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**Investigating the Effect of Sentence-Combining as an Instructional Technique on
English as a Foreign language Learners' Written Syntactic Maturity: The Case of
Third Year Students of English at Biskra University.**

Dissertation submitted to the Department of Letters and Foreign languages in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of **Master in Sciences of Language**

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Declaration

I, Omra Ben Dahmane, do hereby declare that this MA dissertation is my original work and is the byproduct of my own efforts. Excluding where references have been cited, all of the words present in this work are mine and has not been published or written by another person. This work has not been submitted to any other university or institution for the completion of a degree or whatsoever.

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Dedication

إِنْ يَنْصُرْكُمْ اللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ يَخْذُلْكُمْ فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَنْصُرُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ

To the most knowledgeable yet humble person I know, who instilled in me a relentless pursuit of knowledge, a love for writing and reading, and the courage to follow my passions, just as he has always done. **My father.**

To the woman who shaped me into who I am today, who has always looked at me with pride, believed in me when no one else did, filled me with love and affection, and nurtured the positive, forward-thinking mindset I carry. **My mother.**

To those who taught me the meaning of true brotherhood and sisterhood, with whom I feel the safest, most loved, and truly at home. My four **brothers** and two **sisters**.

To the little stars of our family. My **niblings**.

To my roommate, classmate, and childhood friend, **Anfel**, with whom I shared tremendous life memories.

To my bestie and future doctor, **Wafa**.

To my lovely **cousins** (I, A, K, D, M, M, D, M, A)

To my **aunties, uncles**, and all of my extended family.

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Abstract

A fundamental aspect of a well-thought-out written piece is the production of elaborate sentences. Central to this characteristic is the writer's ability to construct complex sentences through which intricate ideas and diverse relationships between them can be transmitted. Despite the pivotal role syntactic maturity plays in transforming poor writing into a sophisticated one, a considerable number of third-year students of English at Biskra University have been noted to have insufficient command of complex syntax, crafting rather short or fragmented syntactic patterns. Guided by a pragmatist paradigm, a Mixed-methods approach, and an embedded Mixed-methods design, this investigation sought to gauge the impact of the sentence-combining technique on improving students' written syntactic maturity, examine their attitudes towards the implementation of this technique, as well as identify the factors that impede them from developing syntactically mature sentences. With the goal of collecting relevant data from 20 third-year students of English at Biskra University who were selected voluntarily, two semi-structured focus group sessions, a pre-test and a post-test, and a student's semi-structured post-treatment attitudes questionnaire were carried out. Analysis of the collected data necessitated the employment of thematic analysis, the Paired-sample T-test and SPSS 23 to navigate meaning across both qualitative and quantitative insights. Results revealed that there are multifaceted factors which can contribute to hindering students' written syntactic maturity. In addition, they exhibited that the sentence-combining technique has no meaningful effect on enhancing students' ability to craft mature sentences. Notwithstanding this, students showed a positive attitude and a marked interest after engaging in sentence-combining exercises.

Keywords: Complex sentences, factors underlying syntactic complexity impediment, sentence-combining exercises, syntactic growth, syntactic maturity

List of Acronyms

APA: American Psychological Association

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESL: English as a second language

SC: Sentence-combining

SM: Syntactic maturity

TGG: Transformational generative grammar

List of Tables

Table 1 <i>The focus group Structure and Objectives</i>	123
Table 2 <i>The Questionnaire Structure and Objectives</i>	128
Table 3 <i>Students' Perceptions about What Constitutes Complex Sentences</i>	147
Table 4 <i>Students' self-perceived Rating on Their Ability to Manipulate Complex Sentences</i> ...	149
Table 5 <i>Students' Reasons about Sami's Struggles with Producing Complex Sentences</i>	153
Table 6 <i>Students' Reflections on Factors Influencing Their Writing of Mature Sentences</i>	157
Table 7 <i>Students' Ranking of Factors Impeding the Development of Mature Sentences</i>	160
Table 8 <i>Students' Perceptions of Learning Syntactic Complexity Through the SC</i>	164
Table 9 <i>Students' Pre-and Post-test Scores</i>	172
Table 10 <i>Mean and Difference Between Pre-posttests Results</i>	174
Table 11 <i>The Test of Normality</i>	137
Table 12 <i>The Paired-sample T-test</i>	179
Table 13 <i>Effect Size Results</i>	180
Table 14 <i>Student' Attentiveness to Sentence Structure</i>	181
Table 15 <i>Students' Understanding of Coordination and Subordination</i>	182
Table 16 <i>Students' Ability to Write Complex Sentences</i>	183
Table 17 <i>Students' Perceptions on the Effectiveness of the SC</i>	184

Table 18 <i>Students' Perceptions of SC Exercises Level of Engagement</i>	186
Table 19 <i>Students' Perceptions of the SC as an Engaging Method for Sentence Construction</i>	186
Table 20 <i>Students' Perceptions of the Positively Challenging Nature of the SC Exercises</i>	188
Table 21 <i>Students' Perceptions of Their Active Involvement During SC Exercises</i>	188
Table 22 <i>Students' Self-perceived Confidence in Producing Complex Sentences</i>	189
Table 23 <i>Students' Perception of Treatment Activities Effectiveness</i>	190
Table 24 <i>Students' Perception of the Suitability of Teacher's Methodology</i>	191
Table 25 <i>Students' Opinions on the Integration of SC Activities into Writing Courses</i>	192

List of Figures

Figure 01 <i>Components of Effective Writing</i>	44
Figure 02 <i>Thematic Map of the Main Factors that Hinder Students' Syntactic Maturity Development</i>	166
Figure 03 <i>The Pre-test Scores</i>	175
Figure 04 <i>The Post-test Scores</i>	175
Figure 05 <i>The Difference Between the Post-and Pre-test Scores</i>	176
Figure 06 <i>The Test of Normality for the Pre-test</i>	178
Figure 07 <i>The Test of Normality for the Post-test</i>	178

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus Group Informed Consent

Appendix 2: Focus Group Opinionnaire

Appendix 3: Focus Group Validation Form

Appendix 4: Focus Group Interview Guide

Appendix 5: Focus Group Transcript

Appendix 6: Head of the Department Consent Letter

Appendix 7: Treatment Informed Consent

Appendix 8: The Mini-syllabus

Appendix 9: The Pretest\Posttest Task

Appendix 10: Opinionnaire of the Attitudes Questionnaire

Appendix 11: Questionnaire Validation Form

Appendix 12: Attitudes Questionnaire

Contents

Declaration.....	2
Dedication.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	4
Abstract.....	5
List of Acronyms.....	6
List of Tables.....	7
List of Figures.....	9
List of Appendices.....	10
Contents.....	11

General Introduction

1. The Background of the Study.....	18
2. Statement of the Problem.....	21
3. Main Research Aim and Specific Research Objectives of this Study	24
4. Research Questions.....	24
5. Research Hypotheses.....	25
6. The Research Methodology for This Study.....	25
6.1. Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique.....	27
7. The Significance of the Study.....	27
8. The Referencing Style for This Dissertation.....	28
9. Delimitations of the Study	28
10. Structure of the Dissertation	29

Chapter One: An Overview on Written Syntactic Maturity

Introduction.....	34
1.1 Writing.....	34
1.2 Definition (s) of Writing.....	35
1.3 The Importance of Writing.....	37
1.4 Components of Effective Writing.....	41
1.4.1 Purpose.....	44
1.4.2 Organization.....	45
1.4.3 Clarity.....	46
1.4.4 Coherence.....	46
1.4.5 Support.....	47
1.4.6 Mechanics.....	47
1.5 Syntax.....	48
1.5.1 Definition (s) of Syntax.....	48
1.5.2 Basic Syntactic Units.....	51
1.5.2.1 Words.....	51
1.5.2.2 Phrases.....	52
1.5.2.2.1 Noun Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.2 Verb Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.3 Adverb Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.4 Adjective Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.5 Prepositional Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.6 Infinitive Phrase.....	53

1.5.2.2.7 Gerund Phrase.....	53
1.5.2.3 Clauses.....	53
1.5.2.3.1 Adverb Clause.....	53
1.5.2.3.2 Adjective Clause.....	53
1.5.2.3.3 Noun Clause.....	54
1.5.2.4 Sentences.....	54
1.5.2.4.1 Types of Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.1 Simple Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.2 Compound Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.3 Complex Sentences.....	56
1.5.2.4.1.4 Complex-Compound.....	56
1.5.2.4.2 Features of Effective Sentences.....	56
1.5.2.4.2.1 Variety.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.2 Clarity.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.3 Emphasis.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.4 Conciseness.....	59
1.5.2.4.3 Syntactic Maturity.....	59
1.5.2.4.3.1 Indices of Syntactic Maturity.....	62
1.5.2.4.3.2 Factors Influencing Syntactic Maturity.....	65
1.5.2.4.3.3 Importance of Improving Syntactic Maturity with Empirically-Based Interventions.....	70
Conclusion.....	73

Chapter Two: An Overview on the Sentence-combining Technique

Introduction.....	77
2.1 Background of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	77
2.2 Definition (s) of the Sentence Combining.....	79
2.3 Sentence Combining Activities.....	82
2.3.1 Cued Exercises.....	83
2.3.2 Open Exercises.....	83
2.3.3 Whole-Discourse Exercises.....	84
2.3.4 Mechanical Sentence Combining Exercises.....	85
2.3.5 Meaningful Activities.....	85
2.3.6 Communicative Exercises.....	86
2.4 Potential Benefits of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	86
2.4.1 Automaticity.....	87
2.4.2 Awareness of Syntactic Options.....	88
2.4.3 Part-To-Whole Learning.....	88
2.4.4 Reading Comprehension.....	89
2.4.5 De-Centering Skills.....	89
2.4.6 Attitude Shift.....	90
2.4.7 Metalinguistic Awareness.....	91
2.4.8 Revision Skills.....	91
2.5 Limitations of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	93
2.5.1 Limited Long-Term Effectiveness.....	93
2.5.2 Inappropriateness for Certain Learners.....	94

2.5.3 A-Rhetorical Orientation.....	95
2.5.4 Undesirable Side Effects.....	97
2.5.5 The Teacher's Variable.....	98
2.5.6 Limited Creativity.....	99
Conclusion.....	101

Chapter Three: The Research Methodology for this Study

Introduction.....	106
3.1 Research Methodology: Theoretical Background, Choices, and Rationale.....	106
3.1.1 Research Paradigm(s).....	107
3.1.2 Research Approach(es).....	111
3.1.3 Research Design(s).....	114
3.1.4 Data Collection Method(s).....	117
3.1.4.1 The Focus Group.....	118
3.1.4.1.1 Structure and Aim.....	120
3.1.4.1.2 Validation.....	121
3.1.4.2 The Tests.....	123
3.1.4.2.1 Structure and Aim.....	124
3.1.4.2.2 Validation and Piloting.....	125
3.1.4.3 The Questionnaire.....	126
3.1.4.3.1 Structure and Aim.....	127
3.1.4.3.2 Piloting and Validation.....	128
3.1.5 Data Collection Procedures.....	129
3.1.6 Data Analysis Procedures.....	130

3.1.6.1	Data Analysis Procedures for the Focus Group.....	131
3.1.6.2	Data Analysis Procedures for the Tests.....	133
3.1.6.3	Data Analysis Procedures for the Questionnaire.....	133
3.1.7	Sampling Technique.....	134
3.2	Rationale and Study Description.....	135
3.2.1	The Implementation of the Treatment.....	139
	Conclusion.....	141

Chapter Four: Fieldwork and Data Analysis

	Introduction	144
4.1	Results and Discussion of the Findings	144
4.1.1	The Semi-Structured Focus Group	144
4.1.1.1	Grounding the Study	144
4.1.1.2	Analysis of the Semi-Structured Focus Group Data	145
4.1.2	Analysis of the Tests	172
4.1.2.1	The Pre-and Post-Test Results	172
4.1.2.2	The Test of Normality	176
4.1.2.3	The Paired-Sample T-Test	179
4.1.2.4	Effect Size	179
4.1.3	Analysis of the Semi-Structured Attitudes Questionnaire	180
4.2	Synthesis of the Findings	193
	Conclusion	200
	General Conclusion	201
	Pedagogical Recommendations and Implications	203

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies	205
References	206
Appendices	225
الملخص.....	276

General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Although writing proficiency is a vital skill in the world of academia, its challenging and multi-layered nature may give rise to some complications. The invaluable role that writing skills play lies in allowing individuals to freely express their thoughts, points of views, and feelings on papers. Besides, it enables academics to report their research findings and enrich the available literature. Addedly, for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, writing acts as a catalyst in their way to produce well-written essays, craft professional emails, write research proposals, and craft compelling arguments; thus, permitting them to establish a good impression and facilitating their attempt to convey complex ideas cohesively. Ultimately, encouraging them to thrive academically. However, acquiring polished writing style can be daunting. That is, a good writer needs not only to be grammatically aware, but also well-equipped with robust vocabulary, skilled in creating logical flow between ideas and paragraphs, trained in selecting the appropriate tone and notably armed with strong sentence manipulative skills.

The latter is particularly noteworthy, as sentences form the foundation of any written piece and are the building blocks of long texts. Teaching a learner how to write an essay or a paragraph usually starts first with teaching them how to craft a sentence, i.e., a complete thought. Well-crafted sentences are expected not only to be correct, but also, they are supposed to be long, complex, varied, mature, and embedded with diverse nouns, adverbial and adjective phrases. Syntactic maturity skill, or the ability to maneuver sophisticated and varied sentence structures, is defined by Cooper and Moraine (1980) as, “Including two components, grammatical complexity as measured by the number of grammatical structures employed, and variety in the use of these

structures” (p.411). Also, it is described by Winterowd (1975) as, “The ability of writers to use the syntactic resources of the language to modify prepositions and to embed prepositions within others” (p.70). Manipulating mature-like sentences could not only allow writers to transmit their intended messages clearly, but is assumed also to offer readers an interesting and enjoyable reading experience. Conversely, “choppy sentences are awkward and stiffas they prevent ideas from flowing easily. Worst of all they may cause the reader to lose interest in the message” (Flower,1999, p.9). Hence, utilizing a diversity of sentence lengths and patterns is fundamental to generate effective piece of writing (Flower, 1999).

In EFL contexts, learners are expected to maintain an advanced level in writing, namely, the writing of well-formed paragraphs and refined essays, through which they discuss intricate ideas using variety of syntactical patterns. Nevertheless, challenges regarding integrating wide range of sentence structures and diversifying their syntactic choices still exist. Apart from this, attempts to enhance learners' syntactic maturity have been numerous, employing vast array of instructional methods. One of the most effective techniques is the so-called sentence combining (henceforth SC), inspired by Chomsky's transformational grammar (TGG), particularly that of Syntactic Structures (1954). This instructional method was originally developed targeting a practical approach towards syntactic maturity (SM).

Effectiveness of sentence combining techniques was well-established and salient in several studies, encouraging further investigations (See Bateman, 1959, as cited in Katib, 2009; Bateman & Zedonis, 1964, as cited in O'Hare, 1973; Kameen, 1978, as cited in Katib, 2009; Mellon, 1967; Daiker, Kerek & Morenberg, 1978; O'Hare, 1973; Saddler & Graham, 2005; Angelis, 1975; Mckee, 1982; Tracy, 1986; Katib, 2009). Elder (1981) regarded (SC) as, “An operation that begins with a simple form; a single or kernel sentence. In order to increase the length of the sentence one

has to add a word, clause or phrase. This follows the pattern of chunking” (p.5). Similarly, Phillips (1996) viewed SC as, “A technique of putting kernels together in a variety of ways so that completed sentences possess greater syntactic maturity” (p.20). The said technique marked a paradigm shift regarding how syntax is being instructed, shying away from traditional grammar instruction and embracing an active application of syntactic rules.

From a focused viewpoint, integrating the SC treatment shows promise of improving students' syntactic maturity through engaging them with interesting and intellectually stimulating exercises. Merging kernel sentences, i.e., simple sentences, together into long and complex ones and ultimately compose their own mature sentences, places students in an active and interactive state where they are problem solvers and not merely passive receptors of syntactic conventions. Further, SC can arguably enhance students' linguistic performance by boosting their awareness of a wide range of the syntactic options in writing and foster their readiness to try a variety of those options (Strong, 1986). Furthermore, according to Hillocks (1986), “Research shows sentence combining on the average to be more than twice as effective as free writing as a means of enhancing the quality of student writing” (p.249). Thus, sentence combining treatment can offer students the opportunity to proactively grasp and apply various syntactic structures.

In the Algerian context, particularly among the third-year students of English at Biskra University, a significant proportion has been noticed to own a limited range of syntactic structures, as well as to have a low capacity for framing ideas into varied and wide-ranging sentence patterns. Potentially, their abilities to learn and practice syntax comprehensively do not align with the traditional ways of instructing syntax through which they are being taught. Therefore, driven by a noticed gap in the targeted sample and the promising research findings, it is expected in this study

that sentence combining technique can potentially improve EFL learners' syntactic maturity in writing.

2. The Statement of the Problem

The path of mastering a foreign language can often be intriguing, yet a multitude of intricate competencies might be required to ensure full proficiency. That is, reading comprehensively, listening actively, speaking fluently, and writing skillfully are all significant skills that EFL learners are expected to exhibit. Among these different competencies, writing is deemed primordial, as it is a critical aspect of a good language user. Through writing, EFL learners can not only convince others with their compelling arguments and well-crafted paragraphs, but they can also deliver their intended messages effectively, avoiding any misunderstanding. Eventually, they might be able to accomplish assignments with success, send meaningful emails, design impactful presentations, and achieve high marks in tests and examinations. Thus, mastering the art of composing meaningful ideas may allow EFL learners to be creative expressers of meaning and sharpen their skill of shaping their messages so that they resonate with their audience, consequently, rendering their written communication more influential and authoritative.

Even though writing is usually regarded as a pivotal skill, the fact that it poses a variety of challenges to learners is undeniable. This likely stems from the idea that it requires learners not only to know what to say, but also how to say it. Central to these challenges is the ability to manipulate mature syntactical structures, which often constitutes the building blocks of effective written works. As has been encouraged by first-hand observation, some EFL writers struggle with producing complex syntactical structures. This assumption has been proven to exist and is prevalent in EFL classrooms, in which Saddler (2023), stated that “composing focused,

meaningful, and interesting sentences that deliver well-defined ideas to readers can be exceptionally challenging” (p.149).

Crafting a mature sentence, i.e., a complex sentence, may seem an easy and axiomatic task, yet several skills and processes need to be involved, spanning across word choice, audience consideration, cohesion, punctuation, and grammatical rules. Not being aware of the large repertoire of complex sentence patterns available in the English language may result in composing abrupt and choppy sentences. Therefore, the final product may sound difficult to grasp, less attractive, and can convey a negative impression about the writer's style. Henceforth, writing style that lacks syntactic complexity and variety may conceivably weaken strong arguments and turn creative ideas into dull concepts.

In the case of third-year learners of English at Biskra university, a considerable number of students have been observed to lack syntactic maturity (SM). Although at this, level they are expected to attain proficiency when dealing with the English grammar and transform the said knowledge into their paragraph and essay writing, some of them still confront serious difficulties when attempting to compose complex sentences. It is believed that this may be linked to the way they have been taught syntax, in which their teachers usually focus on vocabulary development, coherence, and cohesion and ignore the serious training that syntax warrants. Further, teaching students how to compose mature sentences is often given less time and marginal value, viewing it as a self-evident task which the learner can acquire over time. Furthermore, instructional methods with which syntax is being delivered can be labelled as abstract and impractical, as they motivate learners to merely grasp the theory and apply it to write simple, non-mature sentences. Thus, we believe it becomes necessary to find out a remedy that can presumably encourage EFL learners to craft more compelling, varied, and complex syntactical patterns.

A broad range of scholarly contributions suggest the sentence-combining technique to be one of the most relevant and suitable means to potentially overcome the issue of EFL learners' limited syntactic complexity (see Katib, 2009; O'Hare, 1973; Saddler & Graham, 2005). Although this technique is not a newly emerging one, favorable findings from other contexts regarding its application renders it a captivating technique to research. In addition, despite of the widespread studies about the cause-effect relationship between syntactic maturity (SM) and SC, it remains underexplored and scarce in most EFL contexts, and particularly in the Algerian scene.

Implementing such instructional method in a real-life situation does not require teaching students grammatical rules. Conversely, it calls for the practical application of those conventions. After selecting a variety of sentence-combining exercises from different teachers' textbooks, the researcher will place the targeted sample in a problem-solving environment, where they are urged to transform short sentences into longer, meaningful ones. Not only this, learners will embed different types of phrases in sentences, employing many subordinating conjunctions to link ideas, compare between different syntactic patterns of the same sentence, and ultimately write paragraphs where they demonstrate their sentence-combining progress.

Therefore, by means of our study, we seek to investigate the impact of sentence-combining exercises on the syntactic maturity of third-year EFL learners of English at Biskra University. Embracing a Mixed-method approach will hopefully allow us to investigate the factors behind learners' weaknesses in producing complex syntactic forms, carry out the sentence-combining treatment, and collect students' attitudes towards the said method. We strive, further, to shed light on the notion and importance of sentence-combining exercises. More precisely, raise learners' awareness of the vast array of sentence structures available to them, so as more varied and complex sentences would be produced. Broadly, our research is an attempt to provide an all-encompassing

approach of the subject matter to generate a foundational groundwork upon which future research would be built.

3. Main Research Aim and Specific Research Objectives of This Study

The general aim of this study is to improve third year EFL students' syntactic maturity through the implementation of the sentence-combining technique.

Through a more precise lens, this study strives to:

- probe into the main factors that hinder students from developing mature syntactic skills in writing,
- rise students' awareness of constructing more effective, complex sentences through practical sentence-combining exercises, and
- examine students' attitudes towards the implementation of the sentence-combining technique.

4. Research Questions

This research is designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the main factors that impede third year students of English at Biskra university from developing mature syntactic skills in writing?

RQ2: To what extent can the implementation of SC affect the written syntactic maturity of third year students of English at Biskra university?

RQ3: What are the attitudes of third year students of English at Biskra university after the implementation of SC?

5. Research Hypotheses

Building on the previously constructed research questions, we put forward the following research hypotheses:

RH1: We hypothesize that there are several factors which may impede students from improving their written syntactic maturity, one of which is a lack of exposure to diverse writing styles.

RH2: We hypothesize that implementing sentence-combining will have no effect on students' written syntactic maturity.

RH3: We hypothesize that implementing sentence-combining will have a positive effect on students' written syntactic maturity

RH4: We hypothesize that students will display a positive attitude towards the implementation of sentence-combining.

6. The Research Methodology for This Study

To be able to quantify and qualify, that is, measure the effect of SC, as well as describe factors and attitudes, a pragmatist paradigm is projected to align seamlessly with the nature of the study. Its practical, binary, solution-oriented nature calls for the integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. These two approaches, when combined together, a mixed-methods design emerges, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the research problem. Supporting this view, Creswell (2009) argued that, "In mixed methods research, investigators use both qualitative and

quantitative data because they work to provide the best understanding of the research problem” (p.28). Through a more precise lens, since the present study will start with a qualitative exploration, transitions to a quantitative measurement, and then returns to a qualitative interpretation, an embedded-mixed-methods research design will fit perfectly within this particular research framework.

In an effort to culminate in reliable research findings, data must be collected, analyzed, and interpreted strategically. In research where a Mixed-methods research design is integrated, opting for triangulation and the employment of multiple data collection methods can prove effective. Selecting a semi-structured focus group to inspect the factors that impede third-year EFL students from developing syntactic maturity is expected to act as a proof for the existence of such problems in the targeted population. In addition, the dynamic discussion that this tool can arguably offer will pave the way effectively to subsequent stages of conducting the treatment, mainly because it can partially uncover the weaknesses, needs and level of participants, providing rich insights about their perspectives and experiences. To measure the impact of sentence-combining technique on the syntactic maturity of third-year EFL students, tests will be administered before and after the treatment. This is assumed to first establish a baseline for participants, track their progress, and allow for meaningful comparisons. Ultimately, identifying the potential effectiveness of such technique. Furthermore, to gather data about EFL students' attitudes and emotional reactions towards the treatment, a semi-structured attitudinal questionnaire will be administered. The preciseness of the closed-ended questions and the thoughtful insights generated from the open-ended ones, will likely lead to a more nuanced understanding of the treatment's success.

When it comes to data analysis procedures, they will be carried out using varied methods, aligning with the different data collection methods adopted. Qualitative data gathered from the

focus group will be analyzed thematically, employing manual coding. In addition, post- and pre-test numerical data will be analyzed quantitatively with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics will help in effectively calculating measures of frequency, central tendency, and dispersion, and in visualizing their results. However, inferential statistics offers a wide range of tests, particularly the Paired-Sample T-unit and the Shapiro-Wilk test, both of which will be utilized in this study. These tests can be highly effective in proving that the observed difference between tests is due to an actual relationship between variables, rather than due to chance, and in demonstrating the normality of data. Moreover, to analyze the semi-structured attitudinal questionnaire, SPSS will be employed as the main software to run descriptive statistics and visualize findings using bar charts, pie charts, histograms, and tables.

6.1. Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

With the intention of arriving at more contextually rich findings, the population of the study will consist of the third-year EFL students at Biskra University. In more detail, using a voluntary sampling technique, 20 third-year students will be chosen as the targeted sample, upon which data will be collected and from which conclusions can be drawn.

7. The Significance of the Study

The present study is both research and pedagogy-leaning, catering to the interests of researchers and EFL teachers alike. On the one hand, this study could represent a major breakthrough in how syntax is delivered to EFL students, as it encourages moving from conventional methods to embracing grammar-free approaches. It suggests incorporating or the sentence-combining technique into writing programs to enhance EFL learners' syntactic maturity.

Owing to this, teachers can find this particular research highly useful for enhancing their instructional techniques to help students develop their sentence manipulative skills.

On the other hand, it is believed that this study would be the first one in the context under study which will examine the effect of SC on the written syntactic maturity of EFL students. The latter is an attempt to establish a solid groundwork upon which future studies can be based. Although SC is not a new concept, its implementation in this setting is relatively underexplored and highlights an area of missing knowledge. By addressing this gap, this research is projected to confirm previous findings and contribute additional evidence regarding the aforementioned research questions. Therefore, researchers might deem it both significantly valuable and intriguing.

8. The Referencing Style for This Dissertation

There is a general consensus that the key factor in defining the employment of a particular writing style (referencing style) is the area of research. Building on this, and grounded in the fact that the present research can be classified under the domain of educational research, which inherently belongs to social sciences, the APA (American Psychological Association) 7th edition will be consistently implemented throughout this research work. It is worth noting that supervisors' recommendations as far as some elements are concerned, such as cover page formatting and the justify function, will often be followed.

9. Delimitations of the Study

Decisions regarding various aspects of the study have not been made arbitrarily; yet several dimensions, namely the nature and level of participants and ways of assessing their writing, were consciously thought of and plausibly approached.

- Third-year EFL students are assumed to best fit the aims of this research. The targeted sample have already grasped the gist of grammar in second year and are now expected to use their knowledge in practicing various patterns of sentences to construct well-structured essays and paragraphs. Avoiding first- and second-year students can be a wise decision, as conducting a sentence-combining treatment at these levels requires teaching them grammar first.
- Among several indices of syntactic maturity, T-unit length will be adopted in this study as the main indicator of sentence complexity in students' written productions. Besides its accuracy and time-efficient nature, T-unit length is considered one of the most effective and accessible means to measure syntactic improvement (O'Donnell, 1975). In addition, adopting multiple indices of syntactic complexity may prove effective, but it is arguably time-consuming, requiring advanced software to be effectively analyzed.
- Opting for non-random voluntary sampling is expected to ensure that only students genuinely interested in joining the study will participate. This approach is likely to increase their presence, involvement, and engagement. Moreover, such sampling technique appears to be the most feasible option given the limited accessibility of the targeted participants.

10. Structure of the Dissertation

This research work compiles with the following organizational structure:

Chapter one will provide insights into various definitions of writing as a skill, along with its importance, types, and components. It will then transition from a broad discussion of writing to a more focused examination of syntax, its units, and their underlying types. The focus will later shift to defining syntactic maturity, exploring what constitutes a mature writing style, methods of measuring syntactic complexity, and the importance of developing more mature sentences.

Chapter two will contribute to the understanding of the SC technique, offering an overview of its historical background, types of SC exercises, and their potential benefits. Beyond this, the chapter will focus on the objectives of SC, its relationship with writing quality, and the potential shortcomings of the technique.

Chapter three will be dedicated to establishing a comprehensive and general background on the research methodology used in this study. It will precisely offer a structured account of the adopted research design, along with a meticulous analysis of the data collection methods. To ensure the adherence to ethical guidelines, this chapter will further address principles of validity and reliability.

Chapter four will mainly revolve around fieldwork and data analysis, as it will thoroughly demonstrate the analysis and interpretation of data that has been gathered. Besides, it will present an examination of the results, their discussion, and synthesis, accompanied by pedagogical implications and recommendations.

Chapter One

Chapter One: Written Syntactic Maturity

Introduction.....	34
1.1 Writing.....	34
1.2 Definition (s) of Writing.....	35
1.3 The Importance of Writing.....	37
1.4 Components of Effective Writing.....	41
1.4.1 Purpose.....	44
1.4.2 Organization.....	45
1.4.3 Clarity.....	46
1.4.4 Coherence.....	46
1.4.5 Support.....	47
1.4.6 Mechanics.....	47
1.5 Syntax.....	48
1.5.1 Definition (s) of Syntax.....	48
1.5.2 Basic Syntactic Units.....	51
1.5.2.1 Words.....	51
1.5.2.2 Phrases.....	52
1.5.2.2.1 Noun Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.2 Verb Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.3 Adverb Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.4 Adjective Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.5 Prepositional Phrase.....	52
1.5.2.2.6 Infinitive Phrase.....	53

1.5.2.2.7 Gerund Phrase.....	53
1.5.2.3 Clauses.....	53
1.5.2.3.1 Adverb Clause.....	53
1.5.2.3.2 Adjective Clause.....	53
1.5.2.3.3 Noun Clause.....	54
1.5.2.4 Sentences.....	54
1.5.2.4.1 Types of Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.1 Simple Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.2 Compound Sentences.....	55
1.5.2.4.1.3 Complex Sentences.....	56
1.5.2.4.1.4 Complex-Compound.....	56
1.5.2.4.2 Features of Effective Sentences.....	56
1.5.2.4.2.1 Variety.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.2 Clarity.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.3 Emphasis.....	58
1.5.2.4.2.4 Conciseness.....	59
1.5.2.4.3 Syntactic Maturity.....	59
1.5.2.4.3.1 Indices of Syntactic Maturity.....	62
1.5.2.4.3.2 Factors Influencing Syntactic Maturity.....	65
1.5.2.4.3.3 Importance of Improving Syntactic Maturity with Empirically-Based Interventions.....	70
Conclusion.....	73

Introduction

By providing a holistic theoretical view, this chapter aims to position syntactic maturity in the broad picture of the writing skill and syntax. Firstly, this chapter offers a detailed overview of different writing perspectives, its importance and fundamental components, paving the way to a more thorough discussion of syntax and its units. Stepwise, digging deeper into these syntactic units would bring to the forefront a careful description of syntactic maturity, its indices, factors that influence it and reasons behind its teachability.

1.1 Writing

Writing has always been a cornerstone in the humanity's life. The fact that it is highly needed in various fields, strengthening communication bounds between people and recording gigantic amount of knowledge to future generations, makes it an invaluable tool which must receive long-lasting interest. Notwithstanding being tremendously important, writing can be extremely difficult to acquire. In this respect, Gautam (2019) argued that “writing skill assumes the highest order on a scale of hierarchy and develops only after the former three have been learned or acquired” (p.1).

Therefore, proficient writers are assumed to enjoy a great privilege, which may open ample opportunities for them, elevate their academic reputation and grant them exceptional promotions. Besides being undeniably crucial in education, writing skill's role in today's modern world is inevitable, as written communication is occupying our daily transactions more than oral communication has ever done. That is, emailing, text messaging, blogging, digital note-taking are steadily becoming the optimal way of ideas sharing, potentially making writing a fundamental component of day-to-day interactions. Accordingly, it is quite hard to visualize a world without

writing regarding its immeasurable communicative value, as well as, the massive volume of knowledge safeguarded in libraries, websites, databases, and archives thanks to written works.

1.2 Definition (s) of writing

This distinctive skill referred to as “the technology of the mind” by the anthropologist Jack Goody has been the heart of several academic debates and studies. Hence, how it is perceived and defined can often vary from one scholar to another, with each adding not only a fresh interpretation, but also revealing diverse angles to how it is viewed. According to Wilson (2022), “writing is a process: both the interpretation that forms the basis of an argument and the presentation of that argument in a paper need to be done in a sequence of steps, each phase building on the prior” (p.14). This sequential view to writing, emphasizes the importance of producing not merely an idea, but an idea with its relevant explanation in a step-by-step manner, where each step is strongly intertwined with the previous one.

