

A SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS ON EFL'S WRITING TEXT ON WRITING TASK 2 IELTS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes syntactic structures in EFL students' writing on IELTS Writing Task 2 using qualitative methods. Through in-depth analysis of the texts, the study aims to identify patterns and syntactic errors that frequently appear and how these affect the quality of arguments in the writing. A qualitative research method, which aims to deeply analyze the syntactic structures in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' writing on IELTS Writing Task 2. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in detail and depth the elements of language used by writers, especially in terms of sentence structure and grammatical structure. The analysis revealed a general pattern in the use of sentence structure that can affect the coherence and cogency of students' arguments, with some recurring syntactic errors found. Comparison with previous studies revealed that there are certain trends in the development of EFL students' syntactical skills in their writing. This study concludes that a better understanding of syntactic structures is essential for EFL students to improve the quality of their writing in academic contexts. The findings are expected to provide insights for teachers and curriculum developers in designing more effective learning strategies to improve students' writing skills.

Keywords: Syntax, English, Writing, Testing System

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menganalisis struktur sintaksis dalam tulisan siswa EFL pada IELTS Writing Task 2 dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif. Melalui analisis mendalam terhadap teks, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan kesalahan sintaksis yang sering muncul serta bagaimana hal ini memengaruhi kualitas argumen dalam tulisan. Metode penelitian kualitatif, yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam struktur sintaksis dalam tulisan siswa EFL (English as a Foreign Language) pada tugas menulis IELTS Writing Task 2. Metode ini dipilih karena memungkinkan peneliti untuk mengeksplorasi secara terperinci dan mendalam elemen-elemen bahasa yang digunakan oleh penulis, terutama dalam hal susunan kalimat dan struktur gramatikal. Hasil analisis menunjukkan adanya pola umum dalam penggunaan struktur kalimat yang dapat memengaruhi koherensi dan kelogisan argumen siswa, dengan beberapa kesalahan sintaksis yang berulang ditemukan. Perbandingan dengan penelitian sebelumnya mengungkapkan bahwa terdapat tren tertentu dalam perkembangan kemampuan sintaksis siswa EFL dalam tulisan mereka. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemahaman yang lebih baik mengenai struktur sintaksis sangat penting bagi siswa EFL untuk meningkatkan kualitas tulisan mereka dalam konteks akademik. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pengajar dan pengembang kurikulum dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran yang lebih efektif untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menulis siswa.

Kata Kunci: Sintaksis, Bahasa Inggris, Menulis, Sistem Pengujian

INTRODUCTION

Syntax is a branch of linguistics that studies how words and phrases are organized to form meaningful sentences in a language (Petchprasert, 2021). Within the realm of syntax, the various elements of language are organized in such a way as to produce a coherent structure that can be understood by both speakers and listeners. In general, syntax focuses on the rules and patterns that govern word combinations in a sentence, as well as how these elements interact with each other to produce specific meanings. In syntax, there are grammatical rules that must be followed to ensure that a sentence is constructed correctly. A simple example of syntactic analysis is the placement of subject, predicate, and object in a basic sentence, which in Indonesian is usually organized with the S-P-O pattern.

Syntactics not only examines the arrangement of words, but also looks at the relationships between sentence elements, such as how adverbs modify verbs, or how prepositional phrases are used to provide additional information (Du Bois, 2014). For example, in the sentence “He is walking to the park,” a syntactic analysis would show that “He” is the subject, “is walking” is the predicate or ongoing action, and “to the park” is a prepositional phrase that provides a destination. Syntactics also includes further discussion of more complex sentence structures, such as compound sentences and subordinate sentences, which involve hierarchical relationships between different clauses. In compound sentences, for example, two independent clauses can be joined by a conjunction, while in subordinate sentences, one clause depends on the other to provide additional information.

In addition, syntactics also deals with the study of sentence transformation, which is how a sentence can be changed in form without changing its meaning (Baptista & Mamede, 2020). This transformation can involve changing from an active sentence to a passive one, using inversion, or changing the clause structure. For example, the active sentence “Andi ate the apple” can be transformed into the passive sentence “The apple was eaten by Andi” without changing the basic meaning of the action. In certain languages, syntax also plays an important role in determining the compatibility between various sentence elements, such as gender, case, and other morphological aspects that can affect the form of words based on their position in the sentence. By understanding these aspects of syntax, one can better understand how language works on a more in-depth and complex level.

