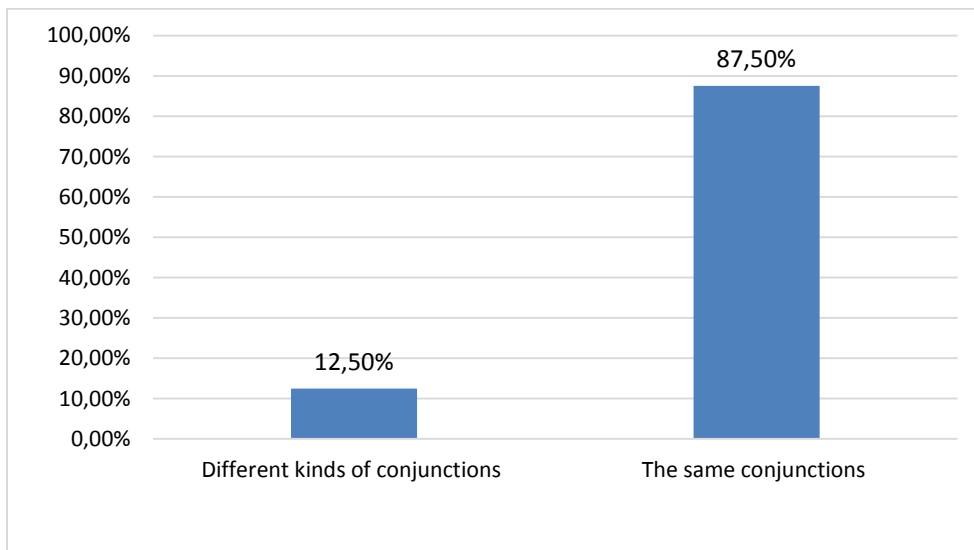


Figure 26: Variety of conjunctions used

87, 50% of teachers reported that their students used the same type of conjunctions in their essays. While writing, students express addition, concession, opposition, cause and effect,

etc. To make their writings interesting, students would better use variety of conjunctions to express these notions.

Q18: What is the best way to improve essay writing?

A: intensive reading

B: much practice

C: teaching syntax

Table 19

Ways to improve essay writing

	Intensive reading	Much practice	Teaching syntax
First	3	4	1
Second	4	2	2
Third	1	3	4

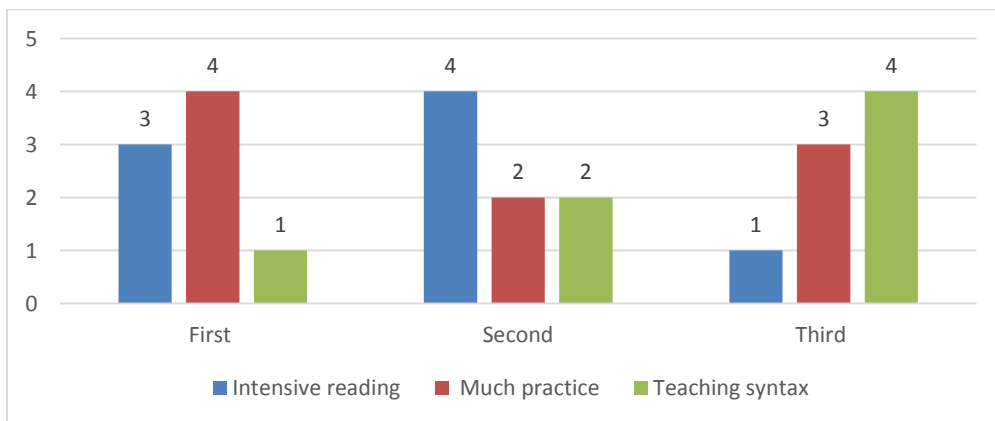


Figure 27: Ways to improve essay writing

Trying to order them in terms of importance, teachers think that practicing writing is the best way to improve students writing. The second best way is intensive reading while teaching syntax comes in the third place. This might be due to the belief that indirect unconscious acquisition is the best way in learning while explicit teaching is old-fashioned and is rejected by many modern approaches.