Maintaining the same train of thought, yet expounding on it, Sandora et al., (2020) claimed that “the writing process is generally seen to involve at least three distinct stages: (1) Pre-writing activities of gathering ideas and planning (2) Drafting ideas into connected sentences and paragraphs (3) Evaluating the draft and revising” (p.116). Abdul Samad (2020) reinforced the same claim, stating that “writing is a series of related texts that are made by developing ideas through a process of drafting, shaping, re-reading, editing, and revising, with the purpose of communicating the ideas to others” (p.3). Thus, it becomes evident that coming up with a polished written piece extends beyond merely putting words on a paper, as writing is neither spontaneous nor a static act; rather it is an activity that calls for careful organization and thoughtful planning.

Bell and Burnaby (1984, as cited in Nunan, 1989) viewed writing from a different angle, demonstrating a strong mental inclination:

Writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts (p.36).

Through this lens, writing is emphasized as a highly demanding mental skill, gearing writers towards striking a balance between the technical and rhetorical aspects of the written piece. In agreement with this perspective, Oxford (1990) pointed out that writing is a process of engaging in a deep level of thinking that requires a great deal of cognitive energy maintained over an extended duration. Similarly, Sandora (2020) affirmed that a considerable intellectual effort is demanded for a writing process to be achieved.

From a social standpoint, writing does not only serve individual needs, but also can be used as a social instrument to maintain relationships, and participate effectively in one's society. This aligns with Hayland (2003) view, "while every act of writing is in a sense both personal and individual, it is also international and social, expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting particular kind of relationship and acknowledging an engagement in a given community" (p.27). In a similar vein, Maru et al., (2024) maintained that "writing as a social act is influenced by social connections, institutional affiliations, and community involvement; It does not happen in a vacuum" (p.19). Likewise, Beyer and Gilstrap (1982) advocated that "writing as a social act is a purposeful interaction between someone with something to say and someone to whom this information is being related" (p.2).

Putting writing in a theoretical framework, Berninger et al., (2002) developed the so-called “simple view of writing”, where it is perceived as the combination of two fundamental skill bundles. Transcription skills and text generation. The former incorporates spelling and handwriting (or keyboarding), and the latter integrates words, sentences, and text-level writing. That is, to have a well-thought-out written piece, writers should make use of their physical writing ability, along with their ability to generate words, sentences and ultimately compelling paragraphs.

Stressing on the ground reality, it can be said that writing is a highly intricate skill which requires careful attention throughout the teaching and learning process. Further, due to the vast availability of writing across disciplines and fields, it seems that shaping an only one, all-encompassing definition is quite unreasonable. What is rather acceptable is providing the space and freedom to scholars and encourage them to create interpretations based on their orientations and perspectives so that new understandings to writing would emerge. Following the same train of thought, Gautam (2019) posited that integrating the vast amount of writing across multiple domains within a single interpretation is fairly challenging.

1.3 The Importance of Writing

In a world where language plays a powerful role, writing and the ability of expressing one’s ideas on papers acts as a catalyst in not only improving human relationships, but also filling gaps in knowledge and strengthening communication networks. From facilitating learning and recording data to improving critical thinking and enhancing cognitive functioning, writing continues to demonstrate a plethora of benefits that makes it a mandatory skill to learn. While it becomes apparent that writing is an incredibly significant skill, an in-depth explanation of the different aspects of its importance is still needed.

As a starting point, writing can be an effective tool for learning. Teachers often use writing as a powerful vehicle to teach their students certain concepts and motivate them to explore some topics. To illustrate, using writing-to-learn exercises urges students to sum up a lesson, imagine a different scenario to a story ending, reflect on what has been learned, and provide their feedback on the session. Doing so, will potentially permit students to make sense of the learning materials, establish connections between their learning process and their personal life experiences and actively engage with the learning journey. In this respect, the novelist C.Day-Lewis stated that “we not only write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand”. Advocating for the same ideation, Wells and Edwards (2013) suggested that “writing is potentially much more than an autonomous transcription of speech or thought, a mere conduit of transmission. It is a tool for recognizing and deepening thought” (p.74). Owing to this, it can be concluded that writing can be of great advantage to students, allowing them to construct meaning, make inferences, and link ideas together so as an efficient learning process would be fulfilled.

In addition, Writing can be of an exceptional privilege when it comes to improving critical thinking skills. Having a robust critical mindset in today's world is fairly indispensable; hence, one of the most optimal ways to develop a critical vision is by writing frequently. Peterson (2017) substantiated this claim by asserting that “the best way to teach people critical thinking is to teach them to write” (1min :23sec). Therefore, good writers are usually good critical thinkers; mainly because once they engage in writing, usually they not only have to check the reliability of data they are using, but also, they are required to distinguish between facts and opinions and evaluate different sources.

Further, generating arguments to back up their claims will possibly place them in a logical state of mind, where they have to consider different perspectives and stay away from biased stances

and emotional standpoints. Through the process of writing, they would be encouraged to think deeply about every word, phrase, and sentence choice so that the intended messages would be delivered. Furthermore, careful studying of their targeted audience and specific writing objective would presumably allow them to adhere to preciseness and conciseness, eventually steering clear of vagueness and over generalization. Therefore, critical thinking skills can be considered a treasure, and to improve them, effective writing skills need to be mastered.

Moreover, writing can conserve knowledge over extended periods of time. According to Calvo (n.d.), “Written words retain their power even after the writer is long gone, thus conferring a sort of immortality” (p.07). This long-lasting existence of written works allows for the revising of ideas, the modification of inquiries, and the updating of concepts that might become outdated. In addition, when scholars review the written production of others, they would be able to build on previously researched notions and come up with totally different contributions. Thus, it can likely save their time and energy, as well as, permit them to provide fresh perspectives. Further, by examining others' compositions, novice writers would have the opportunity to not only track the train of thought of skilled writers, but also, they can imitate varied writing styles, which would consequently enhance their literary voice. Not only this, writing, unlike speaking, offers aspiring writers the possibility of reviewing their old written productions. As a result, they would be able to make comparisons and monitor their progress.

Besides preserving knowledge, writing acts as an impetus for augmenting focus, attention, and cognitive functioning. When writing, individuals would potentially engage in a deep level of thinking, to come up with ideas that flow naturally and paragraphs that are linked smoothly. What is more, writers would be encouraged to make use of their internally stored knowledge, use their own ideas, and frame sentences within diverse syntactical patterns, leading them to be active agents

in the learning process. Supporting this argument, Harmer (2004) explained how writing may elevate focus by stating that:

Writing encourages students to focus on accurate language use because they think as they write; It may well provoke language development as they resolve problems which the writer puts into their minds. When writing, students frequently have more time to think than they do in oral activities. Students can go through what they know in their minds and even consult dictionaries, grammar books, or other reference material to help them (p.31)

Therefore, integrating a multitude of cognitive processes simultaneously while writing, may elevate writers' creativity and sharpen their attention and logical thinking skills. In this respect, Williams (2012) indicated that devoting a considerable amount of time in producing written pieces may augment learners' focusing levels. As a result, they will demonstrate a higher focus on grammatical structures and employ both their explicit and analyzed knowledge.

Furthermore, usefulness of writing skills as far as the job market is concerned can be numerous. Employees with polished writing skills are usually highly sought after in the employment market, as companies are in great need for workers who articulate their ideas clearly and professionally. As reported by the national association of colleges and employers (2016), 73,4% of job providers favor an employee with robust written communication capacities. In addition, the role of writing skills spans various industries and careers such as: content writer, copy writer, journalist, editor, researcher, public relations specialist and social media manager.

This suggests that, the more a person masters writing the more easily they will secure a job. Of equal importance, employees with refined writing ability will not only be able to establish impeccable professional image, but they will also get promoted frequently, due to their capacity to

influence others through compelling arguments, persuasive ideas, and error-free written products. Owing to all of the different facets of writing skills advantages in the job market, one may conclude that proficient writers may arguably enjoy a financially stable future.

In light of the above discussion, one might arguably conclude that writing is a versatile tool which is assumed to smooth the learning path, elevate critical thinking, record a huge amount of information, and enhance cognitive performance. This highlights its importance in contributing to both personal and professional growth. Likewise, it is not limited to one career or path. Rather, its multifaceted nature makes it a fundamental component across various industries. Thus, ensuring an effective delivery of writing instruction is crucial so that more skilled writers are introduced to the world.

1.4 Components of Effective Writing

Writing can be effective only if certain building blocks are present in the final product. A written piece cannot deliver its intended message if all components are not given equal attention. When some components are dominant while others are neglected, the result is often unbalanced writing that lacks both effectiveness and sophistication. As noted by Rai (2014), “effective writing, whatever the current political or theoretical framing of the debate, relies on the writer having a good understanding of the purpose, audience, and context” (p.135). This underscores the significance of not composing randomly. Instead, multiple aspects must be considered. Rijlaarsdam et al., (2005) corroborated this by stating that “effective writing depends not just on how goal-directed writing is, but also on the writer's ability to coordinate all the different processes involved” (p.8). Therefore, adjusting writing for a specific audience, targeting a clear purpose, adhering to grammatical rules, and maintaining coherence and clarity are all crucial. Additionally,

these elements should be appropriately managed to ensure that the written work is fairly comprehensive.

Over several years, a growing body of literature has suggested various models, studies, and assessment rubrics that demonstrate diverse components of effective writing. One of the most noteworthy models is “the five features of effective writing” model, based on North Carolina assessment rubric and developed by Cali and Bowen (2007). The latter is an attempt to clearly demonstrate what constitutes a good written piece. Throughout this theoretical framework, focus, organization, support, and elaboration, style, and conventions are emphasized as fundamental elements, which contribute to writing efficiency and readability. They claim that “by focusing on what is most important in a piece of written communication, these features not only provide teachers with a more objective set of criteria for assessing writing; they also provide students with a framework for reading and improving their own writing” (p.1).

Further, in his book, “Keys to Great Writing”, Wilbers (2000) offered a comprehensive analysis of his perspective about what makes writing sound proficient. As per his belief, competence in writing is achieved if one grasped and knew how to leverage purpose, point of view, organization, support, and coherence to his gain.

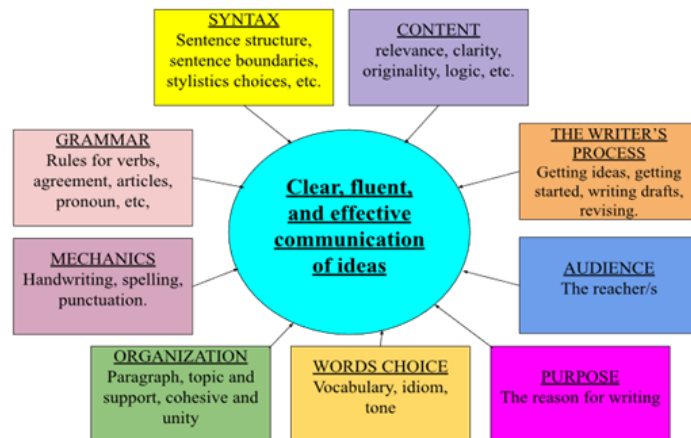
Furthermore, to substantiate their belief that “the confused thinking produces confused structure” (p.130), Kumar (2018) argued that to come up with unified and coherent writing, several elements should be maintained. As far as unity is concerned, the writer is required to showcase uniqueness of the topic, clarity of thought, grouping of ideas into a paragraph, effecting the right sense movement, proper transition, sense of direction, a feel of novelty, generating interest, a sense of completion, and informative content. As for coherent writing, the writer is expected to adhere to precision, conciseness, reasoning, logic, ethics, proper generalization, abbreviation and one

word substitution, compression, avoiding repetition, punctuation, proper selection, economy, and variety.

Approaching Effective Writing Components from an Alternative Lens, Heaton (1990) considered not only the grammatical aspects, but also the rhetorical, conceptual, and judgmental ones, in which he clarified them as follows:

Language use: The ability to write correct and appropriate sentences. Mechanical skills: The ability to use correctly those conventions peculiar to the written language, e.g., punctuation, spelling. Treatment of content: The ability to think creatively and develop thoughts excluding all irrelevant information. Stylistic skills: The ability to manipulate sentences and paragraphs and use language effectively. Judgmental skills: The ability to write in an appropriate manner for a particular purpose with a particular audience in mind, together with an ability to select, organize, and order relevant information (p.135)

In an attempt to provide a visual representation to the subject matter, Riams (1983) developed a diagram, where they outlined the key elements of a good prose writing:

Figure 01*Components of Effective Writing*

As shown in figure 01, Riems sought to gather all of the crucial components of writing within a single framework. He aimed further to demonstrate the strong relationship between achieving clarity and efficiency in writing and the simultaneous integration of a variety of writing elements, including syntax, mechanics, word choice, grammar...etc.

After reviewing some of the most notable frameworks that emphasize various components of effective writing, it becomes conspicuous that they share numerous aspects. Therefore, it is crucial to go into greater details about these shared features so that their possible effects on effective writing would be clarified. Among the key components repeatedly brought to attention across these frameworks are Purpose, Organization, Clarity, Coherence, Support, and Mechanics, which might be considered as the linchpin of a well-thought-out written piece.

1.4.1 Purpose

Without a predetermined purpose, writing can lack direction and tend to sound disorganized. Setting a clear goal can be highly significant in the writing process, as it can affect the decision-making of the writer. This may span across word choice, style, writing genre, and

even ideas development. In light of this, Wilbers (2000), contended that “writing with a clear sense of purpose will help not only write clearly, but also make all other decisions required of you during your journey” (p.146). Jalbout and Taleb (2019) defined purpose as “a goal or an objective: what you intend to accomplish in your piece of writing”. That is, it refers to the goal, reason for writing, and the motive that drives the writer's pen. According to Wilbers (2000), writers often are guided by six basic purposes: 1. To inform 2. To entertain 3. To persuade 4. To conduct a business 5. To express one's self 6. To compose a literary piece. Thus, whatever the reason behind the written work, writers should maintain a solid grasp of their purpose. As a result, their ideas would flow naturally, the decision-making process would run smoothly, and their readers would receive the intended meaning seamlessly.

1.4.2 Organization

In order to come up with a finished piece, one is expected to have a clear vision of the writing process. Organization is a key element at this level, through which a road map of ideas and arguments is meticulously established. Advocating for this claim, Starkey (2004) pointed out that “organization lets you see how your many developing ideas fit within a framework and clearly maps out any type of essay you're required to write” (p.2). Besides smoothing out the laborious task of ideas generation, organization also helps readers in creating connections between the supporting sentences and the main thesis statement as it motivates them to view the writer's arguments as trustworthy and credible (Starkey, 2004). Therefore, by adhering to organization, the writer makes an attempt of improving the quality of their ideas, as well as, reconsidering the arrangements of the main points in a way that sounds logical and coherent.

1.4.3 Clarity

Immersing the readers in the text and conveying complex ideas comprehensively calls for upholding the element of clarity. Polished writing skills extend beyond merely maintaining control over grammar and vocabulary. It necessitates articulating ideas in a straightforward, brief, and seamless fashion (Chahal, 2023). As per Starkey (2004), clarity is remarkably important, in which he stated that “learning how to be a clear and accurate writer will help make your essay readable and will guarantee that those who read it understand exactly what you mean to say” (p.11). Further, clarity cannot only make concepts vivid and approachable, but it also can arguably make the writers style intriguing to read, steering clear of redundancy and duplication. Eventually, offering an enjoyable reading experience. Being a clear producer of ideas, Means using examples to make abstract thoughts concrete, avoiding vagueness by using accurate terminology, and breaking down intricate notions into small pieces of information. Doing so, will hopefully ensure the clear delivery of the message to the targeted audience.

1.4.4 Coherence

When one reads a piece of writing and finds that its ideas are tightly connected, and its paragraphs flows naturally, this likely suggests that coherence is successfully achieved. Humanities writing center (2014), indicated that “coherence refers to the unity or togetherness of the text as a whole and is achieved through the effective grouping and arrangement of ideas in a logical order” (p.1). Therefore, a coherent text can not only facilitate the processing of the big picture, but also may eliminate obscurity and reduces cognitive load, where readers do not have to put great mental effort to grasp information. Conversely, incoherence can be seen as disjoint writing where sentences are arranged adjacently, but are meaningfully disconnected (Brostoff,

1981). Hence, upholding coherence is key in writing to avoid confusion and secure the successful transmission of the intended meaning.

1.4.5 Support

While speaking, tone, intonation, pitch and voice can make a huge influence on the hearer. However, in a silent communication like writing, evidence and supporting details are one of the most useful tools to establish credibility. Supporting arguments goes beyond merely making simple claims. Cali and Bowen (2003) asserted that “supporting details should be relevant and clear. The writer must present his or her ideas with enough power and clarity to cause the support to be sufficient” (p.2). In addition, appealing to feelings, logic, or ethics are all effective vehicles to sound believable. More precisely, writers can use anecdotes, analogies, metaphors, statistics, storytelling, and vibrant examples to back up their assertions. On the whole, using a variety of concrete and relevant details to support one's points tend to be a powerful way to show readers and not merely tell them.

1.4.6 Mechanics

No matter how original an idea writers come up with, the incapacity to express themselves accurately using mechanics can likely impede the transmission of the message. A writer that masters mechanics implies that they are well-rounded about the rules and conventions that dictate how spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar should be used in writing. Accordingly, maintaining accurate mechanics can result in more clarity, correctness, and precision when formulating clauses and sentences. Similarly, a writer's robust control over mechanics could be a reflection of his proficient command of language.

Overall, to take their writing capacity to the next level, writers are expected to integrate multiple components simultaneously, as each one contributes uniquely to the written piece. While

coherence adds harmony, mechanics improves precision, purpose enhances focus, support fosters credibility, and organization creates order. Each component serves a specific function, ultimately leading to a polished final product.

1.5 Syntax

Considering the points raised earlier, it is plausible to state that purpose, organization, clarity, coherence, elaboration, and mechanics can be viewed as the optimal criteria of a skillfully composed writing. Besides these characteristics, Peha (2003) asserted that sentence fluency is another key aspect of a well-crafted written product. That is, if a test is built upon sentences which are ill-structured, the overall style and ideas flow will be weakened. Endorsing this idea, Olshtain (2001) posited that one of the most crucial aspects in writing is to avoid inaccurate structure which may cause the message to be indecipherable. Beyond this, a writer cannot possess a mature syntactical style, while their grasp of syntax is not yet complete. Therefore, it is critical to establish a strong understanding of syntax and its underlying importance, units, and sub-skills.

1.5.1 Definition of Syntax

The arrangement of words to form complete thoughts, the intertwining of phrases to express clear meaning, and the seamless flow of ideas within a sentence are not random occurrences; rather, they follow a systematic set of rules that ensure harmony and clarity in language. This vital aspect of linguistics is referred to as “syntax”.

Because of the primordial role of syntax in the English language, several linguists have been interested in understanding how meaning is constructed through sentence structure. As a result, varied approaches have emerged as an attempt to provide a novel perspective to this key concept. Etymologically, the word “syntax” is derived from the ancient Greek, which means “arrange together”. This word can be used to refer to both the study of the conventions that control

the structure of sentences, and to these rules themselves. According to Irawan and Sulisty (2018) “Syntax deals with the mutual relation of words as componential parts of a sentence and with their proper arrangement to express clearly the intended meaning” (p.2). Asserting this claim, Merriam-Webster (n.d.) indicates that “syntax refers to the way in which linguistic elements (such as words) are put together to form constituents (such as phrases or clauses)”.

Matthews (1981) affirmed this view, stating that “Syntax is the branch of grammar that deals with the arrangement of words to convey connections of meaning within a sentence” (as cited in Armstrong, 2005, p.111). As per this perspective, syntax refers to a set of rules that dictate how words should be ordered and tightly connected to deliver a meaningful thought. These rules offer a highly organized system that ensures consistency and allow language users to express themselves in a way that is grammatically correct, as well as, easily understood.

In addition, Wintner and Francez (2012) believed that syntax cannot be studied in isolation and emphasized its strong relationship with other branches of linguistics:

Syntax is the area of linguistics that assigns structures to utterances, thus determining their acceptability. It cannot, however, be viewed independently of other areas of linguistics. Syntax is an indispensable means for assigning meaning to utterances. Most theories of semantics rely on syntax in that they define meanings compositionally. Thus, the meaning of a phrase is defined as a function of the meanings of its subpart. Furthermore, the principles of syntax are believed by many researchers to be responsible for the structure of words. That is, morphology is viewed by many as a sub-field of syntax. Syntax also has an important influence in phonology; The structure of utterances occasionally affects phonological processes (p.3)

Through this definition, the vital role of syntax within the broader scene of linguistics is effectively conveyed. Syntax extends beyond merely assigning rules, it also influences meaning, intervenes with words and can even impact how certain sounds are uttered. This reinforces the idea that syntax is in a constant interconnection and interaction with other fields of linguistics.

Moreover, to demonstrate the generative aspect of syntax that sets it apart from other linguistic branches, Kim and Sells (2008) emphasized that “the main goal of syntax is building a grammar that can generate an infinite set of well-formed grammatical English sentences” (P.17). Thus, regarding its productive nature, syntax can possibly offer the language user limitless possibilities of grammatical structures and endless syntactic variations.

Beyond that, to showcase the structural makeup of syntax, Miller (2002) suggested that “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” (p.12). This standpoint highlights how the different syntactic layers operate together to formulate meaningful and balanced statements.

Another lens of viewing syntax highlighted that syntactic rules reflect the language users' internal competence in producing varied syntactical patterns (Szczegielniak, n.d.); therefore, syntax is about the mentally stored knowledge which governs how sentences should be manipulated.

In essence, being a fundamental ingredient in grammar and a key aspect of linguistics, syntax can act as the backbone of well-structured sentences. While phonology deals with sounds, morphology tackles word formation, semantics clarifies words' meanings, syntax sets up rules to ensure the seamless interaction between all of these elements. Eventually, establishing sentences that are grammatically correct and meaningfully coherent.

1.5.2 Basic Syntactic Units

English language syntax is a highly organized system. That is, it is not only made of sentences, but also other building blocks that can ensure its logical unity and fluid balance. When these core elements work together, words will be arranged strategically, phrases will be connected harmoniously, and clauses will be combined seamlessly, creating a coherent text where all pieces are in tune with each other. Therefore, making an attempt to understand the essence of words, phrases, clauses and sentences would ultimately allow us to uncover how this intricate syntactic system works.

1.5.2.1 Words. The fact that words are ubiquitous, occupying people's day-to-day activities, that is, reading, writing, speaking, and listening, makes them a vital area of study. Although they constitute the smallest unit in language, words can be regarded as microcosms of language, mirroring its meaningfulness, intricacies, and communicative value. When we take a closer look at words, we can realize that they are more than a mere set of characters put together, as they may transmit a variety of profound connotations, depending on the context they are used in.

According to the Oxford Dictionary (n.d.), a word is defined as “a single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence, and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed”. This points out one of the major qualities of a word, which is meaningfulness; that is, words can convey meaning, whether independently or when grouped with other words to produce a sentence.

Similarly, to add more depth and accuracy to the concept of wordhood, Henderson (2007) argued that words are units of syntax that are orthographically representable, composed of morphemes, interconnected with other words, and can convey meaning. This view draws focus to

the basic characteristics of a word as a linguistic unit, emphasizing their meaningfulness, interrelatedness, and structural role.

1.5.2.2 Phrases. If words are microcosms of language, phrases can act as bridges of meaning that may add more nuance, detail and description to syntactic patterns. Without these units of thought, sentences can possibly sound vague, overly simple and non-mature, which may consequently weaken the quality of the message. To put them in simple terms, phrases are created when two or more words are connected to each other, with the condition that they must not contain a subject-verb pair. Therefore, phrases can not stand alone, even though they may contribute to strengthening the overall meaning.

Phrases can be divided into several types, in which each one serves a specific function in the sentence. The following are the main types and their definitions:

1.5.2.2.1 Noun phrase. The main part of a noun phrase is a noun or a pronoun, which can be modified by other words either before or after them. It can function as a subject, object, or complement in a sentence.

1.5.2.2.2 Verb phrase. It can be made of only one verb, or several verbs, like the case of an auxiliary attached to the main verb. It functions as the predicate of the sentence.

1.5.2.2.3 Adverb phrase. The main word here is the adverb which is often employed to modify a verb, adjective or another adverb through adding extra details.

1.5.2.2.4 Adjective phrase. The main word in this type is an adjective used usually to modify and describe nouns.

1.5.2.2.5 Prepositional phrase. This type usually starts with a preposition followed either by a noun or a pronoun. It can be embedded to demonstrate relationships of time, place, direction...etc.

1.5.2.2.6 Infinitive phrase. In this type, the phrase begins with the infinitive form of the verb (to+verb), in which it may operate as a noun, adjective, or an adverb.

1.5.2.2.7 Gerund phrase. Beginning with a verb in its gerund form (-ing), this phrase often functions as a noun in the sentence.

Thus, accommodating diverse types and functions, phrases can presumably allow writers display more depth and precision in their writing. Eventually, enhancing their sentences in terms of variety and complexity.

1.5.2.3 Clauses. Clauses can serve as the building blocks of sentences. More precisely, clauses can combine strings of ideas together, show logical relationships between varied syntactic units and help in the construction of intricate grammatical patterns. Thus, they can likely play a vital role in the written piece. A generally accepted definition of a clause is that it refers to a group of words with its own subject and verb. If a clause can formulate a complete thought and is capable to stand alone, it is called “independent clause” (main clause); however, when a clause does not express a complete thought and requires another clause to be meaningful, it is called “dependent clause” (subordinate clause).

Along with dependent and independent clauses, there exist other types of clauses, which perform varied roles in language.

1.5.2.3.1 Adverb Clause. This is the kind of clauses that functions as an adverb to modify a verb, adjective or another adverb. It provides answers to questions like: where? When? Why? Under what condition? In what manner? To what extent?

1.5.2.3.2 Adjective clause. (also known as relative clause) it functions as an adjective to describe a noun or a pronoun. It targets questions like: what kind? Which one? How many? How much?

1.5.2.3.3 Noun clause. A dependent clause that functions like a noun (subject, object, complement) and it answers questions like who? or what?

Overall, clauses are of various types, each is responsible for a specific purpose. When put together, clauses can possibly broaden the borders of sentences and enrich the meaning of the written work, through contributing further information and drawing on connections between fragmented thoughts.

1.5.2.4 Sentences. Sentences are the by-products of integrating multiple syntactic units together, including words, phrases, and clauses. Hence, they are reckoned the largest syntactic units recognized in language. Starting from the sentence, many paragraphs, essays, articles, and large written products are created. Therefore, sentences can play a foundational role in language. Ill-structured sentences can likely transform meaningful ideas into weak ones. Conversely, well-written sentences may render the writer's style more intriguing and captivating to read. In this respect, Kane (2000) contended that “good sentences are the sinew of style. They give to the prose its forward thrust, its flexibility, its strong and subtle rhythms” (p.152).

Regarding the invaluable role of sentences in transmitting varied ideas, providing a comprehensive definition to the sentence became imperative. According to Buerger (1899), “a sentence is a group of words having grammatical completeness” (p.118). This view highlights the grammatical aspects of a sentence, implying that a sentence is a complete thought whose grammatical structure requires a subject-verb agreement.

Moreover, to showcase the practical functions of the sentence, Kaul (2020) indicated that “a sentence is a group of words that expresses an entire idea by giving a statement, an order, asking a question or an explanation” (p.30); Thus, sentences serve a critical role in communication. This

is due to its capacity to allow users perform diverse functions by merely putting a group of words together.

Furthermore, in the article “The Sentence” (1875), sentences were viewed as a necessary product of the mind, in which the writer stated that “The languages of the world are all made up entirely of sentences, in all essentials, precisely the same in organic structure as the English sentence. This is so because the mind can think in no other way than through the mediumship of what we call a sentence; and hence as language is always and ever simply and only the expression of thought, it follows that language must ever take the form of sentences” (p.233). What is remarkable about this definition is the idea that sentences are the means by which mental thoughts are transmitted effectively.

1.5.2.4.1 Types of sentences. Distinguishing between different types of sentences is determined by the type and number of clauses they compromise. English sentences usually can be classified into four structures: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences.

1.5.2.4.1.1 Simple sentences. This type of sentences consists of one independent clause only, that is, a subject and verb. Despite of its simplicity, this type can be of great utility, especially when declaring a direct statement, asking a question, displaying a list, and offering concise direction.

1.5.2.4.1.2 Compound sentences. A type of sentences that encompasses two or more independent clauses linked using coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so, or), a semicolon or coordinating adverbs. Because each clause is given equal weight, this type of sentences can create balance between ideas, present additional information, and show cause-effect relationships.

1.5.2.4.1.3 Complex sentences. This type incorporates one independent clause and at least one dependent clause joined using subordinating conjunctions (as, because, while, although, if, since... etc.). Unlike compound sentences, complex sentences do not give ideas equal emphasis. They can be used to express condition, contrast, concession, sequence, reason, and to elaborate on the main idea.

1.5.2.4.1.4 Complex-compound. It is a blend of two or more independent clauses with at least one dependent clause connected using subordinating conjunctions and coordinating conjunctions. These types, when combined, they contribute to adding layers of meaning, expressing multiple ideas, and making writing more complex and varied.

In short, given the various categories of sentence structures, writers are expected to include them carefully, depending on their purpose of writing. They are also anticipated to strike a balance between simple and complex structures, so that more vibrant ideas would be constructed.

1.5.2.4.2 Features of effective sentences. Because sentences are the building blocks of any written piece, writing effective paragraphs requires first writing effective sentences. Being aware of the key aspects of an effective sentence may allow one to know what constitute non-effective and poorly written ones, and ultimately help in avoiding them. Landon (2013) claimed that “to be better writers, we must first and foremost write better sentences” (p.14). Therefore, this makes it clear that effectiveness in constructing syntax surpasses merely maintaining grammatical correctness. Alternatively, a host of qualities need to exist so that effectively communicated sentences would be crafted.

The word effective implies multiple connotations, as it may convey the combination of well-structured, grammatically correct, vocabulary-rich, concise, and even impactful sentences.

As a result, views on sentence effectiveness have been numerous and diverse. Landon (2013) described effective sentences as follows:

And here is the beauty of great sentences: They come in all shapes and sizes, and lots of different things can make them great. Great precision and specificity, Great dramatic impact, Great sound, Great ways in which they direct the reader's thinking, Great ways in which they reveal the writer's mind at work, Great logical progression, Great imagery—And the list goes on and on (p.13)

Landon expressed the all-encompassing nature of the word great or effective, and brought to attention several hallmarks of a good sentence, namely variety, precision, length, impact on the reader, logical flow, and musicality. From another angle, Kane (2000) believed that well-constructed sentences are often characterized by clarity, emphasis, concision, and variety. In a similar vein, after conducting a theoretical overview of sentences, Yu (2017) concluded that there are five foundational traits of an effective sentence: correctness, clearness, unity, coherence, and emphasis. Echoing this sentiment, Spurlock (1961) put forward that in order to craft good sentences, writers are expected to take into account four components spanning across planning and organizing, clarity, concision, and appropriate stylistic expression. Warnock (2003) had a different standpoint as far as sentence effectiveness is concerned. For them, well-written sentences extend beyond merely being readable; they help the writer shape the overall purpose and can add energy and vividness to the written piece.

Having established a clear picture about scholars' different views of what constitutes an effective sentence, four qualities stand out due to their reoccurring significance, encompassing variety, clarity, emphasis, and concision.

1.5.2.4.2.1 Variety. A balanced and interesting writing style is expected to embrace varied sentence patterns. When writers incorporate both short and long sentences harmoniously, they can presumably captivate the reader's attention and keep them engaged with the written piece; Thus, steering clear of monotony and redundancy, which may result from clinging to only one syntactic length and structure. In this regard, Saddler (2012) maintained that, “whatever the length may be, however, each sentence will ideally make a unique and identifiable contribution to the whole” (p.16). This suggests that each sentence has its distinctive role. Therefore, while short sentences may add emphasis and increase readability, long ones can furnish the written piece with nuanced ideas and informative details.

1.5.2.4.2.2 Clarity. In order to ensure the effective delivery of the message, writers should maintain clear sentences. These latter can be achieved by consistency in using pronouns, dominance of the active voice, use of simple language, focusing on the same topic, maintaining grammatical correctness, and logical flow (Spurlock, 1961). Sustaining clear sentences throughout the text can possibly make ideas easy to comprehend, reduce the cognitive load that readers might experience, and alleviate the risk of misinterpretation.

1.5.2.4.2.3 Emphasis. Emphasizing ideas means showcasing their strength, importance, and impact. Unlike speaking, which relies on tone, gestures, and intonation to establish emphasis, writing can do so through repetition, short sentences, passive voice, rhetorical questions, inversion, and vivid vocabulary. Creating emphasis is anticipated to help readers distinguish significant ideas from marginal ones, making them more likely to be retained. Despite its efficiency, emphasis should be incorporated sparingly. Kane (2000) explained this by arguing that “by their nature strong sentences (that is, those having total emphasis) cannot occur very often. Their effectiveness depends on their rarity” (p.201).

1.5.2.4.2.4 Conciseness. “Writing cannot be effective if its message is buried beneath a mass of useless, repetitive words” (Spurlock, 1961, p.207). Thus, sentences that are overloaded with unnecessary words may result in vagueness and lack of focus. Producing concise sentences does not only mean short sentences. Instead, long ones can also be concise if they deliver their intended meanings directly. Concision can be achieved by planning and organizing ideas beforehand, removing superfluous words and phrases, avoiding repetitive language, and being specific. Doing so, is assumed to help readers stay focused, maintain precision, and establish a sense of professionalism.