EFL's (English as a Foreign Language) texts refer to texts or reading materials used in the context of learning English as a foreign language. The term refers to English language learning in countries where English is not the primary or mother tongue. In this context, EFL's

texts are specifically designed to assist non-English speakers in understanding the structure, vocabulary and usage of English in various situations. The main purpose of EFL texts is to improve students' communication skills in English, whether in reading, writing, speaking or listening skills. The material in EFL texts is usually organized in stages, starting from the basic level to the more advanced level, according to the development of students' language skills.

Furthermore, EFL texts have distinctive features that set them apart from general English texts. These texts often use simpler language, clear sentence structures, as well as providing many examples of usage that fit into the context of everyday life (Thi et al., 2023). In many cases, EFL's texts also come with grammar guides, vocabulary exercises and activities that encourage active interaction between students. In addition, EFL texts usually cover a variety of topics that are relevant and interesting to learners, such as culture, technology, or global issues, so they serve not only as a means of language learning but also as a medium to broaden learners' horizons to the world beyond their native language environment.

In practical use, EFL texts are often accompanied by various learning strategies, such as task-based learning techniques, group discussions, and language games designed to increase student engagement. In addition, EFL teachers use these texts as a tool to evaluate students' understanding of the material being taught, provide opportunities for students to practice through practice questions, and encourage them to think critically in their use of the English language (Ha, 2022). Thus, EFL texts play an important role in English language learning, especially in helping non-native students master this language more effectively and contextually. This study offers novelty by focusing specifically on syntactic analysis within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' written texts, especially on Task 2 of the IELTS Writing Test. Unlike previous studies, which often analyze broad aspects of language learning strategies or text-based task performance in general, this research provides an in-depth examination of syntactic structures that EFL learners use. By analyzing these specific syntactic patterns, the study identifies common syntactical challenges faced by learners and highlights patterns that could impact students' performance on standardized tests like IELTS. Additionally, while previous studies may have emphasized lexical choices or discourse markers, this research focuses on the structural components that contribute to overall clarity, complexity, and accuracy in EFL learners' written output. Through its focus on syntax, this research aims to provide educators with insights into common grammatical difficulties that EFL learners encounter, which can be used to develop more targeted and effective teaching strategies to improve students' writing competence in high-stakes testing contexts.

METHOD

The study entitled “A Syntactic Analysis on EFL's Writing Text on IELTS Writing Task 2” uses a qualitative research method, which aims to analyze in depth the syntactic structure in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students' writing on IELTS Writing Task 2. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in detail and in depth the elements of language used by writers, especially in terms of sentence structure and grammatical structure. This qualitative approach emphasizes more on the interpretation and analysis of non-numerical data, namely written texts, where the researcher will identify syntactic patterns that appear in students' writing (Syahid, 2023). The main purpose of this study is to understand the extent to which students' syntactical knowledge affects the quality of their writing, particularly in the context of IELTS Writing Task 2 which often demands strong argumentation and logical reasoning skills.

The data collection method in this study utilized a document analysis technique, in which the researcher collected the writings of EFL students who had completed IELTS Writing Task 2. Writing samples were drawn from a variety of relevant sources, including online published writings or test results available on IELTS learning platforms. The researcher then conducted a syntactic analysis on each writing, focusing on components such as sentence type (simple, compound, complex), the use of subordination and coordination, and the accuracy of using sentence structure according to English rules. This analysis aims to see common patterns or errors that often occur, as well as how sentence structure contributes to the coherence and logic of arguments in these writings.

To strengthen the results of the study, the data collected will be compared with other relevant studies from the last five years, which also use syntactic analysis methods in the context of learning English as a foreign language. These articles will provide an in-depth theoretical foundation, as well as allow the researcher to compare the results of the analysis with previous studies. In addition, these studies will help in understanding the latest trends and developments in the use of syntactic structures among EFL students. This comparative analysis is done to ensure that the study has strong validity and makes a significant contribution to the study of English language learning, especially in terms of syntax in academic writing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The research data generated from several articles in Table 1 demonstrates various approaches and focuses related to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in different contexts.