Q 19: What is the aspect that most affects your evaluation of your students' writing?

Table 20

Aspects affecting teachers' evaluation

	Number	Percentage
Voice	1	4,16%
Ideas	5	20,83%
conventions	5	20,83%
Organization	5	20,83%
Word choice	3	12,50%
Sentence fluency	5	20,83%

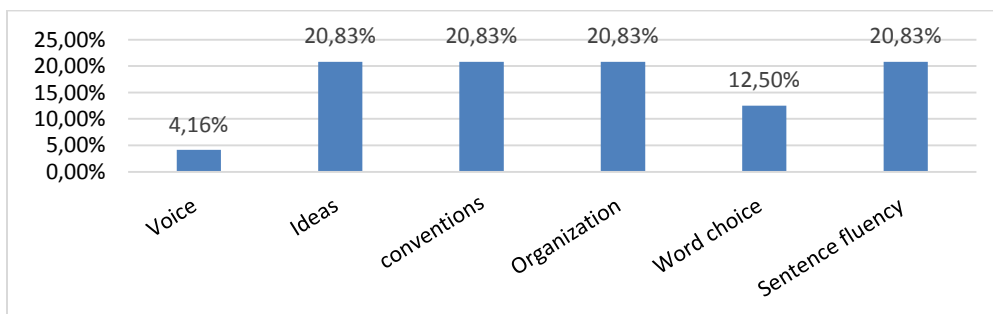


Figure 28: Aspects affecting teachers' evaluation

As it is revealed in Table 20 above, most votes (20, 83%) were equally given to ideas, conventions, organization, and sentence fluency as standard criteria teachers rely on to correct their students essays. In other words, teachers care about the form as much as they care about the content. Not only ideas are important, but also the way they are organized in well structured sentences. This, according to us, is due to the fact that accuracy in writing is an important factor. This opinion might seem influenced by the approach that considers grammar as the most important element in the teaching/ learning process, yet this is a convention of all times and approaches when it comes to writing. Speaking, on the other hand, may allow some violation of these grammatical rules.

Q20: Which is more important to help students improve their writing?

A: the form of the sentence and its structure

B: the content of the message and its message

C: both

Table 21

Importance of the form or the content of the message

	Number	Percentage
Form	2	20%
Content	0	0%
Both	8	80%

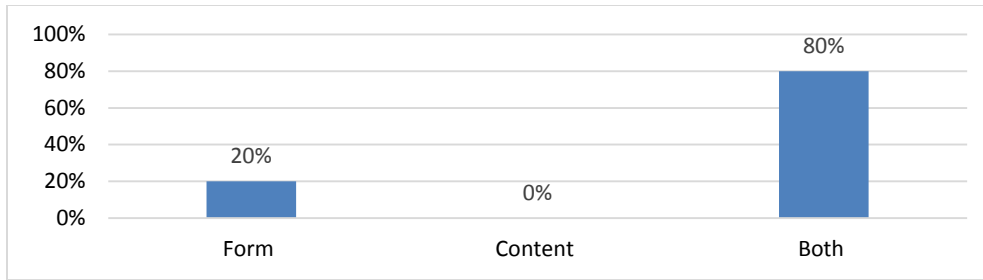


Figure 29: Importance of the form or the content of the message

As 80% of teachers opted for the “C” option, they believe that both the content and the form of the message matter in writing. When teacher give writing assignments, they expect a coherent written piece with good ideas and structure. Evaluation and feedback are given accordingly.

2.4 General Discussion of Teachers’ Questionnaire

After analyzing the data gathered through the questionnaire, we conclude that half the results support our hypothesis while there are still some points that need more explanation. The focus will be on the analysis of three questions that are directly related to our hypothesis. First of all, when teachers were asked about the mistakes their students usually make, most teachers claim that mistakes related to language i.e. grammar, vocabulary and spelling are the most frequent ones. These findings might support our hypothesis which emphasizes the importance of teaching syntax which is part of grammar. Another supporting argument is the teachers’ emphasis on teaching writing at the sentence level before teaching paragraph and essay writing. Their answers reveal their awareness of the importance of teaching sentence structure since correct language is the core of articulate compendious writing. Contradictorily, when asked about the best way to master essay writing, most votes went to “much practice” ignoring the necessity of teaching sentence structure as claimed before.