In conclusion, despite their apparent simplicity, deep down, effective sentences can require more than grammatical correctness. Clarity, variety, concision, and emphasis are other vital qualities that should be approached carefully when the aim is to produce a well-written sentence. As long as all of these qualities are met, the result would be a written product that is syntactically sound, furnishing readers with compelling ideas and a memorable reading experience.

1.5.2.4.3 Syntactic maturity. Another aspect of effective sentences that often goes overlooked is syntactic maturity. That is, while variety, clarity, concision, and emphasis are often labeled as key characteristics of a good sentence, the idea of syntactic maturity, though not as heavily prioritized, serves an equally vital role in achieving proficiency in writing. Advocating for this, Lu (2010) study uncovered that written syntactic patterns that are long and complex can act as a significant marker of learners' proficiency growth. Further, Freedman et al. (2014) assumed that fluency in a certain language encompasses not only vocabulary content, but also syntactic fluency that is communicated with increased confidence. Furthermore, Potter (1967) and Schmelig (1969) studies, which attempted to compare between poor and good written products, revealed that

good compositions are usually associated with longer and more complex sentences (T-units); thus, signaling a higher writing proficiency and quality.

Notwithstanding being a core element of good writing, the concept of syntactic maturity is still blurred, lacking clear boundaries. Therefore, establishing a comprehensive understanding of its underlying nature and its specific utilization within the scope of this research becomes necessary. In discussing syntactic maturity, it is important to note that the terms “syntactic fluency” and “syntactic complexity” are generally used interchangeably with syntactic maturity. According to Garrot (2001, as cited in Slobin, 1966; Hunt, 1967; Radford, 1990) syntactic maturity may be defined as “the developmental stages from one and two word utterances to the hierarchical structures of adult speech” (p.3). This denotes the idea that syntactic growth can be best understood as the progress from an initial stage of producing few words to a more advanced stage of constructing complex, adult-like structures.

Expressing a congruent viewpoint, Cheng (2006, as cited in Isaacson, 1985, p.410) contended that syntactic maturity is “the degree to which a student uses expanded, more complex sentences” (p.19). In essence, this conveys that maturity in manipulating sentences requires the ability of expanding ideas, adding details and incorporating various embeddings to make them more sophisticated. Thinking along the same lines, Winterowd and O'Hare (1975) linked fluency and maturity by claiming that “syntactic fluency-which is the ability of writers to use the syntactic resources of the language to modify prepositions and embed prepositions within others, all of which brings about what English teachers generally term ‘mature style’” (p.70). The latter assertion implies that fluency extends beyond mere grammatical soundness; It involves the capacity of transmitting nuanced and layered meanings that can be achieved through harnessing the different syntactic patterns available in the language.

Moreover, as per Freedman et al., (2014), Syntactic Fluency refers to “the student's ability to choose from a repertoire of syntactic options” (p.90). Later, the authors further elaborated, “it is the ability to use syntactic processes such as coordination and subordination to combine ideas within individual sentences” (p.91). From this definition, one can infer that, before having syntactic maturity, writers should own first syntactic awareness of the diverse types of sentences, clauses and phrases and the different connectors suitable to join them. Having this knowledge, writers would be able to choose the most appropriate syntactic patterns in a certain context, that is demonstrating syntactic maturity.

Further, Smith (2007) held that mature writers do not only demonstrate knowledge of syntactic rules, but also show proficiency in performing a vast array of syntactic constructions. In addition, their sentences are usually of extended and complex nature, encompassing numerous words, multiple clauses, and various embeddings, in which he maintained that:

As a result, we might reasonably infer that good writers, expert writers, mature writers have mastered the syntax of their language and have at their disposal a large repertoire of syntactic forms, especially those forms we associate with long clauses, which we can recognize simply by their length or denser sentences, which we can measure by using the t-unit, an independent clause and all related subordination (p.27).

All things considered, syntactic maturity plays a crucial role in making writing more effective. Hence, long sentences that can convey more detailed information and explanation can affect positively the overall sophistication and quality of the written product, making it informative and useful. London (2013) pushed for the view that sentences that are informative and provide readers with detailed information and thorough insights, are of higher effectiveness compared to

those which convey limited information; similarly, sentences that predict and acknowledge most of readers' questions are superior than those that address minimal amount of questions.

1.5.2.4.3.1 Indices of syntactic maturity. Judging writing as good or bad is often one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. Being a fundamental facet of writing, assessing syntactic maturity can be particularly difficult. This is due to chiefly the absence of a clear understanding of what constitutes a mature style, which is characterized by many researchers as “multi-dimensional”, involving numerous criteria, and enfolding a variety of linguistic elements. For the better evaluation of syntactic maturity, some scholars attempted to establish a set of indices. Besides serving as hallmarks of a mature style, these indices provide a quantitative method for measuring syntactic development across individuals and over time.

When discussing indices of syntactic maturity, Hunt's (1965) foundational study warrants close examination. This study offered pioneering insights and aimed to establish a logical, well-structured, and inclusive method for quantitatively analyzing syntactic structures. To achieve this, Hunt introduced the T-unit—a measure defined as one main clause along with any subordinate clauses or non-clausal structures connected to it. Unlike the sentence, the T-unit can smooth out the analysis of syntactic improvement.

By tracking the progress of schoolchildren in grades 4, 8, and 12 and comparing their writing to that of adults, Hunt arrived at several significant conclusions. One key finding was that T-unit length emerged as "the most valid measure of maturity" (p. 09). In other words, as children progressed through school, their T-units became noticeably longer, with more words integrated to enhance their sentences. Additionally, clause length proved to be the second most reliable index of syntactic maturity. Children lengthened their main clauses by adding subordinate clauses or expanding the main clause itself.

Furthermore, among the three types of subordinate clauses, the increase in adjective clauses stood out as the most significant marker of syntactic growth, making it the third most robust index. In the final stage of his study, Hunt revealed that children often extended their clauses by incorporating noun phrases and other modifiers rather than relying solely on nouns or pronouns. This practice reflects the advanced syntactic manipulation characteristic of mature, adult writing.

On the same tone, O'Donnell (1968) maintained that in order to be able to measure language growth effectively, there should be a tool that is grounded in a credible measurement scale of language maturity; It is expected to be readily quantifiable, as well as it should minimize the influence of certain variables like environment, topic nature, and compositional length. O'Donnell (1967) considered that these criteria resonate with Hunt's T-unit length, stating that "T-unit length is still the most useful and usable index of syntactic development over a wide age-range" (p.38).

Expanding the scope of inquiry, Lu (2010) contribution sought to make the process of applying various syntactic complexity measures easier when it comes to second-language written productions. Therefore, they first collected 14 indices of syntactic maturity used in previous studies, then sorted them into five categories: length of production unit, amount of subordination, amount of coordination, degree of phrasal sophistication, and overall sentence complexity. After that, they described a computational system that aimed at the automatic analysis of the 14 indices of syntactic complexity in L2 written samples. When examined using college-level second-language written text, this computational system demonstrated a significant level of reliability in processing and calculating the syntactic complexity markers of learners' essays. In this light, Lu (2010) asserted that "this system provides a useful tool to second-language writing researchers for

analyzing the syntactic complexity of any number of writing samples using any or all of the fourteen complexity measures (p.491).

In an effort to gain deeper insights into some of the most important indices of syntactic maturity, offering comprehensive definitions for each one is expected to draw a clearer picture of these measures. While **T-Unit** is not particularly an index used to measure syntactic maturity, it can act as a foundational building block upon which many syntactic maturity indices have been developed. It is generally referred to as one main clause, along with any subordinate clauses linked to it. To illustrate, a compound sentence is made up of two T-Units. Hunt (1965) proposed this syntactic unit after realizing that inaccurate punctuation and the careless use of “and” can render sentence length an invalid index. What is more, T-Unit can be determined objectively as it can stand alone as a complete sentence and is not influenced by faulty punctuation. With respect to **T-Unit length**, it is the most reliable index of syntactic maturity. It can be measured by calculating the number of words that a T-Unit consists of. Mature writers often include more details, information, and embeddings, which results in greater number of words at the level of their T-Units. Therefore, it can be said that the greater the number of words in a T-Unit, the more likely the writer is to demonstrate syntactic maturity.

As for **clause length**, it refers to the number of words in a clause, be it an independent or dependent clause. A longer clause can often suggest higher syntactic complexity, as it may imply the writer's capacity to incorporate diverse syntactic units, such as phrases or modifiers, extending beyond merely constructing simple sentence parts. In addition, **clause per T unit** is another index of syntactic maturity that is measured by counting the number of subordinate clauses within each T unit. A greater number of clauses per T unit can reflect higher levels of syntactic sophistication. Furthermore, while **words per T unit** metric examines the average number of words within each

T unit, providing a broader measure of complexity, **words per clause** measure represents the average number of words in each clause across the entire text.

Despite the fact that they have contributed to facilitating syntactic maturity assessment, these indices, developed by Hunt (1965), have been criticized sharply by some scholars. One of these is Christensen (1968) who believed that a mature style is not necessarily one that is filled with lengthy sentences, but is one that “say much in less” and is easy to decipher. They, further, emphasized that mature style should be learned by observing the way by which professional writers craft their ideas, and not children. What is more, because previous studies overlooked the rule of free and bound modifiers, Christensen highlighted their significance, particularly free modifiers, in adding details, yet at the same time upholding sentence clarity and flow. Therefore, they call for the teaching of these modifiers' type as they may contribute to the variety and maturity of writing, ensuring its alignment with modern writing standards.

In conclusion, Hunt's syntactic indices have received criticism from some researchers for focusing predominantly on complexity, as well as, overlooking more nuanced stylistic tools. However, their persistent use in recent studies (see Abdeen, 2019; Wang, 2023) highlights their enduring validity and utility. Consequently, in this study, T-unit length will serve as the primary measure for analyzing learners' syntactic maturity, supplemented by Lu's (2010) web-based syntactic complexity analyzer to facilitate efficient calculations.

1.5.2.4.3.2 Factors influencing Syntactic Maturity. As writers grow, their written input continues to change, their language structure takes a different shape and their output experiences multiple transformations. This can, particularly, be seen in the complexity they usually apply to their sentences, as well as the maturity they possess in linking ideas together. Reflecting on this,

Bo and Beverly (2014) recognized that “the level of syntactic maturity in a language can also change over time as the language evolves and develops” (p.85).

This consistent evolving and ongoing growth can conceivably be due to the environment they are surrounded with, including the type of reading materials they read, the audience they are intended to address, and topics they are expected to discuss. According to jiang (2000), the syntactic structures employed by EFL writers can be impacted by some contextual factors, such as genre of writing, the purpose, and the targeted audience. For this reason, it becomes essential to address factors that may shape writers’ syntactic maturity.

One of the most vital factors in influencing syntactic maturity is the writing genre. because each genre is often characterized by a set of hallmarks that sets it apart. Writers are prone to perform linguistically different in each one. For instance, applying certain grammatical structures in argumentative writing and employing other distinctive structures in writing narratives. This is primarily attributed to the idea that different cognitive processes are required to be used across different modes of discourse (Bi, 2020). To be more precise, argumentative text is distinguished by the use of attributive clauses in displaying the statement; Expository written products may predominantly involve more clauses and attributive adjectives, when it comes to depicting the characteristics of a theme; and narrative pieces lean towards employing third-person pronouns and the past tense (Berman & Slobin, 2013).

To Approach this from an empirical perspective, when Pu et al., (2022) compared the syntactic complexity of students' argumentative and expository written products, they found that writing genre had remarkable impact on their sentences. More specifically, the syntactic complexity of argumentative written texts was substantially greater than that of expository passages. Corroborating this, Rosen (1969) study showcased that subjects produced longer t-units

when it comes to referential writing as opposed to expressive writing. Therefore, these findings substantiate further the assumption that the writing genre can control and determine how writers should structure their ideas; eventually affecting the maturity of their sentences.

Further, A deep connection between writing and reading has always existed. As has been proved by many studies, The exposure to written works can directly impact the writing quality of students (Shanchan & Lomax, 1986). Moreover, learners' writing enhanced more significantly when their classroom input involved more reading (Siedow, 1973), Unlike when students devoted more efforts on practicing regular writing (Stotsky, 1983).

To shift the focus to written syntactic maturity, Douglas and Miller (2016), raised the following question: Can syntactic sophistication of our reading influence our writing? To answer this question, the researchers surveyed students' reading habits and analyzed their writing samples. A strong correlation was found between students' reading material and writing sophistication. To articulate this more clearly, while students who read academic journals, literary fiction, or general nonfiction, exhibited greater syntactic sophistication, others who read genre-fiction (mystery and fantasy), or web-based content displayed decreased levels of syntactic complexity; Thus, what readers are consuming can drastically influence the way they write, the structure of their sentences, and the complexity of the grammatical patterns they use.

Another crucial determinant of syntactic growth is topic familiarity. Andrade et al., (2022) assumed that, in order for writers to produce an effective written piece, they have to possess familiarity with the underlying concepts of the topic. Expanding on this idea, Bu and Beverly (2024) acknowledged that, when learners have a well-rounded understanding of the topic, they may constantly start looking for similar information in their brains, make relations between the new and old insight, and easily grasp meaning from the provided material. Accordingly,

comprehension, production, and reasoning ability can likely increase if writers have a prior exposure and awareness of the subject matter.

Turning the discussion to syntactic maturity, Bu and Beverly (2024), study established a robust connection between having a solid background of the topic and being able to articulate ideas using complex structures. Their major finding was that the more learners are acquainted with a certain subject, the more they become skillful at manipulating mature syntactic structures. This implies that those with an in-depth awareness of a particular issue may feel more comfortable in expressing their ideas, elaborating their sentences by adding details and making their writing more informative and nuanced. Another way to explain this is that a high degree of topic familiarity can possibly free students from the burden of thinking about the content, allowing them to focus their attention merely on the structure and eloquence of their sentences.

Furthermore, as writers grow, their cognitive processing also develops, evolving into more sophisticated thinking skills. This growth encompasses their writing ability, enabling them to gradually introduce complexity to their sentences. According to O'Hare (1973), "as the child matures, he tends to unbeat more sentences, which results in an increase in clause and unit length in his writing. Perhaps these increases can be attributed to his cognitive development or perhaps encountered in his reading and in conversation at school" (p.24).

By comparing between the free writing of schoolchildren and the writing of adults, Hunt (1965) study confirmed that longer sentences and more complex structures are often associated with adults. In line with these findings, Stewart (1978), who investigated syntactic maturity from high school to university levels, concluded that syntactic maturity improves with grade level, demonstrating further the significant impact of cognitive growth on producing mature structures.

Additionally, being aware of the target audience can shape how writers structure their ideas, choose their words, and convey their messages; thus, this process of adjusting one's style to the abilities, expectations, and needs of readers can play a vital role in defining either the simplicity or complexity of their sentences. Cowhurt and Pich's (1979) investigation provides evidence for this insight, as they discovered that students wrote more syntactically complex compositions and longer T-units for the teacher than for their close friend. Hence, when writers address an audience that they do not know at a personal level, this leads their writing to sound formal. The more formal their writing is, the more they are likely to incorporate a serious tone, use sophisticated structures, and provide deeper explanations.

In contrast, writers lean towards an informal style of writing when they are familiar with their intended readers; consequently, they may integrate simple language, short structures, and less complex patterns to ensure accessibility and relevance of the message. It can be concluded that different audiences demand different levels of formality and detail, urging writers to adapt the complexity of their sentences accordingly.

To go even further, task complexity is believed to be a substantial factor in affecting the quality of the written output in general and the complexity of sentences in particular. That is, whether a writer will produce short sentences, simple structures, or multi-layered sentences is often dictated by the degree of task complexity. Because of their thought-provoking nature, challenging writing tasks usually prompt the use of coordination, subordination, and different embeddings to transmit intricate ideas. On the other hand, a less challenging task may require low level of mental effort, relatively resulting in a straightforward style, limited syntactic variety, and plain structures.

As Ruiz-Funes (2015) highlighted that, writing tasks which are characterized by their challenging nature, serious tone, and novel subjects demands increased induction and reasoning

abilities. As a result, learners may produce an academic-like written product showcasing lengthier and varied structures and incorporating subordination to solidify logical relationships. Echoing the same perspective, Huang (2022) revealed that more cognitively demanding writing tasks can lead to more extensive use of subordinate structures, specifically when writers exhibit a strong command of language.

All things considered, to optimize writers' syntactic growth and prompt them to expand their sentences, educators should be aware of a host of internal and external factors that can either limit or enhance complex structures. This includes not only their level of proficiency, age, and targeted audience, but it also incorporates reading content, genre, topic familiarity, and task complexity. Taken together, these factors underscore the idea that syntactic maturity is not isolated and further emphasize its multifaceted nature.

1.5.2.4.3.3 Importance of improving syntactic maturity with empirically-based interventions. Syntactic maturity is a crucial aspect of writing that warrants careful attention and focused development. Rather than relying on traditional and passive methods, adopting proactive, research-based approaches can ensure meaningful improvement of this skill. Such methods not only help writers free up cognitive space for other important tasks but also provide a more engaging and innovative approach to mastering sentence-level skills. Moreover, enhancing syntactic maturity can lead to significant improvements in writing quality and reading comprehension.

Constructing articulate and well-written sentences is a daunting task for many writers, especially less skilled ones. As per Saddler (2023), “though it is imperative for any writer to create well-structured sentences and to develop a signature style in their writing, doing so can be demanding” (p.150). This difficulty stems from the various processes that should be integrated concurrently, extending over word choice, appropriate arrangements of these words, grammatical

correctness, punctuation, adaptation to the audience and purpose, rhythm, and logical flow. For average writers, considering all of these processes to produce good sentences by their own can be nearly unachievable. Them being occupied with basic tasks which require simple cognitive processes, can presumably hinder their ability to generate content, plan and revise which are higher-level skills (Graham et al., 2017). Therefore, using empirically-based interventions is expected to increase the automaticity and spontaneity of crafting sentences, leaving a mental space for more intricate processes to take place.

Teaching of syntax has traditionally followed a conventional approach, centered around the teaching of parts of speech, sentence types, and diagramming of sentences. However, a meta-analysis conducted by Hillock (1986) uncovered that neither the quality of students' written products nor their use of accurate mechanics has been effectively enhanced by the extensive teaching of grammar. Furthermore, when grammar is delivered in a formal manner, detached from genuine writing, it not only makes writers feel bored but also reduces their willingness to write (Jean & Simard, 2011).

Discontent with these results has paved the way for more innovative approaches to grammar teaching, which incorporate straightforward, engaging, and motivating language exposure that can streamline the process of syntactical improvement (Toria, 2014). Admittedly, according to Landon (2013) “Grammar describes the machinery of the sentence, but it doesn’t teach us how to make the sentence go anywhere or do anything. In other words, studying grammar is more than a little bit like counting the spines of a dead fish” (p. 29). In the other hand, Ismoilovna (2020) asserted that “innovative methods help bring change, and most of the time, for the better. It helps students learn faster in an efficient and interactive manner” (p. 99). Thus, unlike formal

grammar instruction, innovative, empirically based methods help students learn more quickly and effectively.

Furthermore, syntactic maturity goes beyond merely enhancing sentence structure; it can significantly improve the overall quality of a written piece. A study by Yan and Xu (2017) found a strong relationship between syntactic complexity and writing quality. Specifically, their results indicated that increases in unit length, complexity, and clause frequency directly contributed to improved writing quality. Similarly, an analysis by Lee and Casal (2019) of 280 ESL undergraduate students' papers revealed that high-quality writing often integrates more complex syntactic structures, reinforcing the link between syntactic maturity and better writing. As students master the use of complex structures, they are better equipped to create richer, more informative sentences that convey nuanced details and ideas. This, in turn, enhances the overall quality of their writing.

Not only do improvements in mature style enhance the quality of the written text, but they can also transfer to other skills, such as reading comprehension. Deacon and Kieffer (2018) found that syntactic awareness acts as a catalyst in enhancing reading comprehension. In other words, the more students are familiar with various syntactic structures and aware of how words are arranged within sentences, the greater their ability to comprehend passages. Along the same lines, Brimo (2011) revealed that the syntactic awareness of adolescent students was an important predictor of their reading comprehension, suggesting that students with a deeper understanding of syntax tend to decipher the meaning of complex texts more proficiently.

To conclude, generating well-constructed sentences framed within varied and complex patterns can be seen as a laborious task. As a result, it requires teachers and researchers to intervene with modern methods and novel techniques, moving away from conventional and formal approaches to syntax instruction. Doing so, can help writers, especially less skilled ones, improve

their syntactic complexity in an interactive environment, elevate their overall writing quality, and potentially transfer improvements to other areas of language, such as reading comprehension.

Conclusion

To draw a comprehensive picture of syntactic maturity, this chapter engaged in a systematic process, seeking to trace where syntactic maturity is situated within this stepwise framework. By addressing elements like definitions to the writing skill, its importance and components, this chapter attempted to set the tone for a detailed examination of syntax and its units, bringing particular attention to the sentence. Clarity was achieved and boundaries were well-defined when the discussion moved to syntactic maturity, where its definition, major indices, factors that may potentially influence it, and its instructional importance were carefully articulated.

In sum, by reinforcing its theoretical foundation, the cultivation of syntactic maturity emerged as a cornerstone of effective written communication. However, despite its significance, syntactic maturity remains a highly intricate skill to acquire. Therefore, there is a pressing need for its explicit instruction through evidence-based methods that may offer an innovative approach, moving away from abstract and traditional trajectories.

The following chapter strives to offer an insightful account for the sentence-combining technique, a method that can presumably foster the improvement of writers' mature sentences.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two: An Overview on the Sentence-combining Technique

Introduction.....	77
2.1 Background of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	77
2.2 Definition (s) of the Sentence Combining.....	79
2.3 Sentence Combining Activities.....	82
2.3.1 Cued Exercises.....	83
2.3.2 Open Exercises.....	83
2.3.3 Whole-Discourse Exercises.....	84
2.3.4 Mechanical Sentence Combining Exercises.....	85
2.3.5 Meaningful Activities.....	85
2.3.6 Communicative Exercises.....	86
2.4 Potential Benefits of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	86
2.4.1 Automacity.....	87
2.4.2 Awareness of Syntactic Options.....	88
2.4.3 Part-To-Whole Learning.....	88
2.4.4 Reading Comprehension.....	89
2.4.5 De-Centering Skills.....	89
2.4.6 Attitude Shift.....	90
2.4.7 Metalinguistic Awareness.....	91
2.4.8 Revision Skills.....	91
2.5 Limitations of the Sentence Combining Technique.....	93
2.5.1 Limited Long-Term Effectiveness.....	93
2.5.2 Inappropriateness for Certain Learners.....	94

2.5.3 A-Rhetorical Orientation.....	95
2.5.4 Undesirable Side Effects.....	97
2.5.5 The Teacher's Variable.....	98
2.5.6 Limited Creativity.....	99
Conclusion.....	101

Introduction

To elaborate on the independent variable of this study, the sentence-combining technique, this chapter would contribute to a deeper understanding of the said technique and how it works. As a natural progress, this chapter begins with establishing a historical background to SC, showcasing its roots and demonstrating its close connection to transformational generative grammar theory. The forthcoming section attempts to define the technique by illustrating how it is perceived across several scholars. To demonstrate the way SC functions the chapter, later, plunges into discussing thoroughly the diverse types of SC exercises. Finally, by examining both the benefits and limitations of these exercises, this chapter presents a well-rounded and balanced understanding of the technique.

2.1 Background of The Sentence Combining Technique

Some EFL learners, due to a lack of practice or low proficiency, may struggle to craft coherent and complex sentences. This weakness often stems from their preoccupation with lower-level skills such as spelling, punctuation, word choice, and word order, while neglecting higher-order aspects that contribute to the effective delivery of their message. In other words, the cognitive load associated with paying conscious attention to sentence construction can prevent students from focusing on and generating coherent content. Consequently, their final products may lack maturity and fluidity, failing to strike a balance between basic and advanced syntactic manipulative skills. In this respect, sentence combining (SC) is regarded as a highly effective and practical technique that promotes the automatization and internalization of a variety of syntactic patterns (Strong, 1986).

Golder (1991) emphasized that, whether working with ESL learners or natives, the only way instructors can teach effectively using sentence combining (SC) is through deeply

understanding the close resemblance between this technique and transformational grammar theory (TGG). Chomsky's seminal work on transformational-generative grammar (TGG) paved the way for the widespread use of SC. With the rise of Chomsky's TGG in the 1960s, SC gained renewed momentum. According to Strong (1986), "As Noam Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar enjoyed ascendancy in the early 1960s, it was only natural that SC exercises should be rediscovered" (p. 10). Nutter et al. (1984) also credited Chomsky's contribution, stating that "[Sentence combining] derive[s] from Noam Chomsky's (1965) theory that the basis of grammar is the irreducible sentence (the "kernel") and that the structure of grammar is the syntactic operations (the "transformations") we perform on kernels to generate new sentences" (p. 450).

Saddler (2023), arguing for the same stance, contended that "sentence combining is derived directly from Chomsky's transformational grammar (1957)" (p. 152). Thus, these perspectives collectively highlight that SC principles are strongly grounded in Chomsky's transformational model of syntax.

Chomsky's theory introduced a novel framework for understanding how language is constructed through a set of syntactic rules. These rules enable users to produce an unlimited number of syntactic variations from a limited set of basic structures. This theory emphasizes two key concepts: the deep structure, which represents the underlying meaning of a sentence, and the surface structure, which refers to the actual expression of that meaning. Kernel sentences—simple subject-verb structures—form the deep structure. These kernels can be transformed and combined in various ways to generate diverse surface structures. To explain this thoroughly, Rose (1983) reinforced the theoretical foundation of SC and ties it directly to transformations:

The second Chomskyan concept, the transformation, can explain why one sentence can be combined with another. Chomsky's Standard Theory, or generative-transformational grammar, offers a model of the way sentence-combining works. In syntactic or structural terms, the idea of a transformation can accounts for the disappearance of parts of the original kernel sentences in the process of their combining with or becoming embedded within one another (p.487).

Accordingly, SC mirrors this process by training students to join, manipulate, and experiment with simple syntactic patterns (kernels) to create more complex and varied ones. To put it simply, SC builds on TGG by prompting learners to derive a variety of surface structures from basic kernel sentences. Given this deep theoretical foundation, it is unsurprising that Rose (1983) claimed that “it is predictable that we would begin to think that without transformational grammar, we would never have had sentence combining” (p. 487).

In short, the foundational premise of TGG--that typical sentences are comprised of multiple constituent kernels, each contributing to the overall meaning--has encouraged researchers to renew the application of practical techniques like SC. By moving beyond abstract theoretical concepts, SC offers a hands-on approach to teaching syntax, and translates the premises of TGG into practical application.

2.2 Definition (s) of Sentence-Combining

What is the best way of teaching sentence construction skills? This question continues to puzzle English teachers and scholars. The direct teaching of grammar was one of the most favorable instructional methods to enhance learners' syntactic manipulative skills. Identifying and explaining different parts of speech and diagramming of sentences, were the most common

practices in such method; however, Jean and Simard (2011) assumed that when delivering grammar in a formal and decontextualized way, writers can possibly experience boredom and become unmotivated to write. Echoing the same perspective, Hillocks (1986), after conducting a writing meta-analysis, they concluded that the prominent focus on grammar studies did not contribute to a noticeable improvement, neither on the use of accurate mechanics nor on the enhancement of learners writing quality.

Many of these scholars praised sentence combining, viewing it as a highly effective instructional technique. For instance, Strong (1986) found that SC exercises “provide a practical way of activating playful attention to written language” (p.10). He further added that “I take the position that SC exercises are a curious kind of “comprehensible input”: learners construct sentences (or surface meanings) from underlying propositions” (p.10). Similarly, Koziol (n.d, as cited in, Sylvia, 1996) described SC as “one of the most exiting instructional strategies..... [of] the past decade” (p.03). Likewise, Saddler (2012) affirmed that “Sentence combining is a fun, playful approach to language that will help writers experiment with different ways to arrange thoughts” (p.07).

In an attempt to understand the essence of SC, several definitions have been associated with it. Davidson (1977) linked SC to the way TGG works, in which he suggested that:

Sentence combining is based on the premise that all of our sentences are generated from "deep structures" through a process which is intuitive for native speakers of a language. "Kernel sentences"-basic subject-verb constructions-are such deep structures, and two or more of them can be combined through use of certain

procedures (transformations) to produce more sophisticated utterances (or writings) in normal communication (p.49).

This indicates that the process of combining sentences can be reflected in the way writers manipulate and maneuver basic structures, by adding modifiers, clauses or phrases which can increase the complexity and depth of their ideas.

According to Saddler (2009, as cited in saddler, 2023), “Sentence combining practice involves explicitly teaching students how to manipulate or rewrite short, syntactically simple sentences into sentences that are more varied in terms of style, as revealed in the arrangement of words and word choice, and complexity, represented by length and syntactic structure” (p.151). this assertion implies that SC includes not only transforming simple grammatical patterns to render them more complex and lengthier, it also incorporates varying these basic structures when it comes to word order and lexical choices.

Further, as asserted by O’Hare (1973), SC is “a type of pedagogy involving extensive, sequence practice of specially formulated print-based exercises through which a student is said to acquire dexterity in writing complex sentence structure” (p.05). Through this definition, O’Hare highlighted that through repeated and sequenced practice in SC, students can develop the skill to handle advanced and intricate syntactic structures with ease and proficiency. These SC activities are not randomly selected, rather they are carefully shaped to suite students’ diverse capacities.

Furthermore, Savage (1980) simplified the concept of SC, claiming that it is a technique of “putting together strings of basic kernel sentences into more complex, syntactically mature, and fluent sentences” (p.01); thus, it can be said that the gradual joining of simpler elements can

probably contribute to the enhancement of writers' complexity, maturity and fluency; eventually, allowing them to enhance the quality of their written piece.

To bring this to a close, sentence combining begins with a kernel sentence, seeking to add richness, variety, and maturity through the embedding of phrases, modifiers, and clauses. Importantly, SC does not merely aim to increase sentence length but to enhance effectiveness, by encouraging writers to convey more meaning with fewer words (Strong, 1985).

2.3 Sentence Combining Activities

Sentence combining, as the name may suggest, at the surface level is the act of assembling or merging simple grammatical structures so that they take more refined and sophisticated shape. However, at a deeper level, sentence combining transcends beyond merely this process, as it seeks to fulfill a variety of purposes when it comes to learning how to write. Namely, sentence combining can be applied to teach various language and composition skills spanning across active and passive voice, sentence variety, transitions, parallel structure, free modifiers, paragraph organization, cohesion, and literary appreciation (Strong, 1986). Golder (1991) agreed with this, pointing out that "sentence combining is one of the various methods of language learning that can be more or less useful at various levels of language learning" (p.07).

To target such diverse skills, ensuring a gradual and smooth integration of exercises, scholars have suggested multiple sentence-combining activities types. When it comes to Strong (1986), he believed that these exercises can take the form of either open or cued, oral or written exercises, realizing different linguistic objectives.

2.3.1 Cued Exercises

With the help of a set of clauses or signals, learners here play with syntactic structures in a controlled manner (Strong, 1986). This type permits familiarizing learners with grammatical patterns such as noun clauses, participle phrases, and appositives (Golder, 1991). Due to the very precise nature of instructions, the cued type of exercises is prone to have a narrow range of correct answers.

Even though these exercises can be considered a good and useful start to any sentence-combining program, the teacher should not depend solely on them, as they have got some shortcomings. This is because cued problems are often decontextualized and presented separately, lacking a connection with a bigger picture. Moreover, when learners practice them a lot, they may overuse a limited number of structures that are not appropriate in certain contexts (Saddler, 2012); Therefore, another type of activities should be employed to compensate for any gaps in learning various syntactic choices.

2.3.2 Open Exercises

Unlike cued combining, in which correct answers are obtained through the use of guiding signals, open combining allows for the generation of a number of grammatically correct responses (Strong, 1986). This type is more complex and learners are expected to think about what significant information should appear in the combined sentence. The main objective of using open problems is to experiment with stylistic options, generate many suitable answers, and make individual decisions. (Strong, 1986). Hence, learners are required to activate their critical thinking to not only rephrase, change the structure, or play with word order, but also to evaluate linguistic choices and arrive to conclusions about which option is mostly effective.

2.3.3 Whole-Discourse Exercises

After mastering sentence combining with and without cues, as well as to improve results with sentence combining exercises, whole-discourse exercises are usually employed. At this stage, there is a shift from sentence-level to paragraph-level practice, presenting learners with basic grammatical patterns and urging them to write a paragraph, merging all of these initially simple ideas (Saddler, 2012). Despite being cognitively demanding, these problems open room for a more real-world, naturalistic, and contextualized compositions (Saddler, 2012). This is advocated by (Strong, 1985), who acknowledged that whole-discourse sentence-combining activities contribute to sensitizing learners about the usage of cognitive strategies in writing, such as general-to-specific paraphrasing, comparison and contrast, use of transitions, and the integration of old and new information.

According to Mellon (1979, as cited in Phillips, 1996), whole-discourse exercises possess two advantages. Firstly, permitting learners to navigate syntactic structures skillfully, by liberating them from the burden of content and ideas generation. Secondly, this kind of problems enhance learners' written production, both within and between sentences.