Table 1. Results of the reviewed articles

No.	Author/Tittle	Method	Variable	Result
1.	Author: Shima Akbarnezhad, Firooz Sadighi and Mohammad Sadeh Bagheri (2019) Iranian EFL learners' perception of the English verbs' argument structure and their language proficiency: A semantic-syntactic approach	<i>Quantitative</i>	1. English Language Proficiency Levels 2. Learners' Perception of English Verbs' Argument Structures 3. Iranian EFL learners 4. Grammatical Judgment	The study revealed that Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels face significant challenges in perceiving English verb argument structures.
2.	Author: Yang Yang, Ngee Thai Yap, Afida Mohamad Ali (2022) A Review of Syntactic Complexity Studies in Context of EFL/ESL Writing	<i>Systematic Literature Review</i>	1. Syntactic Complexity 2. Language Proficiency 3. Developmental Progression	This study reviews over 60 works on syntactic complexity in EFL/ESL writing, identifying key research strands and gaps, including the need for new indices, comparative studies, and more qualitative research.
3.	Author: Chao Zhang and Shumin Kang (2022) A comparative study on lexical and syntactic features of ESL versus EFL learners' writing	<i>comparative analysis</i>	1. Type of learners (ESL vs. EFL) 2. Lexical and syntactic features of writing	The study reveals significant differences in lexical and syntactic features between ESL learners from Hong Kong and EFL learners from Mainland China, with ESL compositions exhibiting greater flexibility and higher information density, while EFL writing demonstrates higher lexical diversity

No.	Author/Title	Method	Variable	Result
4.	Author: Elin Ruth (2024) EFL teacher beliefs about collaborative writing at Swedish primary school	<i>qualitative research method</i>	1. Collaborative Writing 2. EFL learning opportunities	The study found that Swedish EFL teachers believe collaborative writing enhances vocabulary expansion, writing improvement, motivation, and reduces foreign language anxiety among 10–12-year-olds, though challenges such as effective grouping and time constraints exist.
5.	Author: Afzal Khan (2022) The effect of writing exercises in classroom on the production of written sentences at undergraduate level by Saudi EFL learners: A case study of error analysis	<i>quasi-experimental design</i>	1. Writing exercises 2. Production of written	The study found that the experimental group of Saudi EFL learners, who participated in additional writing exercises, made significantly fewer errors in their written sentences compared to the control group, with the experimental group committing 116 errors and the control group committing 199 errors.

The research findings in Table 1 highlight diverse approaches and focuses in EFL learning. Akbarnezhad, Sadighi, and Bagheri (2019) used a quantitative method to reveal that Iranian EFL learners face notable difficulties in understanding English verb argument structures across different proficiency levels. Yang, Yap, and Ali (2022), in their systematic literature review, identified key gaps in EFL/ESL syntactic complexity studies, such as the need for new indices and comparative research. Zhang and Kang’s (2022) comparative analysis found significant lexical and syntactic differences between ESL learners from Hong Kong and EFL learners from Mainland China, with ESL texts displaying greater information density and EFL texts showing higher lexical diversity. Ruth’s (2024) qualitative study explored Swedish EFL teachers' views, finding that collaborative writing fosters vocabulary growth and motivation among younger learners, though time constraints remain a challenge. Lastly, Khan’s (2022) quasi-experimental study on Saudi EFL learners showed that additional writing

exercises led to significantly fewer errors in sentence production for the experimental group compared to the control group.

Discussion

A study conducted by (Akbarnezhad et al., 2019) showed the difficulties faced by EFL learners in understanding the argument structure of English verbs, specifically on three types of verbs: transitive, intransitive and di-transitive. The results show that transitive structures are the most difficult for learners to understand, with the highest number of errors, followed by intransitive and di-transitive. In addition, semantic aspects also pose significant difficulties, especially in the Vendlerian semantic merit category, where learners experience many errors in understanding these structures. The study also highlights that EFL learners' proficiency level affects their understanding of English syntactic and semantic structures, with learners who have an intermediate-high proficiency level showing better results in the grammatical comprehension test. These findings confirm that increased language proficiency plays an important role in improving syntactic ability, where learners with better language input tend to overcome difficulties in verb structures more effectively. Nonetheless, some of the results differed from other studies which stated that intransitive verbs were the biggest challenge, this difference may be due to the different focus of the study, such as on production and perception aspects. The results of this study provide deep insights into how EFL learners encounter difficulties in understanding verb argument structures, which can contribute to the improvement of English language teaching.