To conclude, teaching syntax to improve essay writing, as stated in our hypothesis, might seem an old-fashioned solution that supports an out-of-date approach. Yet, and as implied from the answers given by teachers of written expression in the department of English language and literature in Msila University, both the form and the content matter when it comes to writing essays. Students should be able to construct simple, compound and complex sentences as sentence structure is closely related to cohesion and creativity. The way words are put together influences the content of the message. The latter is definitely related to ideas, yet if not presented in a correct way; it might be ambiguous or even rambling. Thus, syntax might not be the only way to teach essay writing, but it surely is one of the best and would preferably be the first step to do so.

3. The Experimental Study

3.1 Population

The experimental design is carried out at the department of English language and literature at Msila University on a sample of population selected from 2 year students. 34 students have been invited to participate in this study. 17 students are randomly selected as the experimental group while the other half of students (17) is the control group. Due to many factors such as strike and the students' unwillingness to participate, these students were randomly taken from different groups. Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested to either confirm or refute our hypothesis.

3.2 Content and Procedure:

3.2.1 The method used to evaluate students' essays:

To score their students' written productions, teachers usually use a rubric that includes some criteria like relevance, coherence, writing mechanics and punctuation. However, and since

we are concerned with syntax in our research, we designed a rubric (see Appendix C) in which the criteria are directly related to syntax. These criteria include capitalization, punctuation, parallelism, sentence length and wording makes sense. These dimensions are scored four points each. If we take one of these criteria (sentence length) as an example, it is scored as follows:

Consistently uses sentences of appropriate length → 4 points

Usually uses sentences of appropriate length → 3 points

Sometimes uses sentences of appropriate length → 2 points

Rarely uses sentences of appropriate length → 1 point

3.2.2 Pre-test : Description and results

Both the control and the experimental groups were pre-tested. Since we are testing essay writing proficiency, participants were asked to write an argumentative essay in which they defend their opinion about the advantages and disadvantages of using facebook as a social medium (see Appendix B). The type of the essay was intentionally chosen to be argumentative because it is the most common type of essays students are usually asked to write in other modules. The topic (facebook) is related to their daily life experience. The time allocated for the pre-test was one hour and a half i.e the same amount of time students are given during exams.

To correct students' essays, we designed a rubric which includes criteria related to syntax (sentence structure, punctuation). We could not use the rubrics usually used to evaluate essays because they include other criteria that are not related neither to the method used nor to the data we aim to collect.

3.2.3 Results of the pre-test:

After calculating the means of both the experimental and control groups, the following results were obtained:

Table 22

Results of the pre-test

	Mean	Mean difference
Experimental group	9.9412	
Control group	9.5588	- 0, 38235

For a clearer comparison of the results, the data are presented in diagram (18):