Kameen (1978) expounded on strong (1976) binary classification of signaled and open exercises by proposing three types of activities: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative exercises. This refined classification is grounded on certain criteria, which are believed by Kameen (1978) to be “(1) Level of built-in control, (2) Number of correct solutions, and (3) Level of difficulty for intermediate and advanced ESL composition students” (p.396).

2.3.4 Mechanical Sentence Combining Exercises

These are characterized by being extremely guided, easy-to-handle, and single-solution activities. In order to form one right answer, learners are required to simply use the clue provided to shape the sentence into its finest form. Such activity seeks to acquaint learners with the basic concepts of the sentence combining practice, such as subordination, increased length and effectiveness, and bound and free modifiers (Kameen, 1978). Kameen (1978) emphasized that positive applications of this type must be to introduce a sentence-combining program, as well as to increase learners' self-confidence. Conversely, their overuse may hinder learners' engagements with more advanced thought processes that are often needed in real-world writing.

2.3.5 Meaningful Activities

In contrast to mechanical exercises, meaningful ones offer learners the opportunity to perform problems in a more flexible and guided linguistic environment in which they have the advantage of creating more than one right syntactic combination. Kameen (1978) maintained that "these less controlled exercises encourage the students to insert and delete items of their own choice and permit them to use a wide range of structural and stylistic variants in arriving at the correct solution" (p.398).

One of the merits of this type is their ability to trigger discussion in the classroom (Kameen, 1978). Because of the various syntactic options the students can perform, these problems can lead them to question their choices, discuss with their peers about the suitability and effectiveness of each available option. Thus, as per Kameen (1978), "the game-like nature of these exercises invites the students to freely venture at the solution, expressing a freedom and spontaneity within a non-threatening atmosphere not often found in the composition class" (p.398).

2.3.6 Communicative Exercises

As their name might suggest, these exercises aim to enhance the communicative ability of learners. Writers may find these problems harder to solve because they lack clues and possess large selection of right solutions. Despite their mentally demanding nature, they promote experimenting with a broad scope of stylistic and syntactic variants, encourage rearranging the order of sentences, and urge making decisions about the most appropriate expression (Kameen, 1978). Accordingly, though students are neither the content writers nor the ideas inventors, these communicative drills push them to think about how to say and structure information, thereby improving their ability to express ideas effectively.

On the whole, it can be inferred that mechanical exercises are comparable to cued ones, meaningful exercises resemble open ones, and whole-discourse exercises align with communicative problems. Due to their distinct goals, all of these types are important and are expected to be integrated into any SC program. Therefore, instructors should not only vary their choice of activities but also strike a careful balance in their integration. This can presumably ensure a gradual and smooth transition from simple to highly challenging exercises, without overwhelming learners.

2.4 Potential Benefits of the Sentence Combining technique

The ability to craft varied and mature sentences can be a major hallmark of a polished written piece, and sentence combining serves as a driving force in achieving this. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, sentence combining places students in a problem-solving environment. The practice-based nature of such environment urges learners to focus their attention on their sentence structure, leading them to become more syntactically aware; hence, moving

beyond a rules-driven practice to a more proactive approach that encourages real-life manipulation of syntax. To elaborate on its usefulness, this section attempts to showcase how sentence combining can be an effective tool in refining various writing aspects.

2.4.1 Automaticity

Among the many advantages of sentence combining, one notable aspect is enhanced automaticity in manipulating syntax. For many writers, producing a written text that strikes a balance between punctuation, word order, spelling, sentence structure, cohesion and coherence, and ideas generation can conceivably be overwhelming. This means that the simultaneous integration of these skills may require writers to engage in high-order skills, which are likely not accessible to those with low written proficiency. As per Strong (1986), increased attention to sentences while combining can lead learners to feel less anxious and motivate them to be more flexible, willing to take risks and make changes to their text. More precisely, sentence combining can render their syntactic skills more automatic by liberating cognitive space for planning the content.

Accordingly, when writers are more adept at constructing sentences, the general cognitive load of writing is mitigated (Graham, 1982). Stotski (1975) advocated for the same claim, “the practice of playing mentally and operationally with syntactic structures leads to a kind of automatization of syntactic skills such that mental energy is freed..... to concentrate on greater elaboration of intention and meaning” (p.55). Hence, it can be said that the more learners practice combining sentences, the more syntactic construction becomes mechanical, allowing them to achieve balance between all writing elements.

2.4.2 Awareness of Syntactic Options

By engaging in different sentence-combining exercises, students can develop variety in their syntactic patterns. As students experiment with different structures, including subordination, coordination, and different syntactic units, such as phrases, clauses, and sentences, they may gradually become more conscious of the variations available to them. Thus, sentence-combining is a way of drawing their attention and exposing them to unfamiliar syntactic forms; Thereby, “improve students' linguistic performance by introducing them to sentence options or transformations not within their familiar spoken repertoires” (Strong 1985, cited in Saddler 2012, p.23).

Further, students' confidence in maneuvering syntax can also be accelerated if they are acquainted with a vast array of syntactic choices (Saddler, 2012). This confidence can prompt them to take risks, play with structures, and apply multiple variations; eventually, helping them to surmount the monotonous style often resulted from clinging to the same grammatical patterns. Therefore, sentence-combining can prove effective in helping writers achieve a vivid style, as well as gain confidence and familiarity with incorporating various syntactic forms.

2.4.3 Part-to-Whole Learning

Sentence-combining exercises can serve as an initial, preparatory stage of training students to be physically and mentally ready to perform in a real-life situation. By urging them to join kernel sentences to create more complex ones, SC tries to mimic the process of planning, brainstorming, and then merging those ideas into engaging paragraphs that takes place in real-world writing.

Additionally, the smooth transition from cued, open, to whole-discourse exercises can arguably enhance writers' ability of crafting, judging, reading, and editing sentences (Gebhardt,

1985). Saddler (2012) meticulously broke this down, “the exercises allow students to wade slowly in the syntax “pool” from the shallow end, where they have a better chance of successfully learning to swim, instead of jumping into the deep and floundering with syntactic manipulation” (p.22). Accordingly, SC can be of great benefit when it comes to offering students authentic-like settings where they navigate syntactic problems similar to those of genuine compositions.

2.4.4 Reading Comprehension

The positive impact of sentence combining extends beyond merely the sentence level, it can also be used to intervene at the level of reading comprehension. Coleman (1964) found that students' reading comprehension ability is influenced by the level of syntactic difficulty in the reading material. Therefore, it sounds rational that the more students become comfortable with manipulating advanced syntactic patterns, the higher their performance in understanding sophisticated passages. With the aim of developing students' sentence fluency and ultimately their reading comprehension, Hughes (1975) study revealed that lower- and middle-level readers significantly benefited from practicing sentence combining, showcasing higher reading rate. Saddler (2012) speculated that when learners engage in combining sentences with increased complexity, they can likely be able to decipher meaning from sentences easily. In other words, the familiarity with complex syntax that sentence combining offers them can contribute directly to facilitating comprehension in reading.

2.4.5 De-centering Skills

One key contribution of the sentence combining is helping writers decenter, judge their choices, and look at their sentences from the perspective of their readers. Through sentence combining, encouraging writers to restructure simple sentences and eventually create their proper

sentences can allow them redistribute focus, considering how each syntactic variation may impact the intended audience (Strong, 1976). Accordingly, when they start evaluating their sentence options, while also taking into consideration how these options would resonate with readers, they begin to view their written productions using the audience's lens (Saddler, 2012).

Such skill can possibly be of high significance, training writers to critically assess their sentences, which would permit them to craft more engaging and effective prose. In supporting this, Saddler (2012), believed that these decentering skills are not only important on the sentence level, but are also critical to developing the overall flow and cohesiveness of the discourse. In sum, sentence combining can not only help writers make judgments about their syntactic alternatives, but also encourage them to develop a critical eye, stepping outside of their own perspective.

2.4.6 Attitude Shift

Having students experiment with syntactic transformations is assumed to shift their perception of writing as a dull, rigid activity to viewing it as an enjoyable puzzle. Sentence combining can shape students' attitudes and bridge the gap between syntactic rules and meaning by moving them from a state of learning to a state of acquisition (Sanborn, 1987). To put it another way, the active maneuvering of sentences that these exercises call for is presumed to contribute to the internalization of language instead of mere reliance on grammar memorization.

Beyond that, Sanborn (1987) assumed that “attitudes toward language may change because of the elements of “play” in sentence combining (p.69). Thus, the fear of making mistakes and the blank-page-paralysis may be alleviated through sentence combining as the latter emphasize playing with kernels, exploring structures, and experimenting variations. Doing so, can arguably

render writing less intimidating and lessen the burden of coming up with one long written piece in a single attempt.

After conducting a sentence-combining intervention, Hughes (1975) reported that “the students looked forward to each class session and treated the work as problem-solving or as a working puzzle” (p.55). Their enthusiasm to attend and solve more activities proved further the affective dimension SC can leave on writers. It is possible that their attitudes towards learning shifted as they enjoyed the particular task presented to them. This transition from a reluctant, grammar-guided mindset, to a one comfortable with trying diverse syntactic transformations is deemed critical in making them more confident writers.

2.4.7 Metalinguistic Awareness

According to Saddler (2012), a built-in characteristic of sentence combining is its ability to develop writer's metalinguistic awareness. The latter refers to the ability of thinking critically about their writing. Some learners, while constructing their sentences, do not consider the particular process they are going through. Better said, they follow a natural and subconscious writing that lacks awareness about how sentences are developed, so that they take the shape of entire paragraphs. Because of this effortless composing and spontaneous writing, they may not detect areas of improvement and aspects where sentences require further refinement.

In light of this, Saddler (2012), argued that sentence combining exercises can prompt writer's cognitive growth that is taken place instinctively by making them aware of the writing processes they are engaged in unconsciously. Hence, sentence combining exercises make the intuitive syntactic composing apparent and bring writing processes to the surface, opening writer's room for refining the complexity of their grammatical structures.

2.4.8 Revision Skills

Revising, an important stage in any writing process, can also be improved through sentence-combining practice. Zimmerman and Kitsantas, (2002), highlighted that sentence-combining is expected to prompt the development of the revision stage, since the process of combining sentences is chiefly a revising skill. Similarly, Elbow (1985) viewed revision as involving the transformation of sentences. The essence of sentence-combining resonates with this assumption by fostering the expansion, reordering, and condensing of ideas with the aim of making them more effective (Strong, 1985). Simply put, through sentence-combining exercises, learners are encouraged to restructure, modify and revise their sentences for improved cohesion and clarity, rather than merely detecting shallow and surface-level mistakes.

From a more precise lens, sentence-combining can potentially improve revision skills through presenting students with a wide range of syntactic alternatives. Possessing a variety of structures for the same sentence is assumed to encourage writers to choose the best option and alter their initially selected patterns. Therefore, the knowledge about syntactic choices they acquire after engaging in those exercises can perhaps make them less reluctant to make several modifications to their first drafts. In endorsing this, Hillocks (1987), claimed that one of the most effective applications of sentence-combining is possibly during the revising process, given the ample range of sentence structures it presents to writers.

In conclusion, beyond its immediate impact on sentence complexity, diverse benefits of sentence combining are proved to exist across various aspects of writing. From increasing automaticity, promoting reading comprehension, to fostering a positive attitude and developing a metalinguistic awareness, sentence combining stands out as a valuable instructional tool. Taken

together, these advantages demonstrate not only the versatile use of sentence combining, but also its practicality, making it a worthwhile tool in both research and practice.

2.5 Limitations of the Sentence Combining Technique

Despite its evidence-based effectiveness sentence combining is not without limitations; that is, after presenting its various benefits, it becomes imperative to discuss its potential pitfalls to provide a rather realistic view. Crowhurst (1983) advanced that teachers should not overlook the usefulness of sentence combining. Simultaneously, they should not be overly enthusiastic, as exaggerated predictions might be misleading. Moreover, writing can be regarded as a multi-faceted skill, which goes beyond merely conducting longer and complex syntactic patterns. This emphasizes the idea that sentence combining is not a one-size-fits-all solution, nor a stand-alone method that addresses all stylistic and rhetorical aspects of composing. Through close examination of sentence combining weaknesses, this section seeks to view sentence combining through a balanced lens, gearing teachers towards setting realistic expectations and making thoughtful decisions about how to effectively implement the sentence combining exercises.

2.5.1 Limited Long-term Effectiveness

One of the major pitfalls of sentence combining is the idea that the growth it causes is not always sustained over time, which raises concern about its long-lasting impact. After synthesizing a few studies, Zamel (1980) admitted that “sentence combining practice, though beneficial when the practice is concomitant with the writing, has little lasting effect over time” (p.82). Crowhurst (1983) corroborated that syntactic maturity improvement observed as a result of undergoing a sentence combining intervention can possibly be undermined after a few months.

Kerek et al., (1978) revealed that there was no remarkable difference between the control and experimental group in clause-length or t-unit-length after 28 months. echoing similar findings, Combs (1976) acknowledged that after eight weeks, the experimental group, who had achieved significant gains in syntactic fluency immediately after instruction, showed partial growth. Collectively, these results emphasize that although the sentence combining technique fosters syntactic growth, it may not guarantee the durability of this growth over time.

In an attempt to provide a rational interpretation for such shortcomings, Crowhurst (1983) assumed that sentence-combining skills are acquired, but students often fail to practice them, as well as progress made will likely persist if sentence-combining exercises are supplied at evenly spaced intervals. Another insightful interpretation is offered by Mellon (1979), who believed that what sentence-combining actually does is making the linguistic resources that students already have more accessible, instead of developing or changing their linguistic ability. Mellon (1979) further added that sentence-combining's chief aim is training students how to make richer sentences by adding subordinate clauses, which is a one-time skill. This means students are inclined to use such structures more when they are predicted by their teachers, rather than incorporating them naturally into their writing. The latter claim may contribute to the decline of learners' syntactic maturity when sentence-combining exercises are no longer the core of instruction.

2.5.2 Inappropriateness for Certain Learners

Sentence combining may have limited applicability due its unsuitability for certain learners, especially those studying English as a second or foreign language. This technique assumes possessing knowledge about basic grammar rules and concepts. However, unlike native

learners who possess high familiarity with different grammatical structures, English as a second language (ESL) learners usually require explicit instruction in grammar before engaging in a sentence combining practice. For instance, after being well-rounded about subordinating conjunctions, how they work, and the relationships they convey, students then can use that prior knowledge to perform various sentence combining problems related to subordination (Zamel, 1980). Thus, solving those problems is assumed to benefit more learners who have a solid grasp of syntactic construction conventions.

Zamel (1980) reinforced that sentence combining plays a primordial role in any ESL writing program. However, it is not an all-encompassing instructional tool because ESL learners may lack the linguistic repertoire that sentence combining puzzles call for. Instead, for a more efficient application for this technique in the ESL classroom, Zamel (1980) suggested introducing gradually key grammatical concepts which are related to sentence construction. In this way, learners can form a kind of conceptual framework where they can build, analyze, perform, and discuss different syntactic combinations. Therefore, it becomes evident that SC promotes syntactic fluency only if students' linguistic ability is developed and their grammatical competence is to some extent acquired. Otherwise, it could lead to confusion, hindering sentence growth rather than fostering it.

2.5.3 A-rhetorical Orientation

Syntactic maturity, that sentence combining usually seeks to improve, is not the only aspect that needs to be considered in writing. Sentence combining exercises seem to overemphasize syntax and sentence level problems while neglecting the rhetorical nature of composing, which often includes word choice, organization, cohesion, coherence, ideas, clarity, persuasiveness, tone

and audience consideration. For this reason, Zamel (1980) described sentence combining as a-rhetorical. This indicates that when faced with a blank page and required to write a coherent text, the act of putting simple kernels together that sentence combining exercises ask students to perform, would not be of great help when it comes to generating ideas that are impactful, well-structured, and coherent.

Like Zamel, Moffett (1968) qualified sentence combining as “non-naturalistic”, highlighting that it does not eliminate the need for real writing experiences. This claim distinguishes sentence combining exercises from real-world writing, which may pose higher complexity and challenge to students, where they are supposed to take multiple aspects into account, moving beyond merely combining pre-designed sentences. Elbow (1985) also criticized sentence combining, indicating that “it is so a-rhetorical--so distant from the essential process of writing” (p.233). They believed that in case teachers wanted their learners to produce clear and vibrant compositions, they should steer clear of syntax and prompt them to “put down words in the order they come to mind” (p.241). Doing so, would encourage learners to craft naturally flowing ideas, embodying the way human mind works (Phillips, 1996).

As a response to the a-rhetorical nature of sentence combining, Christensen (1968) argued that practicing sentence combining may contribute to generating sentences which are immature and developed “generative rhetoric”, which is an instructional tool that adopts a different syntactic approach. Here, students are geared towards not merely combining sentences, but also adding, expanding, and generating ideas. Thus, generative rhetoric exercises open room for students to be imaginative since they urge them to produce real content and incorporate free modifiers and not merely bound modifiers, which “do not give the writer freedom of choice that rhetoric demands” (Christensen, 1968, p. 576). Accordingly, while sentence combining exercises are of high

significance in solving sentence-level problems, students still need to confront the difficulty of real writing and rhetorical aspects of genuine composing.

2.5.4 Undesirable Side Effects

If SC exercises are not implemented appropriately, the result can probably be sentences that are overly long and a writing style that is cumbersome, leaving a counterproductive effect on the clarity of the message. In this respect, Crowhurst (1983) warned that “teachers should be aware that sentence-combining may have an adverse effect on the writing of some students. It may encourage the production of excessively long, awkward and error-laden t-units” (p.64). This suggests that, through SC, when teachers encourage students to lengthen their sentences, this may lead them to commit several grammatical and syntactic mistakes that can make their writing difficult to read.

Additionally, students may mistakenly understand that long is always better and complex sentences are definitely more effective than short ones. As a result, they start adding more clauses and details to their writing, overlooking that variety in sentence length can also play a vital role in rendering writing lively and dynamic. In like fashion, Williams (1979), criticized SC exercises emphasis on producing long sentences, in which he disputed:

Most of those who measure how well they have taught their students to create big sentences out of little sentences have simply assumed that bigger is better. But we have no idea at all whether the numbers they report relate to anything we might be interested in: whether adults will be better writers if they make lots of long sentences out of lots and lots of small ones.... Every program that attempts to teach adults how to write, adults who have graduated from college and hold even modestly responsible positions, every one of

these programs concentrates on the ways that those adults can write less complex, simpler clauses; not longer, but shorter sentences. Every such program attempts specifically to undo what sentence combiners specifically want to do (p.598).

Thus, assuming that complex sentences lead to good quality writing, is according to Williams, inappropriate. Further, complexity in writing is not an end to itself, but a means to an end, which should be used strategically. Instead of merely focusing on making sentences more complex, adult writing should also be characterized by conciseness, clarity, and brevity because producing unnecessarily long sentences does not actually enhance written communication.

Moreover, skepticism has been expressed by Moffett (1968), who questioned whether sentence-combining practice might lead writers to “value elaboration for its own sake and become facile without relating this facility to those communicative, stylistic, and rhetorical needs that alone make elaboration desirable in the first place” (p.170). This concern warns against the fact that, because of SC exercises, students may not be able to distinguish between syntactic fluency and syntactic appropriateness. Consequently, their syntactic choices may not be based on communicative or stylistic purposes, but on unjustified desire to make sentences more complex, neglecting the contextual factors that play a key role in choosing appropriate syntactic structures.

2.5.5 The Teacher’s Variable

The role of the teacher in determining effectiveness of SC exercises can be of high significance. According to Crowhurst (1983), when reviewing SC studies and their effects on the learner’s writing quality, instructors' teaching style and capacities should be taken into account. In other words, merely performing SC problems may not inherently teach students how to produce a well-thought-out written piece. Rather, the latter problems are expected to be accompanied with

teacher's guidance, feedback, and supportive learning environment, in which teachers know how to steer the discussion, as well as raise students' awareness of different syntactic variations and their appropriate use. This skill of engaging students, evaluating their answers, and creating a positive atmosphere is not a competency that is given to all teachers. The latter fact may lead to skewing results and influencing SC implementation drastically.

Emphasizing the same point, Kinneavy (1979) pointed out the risk that teacher's expertise can strongly shape the impact of sentence combining practice, stating that:

it may be that the most important part of the sentence combining lessons was not the sentence combining but the functional teaching of rhetorical principles connected with the sentence exercises. If this is so, the use of sentence combining as a full-fledged composition program may well depend on a rhetorical background which is not made explicit in books like those of Strong or Daiker-Kerek-Morenberg. If so, in the hands of teachers who do not possess these rhetorical principles, the results of the technique may well be limited to syntactic growth (p.74)

Therefore, if the SC teachers are not well-rounded about the rhetorical aspects of writing and only push students to make syntactic combinations, the result would be sentences that are longer and more complex, but writing style which is weak and full of mistakes, lacking the robust impact of rhetorical awareness.

2.5.6 Limited Creativity

The mechanical nature of certain SC exercises raises concerns about its possibility to stifle students' creativity and authentic expression. While Kleine (1983) recognized the opportunity that

this technique offers to less-skilled writers, they believed that it should occupy marginal space in writing programs, insisting that it should not replace the actual process of composing but accompany it. This is because they find the cued nature of combining sentences ineffective in stimulating “the schemata and conceptual hierarchies” of students, and therefore they may fail in bringing about an actual cognitive growth, the ultimate goal of writing instruction.

More precisely, when students engage in transforming strings of sentences, their focus is structural, superficial, or better said, shallow. As a result, they do not decipher the meaning of sentences, overlooking the communicative value of the message (Strong, 1986). Alternatively, Kleine (1983) urged teachers to employ generative sentence-combining problems, which prompts learners to take responsibility of generating parts of the content. Despite advocating for the effectiveness of SC, Elbow (1985) expressed concern about one potential drawback of this technique, arguing that:

in sentence-combining the student is not engaged in figuring out what she wants to say or saying what is on her mind. And because it provides pre-packed words and ready-made thoughts, sentence-combining reinforces the push-button fast-food expectations in our culture. As a result, the student is not saying anything to anyone: the results of her work are more often “answers” given to the teacher for correction, not “writing” given to readers for reaction (p.233)

Put simply, Elbow (1985) stressed the idea that, by merely playing with sentence structures that are pre-created, SC problems may act as an inhabitant agent in immersing students into authentic writing experiences, where more creativity and ideas generation are there. Further, this act of assembling pre-constructed parts prioritizes a quick and skin-deep approach to writing.

Therefore, the lack of engagement deeply and actively with writers' original ideas may hamper the enhancements of their critical thinking, a key aspect of articulate writing.

In short, SC scholars reached similar conclusions about its usefulness, recognizing its primordial role while also acknowledging its limitations. According to Zemel (1980) and Crowhurst (1983), it is important to view SC through a realistic lens, by understanding that it is a tool targeting a single facet of writing complexity rather than expecting it to meet all learners' needs. Moreover, instead of viewing it as a replacement for genuine composition, Strong (1976) regarded sentence combining as “a skill-building adjacent to a writing program” (p.64). Maintaining a parallel perspective, Kameen (1978) emphasized that SC problems are “not identical to free writing” (p.400). Thus, they are supposed to complement but not replace real practice in free writing. It can be concluded that sentence combining is not a stand-alone method that covers all the nuances of the writing skill. Instead, it should be perceived as a vital part of any writing program and implemented carefully with complete awareness of its advantages and pitfalls.

Conclusion

By reviewing the most relevant pieces of literature about the SC, this chapter aimed at drawing together key insights surrounding the technique. The first section served as a robust foundation that links the SC technique to its historical and theoretical context which paved the way to discussing more profound, SC-related concepts. Presenting definitions from multiple perspectives to better grasp the core and intricacies of the said technique was the chief aim of the subsequent section. The focus then shifted to explaining different SC exercises types and the way they function, marking a pivotal step toward understanding the mechanisms that SC adopts to potentially improve learners' syntactic manipulative skills. When the attention was directed to the

advantages of the SC, it made abstract assumptions about its effectiveness more concrete, showcasing its ability to cultivate diverse set of skills. To stand in ground reality and adhere to a fairly objective stance, the final section, by discussing limitations of the SC, contributed to providing a rather reasonable and balanced assessment of the technique.

As this chapter concludes, it leaves behind a polished understanding of the SC technique and its evidence-based effectiveness. A central takeaway from this discussion is that despite being a highly vital technique to include in any writing program, the SC should not be used alone; in fact, to reinforce learners' writing proficiency and grasp of syntactic structures, one should not overlook the importance of engaging in real composing. Thus, the argument laid out here stresses incorporating such technique as a part of a comprehensive writing program to consolidate practice in sentence construction and not to substitute other instructional tools that may contribute to this program differently. Educators are expected to be highly aware about the latter insight which can help them make informed decisions in their journey of implementing the SC.

Because methodology lies in “the heart” of any research study, the upcoming chapter seeks to set up a theoretical ground basis upon which the methodology of this study is built, to move afterwards to tackling more practical issues. In the latter, a rational behind every methodological decision will be established.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three: The Research Methodology for this Study

Introduction.....	106
3.1 Research Methodology: Theoretical Background, Choices, and Rationale.....	106
3.1.1 Research Paradigm(s).....	107
3.1.2 Research Approach(es).....	111
3.1.3 Research Design(s).....	114
3.1.4 Data Collection Method(s).....	117
3.1.4.1 The Focus Group.....	118
3.1.4.1.1 Structure and Aim.....	120
3.1.4.1.2 Validation.....	121
3.1.4.2 The Tests.....	123
3.1.4.2.1 Structure and Aim.....	124
3.1.4.2.2 Validation and Piloting.....	125
3.1.4.3 The Questionnaire.....	126
3.1.4.3.1 Structure and Aim.....	127
3.1.4.3.2 Piloting and Validation.....	128
3.1.5 Data Collection Procedures.....	129
3.1.6 Data Analysis Procedures.....	130
3.1.6.1 Data Analysis Procedures for the Focus Group.....	131
3.1.6.2 Data Analysis Procedures for the Tests.....	133
3.1.6.3 Data Analysis Procedures for the Questionnaire.....	133
3.1.7 Sampling Technique.....	134
3.2 Rationale and Study Description.....	135

3.2.1 The Implementation of the Treatment.....	139
Conclusion.....	141

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to offer not only a well-founded theoretical ground basis of the methodology underlying this study, but also strives to provide a rationale behind every methodological decision. Each section, whether the one about paradigm, approach or design, opens with a brief theoretical explanation of different types and, then, narrows down the discussion by specifying the particular components adopted in the scope of this research and arguments behind its adoption. Moving the discussion into more concrete terms, the structure and aim of each data collection method will be outlined alongside their piloting and validation stages. To depict this process with more precision, data collection and analysis procedures will be meticulously described. Step by step, sampling, study description and rationale, as well as the treatment's implementation will be explained and justified.

3.1 Research Methodology: Theoretical Background, Choices, and Rationale

To be able to contribute to knowledge and obtain the desired data, researchers should often ask how will they go about their inquiry? One of the most important requirements researchers should be aware of to answer such question are those related to methodology. The importance of establishing a firm basis for the methodology of any study lies in its role of articulating a logical and systematic progression between the different stages of research. It serves as a roadmap that guides researchers towards culminating in reliable data. While it is reasonable to perceive collecting and analyzing data as fundamental methodological stages, this view may limit how methodology should be conceived, jeopardizing its holistic nature. What is rather more appropriate and demonstrate a sound approach to research is conceptualizing methodology in terms of an all-encompassing framework that spans a spectrum from abstract to concrete methodological

components; therefore, the choice of an appropriate methodology should be informed first by a good understanding of what constitute a research paradigm.

3.1.1 Research Paradigm (s)

With the purpose of attaining advanced stages in conducting research, researchers are expected to take their philosophical assumptions into consideration, that is, their research paradigm. Thomas Kuhn (1962) was the first to use the word ‘paradigm’ to refer to a philosophical way of thinking. Paradigm is often used to describe researchers' worldview, belief systems, philosophical underpinnings, set of beliefs, and conceptual frameworks. Kivinja And Kuyini (2017) believed that paradigm is the researcher's conceptual model that acts as a catalyst in defining the research methods and data analysis procedures. Thus, paradigms reflect how researchers see the world around them, interpret meanings, and perceive events.

The choice of a paradigm should be formed through deliberate reasoning because “to indiscriminately apply one approach to all research problems can be misleading and inappropriate” (Kumar, 2011, p.14). Purpose of the study is regarded by Kumar (2011), as a cornerstone element in determining a valid philosophical worldview to research. In guiding such decision, Creswell and Creswell (2018) assumed that factors like domain orientation, research communities, supervisors and teachers, and past research engagements prove to be critical.

In stressing the influential role of research paradigms, Li et al. (2018) contended that “it establishes the criteria according to which one selects and defines problems for inquiry and how one approaches them theoretically and methodologically” (p. 3). Similarly, Kavinja and Kuyini (2017) highlighted that paradigms play a decisive role in research as they constitute of intellectual premises upon which researchers ground their choices about what should be examined, how

examination should be done, and how the meaning of results should be deciphered. Accordingly, through being the most abstract methodological level, paradigms can dictate how other levels would be shaped and approached, enlightening researchers' paths as well as providing them with orientation and guidance.

Paradigm is generally built upon ontological, as well as epistemological assumptions. On the one hand, Cohen et al. (2007) perceived that ontology “concerns the very nature or essence of this social phenomena being investigated” (p. 7). And so, how knowledge is understood and approached is inherently guided by one's ontological stance. For instance, ontology provides the foundational basis for distinguishing between what is objective or subjective by virtue. Key ontological questions may be centered around: is social reality external to individuals, or is it the product of individual consciousness? Is reality of an objective nature or the result of individual condition? In research, it is worth noting that researchers embrace different ontological underpinnings, the reason that will eventually forge their research methods. While discussing the influence ontology can exert on research, Kivinja and Kuyini (2017) stressed that “they help to orient your thinking about the research problem, its significance, and how you might approach it so as to answer your research question, understand the problem, investigate, and contribute to its solution” (p. 27). Hence, ontology aids in conceptualizing reality and therefore directly shaping researchers' worldviews.

While ontology constitutes the researcher's beliefs about reality, epistemology concerns how they come to know that reality. That is, though they do not study the same aspects, ontology and epistemology are closely linked as they complement one another. Epistemological assumptions, according to Cohen et al. (2007), “concern the very basis of knowledge--Its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to other human beings” (p.

7). At its core, epistemology strives to answer questions like: Is knowledge something which can be acquired, or is it something which has to be personally experienced? What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known?

Such questions, as per Kivinja and Kuyini (2017), are of high significance, guiding researchers in positioning themselves within their research context; ultimately, helping them to find out what else is new based on what is already known. In more concrete terms, epistemology is mainly interested in how knowledge is generated, justified, and interpreted, which can immediately impact the selection of research methodologies used to understand a certain phenomenon. It can be concluded that ontology sets the boundaries for epistemology. Thus, perceiving knowledge as having an objective, concrete, and hard nature will require the researcher to observe and adhere to scientific methods. On the other hand, believing in the subjective and personal reality of knowledge may drive researchers to be directly involved with participants, opposing natural science research methods (Cohen et al., 2007).

Advocates of opposing worldviews have developed their own terminology, values, methods, and techniques to understand research problems. Therefore, diverse paradigm classifications have emerged, among which are the positivist, interpretivist, and pragmatist. Focusing mainly on measurable and observable phenomena, the positivist framework is also commonly known as the scientific method of investigation. Because of its strong belief in quantifiability, the positivist paradigm seeks to establish cause-effect relationships. To do so, it primarily employs a methodology which is quantitative and research methods which are experimental (Li et al., 2018).

Because of positivists' failure to capture the immense complexity of the natural world, the interpretivist conceptual framework was developed. The latter is also called constructivism because here knowledge is socially constructed. One of the basic tenets of this worldview is multiple realities and that a single event can possess a variety of points of views, perspectives, and interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because of its anti-positivist inclination, this paradigm emphasizes context-bound and culturally rich insights where people are actively involved in their natural setting. Therefore, looking closely into the subjective world of human experiences is a paramount role of interpretivist researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

To prevent favoring one paradigm over the other and put an end to what was described as 'paradigm wars', the pragmatist way of thinking was evolved (Gage, 1989). A pragmatist outlook believes that a mono-paradigmatic approach to research is not adequate. Instead, it combines the two ends of the spectrum—Positivist and Constructivist—“to provide the best understanding of the research problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 48).

Therefore, because of its problem-solving and solution-oriented nature, pragmatists prioritize employing pluralistic approaches to obtain a clearer picture of the problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); in other words, focusing on what works best to come to grips with a particular research question. Moreover, pragmatism rejects absolute unity, opening researchers' room to freely choose the research methods that fit seamlessly into their inquiries. In sum, by bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide, the pragmatic belief system paves the way for a variety of assumptions and views, a host of research methods, diverse worldviews, and a mixture of data collection and analysis methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018); eventually, contributing to a broad examination of the problem under scrutiny.

A bird's-eye view of these three belief systems may allow one to deduce that a pragmatist paradigm would resonate best with the nature of our study. That is, because in this present study, we strive to merge both the interpretive worldview to investigate the factors that impede learners from developing syntactic maturity and their attitudes towards the treatment implementation, and the positivist philosophy to examine the effects of the sentence-combining technique on written syntactic maturity, the pragmatist paradigm naturally emerged, serving to view the problem at hand through an integrated perspective. Therefore, opting for such paradigmatic view did not arise in isolation; rather, it was part of a larger framework that took into account the nature, as well as the aims peculiar to this research.