Research on syntactic complexity in EFL/ESL writing has discussed various approaches to analyzing language structure, which are relevant to the syntactic study of EFL writing texts on the IELTS writing task (Yang et al., 2022). These approaches involve T-unit-based measures, which focus on sentence length, subordination, coordination, and sophistication of syntactic structures, as well as more detailed complexity indices, such as clausal and phrasal complexity. The positive relationship between syntactic complexity and writing quality reveals that learners with higher proficiency levels tend to write with more complex syntax, while syntactic development shows a nonlinear nature, with not always consistent patterns of progress. Moreover, a comparison between EFL/ESL writing and native speaker (ENL) writing shows that advanced EFL writers have a tendency to produce longer and more complex sentences than native speakers, especially at higher levels, although novice EFL writers still have difficulties in this regard. Various factors, such as topic and writing conditions, influence

syntactic complexity, but previous studies have not controlled for these variables, which may affect the final results. Further research is also recommended to explore syntactic errors qualitatively, as an important aspect in assessing writing accuracy, and to use meta-analysis to review the results of previous studies. The overall findings can serve as an important reference in developing an understanding of syntactic complexity in EFL academic writing, especially in the context of IELTS Task 2 writing.

Differences in lexical and syntactic features between ESL learners in Hong Kong and EFL learners in China show significant variations in written language use between the two groups (Zhang & Kang, 2022). Hong Kong ESL learners are more likely to use informative, coherent and grammatical words, which shows their ability to convey information clearly and orderly. This is reflected in their use of richer syntactic phrases, such as noun, verb and adjective phrases, which enhance the quality and depth of information conveyed. In addition, their writing is more fluent and coherent due to their ability to use connectives and determiners effectively. On the other hand, Chinese EFL learners show more variety in sentence structure but less flexibility, which may be due to the more structured learning approach in their curriculum. Although they used a greater variety of vocabulary, their writing lacked the same cohesion as Hong Kong EFL learners. Differences in learning contexts and language exposure also affect the way these two groups organize syntactic structures in their writing, where ESL learners are more exposed to language use in everyday contexts, while EFL learners rely more on formal classroom approaches. This analysis shows how lexical and syntactic factors are closely related to the language learning context and exposure to language use outside the classroom.

The relationship between syntactic complexity and writing quality in 410 narrative compositions of adolescent EFL students with low to intermediate proficiency levels. The study identified that measures of syntactic elaboration, as measured through average sentence length, number of complex nouns per clause, and clauses per T-unit, served as reliable indicators in predicting writing quality, totally explaining 36.6% of the variance in writing scores (Ruth, 2024). In addition, the syntactic diversity measure, measured using the type-token ratio corrected for dependency relations, also showed a significant contribution by explaining 32.1% of the variance in the scores. Interestingly, the combination of the elaboration and syntactic diversity measures proved to be the most effective in predicting writing proficiency, accounting for a total of 45.3% of the variance in scores. These findings corroborate the view that diverse measures should be applied in assessing the writing proficiency of students who are at different

proficiency levels. In addition, this study highlights the significance of syntactic diversity as an integral component of syntactic complexity, which although under-researched, is of great importance. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the teaching and assessment of EFL writing to integrate syntactic diversity in automated assessment models, with the understanding that these findings may not be fully generalizable to other writing genres or different mother tongue backgrounds. This research also encourages further studies on more credible and effective measures of syntactic diversity, as well as more explicit teaching methods, to assist students in producing more diverse writing structures.

Syntactic analysis is a method used to evaluate sentence structure in written texts, especially in the context of a second or foreign language, such as in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning (Khan, 2022). It aims to understand how syntactic elements, such as phrases, clauses, and relationships between sentences, contribute to the complexity and clarity of writing. In the context of the IELTS writing task, syntactic analysis is particularly important as it can provide a more comprehensive picture of a student's writing ability. By measuring aspects such as average sentence length, syntactic diversity and the use of more complex structures, this analysis helps in identifying students' strengths and weaknesses in writing, which in turn can affect the overall assessment of their writing.