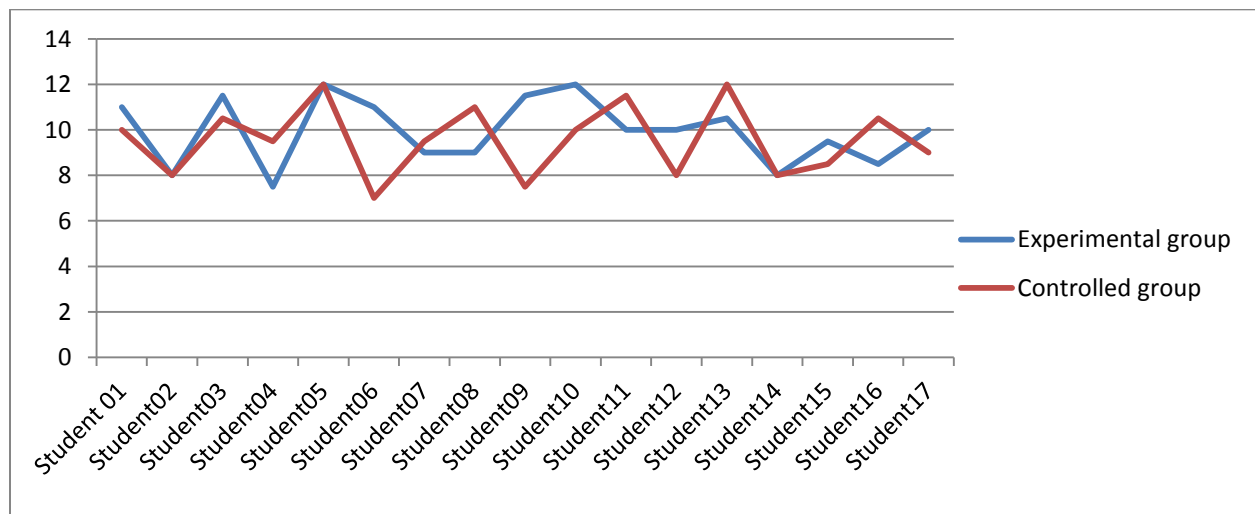


Figure 30: comparison of the pre-test results

3.2.4 Analysis of the pre-test:

As shown in table (18), the control group has scored 9.5588 whereas the experimental group scored 9.9412. Comparing the means of the two groups, there seems to be no significant difference between the performances of the two groups in the pre-test. So, as evident in figure (18), the two groups started with the same proficiency level.

3.2.5 The treatment period: description

The treatment period lasted for six weeks, yet this period was interrupted by an extended spring holiday which unusually lasted for one month. Thus, the experiment took place from January 27th to February 17th and was resumed after the holidays from April 14th to April 22nd. The experimental group received experimental conditions in an additional session (see Appendix F) while the control group was differently taught about essay writing during written expression sessions.

Lessons were presented in the frame of a PPU lesson (presentation, practice, use). We opted for the PPU way since it develops the writing skill as students are asked to write during the use phase. In addition, it is most convenient way used by teachers teach grammar. The structure at hand in presented through examples. Students observe and discuss the structure and punctuation of sentences before doing some meaningful activities. After the practice phase, students are asked to write their own sentences. The last task was usually left as homework because of time shortage. To monitor students' progress, sentences written by students were regularly corrected by the instructor.

3.2.6 Post-test description and analysis:

To determine the effectiveness of the instruction the experimental group received the experimental and control group were post-tested after the treatment period. The same tool used

in the pre-test was used in the post test. Students were asked to write an essay about the same topic (facebook) in the same allocated time (90 minutes). Post-test were scored using the same criteria used in the pre-test (see appendix 3).

After calculating the means of both the experimental and control groups, the following results were obtained:

Table 23:

Results of the post-test

	Mean	Mean difference
Experimental group	11.6176	
Control group	9.9118	-1.70588

As shown in table (19), scores of both groups have improved compared to pre-test results. The control group has scored 9.9118 with a slight improvement difference of 0.353 while the experimental group has scored 11.6176 with a remarkable improvement of 1.6764. These results indicate that the students in the experimental group definitely learned something during the treatment period. The difference is clearly shown in the following figure:

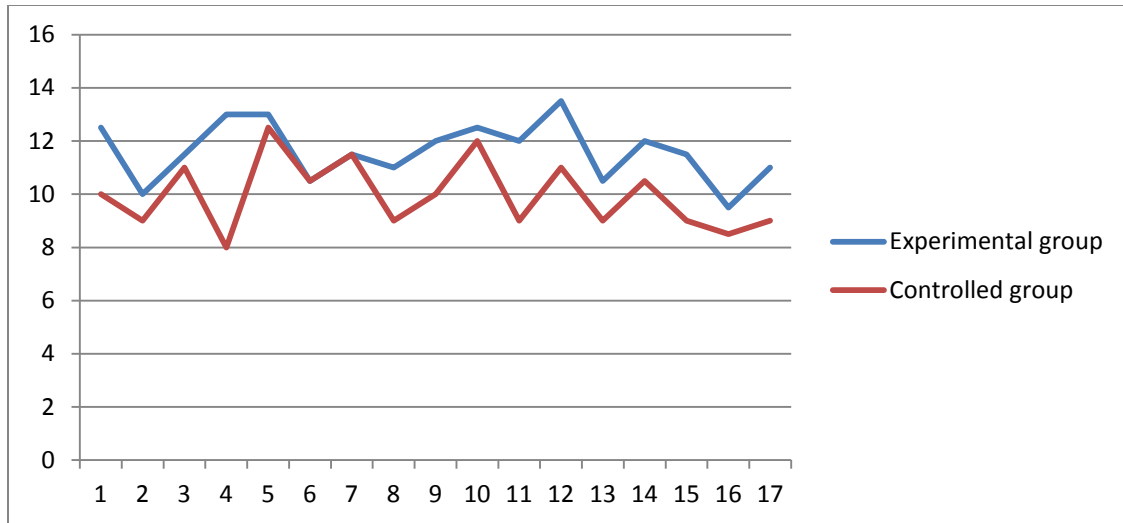


Figure 31: students' scores in the post-test

2.4 Data analysis: comparison of results and means

2.4.1 Comparing the means of the pre-test

The table indicated that there was no remarkable difference (0.32%) between the two groups before the treatment period. Both the experimental and the control groups started with the same level. Considering the means of both groups, they both faced some difficulties in structuring sentences especially complex ones. Mistakes of punctuation were also frequent.

Table 24

The difference between the means of the pre-test

	Experimental group	Control group	The difference
Mean	9.9412	9.5588	-0, 38235
SD	1.44571	1.57006	SD= 0.12435

2.4.2 Comparing the means of the post-test

Comparison between the results of both groups in the post-test is shown in the following table:

Table 25

The difference between the means of the post-test

	Experimental group	Control group	The difference
Mean	11.6176	9.9118	-1.70588
SD	1.11144	1.25294	SD= 0.1415

In the post-test, the experimental group did better than the control group. Teaching syntax proved to help the participants improve the structure of the sentences they wrote, the use of punctuation marks, and parallelism of sentences. On the other hand, students of the control group made the same mistakes as in the pre-test. The difference between the two groups' achievement was evident with a difference of -1.70588.

2.5 T-test analysis:

Table 26

Post-test T-test Analysis

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

									Lower	Upper
test	Equal variances assumed	.434	.515	-4.199-	32	.000	-1.70588-	.40621	-2.53331-	-.8784
	equal variances not assumed			-4.199-	31.551	.000	-1.70588-	.40621	-2.53377-	-.8779

Table (26) shows that the sig value (sig=0.51) is greater than 0.5. This indicates that the two groups are homogeneous and thus can be subjected to further comparison of means. Comparing the means of the experimental and control groups in the post test, we notice that the mean of the control group is 9, 91 with a standard deviation of 1,25 while the mean of the experimental group is 11, 61 with a standard deviation of 1, 11. To test the significance of this difference, t-test for Equality of Means gave the following results. The Sig (2-Tailed) value (=0) is less than 0.05, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of the two groups. Moreover, the t value ($t_{32} = -1.7$) is a negative and statistically significant value at $\alpha=0.05$ with a certainty level of 95%. All in all, the performance of the experimental group in the post-test exceeds that of the control group.

4. Discussion of the Results

The findings of this study indicate that teaching syntax to second year LMD students can help them improve their writing. This conclusion was made based on the performance of the experimental and control groups in the post-test. The former showed a remarkable improvement in writing different types of sentences using the right conjunctions. The result was that their

essays were fluid, focused and coherent. Essays produced by the control group, on the other hand, can be described as circuitous and discursive. Too much irrelevant information was presented using indirect loose language. Only the structure of the essay was respected by both groups.

In addition to sentence structure, punctuation was used as another criterion to evaluate students' writing. After the treatment period, the experimental group was able to use punctuation marks effectively. Unlike their performance in the pre-test, they used commas with complex sentences and semi-colons and commas with compound sentences. The control group; however, still face some difficulties in placing commas in complex sentences.

Concerning punctuation, both the control and the experimental groups supply the right capitalization consistently throughout their essays. Proper nouns were not found in an essay about facebook, but letters were capitalized at the beginning of each and every sentence. This result indicates that capitalization represent no difficulty for students.