3.1.2 Research Approach (s)

Given the diversity of researchers' philosophical orientations, various approaches to research have emerged to take methodology into more systematic and concrete terms. According to Creswell (2014, as cited in Khenat, 2023), a research approach refers to “the plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation” (p. 3). Deciding on which approach to embrace is informed first by the researcher's worldview, in which a positivist paradigm would align perfectly with a quantitative approach, an interpretivist paradigm would subscribe to a qualitative approach, and a pragmatist paradigm resonates best with a more integrative approach called a mixed-methods approach. Not only does the choice of an appropriate approach take into account the researcher's beliefs, but also the research problem, researchers' lived experiences, and the intended audience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A well-selected research approach “ensures that the methods used are aligned with the objectives of the study and the nature of data required” (Saxena, 2024, p.20).

Therefore, making certain that the study is valid, reliable, and relevant to the area of interest (Saxena, 2024).

Qualitative and quantitative approaches fall on opposite poles of the methodological scale, each acting as a pivotal frame that shapes data analysis, collection, and interpretation. On the one end of the scale, quantitative research is “a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 22). From this definition, a manifold of quantitative research characteristics can be extracted, one of which is the fact that it is driven by numerical data, statistics, and mathematical measurements of variables. Another key feature of the quantitative apparatus is its emphasis on identifying and manipulating the relationships among variables instead of individual cases. Moreover, establishing universal laws and coming up with facts that are generalizable lies at the heart of any quantitative inquiry.

At the far end of the scale rests a more exploratory, meaning-driven and subjective type, termed the qualitative approach. The driving force behind any qualitative inquiry is in the description of a certain phenomenon (Li et al., 2018); therefore, it often seeks to unpack deep meanings about humans, behaviors, feelings, and experiences, going beyond surface patterns and relationships. For this reason, it is described by Dornyei (2007) as an ‘emergent’ approach, which sets no predetermined hypotheses or expectations. Rather, the researcher here has to be flexible and open to new insights and details that may emerge as the study unfolds.

The Mixed-methods approach occupies a central position in this scale, bridging together the qualitative and quantitative research canons. Dornyei (2007) defined it as a mixture of both

qualitative and quantitative research methods in a singular investigation. Not only this, Creswell (2009, as cited in Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007), added that “it is more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; It also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” (p. 23). Thus, a mixed-method investigation is based on the premise that, to provide profound insights into a particular topic, researchers should employ a blend of research approaches and a vast assortment of methods. Doing so can hopefully allow them to understand the larger context of the causes and effects contributing to the problem (Li et al., 2018).

In discussing the strength of this eclectic approach, Li et al. (2018) assumed that it can yield better results compared to single-approach research. This is mainly because the merits of one method may compensate for the drawbacks of another (Dornyei, 2007); accordingly, harnessing the strong aspects of both paradigms. Another bright facet of the mixed-method approach lies in its integration of both types of data, in which words allow for meaningfulness and numbers offer precision. Therefore, it proves effective in increasing the validity of the obtained evidence. Nevertheless, what rather raises concern about the effectiveness of a mixed-method approach is the fact that very few researchers excel in both types of research. And so, if researchers are not adequately trained, the reliability of the findings might be at great risk.

In conclusion, qualitative and quantitative approaches contribute differently to research. While both can yield valuable insights when used alone, the validity of these insights may increase when used in tandem. Integrating them together means embracing mixed-methods research, where the strengths of a certain type cover the limitations of another. Choosing an optimal approach is contingent upon certain criteria, such as the nature of the study, the researcher's worldview, and the intended audience.

Moving the discussion into practical terms, our study, by embracing qualification and quantification, sets the tone perfectly for the utilization of a mixed-methods approach. Settling on quantification only means limiting the scope of investigation to examining the effectiveness of the technique. Similarly, favoring qualification indicates reducing the study's aim to probing into the factors that inhibit learners from enhancing their written syntactic maturity. Thus, a single method would not suffice, failing to encompass the chief aims that drive the study. Following this reasoning, a mixed-methods approach is assumed to work optimally within the boundaries of this research, allowing for both the measurement of the technique's impact and the description of learners' attitudes and factors hampering their syntactic maturity development.

3.1.3 Research Design (s)

To lend more precision, specificity, and concrete focus to the study, researchers are expected to move beyond merely deciding about a suitable paradigm and approach. Conversely, their research process should go a step further to include decisions about what research design to choose. A research design constitutes “the researchers' decisions pertaining to what, where, when, and how much, and by what means to carry out a research study” (Li et al., 2018, p. 41). Because it clearly shows the sequence of data collection and analysis, it is commonly referred to as a blueprint, procedural plan, overview, framework, or a roadmap, which guides the researchers from writing hypotheses to the final reporting of findings. through choosing an appropriate research design, researchers can sort out various details regarding their research. These involve determining how data will be collected, analyzed, presented, and how participants will be selected, how much time each step will take, and the sequence of these steps.

Since research design underpins the entire research process, it is often critical to pay great attention and consideration when choosing it, as thoughtlessness at this stage may render the research exercise futile, leading to erroneous conclusions. In contrast, a well-developed research design can contribute to reducing inaccuracy, minimizing time wastage, increasing results reliability, and foreseeing possible problems and flaws (Li et al., 2018). It is, therefore, highly needed as it acts as a catalyst in establishing harmony and smoothness between the different stages of research. There is no single design type that fits all research circumstances. Rather, researchers design their studies in different ways and opt for diverse research strategies, so that chances of collecting reliable and valid data needed to answer a particular question would be increased.

Among the very broad classifications of research designs are the quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research designs. For an in-depth analysis of issues, qualitative designs like the case study, phenomenology, and ethnography, are utilized to gain a better understanding of human behaviors and reasons behind their actions. At its core, a qualitative design is exploratory, seeking to investigate a particular phenomenon without predetermined assumptions. On the other hand, quantitative designs like the experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational, view problems through an objective outlook. Therefore, they utilize statistical analysis to collect numerical data and ultimately generalize the findings across groups of people.

When integrating both of these designs within a single study, a mixed-method design takes shape, encompassing the principles and characteristics of both strands. According to Dencombe (2010), a mixed-method design refers to “a research strategy that crosses the boundaries of conventional paradigms of research by deliberately combining methods drawn from different traditions with different underlying assumptions” (p.137). Thus, in contrast to single-method designs, this pluralistic approach to designs seeks to bridge the gap between the objectivity of

quantitative designs and the subjectivity of their qualitative counterparts, which can generate a more fulsome picture to the issue under study.

Whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, researchers identify the most suitable design based on the problem, research questions, and the study's purpose (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Other factors to think about are the suitability, feasibility, and ethicality of the design (Dencombe, 2010). Achieving the suitability requirement entails well-rounded knowledge of the purpose of the study. Feasibility means the researcher can easily access people, places, and materials needed, as well as able to complete the research within the required timeframe. Ethicality concerns the guideline that no participants should experience harm or disrespect as a result of contributing to the study.

Since the present research adopts a mixed-methods design, further details and explanation are required about the specific mixed-methods design it follows. Plano-Clark and Creswell (2011) recommended six major mixed-methods designs, which provide useful frameworks for researchers. One of the frequently used designs is the embedded mixed-method design. The embedded design is “a mixed methods approach where the researcher combines the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data within a traditional quantitative research design or qualitative research design” (Green, 2007, as cited in Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 135). In this type of design, one data type plays the primary role, while the other serves a supporting role, often referred to as the ‘embedded’ part. The data collection and analysis for the embedded part can occur before, during, or after the primary data is gathered (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

It is noteworthy that although the purposes of the primary and secondary data are closely related, they aim to address different research questions. The embedded design is particularly

useful when a study involves distinct questions that require multiple data types, allowing the dominant design to be enhanced and the overall goal of the study to be more effectively addressed (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Turning the discussion to the specific context of this study, it can be argued that an embedded mixed-methods design aligns optimally with the research objectives. This is a mixed-methods design because it includes both the quantitative measurement of the effects of the sentence-combining technique on learners' syntactic maturity and the qualitative exploration of the factors that hinder learners from developing mature syntactic patterns, as well as their attitudes toward the implementation of the technique.

It qualifies as an embedded mixed-methods design because the quantitative strand, which investigates the effect of the sentence-combining technique (the independent variable) on students' syntactic maturity (the dependent variable), dominates the overall structure of the study. This core, treatment-based design is supported by qualitative elements. Specifically, the investigation of factors impeding learners' written syntactic maturity substantiate the necessity of conducting the treatment, and students' attitudes offer meaningful insights into the impact and effectiveness of the technique. In this way, qualitative data are embedded within a predominantly quantitative design, forming an embedded mixed-methods approach.

3.1.4 Data Collection Method (s)

After setting the plan of actions through choosing an appropriate research design, the data collection stage follows, aiming to translate the researcher's blueprint into practice. By means of this stage, the researcher attempts to gather information regarding certain research questions, employing well-suited and reliable tools (Li et al., 2018). These tools are versatile and

multidimensional, and therefore researchers should not assume that one is better than the other, nor should they rely on random criteria to choose one over the other. Rather, according to Kumar (2011), the purpose of the study, the resources available, and the researcher's skills, as well as the population's socio-economic and demographic characteristics, are of paramount importance in determining the most suitable data collection method.

Relatively, the majority of data collection methods can fit in two types of research, the quantitative and qualitative one. However, it is the degree of flexibility, structure, sequential order, depth, and freedom in their usage that can distinguish between them (Kumar, 2011). These methods lend themselves well in making the picture clearer concerning underexplored phenomena, arriving at facts and evidence about a certain topic, and facilitating precise measurement of variables (Dencombe, 2010).

As per Dencombe (2010), before engaging in collecting data, five aspects ought to be taken into account. First, regularly associating certain research designs with particular data collection methods does not eliminate the researcher's ability to opt for different methods. Second, there is no absolutely optimal tool. Instead, each one has its potentials and drawbacks. Moreover, in deciding which tool to utilize, researchers are expected to look for the most useful and well-suited one in the context of their study. Further, if they find that several data collection methods can be effective, they can opt for mixing methods instead of mutual exclusiveness. Finally, the employment of various methods opens the door for triangulation--the integration of diverse data collection methods--so that a more wide-angled lens on the topic can be established.

3.1.4.1 The Focus Group. Among the frequently used qualitative data collection methods are focus groups, which stand out as one of the most effective instruments that prompt collective

meaning-making. In a focus group situation, several participants gather to share their perceptions, opinions, and experiences guided by a moderator. Throughout a carefully planned series of discussions, the researcher attempts to steer the discussion, allow for agreements and disagreements, and support interaction between subjects; therefore, “it is from the interaction of the group that the data emerge” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 376). This data collection method is particularly useful when the goal is not only to yield a collective rather than an individual view but also to gain a more profound understanding of people's feelings and thoughts concerning a particular phenomenon (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Corroborating this, Dornyei (2007), believed that the essence of focus groups is “the collective experience of group brainstorming, that is, participants thinking together, inspiring and challenging each other, and reacting to emerging issues and points” (p. 144).

Krueger and Casey (2015) highlighted four features that must be present when undertaking focus group sessions. The first one concerns the number of participants, which is expected to range from five to eight individuals. The latter sample size ensures that each participant has an equal chance to contribute to the discussion while at the same time guarantees obtaining a variety of viewpoints. Next, the homogeneity of participants is of primordial importance, as they should possess similar characteristics that ultimately serve the purpose of the study. Further, unlike casual interactions that aim to reach common grounds and arrive at conclusions, focus group sessions seek to collect qualitative data through a vast array of opinions. For this reason, multiple rather than just one focus group session is needed so that researchers can compare, contrast, and identify recurrent themes. Another remarkable characteristic of focus groups is the highly focused discussions facilitated through an interview guide. The latter consists of predetermined and

logically sequenced questions that start with very broad points and end with more focused and specific aspects.

Conducting focus groups proves useful when participants feel a sense of comfort, respect, and freedom to express their thoughts without fear of scrutiny. Additionally, a skillful moderator who plays the role of a listener, observer, questioner, and conversation facilitator, without dominating the discussion, can significantly impact the validity of the outcomes. Emphasizing the advantages of this tool, Dornyei (2007) underscored that “this within-group interaction can yield high-quality data as it can create a synergistic environment that results in deep and insightful discussion” (p. 144).

Thus, focus groups are typically used to obtain rich data through open-ended discussions and participants shared or differing perspectives. Moreover, these interaction-based groups are considered economical for researchers seeking to gather a wealth of qualitative data efficiently. Despite these merits, conducting focus groups presents multiple challenges. Researchers must prepare thoroughly in advance, manage multiple tasks simultaneously, and skillfully improvise probes and follow-up questions. Additionally, they must ensure that outspoken participants do not dominate the discussion while encouraging quieter individuals to share their thoughts freely.

3.1.4.1.1 Structure and Aim. The semi-structured focus group was conducted to mainly probe into the factors that impede learners from developing written syntactic maturity. Uncovering such factors can not only help us prove that lacking written syntactic maturity do exist in the targeted sample, but also can provide insights for how to address such a problem. Two focus group sessions were held with 20 third-year learners of English, in which the first session involved nine participants, while the second one encompassed 13 participants.

Before undertaking focus group discussions, the researchers prepared an interview guide, which was dominated by open-ended questions and interspersed with some closed-ended questions. Both types of questions were divided into categories: opening questions, transitioning questions, key questions, and closing questions. The first category did not seek to steer discussion, but rather to push participants to speak from the beginning, open up, and feel at ease. Also, they were utilized to introduce the topic and get participants to start thinking about their connections and experiences with it. Transitioning questions acted as a logical link between introductory and key questions, setting the stage for participants to reflect more deeply on their opinions and experiences. Key questions are the driving force behind undertaking the focus group, since they tapped into the main aim of the research question. Closing questions were designed to bring the discussion to a close, urging participants to reflect back on their previous comments and determine their final position regarding major areas of the focus group. Question categories and the objective of each one are further elaborated on table 1 joined below.

3.1.4.1.2 Validation. Validity, the extent to which an instrument is measuring what it intends to measure, is deemed a crucial stage before the data collection process. The questions asked to respondents can form the basis of conclusions, affecting the quality and accuracy of the whole study. Therefore, these instruments and question items they consist of are required to be appropriate, relevant, and well-structured, that is, valid. Cohen et al., (2007) emphasized that “validity is an important key to effective research. If a piece of research is invalid, then it is worthless. Validity is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative\naturalistic research” (p.133). Echoing the same view, Li et al., (2018) contended that research validity can be significantly impacted by the tools used to collect data. It is therefore crucial for the data gathering process to be meticulously designed, mainly adhering to both validity and reliability of data

collection methods. Accordingly, going through validation stage is key so that data collection methods can be accurate, reliable, and meaningful, safeguarding the study from producing misleading findings.

To ensure the validity of our focus group's question items, the interview guide has been sent to two internal experts. Though the first expert had no major comments or remarks about inaccuracies, mistakes, or ill-structured questions, they pointed out the complexity of the questions and the importance for the moderator to skillfully manage the situation by explaining, using probes and rephrasing questions. The second expert highlighted that the closing question might be vague and can result in making participants hesitant to speak, as well as challenged to think about possible answers. They then suggested an alternative question, which was incorporated in the final version of the interview guide.

Table 1*The Focus Group Structure and Objectives*

Category	Item	Objective
Opening Questions	1-2	To examine the extent to which participants are aware of the concept of syntactic maturity and how do they perceive it from a personal view point.
Transitioning Questions	3	To gain insights on participants' level of confidence in constructing complex sentences.
Key Questions	4-8	The aims of this category are twofold. On the one hand, it strives to determine participants' specific struggles with complex sentences construction. On the other hand, it digs deep into uncovering the factors that may hinder their syntactic maturity development.
Closing Questions	9	To capture participants' initial perceptions about the effectiveness of SC activities in improving their written syntactic maturity.

3.1.4.2 The Tests. In educational research, tests can serve as a cornerstone, for they are assumed to provide valuable quantitative data that can shape experimental and descriptive studies. This type of instrument can be employed to measure a vast array of human behaviors, attributes, capacities, and skills (Li et al., 2018). One of the most prevalent testing techniques are the ones carried out after and before treatment, frequently described as pre-tests and post-tests. A pretest, according to Creswell (2012), “provides a measure on some attributes or characteristics that you

assess for participants in an experiment before they receive the treatment” (p. 297). However, a post-test is “a measure on some attributes or characteristics that is assessed for participants in an experiment after the treatment” (Creswell, 2012, p. 297). Therefore, it can be admitted that a study where pre- and post-tests are the main data gathering tool is one that measures the change in a certain phenomenon or variable between two points in time. The change is detected by analyzing the difference in the phenomenon prior to and at the end of the experiment (Kumar, 2011). Despite threats to validity that surround such tests, they work remarkably well in establishing cause-effect relationships and yielding objective and measurable evidence.

3.1.4.2.1 Structure and Aim. Using pre- and post-tests is fundamental as they seek to quantify the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable, the driving force behind the present study. More precisely, by using those tests, we strive to measure the impact of a five sessions' treatment of SC exercises on improving learners' written syntactic maturity. While the pre-test was employed to establish a baseline for participants' initial ability to construct mature sentences, the post-test acted as a benchmark for assessing participants' syntactic maturity growth and evaluating the effectiveness of the SC treatment.

In the pre-test, the main task students were required to perform was writing an argumentative essay of 10 to 15 lines. Students were provided with three pictures, each representing a different lifestyle (love, wealth, and fame). They, then, were urged to choose one and convince the smartest person they know that the lifestyle they have chosen is the most important requirement for happiness. In explaining the essay prompt, it was emphasized that they should carefully strike a balance between the quality of their writing and the sophistication of their arguments and ideas. The rationale behind opting for an argumentative essay prompt is grounded

in the idea that argumentative writing can allow writers to produce intricate ideas and more complex sentence structures compared to other essay genres.

Supplying visual demonstration to the written essay prompt ensures that all participants interpret the instruction within a common context and may trigger them to show higher richness, elaboration, and description in their arguments. Opting for such essay length (10 to 15 lines), can help to capture writing complexity throughout several sentences and the logical relationships between them without overwhelming students. The latter decision was also based on students' educational level (third-year), where they are not used to compose very lengthy texts. In the post-test, students underwent the exact same task, explanation and process. Doing so is presumed to allow us to attribute any change or improvement in participants' performance to the treatment itself, instead of variation in task difficulty, as syntactic maturity is highly sensitive to such variable. Moreover, settling on identical tasks in both treatment phases can prove effective in minimizing extraneous variables that could alter results such as increased cognitive load; thus, allowing for comparability, consistency, fair comparison, and precise measurement.

3.1.4.2.2 Validation and Piloting. Li et al., (2018) believed that a good test is expected to demonstrate validity, reliability, and objectivity. Valid in a sense that it measures what it claims to measure; reliable when its results are accurate and consistent over time; and objective when it provides a “correct and clear score value for each performance” (p. 354). In this study, the pre- and post-tests did not go through validation and piloting stages as they were adopted from Willig (1985) study, in which they have already been scrutinized for fairness, reliability, and objectivity. Leveraging existing research tools instead of inventing novel ones lends itself well in saving time and effort, as well as reducing biases and subjectivity that a novice researcher may risk falling into.

3.1.4.3 The Questionnaire. One of the most well-established techniques of data collection, is the questionnaire, a widely used method to gather information on participants' social traits, behaviors, and reasons for actions in educational research. Brown (2001) defined questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them from existing answers” (p.6). Questionnaires vary in their level of structure, ranging from highly structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. The latter decision is largely based on the nature of the study and shaped by question items. These items can be either close-ended, which is often characterized by predetermined answers leading to quantified data, or open-ended, which open respondents the room for expressing their opinions and beliefs freely, resulting in more in-depth and meaningful insights (Machey & Gass, 2016). By incorporating a mixture of question types, researchers can collect not only factual information about respondents, but also behavioral and attitudinal data.

Not all research types allow for the use of questionnaires. Rather, this kind of data collection method is best suited in cases where limited resources are available and where the researcher strives to gather data from a wide range of participants. Also, they are most beneficial in contexts where participants' privacy ought to be strictly protected (Li et al. 2018). Key advantages of questionnaires may involve their ability to generate large numbers of responses in a cost-effective way. Moreover, the pre-coded and standardized answers that this tool is distinguished by can protect data against variations in wording. Thus, “there is little scope for data to be affected by interpersonal factors” (Dencombe, 2010, p.169). However, the way these questions are structured and responses are predetermined can turn out to be counterproductive, frustrating respondents and limiting them from expressing their real views and beliefs on the topic. In addition, questionnaires may exhibit potential pitfalls because of lacking the direct face-to-face

interaction between researchers and respondents, the reason which may prevent researchers from verifying data accuracy.

3.1.4.3.1 Structure and Aim. Although the questionnaire was administered at a distinct stage of the study, it has acted as a complementary component to the treatment phase. The chief objective behind its administration was to examine participants' attitudes and reactions after undertaking the SC practice in treatment sessions. Doing so can hopefully provide us with further insights about the effectiveness of the technique and its impacts on their syntactic maturity. Whether positive, negative, or neutral, understanding learners' attitudes can offer a more comprehensive evaluation of the treatment's impact and inform future implementation of such technique.

The attitudinal questionnaire, though dominated by closed-ended items, it is considered semi-structured as some open-ended questions were also incorporated to gain deeper explanations and detailed answers. These questions were sorted into three sections. The first section was particularly concerned with students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of the SC technique. The subsequent section shed light on engagement and interest of students in the implementation of the technique. The last one involved questions about the difficulties students encountered during the treatment, as well as suggestions that they may have for future implementation of the technique. Table 2 visualizes the structure of the questionnaire more effectively.

Table 2*The Questionnaire Structure and Objectives*

Sections	Item (s)	Content	Objective
1	1-4	Students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of the SC practice.	To gain better understanding on the treatment's attitudinal impact on students. More precisely, to uncover their reactions regarding the effectiveness of the SC technique, their level of interest and engagement with the activities, challenges they faced and suggestions about different approaches to applying the SC practice.
2	1-6	Students' engagement and interest in the implementation of the SC technique.	
3	1-4	Challenges and further suggestions.	

3.1.4.3.2 Piloting and Validation. Going through piloting and validation stages is deemed primordial in ensuring that the questionnaire involves well-structured layout, appropriate wording, considerate length, correct grammatical structure, and clear language. For the completion of the validation stage, two internal experts contributed valuable insights and raised significant remarks. The latter were specifically about the logical order of questions and their appropriateness for each section. They emphasized adhering to a more coherent structure by noting that certain questions were better suited for specific sections rather than others. Ultimately, their feedback was carefully considered, which resulted in enhancing, to some extent, the clarity and logical flow of questions.

After ensuring the validity of the questions, the piloting stage was conducted incorporating a total of six participants from the targeted population. These participants were provided with the

actual questionnaire, which was supplied by an opinionnaire. A quick glance at their responses revealed that they have faced no difficulty in understanding, ticking, and answering questions. Addedly, they confirmed the appropriate length and clear instructions of the questionnaire. The latter fact has seemingly further increased the reliability of the instrument and its suitability for the targeted sample.

3.1.5 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection of this study followed a logical order in which it started by conducting focus group sessions, moved to carrying out tests, and finished with examining students' attitudes using a questionnaire. The latter process spanned approximately one month, taking place from the 3rd of February to the 2nd of March. To ensure conformance to ethical guidelines, oral and written consents were obtained from both the head of the department and students who participated in the three data collection methods. While the head permitted occupying empty rooms and undertaking the study within students' free hours, students accepted to participate after being informed about their rights, duties, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Initially, two focus group sessions were conducted. These sessions were carried out on February 3rd and each lasted about 35 minutes. After gathering students in a circle, the researchers started by introducing the topic and purpose of the focus group and emphasizing that there are no wrong or right answers; thus, setting the tone for the interview and putting participants at ease. In a calm classroom and inviting atmosphere, students engaged in a semi-structured discussion, answering and reacting to both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Two recording devices were used to protect against data loss. To increase the research fairness and authenticity of the discussion, participants were not informed about the content of the questions beforehand.

The pre-test took place on Wednesday, February 5th with 20 participants in one of the faculty classrooms. It consisted of a single task which asked students to produce an essay. After explaining the essay prompt, participants had to answer individually and were given 1 hour and 20 minutes to finish. Additionally, they were required not to use their phones or to rely on external tools to perform the task. Conversely, they were invited to use their own mental abilities and writing style. Despite prohibiting using external aids, questions and dictionaries were allowed. For the post-test, which was conducted on Sunday, March 2nd, the same process, tasks, instructions, and explanations were applied.

On the same day and place, and immediately after the post-test, the attitudinal questionnaire was administered to 20 participants. The latter were required to fill out the questionnaire individually based on their experience on treatment sessions. The questionnaire was introduced by a small paragraph which was designed to inform respondents about the purpose and topic of the questionnaire and ensures them the confidentiality of their responses and anonymity of their identities. 15 minutes were an adequate duration for them to finish answering all items. Clarifications and explanations of certain question items were provided by the researcher whenever needed.

3.1.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is one of the various steps that is highly required in any research journey. Analyzing data means making sense of them, better understanding the relationship between them, and thoroughly examining their meaning in order to enable accurate assessment of their contribution to the overall findings. According to Li et al., (2018), data analysis refers to “the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling data with the goal of discovering

useful information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making” (p. 395). After the analysis stage, those raw data take an organized and well-examined shape, paving the way for more advanced stages of hypothesis testing and predictions making.

Data analysis encompasses diverse approaches, namely the qualitative and the quantitative approach. The former's basic units of analysis are words and images, where the researcher's role and involvement are of remarkable significance. However, in the latter, the researcher is completely detached from the analysis processing, letting numerical data and mathematical calculations speak for themselves. Since the present research study embraces a mixed-methods approach, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods will be put to use.

3.1.6.1 Data Analysis Procedures for the Focus Group. Focus group questions are semi-structured, yet they are dominated by open-ended items. Consequently, conducting thematic analysis would resonate seamlessly with the descriptive-oriented nature of the said data collection method. Analyzing data thematically can possibly yield an in-depth and nuanced account of data as it is a method for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified two types of thematic analysis, the inductive and the deductive approaches. Following the inductive method means being interested mainly on the data and what can be generated or evolved from them without subscribing to a particular research question. As opposed to the previously mentioned data-driven method, the deductive approach can be described as analyst-driven because it aims to provide a more specific analysis that is led by a predetermined research question. Our analysis of the focus group will be primarily governed by a

deductive way of analyzing data, considering its focus on addressing a particular question instead of digging deep into the data with the aim of generating one.

In analyzing the raw data obtained from the two focus group sessions, we will follow thematic analysis steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step of familiarization with the data incorporates the repeated exposure, listening, and reading of the interviews, records, and transcripts. Through actively immersing oneself with the data, the researcher can hopefully get acquainted with the content and start to sense patterns in meaning. To facilitate the latter process, transcription of the tape-recording ought to be made. When transcribing, we will opt for a non-verbatim transcription in which unnecessary sounds, filler words, stutters, and superfluous elements will be removed without changing the structure and meaning of the responses. Doing so ensures that the final transcripts would be clear and readable. In light of this, Dencombe (2010), emphasized that transcribing is not a mechanical operation; instead, they highlighted that “it needs to be ‘tidied up’ and edited a little to put it in a format on the written page that is understandable to the reader” (p.278).

The second phase of the analysis concerns generating initial codes. Here, the researcher looks for repeated patterns seeking to find meaningful elements that may lay the groundwork for possible emerging themes. Coding can be carried out either manually or through a software. In our case, manual coding will be utilized, wherein different colors will be associated with different segments of the transcript. In the third phase, work will begin on identifying overarching themes from those initial codes and finding out connections between them. Careful review of those themes should be then conducted to possibly merge certain similar themes, make adjustments, or even separate others. The subsequent steps of polishing and defining themes make up the end of

analysis. At this level, defined themes' names are set and explanations of each theme are established along with clarifying how each one fits into the bigger picture.

3.1.6.2 Data Analysis Procedures for the Tests. Post-and pre-test executed before and after the SC treatment will be analyzed quantitatively through statistical methods. Since tests required students to produce a written piece, the analysis will first start by turning those handwritten essays into a digital version. This will facilitate asserting them in a software called 'Syntactic Complexity Analyzer' and calculating the syntactic maturity of their texts. After obtaining the sentence maturity scores of participants, they will be imported to SPSS, in which descriptive and inferential statistics will be run. The statistical description of the scores will not only allow us to calculate measures of dispersion and frequency, but will also help with summarizing and visualizing them in tables and graphs.

This operation serves to merely show the features that already exist in a sample, yet it does not measure the effect of the independent variable. What is rather needed is inferential statistics that will likely examine the relationships between variables and permit the researcher to either reject or accept the null hypothesis. In so doing, the paired-sample t-test and the Shapiro-Wilk test will be utilized. These tests can be highly effective in proving that the observed difference between tests is due to an actual relationship between variables, rather than due to chance and in demonstrating the normality of data.

3.1.6.1 Data Analysis Procedures for the Questionnaire. Firstly, a codebook will be created in which each response option will be associated with a number. After coding, data will be imported to SPSS so that descriptive statistics could be run and whereby each question will be visualized with a table. Based on those frequencies and calculations displayed, closed-ended items

will be analyzed and interpreted. When it comes to open-ended items, they will be integrated as quotes to add more depth and give voice to those highly structured responses.

3.1.7 Sampling Technique

Because in educational research the focus is placed on human participants to collect data and draw inferences, sampling plays a pivotal role in shaping the research process. When researchers engage in sampling, they typically select a small group of participants from a larger group or population so that it can be used to form estimations and develop a projection about an undisclosed detail, event, or phenomenon with respect to the whole population (Kumar, 2011). Broadly speaking, two categories of sampling can be identified, probability and non-probability sampling.

The former lend itself well in large-scale studies, where the aim is to generalize the findings over the whole population. As such, it ensures that every individual in the sample has an equal chance to be selected in the population, that is, randomization. On the other hand, non-probability sampling tends to fit qualitative and small-scale studies, where the principle of randomization is not considered and researchers are not seeking the generalizability of results. Since our present study can be categorized under small-scale research and our goal is neither to generalize findings nor to obtain a representative sample, we opted for a voluntary sampling technique, a type of non-random sampling.

In this respect, Cohen et al., (2007) asserted that small-scale studies make use of non-random approaches to sampling “because, despite disadvantages that arise from their non-representativeness, they are far less complicated to set up, are considerably less expensive, and can prove perfectly adequate when researchers do not intend to generalize their findings” (p.113). With

this in mind, a voluntary sampling is believed to be suitable in cases where participants are not easily found and accessed, offering a more flexible and feasible alternative of forming samples.

This study targets EFL learners of Biskra university. Drawing on a voluntary sampling technique allowed for selecting 20 third-year level students from the targeted population. The latter served as the foundation of data collection throughout its three phases (focus group, pre- and post-test, and the questionnaire). Settling on third-year students is contingent upon the fact that their English language competency can align perfectly with the objectives of the study, and particularly the objectives and tasks of pre- and post-tests and treatment sessions. In addition, students at such level are assumed to have a strong grasp of grammar and sentence types knowledge; thus, they are expected to possess the ability of solving SC exercises and manipulating diverse syntactic structures, a skill that first- and second-year students may not have. Therefore, since they already have a considerable amount of background knowledge about grammar, this removes the burden of teaching them the targeted grammatical aspects and opens room for them to practice and improve their written syntactic complexity.

3.2 Rationale and Study Description

The problem that we have shed light on did not emerge in a vacuum. Several reasons have acted as a catalyst in bringing this issue to life. In the first place, the researcher's strong interest in improving her writing style was a driving force. That is, this constant interest motivated the researcher not only to be curious about innovative writing teaching methods, but also inspired her to engage in self-reflection, looking for ways of improving sentence fluency and establishing control over one's syntax. Hence, this insight has driven the researcher to pursue this issue.

In the second place, this problem extends beyond merely the researcher's own experience. When attempting to write essays, a fair amount of the researcher's peers at the third-year university level, have been observed to have limited ability in manipulating good sentences. This weakness in maneuvering mature syntactic structures and handling advanced syntax is problematic. Mainly because it can presumably lessen the value of their ideas, deteriorate the profoundness of their style, and ultimately can generate a poorly written product. This segment of students has been spotted to have incompatible levels of syntactic maturity. Thus, what is expected from them is far from their actual level. The core reasons behind this gap between expectations and ground reality can be varied, spanning across: limited vocabulary, insufficient grammar knowledge, traditional teaching methods, first language influence, inadequate feedback...etc. Despite their variety and predictability these reasons will be carefully addressed in this research, so that more in-depth results can be obtained. These findings are expected to validate the existence of such problem in the targeted sample, strengthening further what have been observed and reviewed in the literature

In the third place, another reason for selecting syntactic maturity as the main focus is its multifaceted nature. Although it is undoubtedly an important aspect of writing, crafting varied and complex syntactic structures can be extremely challenging. Sentences are the pillars of any written work, which can possess a paramount effect on the tone, style and effectiveness of writing. Unless structuring them well and ensuring their diversity and complexity, sentences can arguably detract from the quality of the composition. According to Saddler (2012) "poorly written sentences may also mean lower scores on written products for such students, because sentence structure has a strong influence on the quality of the students' texts" (p.18).