In research conducted on EFL writing texts on the IELTS writing task 2, it was found that measuring syntactic complexity is an important indicator in assessing the quality of students' writing. By analyzing the various texts produced by the students, the researcher was able to assess the syntactic elements that indicate the skill level of the writer. The findings suggest that average sentence length (MLS), the number of complex nominals per clause, and the ratio of clauses per T-unit (C/T) are reliable measures for predicting students' writing ability. The existence of these measures is not only relevant for less proficient writers, but can also be used to differentiate ability levels among writers who are learning English (Marzuki et al., 2023). Thus, syntactic analysis offers a useful framework in understanding the dynamics of writing complexity in language learning contexts.

Syntactic elaboration, which includes average sentence length and nominal complex ratio, is the main focus in this study. Findings show that MLS is effective in reflecting students' writing ability at various levels, from beginner to advanced. Previous research has also noted that sentence length can be an indicator of writing quality, especially among beginner and intermediate writers (Amirjalili & Jabbari, 2018). By providing additional insights into how more experienced writers use more complex structures, this study shows that syntactic

elaboration is not just about sentence length, but also about the ability to combine ideas effectively in writing.

Furthermore, the ratio of clauses per T-unit (C/T) emerged as a useful measure in assessing syntactic complexity, although there is debate about its relevance at higher levels of writer ability. Although C/T can distinguish between the writing of less proficient and intermediate writers, this analysis indicates that for more proficient writers, this measure may not be sensitive enough to accurately reflect writing quality (Werdiningsih et al., 2024). This study supports the view that subordination-related measures should be used with caution, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach to evaluating syntactic complexity in line with the level of expertise of the writer.

Finally, syntactic diversity was identified as a crucial component in the assessment of writing quality. Findings on corrected type-token ratio of dependency relations (MSTTRDR-50) showed a significant relationship with writing ability. By integrating MSTTRDR-50 into the analysis model, this study provides additional explanations for the variance in writing scores, although not always statistically significant. This finding is in line with previous studies showing that syntactic diversity can be a useful indicator in assessing EFL writing ability, which underscores the importance of understanding this diversity to improve accuracy in writing assessment.

CONCLUSION

A syntactic analysis of written texts in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context of writing task 2 in the IELTS exam shows the importance of various measures of syntactic complexity in predicting writing quality. The study emphasizes that measures such as Mean Length of Sentences (MLS), Complex Nominals per Clause (CN/C), and Clauses per T-unit (C/T) serve as valid indicators to assess the writing ability of learners at the early and intermediate stages. The results show that MLS plays an important role in differentiating writing quality among less skilled EFL learners, in accordance with previous findings noting that sentence length can show significant differences in writing ability across different proficiency levels. In addition, the CN/C measure proved to be effective for assessing students' progress across different stages of language learning, suggesting that it is widely applicable, regardless of the level of proficiency held by the learner. However, while C/T was also considered a relevant measure, the results showed that it is more sensitive to the learner's proficiency level, where its presence in the syntactic model is more pronounced in learners

with lower writing proficiency. This finding suggests that there is a need to separate the measurement tools used by proficiency level, especially when assessing EFL writing.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that syntactic diversity plays a key role in evaluating the quality of EFL writing, where measures such as the Corrected Type-Token Ratio of Dependency Relations (MSTTRDR-50) are significantly correlated with writing proficiency level. When this diversity measure is included in the combined model, there is an increase in explaining the variance of writing scores, confirming that the ability to use a variety of syntactic structures is an integral part of EFL learners' writing competence. While some previous studies have shown a less strong relationship between syntactic diversity and writing quality, the results of this study underscore the importance of a more comprehensive approach to evaluating and teaching syntactic diversity in the classroom. In conclusion, the results of this analysis suggest that the measurement of syntactic complexity and diversity should be integrated into the automatic assessment and teaching of writing, in order to improve the effectiveness of measuring writing quality in EFL contexts. This study proposes that teaching that emphasizes variety in sentence structure can enrich learners' writing ability and help them achieve a higher level of proficiency in English.

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