For parallelism, the experimental group highly excelled in balancing their sentences. When writing compound sentences, students were able to maintain parallel construction which made their essays easier to process. The control group, on the other hand, seems to face difficulty in balancing similar phrases or clauses that have the same structure although parallelism is one aspect of grammar that should not be neglected.

The last criterion used to evaluate students' essays was "wording makes sense". Each sentence in an essay should have a "meaning" and a function. Essays written by the experimental group satisfactorily include well-stated thesis statements and topic sentences. Moreover, the following supporting sentences, details and examples were organized in a meaningful coherent way. Essays written by the control group, however, did not include sentences with clear

functions. In other words, students knew what a thesis statement and topic sentence is, but could state one in a complete sentence neither put it in the right place. As a result, ideas were not clearly presented and meaning was lost. Lack of organization is usually due to jotting ideas without outlining, drafting or editing.

It is worth noting that the criteria used to evaluate students' essays were all related to syntax and to the intervention made in the treatment period. Before that period, both the control and the experimental groups were pre-tested. The same criteria were used to evaluate their essays. After receiving short but intensive instruction by the experimental group, both groups were post-tested. Comparing the means of the two groups in the pre-test, both groups showed an average level in writing (EG \bar{x} =9.94, CG \bar{x} =9.55). The mistakes students made were common in both groups. They were mainly related to parallelism, sentence structure, punctuation and cohesion. Performance of the same groups, however, differed in the post-test (EG \bar{x} = 11.61, CG \bar{x} = 9.91) with a mean difference of 1.7. This suggests that teaching syntax has a positive effect on improving students' writing. Thus, the results obtained confirms the hypothesis of the present study and presents teaching sentence structure and combining as one way to improve students' essay writing in addition to reading and practice.

Conclusion

To help teachers of written expression and students who work on improving their writing performance, the present study seeks to provide another solution to approach writing difficulties. Teaching syntax is hypothesized to be an efficient technique to improve essay writing. To get more insight and to test our hypothesis, a questionnaire was submitted to teachers of written expression. In addition, an experiment was designed and conducted with second year students at the department of English language and literature in Msila University. The data obtained from the post-test shows a remarkable improvement in the experimental group performance.

Furthermore, teachers' answers reveal their awareness of the importance of teaching sentence structure as the basic part in any written piece and the form of the essay is as important as the content. All in all, the results obtained confirm the hypothesis of our study and suggest the importance of teaching syntax as a technique used to improve students' essay writing.

General Conclusion

Writing, as it is widely known, is the most difficult skill to master. Yet, its importance as a productive skill in using the target language is undeniable. Thus, it is essential for academics learning and using the target language to write in an efficient clear way as a means to communicate with their peers. Students at university make part of these academics who are constantly asked to write essays at university, not only in written expression module but also in other modules. To develop this skill, our present study attempts to provide teaching syntax as one solution. The idea comes from the fact that to be able to write paragraphs and essays, students need first to write correct sentences of different types using the right conjunction and parallel constructions. Thus, the main aim of this research is to test the effect of teaching syntax to second year students at Msila University on their essay writing.

In chapter one, we basically gave a systemic definition of syntax and how it differs from grammar followed by a discussion of the main aspects of the theory of syntax. Moreover, we tackled the syntactic structure in addition to the effects of teaching syntax on learners' cognition. The second chapter dealt with essay writing, its definition, teaching stages and process. The last section was about the relation between teaching syntax and essay writing. The third chapter presented the methods that were used and gave description and results of the data obtained. The results provided by both the questionnaire, the pre-test and post-test were in favor of our hypothesis. Essays produced by the experimental group in the post-test included clear and well-structured sentences. In addition, punctuation and capitalization were carefully used. Their use of different sentence types brought variety to their writing in addition to the creative presentation of ideas.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Since studies that have ever been conducted were meant to provide answers to research problems, ours is not an exception. Based on the results obtained, and as a modest contribution to the field of EFL teaching and learning in general and to teach the writing skill in particular, we recommend the following:

- a. As sentence structuring and combining proved its effectiveness in making significant improvement on students' essay writing, it is necessary to include teaching syntax within writing curriculum programs. The syllabus taught in the treatment period (see appendix 4) can be adopted by teachers of written expression to teach syntax to second year students. The different types of sentences and clauses should be tackled in addition to parallelism and wordiness.
- b. Teachers are also asked to raise students' awareness of the importance of mastering essay writing. The latter is not only need during exams, but also required in competitions and contests for further studies.
- c. One important technique to make students write more essays is to include essay writing as an instruction in exams. Not only teachers of written expressions can do it, but also teachers of other modules. It is important for every teacher to specify the criteria he/she is looking for in students' essays and to focus on the type of essay which corresponds to the topic at hand.
- d. Coordination and gradual instruction is another important point to take into consideration. As a suggestion for an effective writing program, teaching syntax in one semester followed by teaching paragraph writing in the second semester will assure a gradual improvement of the writing skill with coordination of teachers of grammar who would be teaching parts of speech at the same time. For third year

students, much practice of writing different types of essays would be preferred. Moving gradually from sentence to paragraph and then essay writing would give students the opportunity to acquire the basics and be motivated to write.

- e. At last but not least, the role of feedback cannot be neglected. Teachers of written expression should also focus and be consistent in providing feedback about their students' writing. Knowing their weaknesses, students would be able to find the right solution to be at the level of grammar, syntax, vocabulary or organization.

In a nutshell, the findings of our research would hopefully contribute to the field of EFL teaching and learning and to solve problems related to developing the writing skill. As the setting and challenges differ, more research in aforementioned area is required. Just like difficulties differ, so do opinions, efforts, and insights.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a research on teaching syntax to improve essay writing. It aims at finding out teachers' opinions about ways to teach essay writing and difficulties faced by students.

We would be thankful if you could fill in this questionnaire.

Section one: Background information

1. Gender: male female
2. degree held : bachelor
Master
Magister
PhD
3. Professional experience: number of years

Section two: Teaching essay writing

1. Is time allocated to “written expression” module enough to improve students’ writing skill?
Yes no
2. Have you taught “essay” writing before?
Yes no
3. Do you think it is necessary to include “essay writing” in EFL syllabus?
Yes no

4. At which level should learners start learning “essay writing”?

1st year

2nd year

3rd year

Master 01

Master 02

5. what is the general evaluation of your students essays:

Very good

Good

Average

Bad

Very bad

6. What are the most common mistakes students usually make when writing essays? You can choose more than one.

Form (layout)

Content (ideas)

Language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling)

7. Do students usually respect the norms of the writing process (brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing, and publishing)?

Yes

no

8. What is the most common type of essays students are usually asked to write:

Expository

- Descriptive
- Narrative
- Compare and contrast
- Argumentative

Section three: teaching syntax

1. Do you think it is necessary to teach writing at the sentence level before moving to teach paragraphs and essays?

Yes no

2. What is the most frequent type of sentences students use while writing? Order them according to frequency

- Simple sentences
- Compound sentences
- Complex sentences
- Compound complex sentences

3. Students usually use:

- Different kinds of conjunctions to make complex sentences
- The same conjunctions in a redundant way

4. What is the best way to improve essay writing? Rank them according to importance

- Intensive reading
- Much practice
- Teaching syntax

If there are other ways, what are they?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you.

Appendix B

The Pre-test and Post-test Instruction

“Facebook is one of the most well- known social media that have a great influence on people”. As a facebook user, write a five paragraph argumentative essay in which you highlight both its advantages and disadvantages.