Hence, improving third year EFL students' syntactic maturity can potentially be critical to their academic growth. Further, acquiring syntactic maturity can be regarded as highly

complicated. Saddler (2012) advocated that “although it is certainly an important skill, developing a style in writing is a complex business to teach and learn, in part because of the variety of sentences that can be used” (p.17). This claim highlights the fact that some students struggle to improve their sentence fluency on their own; rather they are likely in need for an instructional method that may smooth out their learning journey.

To speed up the growth of their syntax, the so-called sentence-combining technique has been chosen as a potential solution to the addressed issue. The decision to measure the effects of SC is based on a set of plausible arguments. Above all, SC technique has been in the heart of several investigations. Thus, acquiring a rich body of literature makes it a researchable area to study. Of equal importance, is that the majority of studies revealed promising results concerning its effectiveness. Nevertheless, the impact of such technique is understudied in our setting. Eventually, rendering it a motivating area of interest that needs to be inspected more closely.

Additionally, advantages that SC technique can cultivate in learners appear to be numerous. Engaging students with various SC exercises can allow them to commit less syntactic mistakes, by helping them decrease the amount of abrupt and overly long sentences which they may construct (Gleason, 1962). Moreover, SC may serve as an instrumental tool in the revising process, as it can train students to expand and reorder ideas to strengthen their language (Strong, 1985). Furthermore, SC can possibly familiarize learners with a large repertoire of syntactic structures, by rising their awareness of the existing syntactic choices in writing and foster their eagerness to try vast array of syntactic variations (De Beaugrande, 1985). therefore, it becomes evident that SC technique is worth investigating, regarding the multifaceted benefits it brings forth.

To examine the causal relationship between syntactic maturity and SC techniques, a treatment will be carried out. By implementing this treatment, the researcher strives to design a mini-syllabus, in which diverse SC activities will be incorporated. Achieving this, will hopefully immerse third year EFL students in a completely practical environment, steering clear of theoretical concepts or abstract grammatical terminologies. This practical approach to syntax, will be introduced first using simple and “cued” (signaled) exercises. Later on, more advanced and “open” exercises will be gradually integrated. Moving from cued to open, in other words, from less challenging to more challenging activities is assumed to allow students grasp the gist of SC, while also building on their previously learned syntactic skills. Whereas some activities will be derived from books like: *Modern English exercises for non-native speakers*, *Sentence combining workbook*, *Tiered sentence-combining* and *Teacher’s guide to effective sentence writing*, others will be adopted merely as an idea and adapted, refined and modified by the researcher in terms of language and topics discussed.

Even though these activities will prompt learners to manipulate compound sentences (coordination), complex sentences (subordination) and complex-compound sentences all together, strong emphasis will be directed towards subordination. This is due to firstly, the available time is extremely limited to encompass various syntactic aspects. Secondly, SC activities can be presented to teach large assortment of skills in writing, extending over parallel structure, passive and active voice, cohesion, coherence, revising, paragraph organization, free modifiers...etc. Accordingly, having a clear objective of their use would create a more focused approach to teaching.

The above process of delivering the mini-syllabus content, will span across five weeks, with a total of eight sessions. These Sessions will be held twice a week, each lasting an hour and a half. Besides, two sessions will be devoted to the pre-test and post-test. Distributing sessions this

way, will ensure that students can strike a balance between their regular studying sessions and treatment-related ones. The treatment will start with conducting a pre-test to analyze subjects' initial syntactic maturity. At this level, participants are urged to accomplish a writing task, which necessitates them to write a short argumentative essay based on a prompt that encourages the use of complex and varied syntactic patterns.

As for the pre-test, students will be assigned the same writing task, with the primary difference being that they are expected to apply the SC techniques they have learned. These tests will allow the researcher to make clear comparisons between participants' syntactic complexity before and after the treatment. Thus, assessing to what extent can the implementation of SC affect the syntactic maturity of third year EFL students. To effectively evaluate students' writing on both tests, the researcher will rely on "t-unit length" as the main indicator of syntactic development. This latter has been introduced by Hunt (1965), functioning as a reliable factor of syntactic complexity.

Subsequently, participants' perceptions of and attitudes towards the treatment will also be examined. Along with the treatment's results, this stage will uncover how effective the treatment was from the standpoint of the participants themselves. Moreover, participants' reactions can be highly significant in revealing how engaging and interesting the treatment was, further substantiating its credibility.

3.2.1 The Implementation of the Treatment

The instructional procedures of the SC technique were carried out over a structured sequence of stages, each fulfilling a given purpose. The first stage mainly included the preparation of a mini-syllabus, which aimed at mapping out the entire instructional plan of treatment sessions.

Here, the researcher had to strategically think about how many units, lessons, and sessions to conduct. Not only this, the content of each lesson, its objectives, and degree of difficulty of every activity had to be carefully examined at this stage. A great challenge that the researcher faced here is choosing the appropriate activities and adapting them to suit the needs of the targeted learners.

The second stage involved translating what was written as a blueprint to an actual delivery of lessons. Throughout five sessions and three units, three main lessons were delivered, each lasting one hour and a half. Despite the variety of exercises that were carried out individually, in pairs, or sometimes in groups, they all targeted combining simple sentences using either coordinating conjunctions, coordinating adverbs, or subordinating conjunctions. In so doing, the teacher geared learners towards producing complex sentences and expressing ideas through nuanced relationships. In most cases, a session opens with a reminder about a particular sentence type and how it can be combined through diverse conjunctions seeking to activate learners' background knowledge.

Three activities then follow, each designed to either warm them up, urge them to produce their own complex sentences and paragraphs, or engage them in a game-like environment of linking simple structures together. Whenever a new activity is introduced and explained, learners were given enough time to answer. After, they were encouraged to participate, read, and discuss different syntactic structures and decide which one was the most effective. No session was conducted online; rather, all of them were in-person to ensure participants' full engagement, active participation, and deep immersion with activities.

Conclusion

The production of this chapter was based on the premise that methodology follows a top-bottom process. Therefore, the choice of a certain component logically influences the choice of the subsequent one. Following this reasoning, this chapter started with eliciting the highly abstract and philosophical components and ended with very practical and concrete level of discussion. Thus, effectively progressing from paradigm, approach and design to reach data collection and analysis methods. In the chapter that follows, the collected data, which are still raw, disorganized, and unprocessed, will be systematically analyzed, cleaned, and interpreted. This processed version of them will hopefully allow us to reach meaningful conclusions.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four: Fieldwork and Data Analysis

Introduction	144
4.1 Results and Discussion of the Findings	144
4.1.1 The Semi-Structured Focus Group	144
4.1.1.1 Grounding the Study	144
4.1.1.2 Analysis of the Semi-Structured Focus Group Data	145
4.1.2 Analysis of the Tests	172
4.1.2.1 The Pre-and Post-Test Results	172
4.1.2.2 The Test of Normality	176
4.1.2.3 The Paired-Sample T-Test	179
4.1.2.4 Effect Size	179
4.1.3 Analysis of the Semi-Structured Attitudes Questionnaire	180
4.2 Synthesis of the Findings	193
Conclusion	200

Chapter Four: Fieldwork and Data Analysis

Introduction

to culminate in meaningful findings, in this chapter, the collected data will go progressively through display, analysis, interpretation, and finally synthesis. Whenever a new tool is introduced, a brief overview of its collected data will be established through tables, visual presentations, and narrative paragraphs. In doing so, interpretations will be provided each time a key trend or pattern in the data is highlighted. Following this process, findings will be subjected to synthesis in relation to research questions. At this stage, results will be compared to previous research, possible explanations will be proposed, and divergence or convergence between qualitative and quantitative data will be often identified.

4.1 Results and Discussion of the Findings

4.1.1 The Semi-structured Focus Group

4.1.1.1 Grounding the Study. The main thrust behind conducting this focus group is to probe into the reasons that may hinder learners from developing syntactic maturity in writing. To that end, two focus group sessions were conducted with third-year EFL learners, in which the first one consisted of nine participants and the second one involved 13 participants. Carrying out more than one session strived to ensure that the data obtained are rich and multifaceted, and to prove that the same factors exist across a variety of students. Thus, presumably increasing the validity of the findings. Third-year level students are deemed an optimal sample for answering such research question because at this stage they are expected to craft long compositions moving beyond small paragraphs and short sentences. Therefore, the challenge of producing syntactically mature sentences can be highly accentuated at this level.

In an attempt to guarantee ethical considerations, participants were provided with consent letters to brief them on the procedures which will take place, potential risks associated with their participation, confidentiality of their responses, and voluntary participation. By confirming to these guidelines, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names to conceal their identity. To extract meaningful insights from the collected data, audio recordings were transcribed so that greater familiarization with the data would be facilitated. After engaging with meticulous and repeated readings, the researcher moved to the process of coding and finding patterns in meaning. Due to the manageable length of the transcripts, manual coding was approached rather than software coding, which is believed to be a better fit for larger datasets.

This process involved following Strauss and Corbin (1990) approach. The latter approach informed the decision of going through open coding, where the text was separated into numerous segments, then axial coding, where connections between those discrete text parts were established, and finally, selective coding, in which subcategories and initial codes were classified into four broader categories. Since our approach to thematic analysis is deductive, that is, driven by a predetermined research question, those themes represent different factors that may impede learners from developing written syntactic maturity. In the following section, data collected from the two focus groups will be displayed through tables or narrative paragraphs where comparisons, patterns in meaning, and interpretations will be established. Subsequently, an explanation of each emergent theme will be developed.

4.1.1.2 Analysis of the Semi-structured Focus Group Data.

Q01: What features do you think an effective sentence should have?

The first question served different purposes. First, to set the tone for the discussion to start and to reveal partially the topic that will be in the center of focus. Second, to see whether students will point out to the notion of syntactic complexity as a significant feature to an effective sentence. Students' claims about the features of a syntactically effective sentence ranged between grammatical correctness, clarity, organization and coherence, simple language, and straightforwardness. Although these answers may represent a sound and logical understanding of what makes up a good sentence, they still lack richness and detail. Specifically, syntactic complexity was entirely lacking in those responses, seemingly indicating a surface-level perception of sentence effectiveness, as well as an awareness that lacks depth and offers only a partial grasp of the issue. By signaling those sound yet limited number of characteristics, it can be assumed that students maintain a rather general awareness of what constitutes a good sentence.

Q02: What comes to your mind when I tell you ‘complex’ or ‘mature’ sentences?

By asking this question, the moderator aimed to assess students' conceptual understanding of syntactic maturity, urging them to describe the concept using their own words and perspective. Participants' answers on both sessions are elicited in Table 3:

Table 3*Students' Perceptions about What Constitutes Complex Sentences*

Participant	Session	Quote
Nour	1	"Multiple clauses, sophisticated word, complex words, dependent and independent clauses, and also long sentences".
Hadjer	1	"Sentences that are linked using coordinating conjunctions and other types of conjunctions, sentences that contain two independent sentences which means two ideas".
Nabila	2	"Complex words".
Nawale	2	"It consists of advanced language, nearly close to native speakers' style of language".
Unknown		"Difficult vocabulary".
participant A	2	
Maramé	2	"May be a sentence that is hard to understand".
Said	2	"Contains more than one sentence, one independent and one dependent".

As shown in table 3, participants' responses across sessions varied remarkably, both in quality and quantity. When it comes to the first session, the two perspectives provided were fairly acceptable, linking complexity to length of sentences, diversity of clauses, as well as to subordination and coordination. This implies a quite solid and accurate perception of the concept. However, the fact that only two participants could respond poses a concern, as it may allude to

participants' hesitance and uncertainty, as well as the inability to form a clear opinion regarding the constituents of a mature sentence.

As far as the second session is concerned, although a higher number of responses was marked, students' definition of the concept appeared to be relatively limited, offering either a deviated or a superficial grasp of syntactic maturity. Surprisingly, the latter term was, according to them, linked to either lexical complexity, advanced word choice, or meaningfully difficult sentences. This understanding, though can be partially correct, it does not capture the essence of syntactically mature sentences. Therefore, reluctance expressed by session one's participants and confusion that was conspicuous in their second one's counterparts can be strongly associated with a low level of awareness and a negligible recognition of the idea of syntactic maturity.

Q03: How confident are you about your current ability to produce lengthy sentences with varied structures, multiple details, clauses and modifiers?

Q04: if you had to rate your confidence in writing complex sentences on a scale from 1 to 10, what number feels right to you?

These two questions will be analyzed together because they both aimed at assessing learners' confidence level and perceived ability to construct complex sentences. While the first one invited them to reflect on their confidence level using words, the second one urged them to assign numerical values to their abilities using a number from 1 to 10. Because very few students commented verbally, but all of them provided a self-perceived rating on their ability to construct complex sentences, only a table of these numerical values will be presented.

Table 4*Students' self-perceived Rating on Their Ability to Manipulate Complex Sentences*

Participant	Session	Self-perceived Rating
Amira	1	5
Hadjer	1	5
Hanine	1	2
Basma	1	3
Unknown participant 1	1	5
Nour	1	7
Sali	1	3
Unknown participant 2	1	5
Sabrina	1	3
Doha	2	7
Unknown participant A	2	5
Unknown participant B	2	6
Unknown participant C	2	8
Said	2	6
Unknown participant D	2	6
Unknown participant E	2	8
Marame	2	8.5
Nabila	2	8
Unknown participant F	2	8

Nawale	2	9
Unknown participant G	2	6
Unknown participant H	2	8

In session 1, students' ratings ranged between 2 to 7, which indicates very low or moderate ability of constructing syntactically mature sentences. This low self-perceived assessment was coupled with verbal comments such as, Besma: “I am not confident, I am bad at writing”; Hadjer: “I prefer short sentences or maybe not too long sentences or too many ideas”; Besma: “for me, I prefer writing freely. I don't like rules and do that and you have to do that”. Their honesty and admitting that they possess minimal confidence and inadequate ability to manipulate longer and more complex sentences resonates strongly with their earlier reluctance in describing what constitutes a mature sentence. This alignment between their ratings and comments in Q03 and 04 and their limited involvement with defining a complex sentence in Q02 demonstrate a fairly realistic judgment and a sound perception of their weaknesses.

In the second session, students associated numerical values can be qualified as a high, suggesting a robust sense of confidence and a firm belief in their capacity to produce syntactically complex sentences. These values, which stretched from 5 to 9, was accompanied by remarks like Marame: “I am mostly confident because I know the basis of constructing sentences”; Unknown participant A: “confident”; Unknown participant B: “I am confident also”. Despite their positive self-perceived ability, students' self-evaluation seems questionable and unreliable. This is mainly because it does not align with the restricted and confused view of sentences expressed by them in Q02. This conflicting stance and inconsistent responses reflect further their inadequate

understanding of mature sentences because one who is highly confident in crafting such sentences is expected to articulate clearly what characterizes them.

Q05: Can you think of a time when you struggled to write a complex sentence that included multiple details, clauses, or pieces of information? What specific challenge did you face in constructing that sentence?

The purpose that derives this question is triggering participants to start talking about their experiences and difficulties they faced when producing a long and mature sentence. Identifying these challenges is expected to help us determine the factors behind them. The following bullet points represent the different challenges students in session one and two have mentioned, supplied by relevant quotes.

- **Vocabulary limitations**

Basma (G1): “Not finding words to replace others that we frequently use, especially if they were academic words”.

Doha (G2): “Lack of vocabulary”.

Nawale (G2): “It is also due to the fact that we are limited in time in addition to vocabulary retrieval, so we need more time to process, retrieve, and remember the vocabulary”.

Nabila (G2): “Vocabulary recall and anxiety. when you don't have much time to write a full paragraph or essay, you forget most of the words you know”.

- **Grammatical challenges**

Hadjer (G1): “Conjunctions.... How to make coherent ideas and end up with one sentence which is correct in terms of punctuation, meaning clarity”.

Unknown participant A (G2): “Grammar mistakes or grammar knowledge”.

Nour (G1): “I struggle with repeating the same structure. I keep in adding appositive phrases. I do that too often because it is one of the easiest ways to create complex sentences, so I struggle with repetitiveness”.

It could be observed that participants across both sessions cited multifaceted difficulties they usually confront when expanding their sentences and making them more complex. Among the highly salient challenges is the lack of vocabulary, especially when they are bounded with a short time frame. Besides the possibility of not possessing a rich vocabulary repertoire to expand their sentences, students may suffer from an anxiety to remember and process the words they already know. Accordingly, this vocabulary deficiency that might be accompanied by time shortage can result in making them either stick to short and simple sentence patterns, or lean towards employing similar structures repeatedly.

Equally important is the lack of grammar knowledge, which can be manifested in making grammatical mistakes, utilizing the same kind of conjunctions, producing disjoint and incoherent sentences, and repeating the same sentence structure. Thus, when students are unaware about the syntactic rules to craft correct sentences and are not well-rounded about various sentence structures, their writing may sound monotonous, failing to employ a range of relationships between ideas.

Q06: Imagine Mariya, an EFL student, who consistently writes complex and mature sentences like this: [Example: After years of hard work and dedication, the scientist was able to uncover the truth behind the mysterious phenomenon, a discovery that not only contributed to the field of astronomy but also opened up new possibilities for future

research]. Now think about Sami, who is at the same educational level as Mariya, but his sentences are simpler and less developed, like this: [Example: The scientist made a discovery and shared it with his team]. Based on this scenario, please write on your index cards: What you think are the three main factors that might lead Sami to struggle with writing mature sentences?

Maria and Sami's scenario intended to provoke learners' imaginary thinking and help them envision a real-life situation of the issue. Doing so can permit them to put themselves in the shoes of Sami and thus providing more true-to-life answers that are related to their personal experiences with constructing mature sentences indirectly. The following table demonstrates a sample of their responses:

Table 5

Students' Reasons about Sami's Struggles with Producing Complex Sentences

Participant	Session	Response
Amira	1	"Lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes prevent him from writing mature and complex sentences".
Hadjer	1	"One reason is that he does not know how to use punctuation and transitional signals. The fear of making mistakes in expressing ideas that is way he keeps in using 'and'. Also, lack of information about the topic he is writing about that is why he cannot extend his sentences".
Hanine	1	"I think the first reason is that he has not followed the instruction of the teacher in the course. Second, reason is

		lack of vocabulary. Third, he did not do a lot of exercises”.
Basma	1	“For me, not reading books or not practicing writing at home and also, he might be too lazy to use complex structures and academic words. He is like me; I am too lazy to use complex words and structures. That is why I use only simple words in my writing”.
Nour	1	“I think not reading enough or reading simple language. That is, reading books that are written with simple language and designed for beginners because I believe the more you read the more you get better in writing”.
Sali	1	“The main reason I think is poor vocabulary or punctuation, or maybe he did not follow the correct grammatical rules”.
Unknown participant 2	1	“The main reasons I think are poor capacity in writing, missing vocabulary rules, and lack of reading also that encourage acquiring different capacities in wiring”.
Sabrina		“For me lack of vocabulary and not practicing enough in writing, listening and reading, like listening to audios and reading books”.
Marame	2	“Maybe he lacks practice or lacks enough vocabulary about the specific topic, or maybe he lacks knowledge about sentence structure rules”.
Marwa	2	“Lack of vocabulary, lack of practice or maybe he is not confident in his writing ability”.

Nawale	2	“Lack of practice since we are not a native English community, lack of reading habits and difficulty in vocabulary retrieval”.
Unknown participant B	2	“Lack of practice, communication and using the language and the lack of vocabulary”.
Doha	2	“Maybe he did not read a lot of books to get some ideas and some new vocabulary”.
Said	2	“Lack of motivation, absence of concertation and practicing without feedback”.
Nabila	2	“Lack of practice in writing which result in not knowing the sentence structure, anxiety and lack of vocabulary”.

When providing potential reasons for the struggles of Sami, students viewed the problem from an external perspective. By means of this, two factors which were prominent in the previous question, that is, lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, appeared again, in addition to minimal reading and low practice levels. Several participants have attributed producing simple sentences like the ones of Sami to either restricted reading habits or reading only simple language passages. For instance, Nour stated that: “I think not reading enough or reading simple language, that is, reading books that are written with simple language and designed for beginners because I believe the more you read, the more you get better in writing”.

Arguably, reduced reading opportunities may lead to a lack of familiarity with varied topics and therefore limited exposure to new vocabulary and insufficient understanding of its contextual application. The latter key insight suggests that reading is an all-encompassing factor. Thus, when not practiced regularly, it can give rise to multiple difficulties in producing complex structures.

This reasoning can be substantiated by the point raised by Doha who suggested that: “Maybe he did not read a lot of books to get some ideas and some new vocabulary”.

Lack of practice is another factor which is repeatedly brought up by students. This recurring perception indicates a shared understanding that syntactic maturity development is not exclusively a question of receiving input, but also it involves exerting conscious effort to produce an output. Moreover, some students subtly revealed that although they acknowledge the role practice can have in their writing of complex sentences, unguided instruction and lack of motivation may act as a barrier in their way to improve syntactic complexity. Along with reading and practicing, limited grammar knowledge was deemed by students to be a prominent factor in shaping how sentences are structured. One way to explain this is that when students' knowledge about grammar rules such as punctuation, transitional signals, and conjunctions is not refined, they tend to fear making mistakes and lack the confidence to experiment with diverse sentence patterns. As a result, their inclination to apply simple and monotonous structures increases.

Q07: How do these factors relate to your own experiences with writing mature sentences?

While the previous question encouraged students to view Sami's experienced difficulty with writing complex sentences from an external perspective, this question prompted them to provide internal reflections based on their personal experiences. Since participants offered insightful responses, quotes from points they have raised will be displayed in the table below:

Table 6*Students' Reflections on Factors Influencing Their Writing of Mature Sentences*

Participant	Session	Response
Hadjer	1	“There are two reasons which I relate to them: first thing is lacking information about the topic itself. So, I need to read more in order to gather more information and vocabulary. So, I need to have the input and when writing it's the output so I can write enough long sentences. Also, not practicing enough because after reading comes practice. Also, lack of knowledge about punctuation, writing styles and sentence structures”.
Nour	1	“I think especially recently and due to my short attention span, I prefer reading simple books. Like sometimes I have two books. One has more complex language and the other one is simple. I would read the simple one three times before I even read the third of the other book because when I pick it up and read two or three lines, I feel like my brain is stuck so I put it down and read the simple one multiple times”.
Basma	1 “I am just lazy. I don't read nor practice writing at home. So, when I get home, I forget everything I studied.... I want to do as others do but for me it is not necessary to write complex sentences. As long as you understand what I am saying, even if it was using

		simple words, there is no need to use complex words”.
Marame	2	“Being less knowledgeable about vocabulary of a specific topic, or sometimes even if I have enough vocabulary about the topic sometimes, I don’t have the time to practice the rules.so, sometimes I go to the teacher and tell her to give me some exercise to improve my skill”.
Nabila	2	“For me, vocabulary recall. My anxiety makes me forget a lot of stuff. Even my pronunciation is affected by that reason”.
Nawale	2	“I think we are not familiar with developing reading skills. It is like we are not used to read a lot. So, it is a little bit hard to focus and keep reading a book for, for example, one hour. We get bored”.

Based on the insights provided by students in both sessions, it can be acknowledged that three main factors dominated the discussion:

1. Reading

Participants frequently cited the importance of adopting regular reading habits to enhance their writing in general and their construction of syntactically mature sentences in particular. They implicitly emphasized the necessity of acquiring rich vocabulary resources and developing knowledge across multiple topics, two aspects that cannot be obtained unless the reading skill is harnessed. In addition, reflections on developing reading habits involved insistence on the idea that syntactic fluency cannot be achieved through reading random materials, but being exposed to

complex input is what creates the difference. Moreover, the relationship between reading and writing appears to be mediated by a lack of motivation and attention span in which some students expressed that they usually experience boredom and distraction while reading complex texts along with lacking the internal urge to engage in a reading activity.

2. Practice

Because after reading comes practice, some participants emphasized that consistent practice is essential for enhancing syntactic fluency. Despite being important, one of the participants expressed that she is the one who asks the teacher for writing exercises. This key insight implies the existence of an instructional gap in the methods used to teach writing. Ostensibly, students are more likely to improve when writing tasks are repeated, scaffolded, and offer feedback; however, participants' claims suggest that prevailing instructional endeavors may be failing at endowing adequate and purposeful engagement in such practices.

3. Awareness

Some students' struggles can be traced back to their lack of awareness and underestimation of the value of complex sentences. This idea is highly accentuated in Basma's comment, claiming that, "for me, it's not necessary to write complex sentences as long as you understand what I'm saying". Such assumption suggests giving greater importance to idea transmission, while overlooking the shape and structure this idea should be framed into to be transmitted effectively. Therefore, the result would be a writing style that fails to exhibit strength and sentence structures which are static and redundant.

Q08: The researcher will distribute cards that list various factors that may impede students from developing mature sentences. Participants are asked to: rank these factors in terms of

significance, using numbers from 1 to 9, where 1 represents the most significant factor and 9 represents the least significant factor.

Q09: What specific reasons or experiences led you to rank one factor as the most significant in impeding the development of mature sentences?

At this stage of the focus group, students were not asked to provide their own personal reflections. Instead, they were presented with a set of factors that impede syntactic maturity growth and encouraged to rank them. In the follow-up question, reasons and lived experiences were sought to justify the way those factors were ranked. The following table showcases the frequency of each factor across the two sessions:

Table 7

Students' Ranking of Factors Impeding the Development of Mature Sentences

Factor	Times Ranked as 1st	Total mentions in top 3
Limited vocabulary	6	12
Poor exposure to complex texts / lack of reading	3	10
Insufficient practice in writing	3	9
Fear of making mistakes	3	9
Lack of feedback	0	7
Lack of grammar knowledge	1	6
Time constraints during writing	0	5

Traditional teaching methods	0	5
Influence of the first language	1	3

According to students' ranking, the most significant factors in hindering them from improving complex sentence structures are 1. limited vocabulary, 2. lack of reading, 3. insufficient practice in writing, 4. instructional gaps, 5. fear of making mistakes. These insights do not conflict with earlier data collected from Q05 and Q06; rather, they further reinforce them.

When they were asked to offer a rationale behind their ranking, participants' answers were rich and varied, all revolving around the following aspects:

1. Limited vocabulary

Students who ranked vocabulary as the main challenge believe that possessing various synonyms to the same word, as well as being familiar with the terminology of a particular domain, is key to expand sentences and make them richer. For example, Sali indicated that “for me, the main factor is limited vocabulary because I face a big problem with it. When I write, I feel like I don't know a lot of information and synonyms about the topic”. This illustrates that lexical limitation may force students into repeating the same information and thus constraining syntactic variation and flexibility.

2. Lack of Reading

By advocating for the reading skill to be the most contributing aspect, some participants emphasized the significance of reading diverse materials, especially those containing sophisticated structures. In supporting this, Nour declared that “I sometimes try to journal, but because I usually

read books that have simple sentence structures, I always write in simple structures. When I asked an English teacher to read my writing and evaluate it, he told me that it is too simple and he told me that it is because I don't read books with complex language and sentences". This claim suggests that what readers consume can directly influence the way they shape their sentences. Accordingly, in order for writers to enhance their syntactic growth, they ought to be selective on what they read, focusing on texts that enrich their vocabulary and expose them to a vast array of syntactic patterns.

3. Insufficient practice in writing

Minimal opportunities of purposeful and meaningful writing is another vital reason behind syntactic fluency impediment. In this respect, Amira highlighted that "I actually ranked insufficient practice in writing as the first one because I love writing, but I don't follow the rules. I just write for the sake of writing". It is evident, through this statement, that improvement in syntactic maturity requires more than just putting words in papers; instead, it presumably calls for a strategic, guided, and consistent practice where students are actually involved and aware of what they are doing.

4. Instructional gaps

In showcasing the weaknesses of traditional approaches of instruction, Nabila reflected that "for me, traditional methods of teaching sentence structure, in which some ways of teaching aren't really helpful for many of students, so that they may not know the right structure to write a full sentence, so they tend to use simple words that lead to shorter sentences". This indicates the teacher-centered and non-interactive methods of teaching that are currently being used to teach sentence structure, which may not be well suited for all types of learners, leading to a sense of disengagement and frustration towards the topic of interest.

Moreover, critical to the field of instruction is providing feedback, according to Nawale, “if there is no one to give you feedback or to evaluate your writing, it won't be that good, because you may make mistakes. When there is no one to correct for you, then it is hard to develop your skills”. Thus, it can be inferred that even if students were good readers, proficient writers, and well-rounded with a vast array of lexis, when no one points out their mistakes and highlights inaccuracies in their sentences, they would be unaware and unable to progress. In sum, these insights stress the necessity of practice-based and interactive instruction, where balance is struck between theory, practice, and feedback.

5. Fear of making mistakes

Emotional factors such as fear, shame, and anxiety are assumed to undermine students' potential to take risks and experiment with diverse syntactic variations. This is apparent in Said's comment, who contended that “there are a lot of people who have rich vocabulary and grammar knowledge, but when they speak or write, the fear of making mistakes and feeling ashamed and embarrassed and stressed out may make them sound less engaging”. This implies that affective factors can influence students' output and, more specifically, their style of writing. Owing to this, if the learning environment is unsafe, uncomfortable, and judgmental, this may result in making students less liable to try different syntactic patterns, expand their sentences, and make them lengthier to reduce the likelihood of making mistakes.

Q10: How do you feel about learning sentence complexity through activities like sentence combining as opposed to traditional methods?

This question purposed for capturing students' attitudes and openness towards practice-based methods to learn syntactic maturity. Simultaneously, it was intended to assess their level of

satisfaction towards current traditional approaches by which sentence structure is being taught. A sample of their responses is exhibited in the following table:

Table 8

Students' Perceptions of Learning Syntactic Complexity Through the SC

Participant	Session	Response
Hadjer	1	“Actually, this is what we should do, combining simple sentences using transitional signals and conjunctions to have at the end a complex sentence. So, yes it seems beneficial but we should know about punctuation and transitional signals to write correct sentences at the end”.
Nour	1	“I think as long as they are taught through practice and not through memorizing which part should go next after a certain part...because when we studied complex sentences, we had to memorize what type of clause is this and what type of clause should go after this.so, yes, I think it is good especially if it is endorsed with practice”.
Nabila	2	“By combining many parts of sentences, it makes you more knowledgeable about how to create a full sentence in your own”.
Marame	2	“It will give you a memory of combining these sentences, so when you write on your own you will remember how you combined those sentences and you will write them as efficient as possible”.

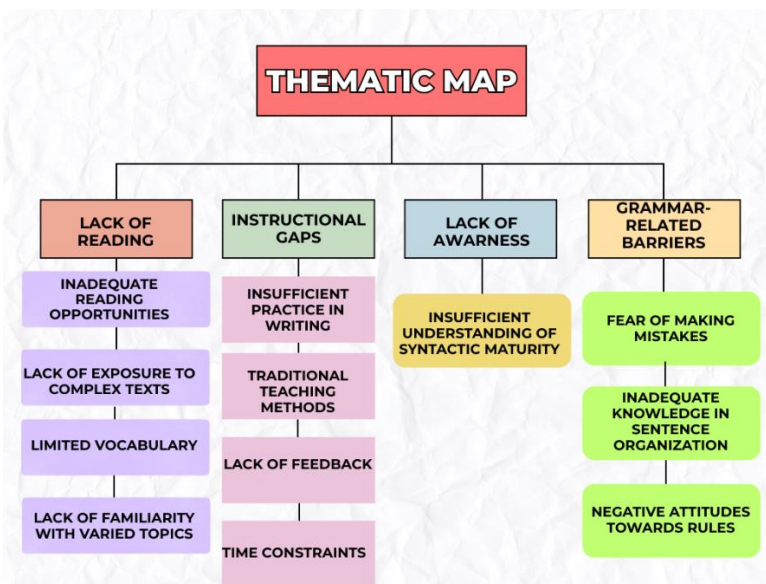
Nawale	2	“So, this activity obliges you to put effort to combine and to write complex sentences and when you write a correct and good complex sentence, it is really good. It gives you good feeling about your abilities”.
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Students' answers revealed consistently a positive attitude toward engaging in sentence-combining exercises as a way to improve their manipulation of mature sentences. They anticipated that it might be ‘good’, ‘effective’, ‘great’, as it can presumably familiarize them with a variety of structures and create them a memory of how clauses should be combined. Therefore, they mostly appreciated its practice-based and interactive nature. though not stated explicitly, their enthusiasm for these hands-on exercises and positive expectation of its effectiveness hints at their implicit dissatisfaction with current conventional methods, which promotes rule-based and memorization-oriented learning. The latter seemed to be inadequate in enhancing students' syntactic fluency. Thus, their clear preference of novel and more engaging methods provides further evidence to the existence of serious instructional gaps when it comes to syntactic maturity.