Appendix C

The Rubric Used to Evaluate Essays

Table C1

The rubric used to evaluate essays

	Excellent (4 pts)	Proficient (3pts)	Acceptable (2pts)	Limited (1pt)
capitalization	Consistently uses capitals correctly	Usually uses capitals correctly	Sometimes uses capitals correctly	Rarely uses capitals correctly
Punctuation	Consistently uses punctuation correctly	Usually uses punctuation correctly	Sometimes uses punctuation correctly	Rarely uses punctuation correctly
Parallelism	Consistently uses parallel structures	Usually uses parallel structures	Sometimes uses parallel structures	Rarely uses parallel structures
Sentence length	Consistently uses sentences of appropriate length	Usually uses sentences of appropriate length	Sometimes uses sentences of appropriate length	Rarely uses sentences of appropriate length
Wording makes sense	Consistently uses sentences which make sense	Usually uses sentences which make sense	Sometimes uses sentences which make sense	Rarely uses sentences which make sense

08
20

Facebook is a social media, ^{gram} it ^{gram} uses for communication with ~~each other~~ different people from ^{gram} the different places.

This social media has advantages and disadvantages of using. ~~the advan~~

^{w-} The advantages of using facebook are communicating with people for work, friendship; it helps ^{spelling} ~~to~~ know about ^{gram} an other culture ~~it helps to~~. ~~Another~~ Although

Facebook has advantages of using, ^x but it has also disadvantages. These disadvantages are ^{ww} losing time for ^{gram} the people who stay a lot of time with ~~it~~; it makes people don't ~~talk~~ with ^{pm} stay with ~~an~~ each other in real world, it make a human stays alone.

In conclusion, this media gram

Appendix E

Two Samples of Post-test Essays

12
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In the last few years, the world witnessed a great development in technology. many social media sites appears. Facebook is one of the most popular ^{Comp. Site} ^{grm} account you can have. But people divided into two groups, one is convinced that Facebook is totally good. However, the others ^{Complex Site} see it as a useless application.

Among the very important issues we can use it. The facebook account for, first using your facebook account you can send an important information to your partner who is ^{relative} ^{change} in very important meeting in a second, you can receive news about your family despite the distance between you without travelling. Facebook is a tool that limit the distance, time as much as possible, ^{including that group} through the Facebook you can get access to all news about any person or thing in any field from any country in the world.

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Facebook is a social-networking website where ^{complex side} users can find acquaintances or friends, exchange messages and post updates, and it may be good or bad. ^{par. str}

this social-media as most of us are seeing it is very important and something can change our feelings and mood to better it helps us to know the recent news and chat for free with anyone, we can also know people from other countries ~~and~~ ^{in our part}

On other side, it may be bad and ~~does~~ something empty in our life, when we're using it we're ^{waste} wasting our time and may we know people with fake names and so on.

In the end, we must know how to use it for what may help us and avoid what can be effect negatively on our social life.

Appendix F

The Syllabus of Syntax Taught in the Experiment

1. Introduction to sentence structure
2. What is a sentence?
 - 2.1 simple sentences
 - 2.2 compound sentences
 - 2.3 complex sentences
 - 2.4 compound complex sentences
3. adverbial clauses
4. relative clauses
5. noun clauses
6. conditional clauses
7. participial phrases
8. English phrases
9. Passive sentences
10. parallelism
11. wordiness

المخلص:

تعتبر القدرة على كتابة مقالات جيدة من بين المهارات التي يحتاجها الطالب الجامعي من أجل التحصيل الأكاديمي. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى اختبار تأثير تدريس تركيب الجمل على تحسين مهارة كتابة المقالات. لتحقيق هذا الهدف قام مجموعة من أساتذة التعبير الكتابي بالإجابة على الأسئلة، بالإضافة إلى قيامنا بدراسة تجريبية على طلبة السنة الثانية بكلية الآداب و اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة المسيلة حيث تم تقسيم 34 طالب مشارك إلى مجموعتين: مجموعة تجريبية ومجموعة ضابطة. شاركت كلتا المجموعتين في اختبارين قبلي وبعدي. و أظهرت النتائج المتحصل عليها أن جودة الكتابة لأعضاء المجموعة التجريبية الذين درسوا دورات مكثفة في تركيب الجمل قد تحسنت بشكل ملحوظ. كتطبيق لهذه النتائج يمكن لأساتذة التعبير الكتابي أن يعتمدوا على تدريس الطرق المختلفة لتركيب الجمل من اجل تحسين مستوى الطلاب في التغلب علي صعوبات الكتابة.