After displaying, analyzing, and coding focus group data, the following section is an attempt to connect the dots together, showcasing why and how each of the four themes can hinder written syntactic maturity development. The following thematic map visually demonstrates these themes alongside their sub-components:

Figure 02

Thematic Map of the Main Factors that Hinder Students' Syntactic Maturity Development



1. Lack of Reading

Because several participants have frequently cited that reading skills constitute one of their major challenges to enhance their craft of complex sentences, the theme of lack of reading has emerged. This challenge encompasses two aspects. One of them is inadequate reading opportunities. This is clearly expressed by Nawale: “I think we are not familiar with developing reading skills. It's like we are not used to read a lot”. This signifies an absence of a reading routine which can enable the student to be consistently exposed to a written input. The second obstacle concerns the type of reading material that these students are consuming. Engaging in non-complex texts that are characterized by simple language and plain syntactic structures seems to be a strong preference of some learners. In light of this, Nour shared that “I prefer reading simple books. Like sometimes I have two books, one has more complex language and the other one is simple. I would read the simple one three times before I even read the third of the other book”. Therefore,

infrequent reading habits and a marked inclination towards more accessible texts are assumed to undermine students' likelihood of being exposed to varied syntactic patterns. This kind of fluctuating and inconsistent exposure can directly affect their writing style, potentially leading them to mimic these simple patterns and adhere to shorter, plainer structures.

As a consequence of reduced interaction with written texts, two cornerstone problems can arise, namely limited vocabulary sources and a lack of familiarity with varied topics. Reflecting this, Hajar said that “I need to read more in order to gather more information and vocabulary”. That is, when reading habits are not cultivated, learners may suffer from vocabulary shortage and insufficient acquaintance with diverse topics. As a result, they may not find the information and lexis necessary to extend their sentences and produce content-rich ideas. This, in turn, can prompt them to incorporate very limited number of clauses and modifiers, resulting in immature syntactic structures. Indeed, reading especially that of complex materials can be deemed an inclusive skill that, when sustained, fosters the development of rich vocabulary and enhances familiarity with a range of topics and syntactic patterns.

2. Instructional Gaps

Although developing syntactic maturity must be often contingent upon personal efforts and internal motivation, some participants attributed their struggles with developing such skills to issues in the way writing is taught. Among these major instructional gaps is insufficient practice in writing. Reflections like those made by Amira :“I love writing but I don't follow the rules, I just write for the sake of writing, and practicing is very important to write a good piece of writing” , And Maram, who stated that “sometimes I go to the teacher and tell her to give me some exercises to improve my skill”, demonstrate that students are internally motivated and are highly aware of

the value of practice, yet they are not offered with meaningful practice opportunities. Thus, due to a lack of application, the possibility of being challenged and cognitively stimulated while playing with different syntactic combinations would be relatively scarce. Hence, when writing practices are not guided and approached sporadically rather than regularly, this can lead to minimal cognitive growth and therefore no or very low syntactic development.

Linked to writing opportunities is the type of written exercises that students are immersed into and the way sentence structure instruction is being delivered. Students qualified current instructional methods as traditional, theory-laden, and impractical. This gap is exemplified in Nabila's statements where she emphasized that “traditional methods of teaching sentence structure in which some ways of teaching aren't really helpful for many of students so they may not know the right structure to write a full sentence”. Nour echoed the same sentiment when she stated that “when we studied complex sentences, we had to memorize what type of clause is this and what type of clause should go after this”.

Taken together, these reflections point out to the current conventional approaches to teaching sentences where drill-based, form-focused, and rote memorization of abstract terminologies dominate the learning process. When teaching is heavy with theory and abstract concepts, this can, perhaps, divert learners' attention from engaging in real-time exercises in which authentic and meaningful manipulation of syntactic constructions takes place. Hence, instead of applying those rules in diverse contexts and communicate the said knowledge effectively, learners are often being occupied with memorizing terminologies and parts of speech that may not help them significantly when time comes to the genuine composing of a written piece.

In addition, while discussing the potential effectiveness of the sentence-combining technique, students demonstrated a positive attitude towards its implementation, in which they anticipated its effectiveness, claiming that it promotes practice-based learning of syntactic complexity. This supportive yet enthusiastic stance towards immersive, hands-on, and interactive instructional methods further underscores their rejection to traditional methods and their openness to learning sentence construction through innovative approaches.

Students' deficiency in constructing syntactically mature structures can also be tracked back to the absence of guidance and consistent feedback. This point is reinforced by Nawale, who believed that “if there is no one to give you feedback or to evaluate your writing, it won't be that good because you may make mistakes. When there is no one to correct for you, then it's hard to develop your skills”. Therefore, without feedback, students may not know when to use complex sentences, how to use them, and how to balance their usage with simple structures. Accordingly, this lack of remarks and constructive feedback from the part of teachers can possibly deprive learners of the chance to identify their weaknesses and increase their awareness about their writing style, eventually causing a tendency to remain on the same level and mark no significant progress in producing sophisticated patterns.

Some students contended that even though they might be skillful at writing mature sentences, time constraints hinder them from extending their ideas. The short periods of time set by teachers during classroom activities and examinations appear to force some writers to rely on simpler structures and prevent them from showing their full writing capacities. In this respect, Hadjer expressed that “time constraints during writing, especially in exams, it really makes me write badly”. Knowing that they are bounded with a specific time can conceivably lead students to favor quantity over quality, as well as to prioritize producing a final product over carefully

constructing each sentence. Thus, time-limited contexts can be a notable factor in making writers sacrifice syntactic elaboration for speed and completion. In brief, what emerges then is a series of interconnected instructional issues that collectively represent a learning environment where learners are not offered neither the right kind of input, feedback and time, nor the adequate amount of output opportunities.

3. Lack of Awareness

Another challenge which has come to light is students' limited awareness of what makes up mature sentences and how they contribute to writing effectiveness. The latter theme was brought up as a result of several hallmarks that were noted in both participants' behaviors and responses. Firstly, when asked, very few students could describe and capture some basic features of a complex sentence. Secondly, many confused it with advanced vocabulary and rich lexis, whereas others were reluctant to share their answers and eventually remained silent.

Not only this, some exhibited negative perception towards using complex sentences, such as Basma, who indicated that “it is not necessary to write complex sentences as long as you understand what I am saying”, and Marame who suggested that “it may be a sentence that is hard to understand”. Together, these hallmarks illustrate a pattern of unawareness and insufficient understanding of the importance, relevance, and function of syntactically complex sentences. Without a strong grasp of what constitutes mature sentences, when and where they are needed, it is improbable that learners would even attempt developing them, let alone achieving mastery.

4. Grammar-related Barriers

A less prominent, yet frequently mentioned theme pertains to students' limited grammatical knowledge and their lack of confidence in applying it. Some learners are willing to produce

complex sentences, but their feeling of insecurity, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes may hamper this ability. This challenge is clearly accentuated by Hadjer who communicated “I do write complex sentences, but I am not sure if they are correct. ...When I write long sentences, I fear doing wrong punctuation”. This uncertainty and doubt can probably constrain students from making linguistic risks, experiment with different syntactic variations, and play with diverse sentence types.

In addition to fear of error, inadequate knowledge and skills in punctuation and sentence organization may obstruct the development of syntactically mature sentences. By virtue, mature sentences are long, contain rich details, multiple clauses, and are embedded with various modifiers. Therefore, constructing them demands a sense of proficiency in applying the right punctuation and the appropriate organization of their different units. For this reason, ensuring accurate mechanics and proper arrangement was a challenge that several students articulated. Among them is Noor, who conveyed that “I usually write really long sentences. I just struggle with dividing them and organizing them”. As a result of these deficits, students, when they attempt to express a layered and intricate idea, they either end up with too long or too short sentences. These grammatically violated and confusing sentences may inhibit the effective transmission of the said idea, undermining both readability and coherence.

Moreover, negative attitudes towards rules and grammatical rigor can shape remarkably how students structure their sentences. This sentiment was echoed by Basma, who remarked “I prefer writing freely. I don't like rules and do that and you have to do that”. Negative disposition that was demonstrated by some participants towards the rule-based nature of writing is presumed to influence their syntactic choices. Consequently, they may feel discouraged to integrate complex grammatical structures which require tighter grammatical control and heightened accuracy.

Therefore, perceiving composition rules as burdensome and stifling may cause a tendency of opting for risk-free sentences and cautious sentence choices. This perception can lead eventually to repeating the same structures rather than expressing varied relationships between ideas through coordination, subordination, and multiple embeddings. As such, students' writing style may remain stagnant, underdeveloped, and immature.

4.1.2 Analysis of the Tests

4.1.2.1 The Pre-and Post-test Results.

Table 9

Students' Pre-and Post-test Scores

Student Number	Pre-test	Post-test
Student 1	15.7	19.3
Student 2	21.2	20.9
Student 3	24.3	22.2
Student 4	19.5	23.0
Student 5	18.6	17.7
Student 6	20.8	22.2
Student 7	18.4	19.0
Student 8	10.0	22.0

Student 9	13.2	17.47
Student 10	28.7	32.0
Student 11	14.6	21.1
Student 12	21.7	19.9
Student 13	17.0	16.8
Student 14	18.2	19.2
Student 15	18.8	23.0
Student 16	18.8	18.7
Student 17	17.2	28.0
Student 18	23.0	17.7
Student 19	14.6	14.7
Student 20	17.5	13.7

The above table demonstrates students' mean length of T-unit after and before undergoing five sessions of SC exercises. T-unit length is deemed a highly effective index to capture syntactic complexity. Measuring T-unit length means calculating the number of words per sentence along with any subordinating clause attached to it. The higher mean length of T-unit, the more skilled the student is in producing complex and sophisticated sentences. The latter calculation, due to its

time-consuming and meticulous nature, was facilitated through a specialized tool named ‘L2 Syntactic Complexity Analyzer’. The process of analyzing T-unit length produced preliminary scores, acting as a baseline for students' initial performance prior to treatment sessions.

It, as well, contributed to obtaining post-test scores, which reflect participants' performance following the SC treatment. In the pre-test, students' scores were varied, ranging between low, moderate, and high. This diversity indicates that participants possessed mixed abilities, different levels, and background knowledge. On the other hand, despite showing high variety, post-test scores were not similar to their pretest counterparts. At this stage, relatively 12 students showed mixed levels of improvement, three students exhibited relatively consistent results, and four of them scored lower than the pretest. Therefore, it can be admitted that scores across post- and pretests reflect a blend of modest to substantial change, stability, and even decline among a few students. These mixed results, though showing a general trend of positive progress, need to go through descriptive and statistical analysis so that it can be better interpreted. Thus, in the following table, pre- and post-test means and the difference between them will be displayed to accurately identify whether there was consistency, improvement, or deterioration.

Table 10

Mean and Difference Between Pre-posttests Results

Students	Test	Mean	Difference
20	Pre-test	18.59	1.84
	Post-test	20.43	

Table 10 shows effectively the mean of each test and the difference between them. This difference indicates that there is slight increase in students' performance. Thus, although a positive change was witnessed, it can be qualified as minimal or modest. An enhanced illustration of participants' scores and a visual display of the difference captured are shown in the bar charts below:

Figure 03

The Pre-test Scores

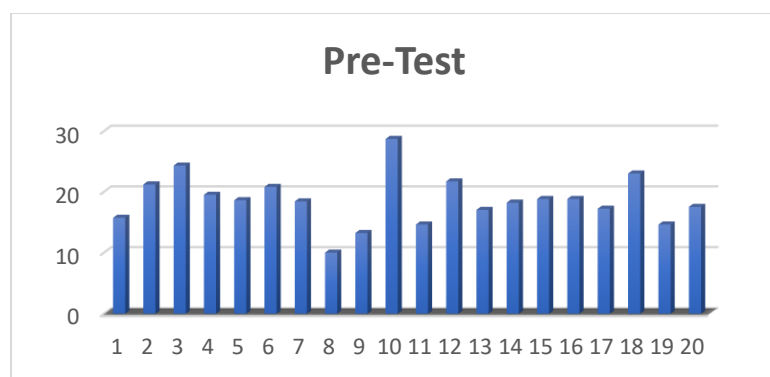


Figure 04

The Post-test Scores

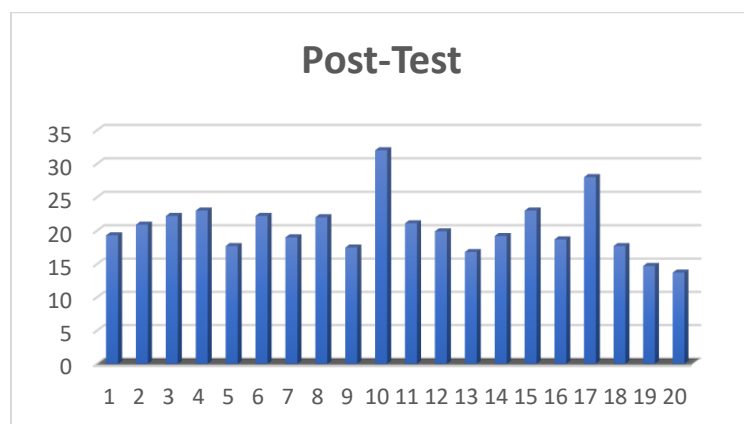
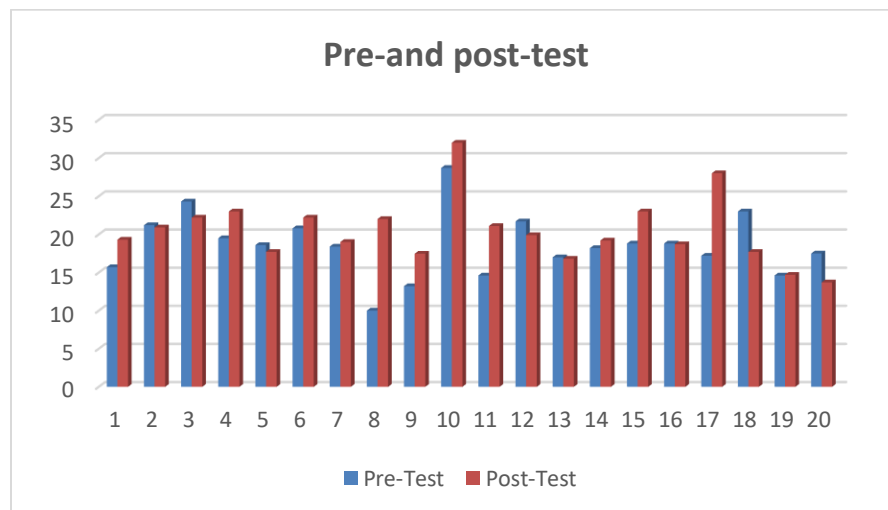


Figure 05

The Difference Between the Post-and Pre-test Scores



Bar charts exhibition corroborate what was observed earlier. At first glance, participants' scores across tests may sound similar, yet after a closer look, a minor positive shift can be noticed. To check the meaningfulness of such improvements, the paired-sample t-test needs to be carried out; however, before engaging with assessing results' significance, normality of the data ought to be ensured.

4.1.2.2 The Test of Normality. The reasons behind testing the normality of the data are twofold. First, to better understand the nature of the data and their behavior, that is, identifying whether the distribution is skewed, has a bell-shaped curve, or has outliers. Second, the nature of the distribution can inform the decision of a suitable statistical test. In simple terms, a normal distribution allows the employment of a parametric test. Conversely, a skewed distribution requires utilizing a non-parametric test. Doing so is assumed to help the researcher steer clear of false inferences. If the significance level of the distribution marks a value that is less than 0.05, this yields a skewed or a non-normal distribution (field, 2009). In our case, however, the data indicated

a significance level that is higher than 0.05 in both the Shapiro-Wilk and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, suggesting that the data are normally distributed and are evenly clustered around the mean.

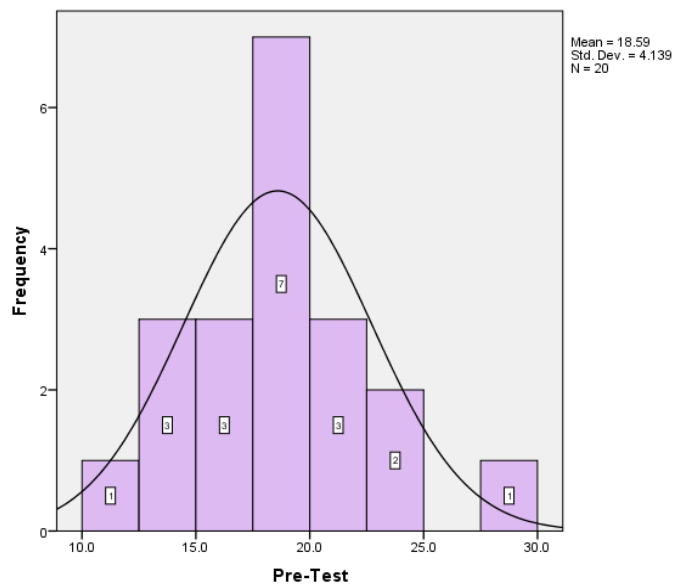
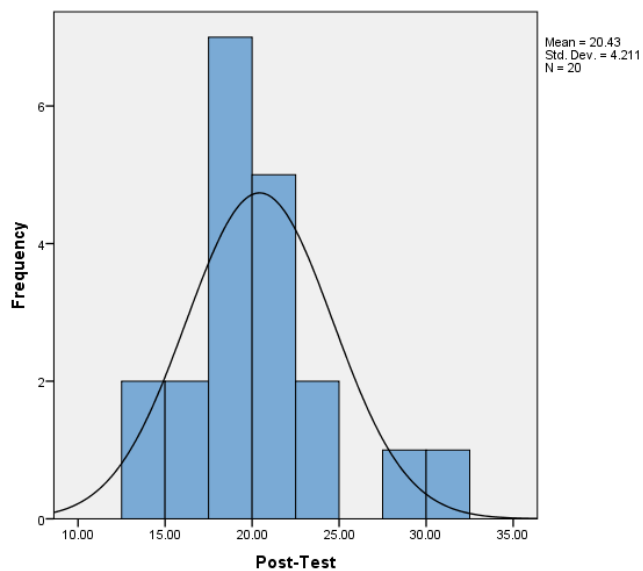
Table 11 best demonstrates the significance level (*sig*) of the distribution.

Table 11

The Test of Normality

	The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test			The Shapiro-wilk test		
	sts	df	Sig.	sts	df	Sig.
Pre-test	.130	20	.200	.978	20	.905
Post-test	.171	.20	.129	.920	20	.099

The histograms below offer a clearer picture of the findings, in which a bell-shaped curve appeared in both datasets, making the normal distribution more concrete.

Figure 6*The Test of Normality for the Pre-test***Figure 7***The Test of Normality for the Post-test*

4.1.2.3 The Paired-Sample T-test. Since data are normally distributed, and the purpose is to compare between two related samples, that is, pre- and post-tests, using the paired-sample t-test seems optimal. By utilizing such test, we will hopefully be able to sort out the mixed results obtained earlier, as well as reject or accept the null hypothesis that suggests that the SC treatment has no effect on students' syntactic manipulative skills. Employing SPSS 23 facilitated running the paired-sample t-test and obtaining the following results:

Table 12

The Paired-sample T-test

Pre-test	Post-test	Mean	P-value	T-test	Degree of	Critical
mean	mean	difference			freedom	value
18.59	20.43	1.84	0.05	-1.88	19	.075

As elicited in Table 12, the test yielded a critical value that is more than 0.05, which implies statistically insignificant effect. As per Field (2009), “So, as test statistics get bigger, the probability of them occurring becomes smaller” (p.53). Accordingly, based on the latter insight and the critical value obtained, the null hypothesis can be safely accepted, and the alternative hypothesis indicating the statistically significant effect of the technique is reasonably rejected.

4.1.2.4 Effect Size. To move a step beyond statistical significance, effect size will be measured with the intention of capturing the practical significance of the results. Regardless of the insignificant critical value found previously, effect size will help us define whether an effect does exist and how large, small, or meaningful that effect is. According to Field (2009), “all that a non-

significant result tells us is that the effect is not big enough to be anything other than a chance finding--It doesn't tell us that the effect is zero" (p.53). Through a manual calculation, we were able to obtain the following results:

Table 13

Effect Size Results

Statistic	Value
Mean difference (pre-posttests)	1.84
Standard deviation of differences	4.37
Cohen's d (effect size)	0.42

An effect size that yields a value of 0.42 can be qualified as a small effect. This key insight reveals that although an effect did exist, it was not large enough to be considered statistically significant, leading automatically to the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

4.1.3 Analysis of The Semi-structured Attitudes Questionnaire

Section One: Students' attitudes towards the significance of the sentence-combining technique

Item 1. Now I pay more attention to sentence structure when writing.

Table 14*Student' Attentiveness to Sentence Structure*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	4	20%
Agree	13	65%
Strongly Agree	3	15%
Total	20	100%

Item 2. I have improved my understanding of how to use coordination and subordination effectively.

Table 15*Students' Understanding of Coordination and Subordination*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	5%
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	2	10%
Agree	15	75%
Strongly Agree	2	10%
Total	20	100%

Item 1 and Item 2 will be merged as they are interconnected. The goal behind including such statements is to identify students' level of awareness and attentiveness to sentence structure, as well as their grasp of coordination and subordination. Item 1 reveals that a great number of students (80%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a significant shift in their level of awareness. When learners are more aware of this writing aspect, they start putting a serious effort in framing their sentences within well-structured and varied syntactic patterns, instead of merely focusing on ideas generation. This heightened sensitivity to sentence construction is further backed up by insights obtained from Item 2, in which a considerable number (85%) of students reported their agreement. Knowing varied conjunctions and practicing their use in different contexts is a crucial skill for producing complex sentences. Therefore, students' self-reports of being more skilled in manipulating subordinating and coordinating conjunctions

strongly suggest not only a developed syntactic awareness, but also an enhanced ability to link ideas effectively.

Item 3. Sentence combining exercises helped me write more complex sentences.

Table 16

Students' Ability to Write Complex Sentences

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	3	15%
Agree	14	70%
Strongly Agree	3	15%
Total	20	100%

As displayed in Table 16, the majority of students revealed alignment (75%), or strong alignment (15%), few of them remained neutral (15%) While no one expressed disagreement. These insights are particularly important because this item targets directly the dependent variable we aimed to improve throughout treatment sessions. Substantiating this, students left multiple rich comments. One student expressed that “before I was only focusing on giving ideas without paying attention to how sentences should be conveyed in a correct way”. Another student shared “it helped me learn how to combine several ideas into one sentence by finding the relationship between them and expressing it through subordination and coordination”. A particularly illustrative response highlighted that “before my sentences used to be short and narrow, but now they are more detailed

and structured”. Collectively, these reflections further support previous items’ findings, and likely imply improved capability and refined awareness of complex syntactic structures.

Item 4. I prefer sentence combining over direct grammar instruction to enhance my sentence complexity.

Table 17

Students’ Perceptions on the Effectiveness of the SC

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	1	5%
Neutral	6	30%
Agree	10	50%
Strongly Agree	3	15%
Total	20	100%

This item purposed for evaluating the sentence combining effectiveness in comparison to the traditional methods of teaching grammar. Most students' responses leaned positively, in which out of 20, 8 students agreed (50%), and 3 strongly agreed (15%), indicating that more than half of the students favored the sentence combining technique in enhancing their sentence construction. Meanwhile, (30%) of students adopted a neutral stance, and 1 student (5%) expressed disagreement. In justifying their indifferent opinions, one respondent commented that despite the beneficial and engaging nature of the sentence combining technique, it cannot serve as a

replacement for direct grammar instruction, which is still an important stage in learning sentence types.

However, those who appreciated the value of sentence combining exercises conveyed different opinions. Among them was an interesting comment which underscored that “direct grammar instruction gives the way to link sentences whether you understand them or not, while sentence combining requires some critical thinking”. Equally insightful is the point another student raised, who contended that “sentence combining teaches me the actual skill of forming complex sentences rather than memorizing the rules. It is also more clear and easier to understand and use”. The overall results transmit that the effectiveness of the sentence combining was commonly agreed upon and acknowledged by students. Nevertheless, it is not viewed as a complete alternative for direct grammar methods, likely due to individual preferences and varied learning styles.

Section Two: Students’ engagement and interest in the implementation of the sentence combining technique

Item 1. Sentence-combining exercises were engaging and enjoyable.

Table 18*Students' Perceptions of SC Exercises Level of Engagement*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	5%
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	3	15%
Agree	11	55%
Strongly Agree	5	25%
Total	20	100%

Item 2. Sentence combining made sentence construction more interesting to learn.

Table 19*Students' Perceptions of the SC as an Engaging Method for Sentence Construction*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	4	20%
Agree	10	50%
Strongly Agree	6	30%
Total	20	100%

The element of interest, engagement, joy, and fun is vital for the learning process to be achieved successfully. For that reason, item 1 and item 2 were incorporated, striving to capture students' reactions towards the implementation of the sentence-combining technique. When it comes to item 1, participants' responses varied in which 55% agreed, 25% strongly agreed, 15% expressed neutrality, and 5% disagreed. Reflecting somehow similar results in item 2, half of the students agreed (50%), 30% leaned towards strong agreement, but a few (20%) remained neutral. These findings, though being varied, reveal a general trend of agreement. This suggests that a considerable proportion of students demonstrate a positive attitude towards the sentence-combining implementation.

To provide evidence for the previous claim, further insights from students were gathered. According to one participant, “even though it teaches you something, it doesn't feel like you are forced to learn, it is an easy, logical task through which my brain gains new skills”. Another participant expressed that “it makes you want to do it right and gives you the satisfaction of the achievement”. Holding such favorable perceptions denotes the ability of these exercises to turn the dull and tedious nature of grammar and syntax to an engaging and interesting experience.

Item 3. I felt challenged in a positive way while completing sentence-combining exercises.

Table 20*Students' Perceptions of the Positively Challenging Nature of the SC Exercises*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	1	5%
Disagree	1	5%
Neutral	3	15%
Agree	11	55%
Strongly Agree	4	20%
Total	20	100%

Item 4. I felt actively involved in the learning process during sentence-combining activities.

Table 21*Students' Perceptions of Their Active Involvement During SC Exercises*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	1	5 %
Agree	13	65%
Strongly Agree	5	25%
Total	20	100%

These two items sought to inspect whether students were positively challenged and actively involved while engaging with SC exercises. Agreement and strong agreement were predominant in both items, whereas neutrality and disagreements were relatively limited. These insights indicate a general consensus among treatment participants that the learning process was not teacher-centered, rather it was learner-centered, where they felt cognitively stimulated and fully immersed in the activities presented. Worded differently, they were not mere receivers of input, but also agents who manipulate sentences, discuss syntactic choices, and decide which syntactic arrangement is most effective. This justifies their positive attitude towards the sentence-combining activities demonstrated previously.

Item 5. Practicing sentence combining has increased my confidence in constructing complex sentences.

Table 22

Students' Self-perceived Confidence in Producing Complex Sentences

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	3	15%
Agree	12	60%
Strongly Agree	5	25%
Total	20	100%

This item was designed to gauge learners' self-perceived confidence in maneuvering mature sentences after the sentence combining treatment. Surprisingly, five respondents (25%),

reported their strong agreement 12 respondents (60%) proclaimed their agreement, and three (15%) maintained a neutral stance. From these results, it can be stated that the technique was well-received across the majority. Acquiring this confidence is highly important for their syntactic growth in writing because this means they become more liable to take linguistic risks and manipulate varied and more complex sentences without fear of making mistakes. Thus, the sentence combining has likely shifted their self-perception in sentence construction by making them more confident.

Item 6. Did you feel that the activities included as part of the treatment practice were effective?

Table 23

Students' Perception of Treatment Activities Effectiveness

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	100%
No	0	0
Total	20	100%

Along with inspecting the level of engagement, interest, active involvement, and confidence, identifying the effectiveness of the activities that were included as part of the treatment is also highly needed. As shown in Table 23, participants showed a unanimous agreement upon the effectiveness of the employed activities. Such finding points out clearly to the extent to which participants were satisfied and highly engaged with treatment activities, in which the shared agreement they demonstrated might be related to the fact that those activities

were relevant and suitable to their learning needs, further strengthening the validity of the sentence combining as an instructional technique.

Section Three: Challenges and further suggestions

Item 1. Did you see that the teacher's methodology when explaining and delivering activities was suitable?

Table 24

Students' Perception of the Suitability of Teacher's Methodology

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	95%
No	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Teacher's style of delivering input, managing the session, providing feedback, and instructions can play a decisive role in the learning process, and particularly during sentence-combining exercises. The fact that 95% of respondents affirmed the suitability of teachers' methodology possibly hints that it aligned with what they expected, as well as met their learning preferences.

Item 2. Sentence combining activities should be integrated into regular writing instruction.

Table 25*Students' Opinions on the Integration of SC Activities into Writing Courses*

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	90%
No	2	10%
Total	20	100%

The purpose of this statement is to determine to what extent learners value the technique and perceive it as a significant part of a writing program. Out of 20 students, 18 (90%) recommended its inclusion to writing instruction. Believing that it deserves a space in writing courses is indicative to the appreciative and supportive stance students adopted towards the technique. Students accompanied their positive dichotomous choices with some reflections, with one believing that “it makes students feel entertained and motivated through different types of exercises”, to another claiming that it is effective because “it is highly focused on sentence structure”. Through these statements, it becomes evident that students did not only appreciate the effectiveness and enjoyable nature of sentence-combining exercises, but also advocated for its embedding within their regular writing courses. This further evidences their future willingness and openness to engage with such exercises again.

Item 3. What challenges did you face when solving sentence combining exercises?

This open-ended question sought to capture students' difficulties and inconveniences they encountered throughout treatment sessions. Respondents highlighted diverse challenges, mainly rooted in their limited grammar knowledge, lack of regular practice, and limited vocabulary.

Therefore, while solving activities and combining different sentences, students highlighted the challenge of putting the right punctuation, repeating the same structure, finding the appropriate conjunction to link ideas, and ordering of sentences. A student summarized the aforementioned hurdles by conveying that “challenges often included knowing where to begin, getting the punctuation right, keeping the meaning clear, and not overusing conjunctions”. While the majority of the cited challenges were activities-related, no one pointed out setbacks that might be relative to sessions' number, timing, and the overall learning environment.

Item 4. If you have any additional suggestion (s) regarding the application of the sentence combining exercises to improve learners' sentence complexity, please write it\them in the space provided.

Posing this last question was intended to obtain students' suggestions and recommendations so that future implementation of the said technique can be enhanced. Some students did not put forward suggestions, but expressed that “the way we dealt with the technique and the treatment was good enough”, and advocated for its integration in first- and second-year EFL grammar sessions. One student left a particularly insightful reflection in which they contended that “I feel like we should have practiced more in writing complex sentences within paragraphs, not separately within the activities”. Indeed, students often were required to produce and work on paragraph-level writing, yet the majority of activities were sentence-bound, urging learners to combine a set of simple sentences to create more complex ones.

4.2 Synthesis of the Findings

After presenting and analyzing the data, a more thorough interpretation of their findings became highly needed. Doing so, this section will dive deep into the most significant takeaways

of the study, in an attempt to trace connections between them and, whenever possible, identify where qualitative and quantitative results intersect or diverge. To that end, each research question will be addressed and revisited subsequently.

RQ1: What are the main factors that impede third year students of English at Biskra university from developing mature syntactic skills in writing?

Inspecting the reasons that can hinder third-year EFL learners' written syntactic growth was the driving force behind this research question. Following this question, it was hypothesized that several factors can hamper students' syntactic manipulative skills, among which is limited exposure to complex text. To determine whether the hypothesis holds true or not, two focus group sessions were conducted and analyzed thematically. Once the analysis was finalized, a general conclusion was made about the fact that written syntactic maturity is not an isolated skill, nor is it an axiomatic competence that writers naturally born with; what was rather concluded is that syntactic growth happens when a set of factors are present. If these factors are inadequately cultivated, this may lead to syntactic maturity impediment.

One factor that is found to be most contributing to hindering syntactic growth in our target sample is lack of reading. Students emphasized that they are not engaging in a consistent reading routine, and if that were to occur, they would tend to gravitate toward simpler and more easily understandable materials. In addition, failing to establish a regular reading habit along with getting exposed to texts with minimal syntactic complexity seem to form a mutually reinforcing cycle with limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with diverse topics. That is, because of their limited reading opportunities, these students may fall short to add layers and nuance to their ideas, as well as they may even start to imitate the syntactically simple writing style that they are exposed to.

These findings are consistent with those of Douglas and Miller (2016) and Bu and Beverly (2024), who revealed that what students are reading and the extent to which they are familiar with the topic can drastically shape their syntactic maturity development.

Further, instructional gaps, by failing to bridge theoretical knowledge about grammar and writing practice, they can negatively affect syntactic growth. Students qualified current approaches to teaching sentence construction as traditional and theory-laden. Hence, they prioritize rote memorization of sentence clauses and phrases types at the expense of engaging in authentic practice experiences. As a result of not practicing adequately, students may not feel cognitively challenged nor mentally stimulated; the reason that may lead them eventually to stagnate, as well as prevent them from experiencing syntactic variations.

Furthermore, although they may often experience some practice opportunities, students highlighted that they are not receiving finely tuned feedback that may contribute to refining their skill. Consequently, they are left unaware of their weaknesses and areas of improvement that their sentences and writing style might require. Similarly, writing under pressure, including time constraints, can further hinder learners' ideas expansion. Students reinforced that the short time frame often allotted to writing tasks is insufficient, leaving them to feel anxious and rushed to finish. Accordingly, they sacrifice writing quality and sentence complexity in favor of content generation and bringing the final product to completion.

Added to this issue is the lack of awareness clearly demonstrated through students' answers. Because of their consistent confusion of syntactic maturity with technical vocabulary and native-like expressions, along with their reluctant and uncertain attempts to define the concept, students appeared to have limited understanding of the components, function, and importance of complex

sentences. This superficial, yet fragmented knowledge about syntactic maturity may cause them to mark no progress, as one who is unaware of what makes up a concept would not be expected to develop it. There is a notable overlap between these results and those of Fadallah Ali (2021) study, who associated students' poor sentence-combining skills to their lack of awareness of sentence-manipulative skills.

Grammar-related barriers are also frequently articulated obstacles of syntactic development. Notably, fear of making mistakes, negative attitudes towards rules, and limited understanding of mechanics and sentence organization were salient factors across students' reflections. Collectively, they are assumed to constrain students' ability to experiment with different syntactic choices, adhere to repetitive structures, and keep them confined to safe or simple forms.

In summation, the hypothesis set earlier can be safely confirmed given the multifaceted factors that have emerged through a discussion with Third-year EFL students. Taken together, these factors, whether internal (lack of motivation, confidence and failing to establish reading routines) or external (instructional gaps) they hint at the existence of a serious gap in students' learning environment. This environment seems to lack both meaningful input and output opportunities, which may contribute to students' syntactic improvement. This justifies the need for adopting innovative, interactive and practice-based approaches, which resonates more closely with EFL learner's need for authentic and hands-on learning to cultivate written syntactic maturity.

RQ2: To what extent can the implementation of the SC affect the written syntactic maturity of third year students of English at Biskra university?

In an attempt to address gaps in students' syntactic maturity production, five sessions' treatment of SC exercises were carried out. Initially, the comparison between pre- and post-test results revealed mixed findings, in which some students showed modest to significant growth, others exhibited stagnation, whilst few of them showed decline. These inconsistent outcomes were better interpreted when a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The latter marked a critical value of 0.075, which implied statistically insignificant results. As a result, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that the SC technique had no meaningful effect on learners' written syntactic growth. To measure the practical value of the treatment's effect, Cohen's d was further calculated, eventually revealing a small effect size (0.42). These insights together suggest that while there was a minor growth, it lacked the strength to be deemed statistically significant. Hence, it can be admitted that the application of the said technique in this context, during this study's time frame, and with this particular sample, yielded inadequate syntactic growth. The results here are in line with that of Ney (1976), in which the experimental group exhibited no meaningful improvement.

When reading and evaluating students' post-test written productions, one can notice that their use of subordinating and coordinating conjunctions has been enhanced. Not only this, their production of lengthy, detailed sentences and complex structures was apparent, presumably denoting an elevated awareness of this type of sentences. Despite these positive observations, the majority of students, if not all of them, appear to lack knowledge of putting the right punctuation, conjugating verbs appropriately, and linking ideas smoothly; accordingly, leading them to commit serious grammatical errors.

Therefore, along with practicing complex sentences, these students possibly need to undergo training in basic grammatical notions that they are expected to master at a third-year level. Another explanation for their unsatisfactory gains is the limited number of treatment sessions,

which probably led to insufficient practice and ultimately reduced the impact of the exercises. It can be concluded that the sentence combining could have resulted in significant syntactic gains, yet its effectiveness is contingent upon the nature of students and their background knowledge, as well as the frequency and amount of practice. Further interpretation of the treatment's impact will be established in the upcoming section.

RQ3: What are the attitudes of third-year students of English at Biskra university after the implementation of the Sentence Combining?

Following treatment sessions, a semi-structured attitudes questionnaire was administered to students to capture their reactions towards the SC exercises. Whether positive or negative, their attitudes will hopefully allow us to get deeper insights about either the effectiveness or the failure of the treatment, moving beyond merely surface-level interpretations.

The aim of the first section was probing into students' perceptions of the sentence-combining effectiveness. Along with admitting that they became more attentive to their sentence structure, students confirmed their enhanced ability in understanding of subordination and coordination use. Not only this, they highlighted the SC role in facilitating their production of complex sentences, and eventually expressed preference for the SC activities over direct grammar instruction to enhance their syntactic complexity. These insights collectively hint at an elevated awareness of the concept of syntactic maturity and acknowledgment of the technique's effectiveness.

The second section sought to inspect students' level of engagement and interest in the SC implementation. A general trend of positive attitudes and favorable reactions was conveyed at this level. In more detail, a fair number of respondents found the SC to be effective, enjoyable,

engaging, and made sentence construction more interesting to learn. Moreover, they felt positively challenged and actively involved in the learning process during treatment sessions. Additionally, they reported an increased confidence level in manipulating complex structures after undergoing training in sentence-combining.

The third section was reserved to exploring challenges that students have possibly encountered, as well as their suggestions regarding future applications of the technique. Fortunately, all students found the teacher's methodology in explaining instructions, delivering activities, and managing the session to be suitable. In addition, most of them suggested integrating the SC exercises into writing courses. This demonstrates their satisfaction with the sessions and future willingness to undergo training in SC activities. In sum, findings from section one, two, and three together confirm the hypothesis, which puts forward learners' positive reactions towards the SC implementation. This outcome mirrors those of Daiker (1979) and O'Hare (1973), where students showed massive interest and had favorable perceptions of the technique.

It is apparent that the findings from both the post-pre-tests and the attitudes questionnaire are fairly conflicting. Although students believed that the treatment activities were effective, argued that SC made sentence construction more engaging, and advocated for the integration of such activities into writing programs, the desired gains were not achieved, raising several questions. It can be concluded that students' inadequate improvement in the post-test is neither attributable to the teacher's methodology nor to the activities employed. While students exhibited increased awareness and an enhanced understanding of subordination, their syntactic development did not show a statistically meaningful improvement. This outcome can primarily be relative to a lack of practice and the limited number of treatment sessions. It is important to note that six sessions were initially scheduled; however, one was canceled due to time constraints.

Therefore, it is likely that students required more sessions and practice for the effects of the activities to become more salient. Second, this limited improvement may also be attributed to extraneous variables that might have intervened, particularly considering that the pre-test was administered during students' regular study days, whereas the post-test was conducted during 'Ramadan'. During this period, students are likely to experience fatigue and reduced energy levels, which may negatively impact their focus and attention span. Third, another possible reason concerns the nature of the mini-syllabus activities, which primarily focused on sentence-level combinations. Given that the post-test took the form of a composition, this might have made the process of transferring the acquired skills to paragraph-level writing uneven and considerably more challenging.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, we aspired to make sense of the collected data, so as answers to the research questions can be fairly obtained. Accordingly, given the diversity of the data collection methods employed, a blend of quantitative and qualitative procedures was adopted. With more precision, whereas quantitative data gathered through pre-post-tests and attitudes questionnaire were analyzed by means of Excel and SPSS 23, qualitative data collected via two focus group sessions were analyzed thematically. As a result, descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-test, normality test, and four main themes were effectively managed and obtained. The latter process facilitated the synthesis of the findings, where each research question was addressed separately in an effort to arrive at reasonable and convincing explanations for the results.

General Conclusion

Fluent speaking, sophisticated writing, attentive listening, critical reading are often the four main competencies that define a proficient EFL learner. At first glance, these skills may seem to possess similar levels of difficulty, but in reality, writing usually stands out as the highest hurdle. More precisely, it is at the sentence level that this obstacle manifests more strongly. Because they constitute the building blocks of language, sentences are where writers' personality, style, and thought processes are mostly translated. Crafting well-structured syntactic structures demands the simultaneous integration of multiple aspects, including clarity, correctness, cohesion, and coherence, precision, and variety. Another vital yet neglected feature of an effective sentence is syntactic complexity. The construction of mature sentences is believed to be primordial in transmitting intricate ideas, expressing nuanced relationships between them, and enhancing the overall sophistication and persuasive tone of written works. Thus, they are deemed key ingredients of an impactful, proficient writing.

Notwithstanding the significant role it plays in effective writing, syntactic maturity can seem to be lacking and weakly cultivated in EFL students' writing, particularly third-year students at Biskra university. A significant proportion of these students were observed to possess inadequate control over complex syntax. In more detail, they either craft extremely disjoint and short sentences or complex structures that are static, repetitive, and lack correctness. This what usually lead them to struggle with maintaining strong arguments, convey elaborate ideas, and uphold a forceful style. Reading a considerable body of literature revealed that this problem does exist; However, it indicated also that learners are unable to overcome this weakness by themselves unless they undergo training using hands-on, sentence-focused, and practical approaches. The fact that current teaching methods embrace theory-rich and rule-based approaches to sentence construction

was a driving force for the researcher to find a more practice-oriented technique that can directly address students' gaps in manipulating mature sentences.

The decision to choose an appropriate teaching technique was based on: to what extent this method has rich literature, and how many times it yielded positive results. Following these criteria, the choice fell on the sentence combining technique. As a result, investigating the impact of the sentence combining technique on EFL students' written syntactic maturity was the chief aim driving this present research project. The latter causal relationship, despite being inspected before, its examination within the context of this research context remains relatively scarce. As such, identifying this research gap provided the initial impetus for undertaking the study.

In order to achieve the general as well as the more specific aims of this research work, the researcher embraced a mixed-method approach which aligns seamlessly with their pragmatist worldview. Subsequently, an embedded Mixed-methods design was adopted as it was well-suited for the nature of the study, its research questions, and aims. In accordance with this choice, a variety of data collection methods were utilized, allowing for triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data. With the purpose of determining the factors which impede students from developing complex sentences, two focus group sessions were conducted. In addition, while pre-test-post-test results allowed for measuring the impact of the technique on learners' written syntactic maturity, Attitudes questionnaire facilitated obtaining deeper insights about the treatment's impact, whether negative or positive.

By means of qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures, findings and connections between them eventually were obtained and identified. Thematic analysis of two focus group sessions revealed that there are multifaceted factors that can cause EFL students' syntactic

maturity impediment, extending over lack of reading, instructional gaps, lack of awareness, and grammar-related barriers. This weakly-harnessed aspects justified the need for intervening with more innovative yet practical techniques to enhance students' syntactic manipulative skills. Building on this, five sessions' treatment of SC exercises were conducted. Pre-test-post-test results, after undergoing measurement through the paired-sample t-test, demonstrated a statistically insignificant value (0.075), which led reasonably to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. These undesirable results were further supported by testing Cohen's d, which illustrated a small effect size (0.42).

Surprisingly, findings from the questionnaire uncovered that students had a positive attitude towards the implementation of the technique, believing that activities were interesting, teaching methodology was effective, and affirming their active engagement in the learning process. Because pre-post-test and questionnaire's results exhibited a contradictory pattern, it was inferred that neither teaching methodology nor the nature of activities were responsible for the unsatisfactory gains; rather, presumably the lack of practice, extraneous variables, or the type of pre-post-test tasks acted as inhibiting factors to the success of the treatment.

Pedagogical Recommendations and Implications

Inspired by the overall findings of the study, the following section will be reversed to practical recommendations to both teachers and students. In doing so, specific actions will be outlined to enhance the delivery and learning of written syntactic maturity in EFL contexts.

- Teachers should rise their students' awareness about the skill to manipulate complex sentences through explicitly informing them about the components, function, and importance of this type

of sentences. As a result, they are assumed to become more attentive to their sentences structure, and therefore attempt developing them.

- Teachers, instead of merely focusing on teaching sentence construction through rule-based approaches, they should engage their students in mentally stimulating exercises and syntactic problems, like the SC exercises, so that a real syntactic growth can be achieved.
- When revising students' paragraphs and essays, teachers should provide more feedback at the level of sentences, for instance, sentence length, variety, complexity, appropriate conjunctions use, and the relationships expressed between sentences.
- Along with focusing on higher-level writing skills, essay genres, and advanced vocabulary, teachers are advised to regularly review fundamental academic concepts with their students, such as punctuation, sentence organization, phrases integration, and the use of subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. These components are necessary for constructing grammatically correct, complex sentences.
- Given the engaging nature of SC exercises, teachers are recommended to incorporate them as an essential part of their writing and grammar courses. This is mainly to increase their students' motivation and interest in sentence manipulation, as well as to make them positively challenged while solving syntactic combinations.
- Students are urged to consider expanding their vocabulary storage and improve their technical terminology lexicon about a variety of topics. This is expected to help them find ideas in order to expand their sentences with varied details.
- Students are encouraged to establish regular reading habits and get exposed to texts with complex structures like academic materials. Getting exposed to sophisticated inputs is believed to guide them in mimicking and transferring those structures into their writing.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its significance and potentially meaningful contribution, this research work is not without limitations. These gaps in methodology, sample and treatment, do not diminish the value of the findings; Rather, they may increase the transparency and integrity of the study, as well as open room for further research to refine, build on, and modify certain decisions and variables to promote the achievement of more substantial contributions.

- By targeting only 20 students, the sample of this study is considered relatively small. Consequently, the representativeness of the findings cannot be assured, as well as measurement of the meticulous impact of the treatment across a wide range of participants was not possible. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to target a greater number of students so that results can be generalized and the possibility to gain desirable effects would increase.
- Using voluntary sampling is also presumed to minimize the representativeness of the sample because, here, only individuals who are outgoing and motivated would consent to participate. Future studies can embrace more random sampling techniques to obtain unbiased samples and therefore generalizable findings.
- Instead of opting for the SC exercises, future researchers can investigate the effect of other techniques like sentence expansion or generative rhetoric on students' written syntactic maturity.
- This research was limited only to one dependent variable, which is syntactic maturity. This means that even if students mark a noticeable syntactic growth, the strength of their writing style and quality cannot be captured. To add more in-depth insights, subsequent research works are recommended to tackle not only syntactic maturity, but also writing quality of students' productions.

- While there are 14 syntactic maturity measures, this study employed only the t-unit length, which was suitable yet not adequate. Other measures can be used adjacently in upcoming investigations to provide a rather inclusive examination of the technique's impact.
- The limited number of sessions conducted as part of the treatment can be considered as the primary reason in reducing the impact of the technique. Researchers in future studies are urged to maximize the number of sessions in order for the technique's impact to be more articulated.
- Because of the slight incompatibility between treatment activities and post-pre-test tasks, students may have found it difficult to transfer what they have been trained on in treatment sessions to post-test task. Thus, follow-up research is anticipated to ensure this enlightenment. Worded differently, in case sessions were dominated by sentence-level activities, post-pre-test tasks are expected to maintain the same activities type and flow.
- There is a high likelihood that extraneous variables were introduced during the post-test, as it was conducted during 'Ramadan', whereas the pre-test took place during students' regular study days. Consequently, factors such as fatigue and reduced energy levels may have interfered. In light of this, future investigations are encouraged to administer tests under consistent conditions, variables, and environments to ensure the independent variable is fairly manipulated.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus Group Informed Consent

Informed Consent for the Focus Group

Procedure

You will participate in a 40-minute focus group session with other students, where we shall discuss your experiences with sentence construction and the challenges you face in developing more complex, mature sentences.

The session will involve answering questions and engaging in activities (e.g., ranking tasks, sentence comparisons). You will not be required to provide any personal or sensitive information beyond questions that serve the purpose of this focus group.

Potential Risks

There are minimal risks associated with your participation. These may include discomfort when discussing personal experiences related to language learning. You are free to skip any questions that make you uncomfortable.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will only be used for research purposes and will not be linked to your name or identity.

Focus group sessions will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only. If you prefer not to be recorded, please let me know before the session, and I will ensure your participation remains anonymous. The data collected will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the focus group at any time without any consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data collected from you will be deleted, unless you specifically consent to its inclusion.

Consent

By signing below, you agree to participate in this focus group and understand the details outlined in this consent form.

Participant's Full Name (Printed): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact:

Master Researcher: Omra Ben Dahmane

Institution: University of Mohammed Kieder Biskra

Contact Information: omrabendahmane.2001@ gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof. Ahmed Chaouki Hoadjli

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 2: Focus Group Opinionnaire**The Opinionnaire**

1- Do you think this data collection method is suitable to answer the targeted research question?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If no, please clarify which data collection method would more appropriate and why?

.....

.....

.....

2-Are there any repetitive questions?

Yes ☐

No ☐

- If yes, please specify them.

.....

.....

.....

3- Did you find any grammar / spelling mistakes in the questions?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If yes, please notify them below.

.....

.....

.....

4- Are there any irrelevant questions that need to be removed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If yes, please provide the number of the question(s) below.

.....

.....

.....

5- Are there any ambiguous questions that need to be reformulated and / or clarified?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If yes, please indicate which questions require rewording.

.....

.....

.....

6- Do the questions encourage open-ended discussion and allow participants to share detailed experiences or insights?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If no, which questions need revision to better prompt discussion?

.....

.....

.....

7- Do the questions flow naturally from one to the next, creating a logical progression of discussion?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If no, which questions need better transitions?

.....

.....

.....

8- Are the questions manageable within the allocated time for the focus group discussion (40-50 min)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

-If no, which questions could be removed or simplified to save time?

.....
.....
.....

9- If there are any questions that you believe are of close relevance to the purpose of the focus group but were not included, please write them below.

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you very much for your time and collaboration!

Appendix 3: Focus Group Validation Form**The Focus Group Validation Form**

I hereby certify that I have read the students' focus group questions in the study carried out by Omra BEN DAHMANE who is currently working on her MA dissertation at Biskra University. I have provided the researcher of the present study with remarks and comments regarding the focus group questions' clarity, relevance, structure and accuracy.

Background Information on the Expert:

Name:

University:

Present Occupation:

Degree:

Telephone Number:

Email Address:

Signed:

Researcher Contact Details:

Omra Ben Dahmane

Email: omrabendahmane.2001@gmail.com

Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

Department of English Language and Literature

Appendix 4: Focus Group Interview Guide

Focus Group Questions:

1. Opening questions

- 1. What features do you think an effective sentence should have?
- 2. What comes to your mind when I tell you “Complex or mature sentences”?

2. Transitioning question

- 3. How confident are you about your current ability to produce lengthy sentences with varied structures, multiple details, clauses and modifiers?

3. key questions

- 4. Can you think of a time when you struggled to write a complex sentence that included multiple details, clauses, or pieces of information? What specific challenge did you face in constructing that sentence?

- 5. Imagine Mariya, an EFL student, who consistently writes complex and mature sentences like this: [Example: After years of hard work and dedication, the scientist was able to uncover the truth behind the mysterious phenomenon, a discovery that not only contributed to the field of astronomy but also opened up new possibilities for future research]. Now think about Sami, who is at the same educational level as Mariya, but his sentences are simpler and less developed, like this: [Example: The scientist made a discovery and shared it with his team]. Based on this scenario, please write on your index cards what you think are the three main factors that might lead Sami to struggle with writing mature sentences.

- 6. How do these factors relate to your own experiences with writing mature sentences?

- 7. The researcher will distribute cards that list various factors that may impede students from developing mature sentences. Participants are asked to: rank these factors in terms of significance, using numbers from 1 to 9, where 1 represents the most significant factor and 9 represents the least significant factor.

- Limited vocabulary.
- Lack of grammar knowledge.
- Insufficient practice in writing.
- Traditional methods of teaching sentence structure.
- Fear of making mistakes.
- Lack of feedback.
- Time constraints during writing.

- Influence of first language.
- Poor exposure to complex texts (lack of reading).
- 8. What specific reasons or experiences led you to rank one factor as the most significant in impeding the development of mature sentences?

4.Closing questions

- 9. How do you feel about learning sentence complexity through activities like sentence combining as opposed to traditional methods?

Appendix 5: Focus Group Transcript

Transcription of focus group 1

Moderator: hello everyone! Welcome to this session and thank you all for being here. We are here today in order to discuss your experiences with sentence construction and the challenges you face in developing more complex and mature sentences. Your answers are essential in understanding these challenges and also to explore ways in order to address them. just A quick reminder of some ground rules in order to ensure smooth discussion:

I would like to put your phones silent

Remember that there are no wrong or right answers. This is a safe space to share your thoughts, feelings and perceptions and even you have different opinion that others, you are the most welcome to share it.

In order to make sure that we capture everything, this session will be recorded.

[00:02:19]

Q1: Tell me! What features do you think an effective sentence should have?

Nour: clarity.....to have clear meaning.... if it does not have clear meaning, it is wrong.

Hadjer: correct sentence structure and correct punctuation.

Unknown Participant 1: it should be organized and coherent.

[00:03:02]

Q2: what comes to your mind when I tell complex or mature sentence, like how would you describe it in your own words?

Nour: multiple clauses, sophisticated words...complex words.... dependent and independent clauses...and also long sentences.

Hadjer: sentences that are linked using coordinating conjunctions and other types of conjunctions.....sentences that contain two independent sentences which means two ideas.

[00:04:01]

Q3: how confident are you about your current ability to produce lengthy sentences with varied structures, multiple details, clauses and modifiers?

Basma: I am not confident; I am bad at writing.

Unknown Participant 1: me too

Hadjer: I prefer short sentences or may be not too long sentences or too many ideas.

Nour: actually, it's the other way for me, I usually write really long sentences, I just struggle with dividing them and organizing them. I don't like to write too many short sentences together.

Hadjer: when I write long sentences, I fear doing wrong punctuation

Basma: for me, I prefer writing freely. I don't like rules and do that and you have to do that. No need to punctuation or finding complex words and academic words. I like to write anything that comes to my mind, using simple words or anything. As long as it is simple and convey what you feel, it's enough.

Moderator: as I understood, you feel more confident in constructing complex sentences in free writing

Basma: something like that, yes!

[00:05:59]

Q4: if you had to rate your confidence in writing complex sentences on a scale from 1 to 10, what number feels right to you? We will go around the table so that each one can answer the question.

Amira: 5

Hadjer: 5 as well, because I do write complex sentences, but I am not sure if they are correct. Sometimes we need to write complex sentences for compositions or essays.

Hanine: 2

Basma: 3 out of 10

Unknown participant 1: 5, I feel it depends on the topic also.

Nour: I think 6 or 7. I have been trying to write longer sentences because I think the teacher or the reader takes you more seriously. So, I have been practicing a little bit. I'm a bit confident.

Sali: I think 3

Unknown participant 2: I think 5 out of 10

Sabrina: 3 out of 10

[00:07:40]

Q5: Can you think of a time when you struggled to write a complex sentence that included multiple details, clauses and pieces of information, what specific challenge you faced in constructing that sentence?

Hadjer: [unclear].....conjunctions.

Basma: may be how to find the right words, or not finding words to replace others that we frequently use... especially if they were academic words

Hadjer: for me the major problem is how to make coherent ideas and end up with one sentence which is correct in terms of punctuation, meaning, clarity

Nour: I struggle with repeating the same structure. I keep in adding appositive phrases. I do that too often because it is one of the easiest ways to create complex sentences. So, I struggle with repetitiveness.

[00:09:47]

Q6: Imagine Mariya, an EFL student, who consistently writes complex and mature sentences like this: [Example: After years of hard work and dedication, the scientist was able to uncover the truth behind the mysterious phenomenon, a discovery that not only contributed to the field of astronomy but also opened up new possibilities for future research]. Now think about Sami, who is at the same educational level as Mariya, but his sentences are simpler and less developed, like this: [Example: The scientist made a discovery and shared it with his team]. Based on this scenario, please write on your index cards, what you think are the three main factors that might lead Sami to struggle with writing mature sentences?

Amira: lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes prevent him from writing mature and complex sentences.

Hadjer: one reason is that he does not know how to use punctuation and transitional signals. The fear of making mistakes in expressing ideas that is way he keeps in using 'and'. Also, lack of information about the topic he is writing about that is why he cannot extend his sentences.

Hanine: I think the first reason is that he has not followed the instruction of the teacher in the course. Second, reason is lack of vocabulary. Third, he did not do a lot of exercises.

Basma: for me, not reading books or not practicing writing at home and also, he might be too lazy to use complex structures and academic words. He is like me; I am too lazy to use complex words and structures. That is why I use only simple words in my writing.

Unknown participant 1: for me....[unclear].... And thinking in his mother language....[unclear]

Nour: I think not reading enough or reading simple language. That is, reading books that are written with simple language and designed for beginners because I believe the more you read the more you get better in writing.

Sali: the main reason I think is poor vocabulary or punctuation, or maybe he did not follow the correct grammatical rules.

Unknown participant 2: the main reasons I think are poor capacity in writing, missing vocabulary rules, and lack of reading also that encourage acquiring different capacities in wiring.

Sabrina: for me lack of vocabulary and not practicing enough in writing, listening and reading, like listening to audios and reading books.

Q7: How do these factors relate to your own experiences with writing mature sentences?

Hadjer: there are two reasons which I relate to them: first thing is lacking information about the topic itself. So, I need to read more in order to gather more information and vocabulary. So, I need to have the input and when writing it's the output so I can write enough long sentences. Also, not practicing enough because after reading comes practice. Also, lack of knowledge about punctuation, writing styles and sentence structures

Nour: I think especially recently and due to my short attention span, I prefer reading simple books. Like sometimes I have two books. One has more complex language and the other one is simple. I would read the simple one three times before I even read the third of the other book because when I pick it up and read two or three lines, I feel like my brain is stuck so I put it down and read the simple one multiple times.

Basma: I feel that Sami's experience resembles mine. If I am at the the same situation as him, I would write the same sentence because I am just lazy. I don't read nor practice writing at home. So, when I get home, I forget everything I studied.

Moderator: is it something that is related to a lack of motivation to improve that skill?

Basma: not really. I am motivated. I want to do as others do but for me it is not necessary to write complex sentences. As long as you understand what I am saying, even if it was using simple words, there is no need to use complex words.

Hadjer: but using long sentences gives more value to your writing style....[unclear]...it is a necessity to try different writing styles and improve each time, especially later when we become researchers or teachers when we publish essays in journals. So, we should have a good writing style because it would be necessary later on.

[00:24:08]

Q8: The researcher will distribute cards that list various factors that may impede students from developing mature sentences. Participants are asked to: rank these factors in terms of significance, using numbers from 1 to 9, where 1 represents the most significant factor and 9 represents the least significant factor.

- Limited vocabulary.
- Lack of grammar knowledge.

- Insufficient practice in writing.
- Traditional methods of teaching sentence structure.
- Fear of making mistakes.
- Lack of feedback.
- Time constraints during writing.
- Influence of first language.
- Poor exposure to complex texts (lack of reading).

Hanine: the main factor in my opinion is the influence of the first language. The second one is fear of making mistakes. The third one is limited vocabulary.

Nour: the first one is poor exposure to complex texts or lack of reading because I think you have to read in order to become good writer. The second one is insufficient practice in writing, sometimes you think you are good at writing until you actually write and experience how difficult it is. three is fear of making mistakes and not having the confidence.

Basma: the first one is limited vocabulary and not having the words. The third one is fear of making mistakes. The third is lack of reading. The fourth is lack of feedback.

Hadjer: in the first place I would rank poor exposure to complex texts and not practicing writing enough. Also, time constraints during writing especially in exams...it really makes me write badly

Amira: I think the main factor is insufficient practice in writing. The second is poor exposure to complex texts and lack of reading. The third is limited vocabulary which an essential reason. Fear of making mistakes, then lack of feedback, then lack of grammar knowledge and then traditional methods of teaching sentence structure, then time constraints during writing. Then, influence of the first language.

Sabrina: the first reason is limited vocabulary. The second one is lack of feedback. The third one is insufficient practice in writing.

Sali: I think the first one is limited vocabulary. The second one is poor exposure to complex texts. Then lack of grammar knowledge and then lack of feedback and also time constraints during writing.

Unknown participant 1: 1) poor exposure to complex texts 2) lack of reading 3) limited vocabulary 4) lack of grammar knowledge 5) lack of feedback 6) fear of making mistakes 7) time constraints during writing 8) influence of the first language 9) insufficient practice inn writing 10) traditional methods in teaching sentence structure.

[00:30:49]

Q9: What specific reasons or experiences led you to rank one factor as the most significant in impeding the development of mature sentences?

Nour: I sometimes try to journal but because I usually read books that have simple sentence structures I always write in simple structures. When I asked an English teacher to read my writing and evaluate, he told me that it is too simple and he told me that it is because I don't read books with complex language and sentences.

Hadjer: I have ranked poor exposure to complex texts as the first one because it is related to my own experience. I always say that I have to read more, practice more and to be exposed to books to develop my writing but I fail to do that.

Amira: I actually ranked insufficient practice in writing as the first one because I love writing but I don't follow the rules. I just write for the sake of writing. And practicing is very important to write a good piece of writing.

Unknown participant 1: Due to my experience I think poor exposure to complex texts or reading and I hate reading that is why it affects my writing of complex sentences.

Hanine: the influence of the first language. I have this issue because whenever I am writing I always think in Arabic.

Sali: for me the main factor is limited vocabulary because I face a big problem with it. When I write I feel like I don't know a lot of information and synonyms about the topic. I should practice more and enrich my vocabulary.

[00:34:03]

Q10: How do you feel about learning sentence complexity through activities like sentence combining as opposed to traditional methods?

Hadjer: actually, this is what we should do, combining simple sentences using transitional signals and conjunctions to have at the end a complex sentence. So, yes it seems beneficial but we should know about punctuation and transitional signals to write correct sentences at the end.

Nour: I think as long as they are taught through practice and not through memorizing which part should go next after a certain part...because when we studied complex sentences, we had to memorize what type of clause is this and what type of clause should go after this.so, yes, I think it is good especially if it is endorsed with practice.

Hadjer: but I think the traditional way to know the theoretical part first as she said clauses types and what should be used next is important first to know and then we should practice.

Moderator: we have reached the end of our focus group. thank you all for your valuable time and input! It was a really and interesting discussion.

Transcription of Focus group 02:

Moderator: hello everyone! Welcome to this session and thank you all for being here. We are here today in order to discuss your experiences with sentence construction and the challenges you face in developing more complex and mature sentences. Your answers are essential in understanding these challenges and also to explore ways in order to address them. just A quick reminder of some ground rules in order to ensure smooth discussion:

I would like to put your phones silent

Remember that there are no wrong or right answers. This is a safe space to share your thoughts, feelings and perceptions and even you have different opinion that others, you are the most welcome to share it.

In order to make sure that we capture everything, this session will be recorded.

[00:01:45]

Q1: What features do you think an effective sentence should have?

Nawale: Simple language that ensures that everybody who listen to it could understand so it won't be mysterious and there would be no misunderstanding of the sentence meaning.

Marame: I think it should be straightforward in which you should choose wisely your words to express yourself simply.

[00:02:41]

Q2: what comes to your mind when I tell you a 'complex or mature' sentence?

Nabila: complex words.

Nawale: it consists of advanced language, nearly close to native speakers' style of language.

Unknown participant A: difficult vocabulary.

Marame: may be a sentence that is hard to understand.

Said: contains more than one sentence, one independent and one dependent.

Q3: how confident are you about your current ability to produce lengthy sentences with varied structures, multiple details, clauses and modifiers?

Karima: neutral

marame: I am mostly confident because I know the basis of constructing sentences

unknown participant A: confident.

Unknown Participant B: confident also.

[00:05:00]

Q4: if you had to rate your confidence in writing complex sentences on a scale from 1 to 10, what number feels right to you? We will go around the table so that each one can answer the question.

Doha: I think 7

unknown participant A: 5

Unknown participant B :6

Unknown participant C : 8

Said :6

Unknown participant D : 6

Unknown participant E :8

Marame :8.5

Nabila :8

Unknown participant F : 8

Nawale :9

Unknown participant G: 6

Unknown participant H : 8

[00 :06 :00]

Q5: Can you think of a time when you struggled to write a complex sentence that included multiple details, clauses and pieces of information, what specific challenge you faced in constructing that sentence?

Marame: lack of vocabulary. last year I think in written expression when they limit us to only one topic sometimes it is hard to find vocabulary to write complex sentences.

Moderator: so, you are talking in case you are not familiar with the topic.

Marame: yes.

Unknown participant A: grammar mistakes ..or grammar knowledge.

Doha: lack of vocabulary.

Nabila: yes, lack of vocabulary.

Nawale: it is also due to the fact that we are limited in time in addition to vocabulary retrieval so we need more time to process, retrieve and remember the vocabulary.

Nabila: vocabulary recall and anxiety. When you don't have much time to write a full paragraph or essay, you forget most of the words you know.

Unknown participant B: forgetting also is one of the problems that I face.

[00:08:00]

Q6: Imagine Mariya, an EFL student, who consistently writes complex and mature sentences like this: [Example: After years of hard work and dedication, the scientist was able to uncover the truth behind the mysterious phenomenon, a discovery that not only contributed to the field of astronomy but also opened up new possibilities for future research]. Now think about Sami, who is at the same educational level as Mariya, but his sentences are simpler and less developed, like this: [Example: The scientist made a discovery and shared it with his team]. Based on this scenario, please write on your index cards, what you think are the three main factors that might lead Sami to struggle with writing mature sentences?

Nabila: lack of practice in writing which result in not knowing the sentence structure, anxiety and lack of vocabulary.

Marame: maybe he lacks practice or lacks enough vocabulary about the specific topic, or maybe he lacks knowledge about sentence structure rules.

Marwa: lack of vocabulary, lack of practice or maybe he is not confident in his writing ability.

Nawale: lack of practice since we are not a native English community, lack of reading habits and difficulty in vocabulary retrieval.

Unknown participant A: he lacks listening, writing, reading and speaking, learning new words and vocabulary, then practice.

Unknown participant B: lack of practice, communication and using the language and the lack of vocabulary.

Doha: maybe he did not read a lot of books to get some ideas and some new vocabulary.

Said: lack of motivation, absence of concertation and practicing without feedback.

[00:14:56]

Q7: How do these factors relate to your own experiences with writing mature sentences?

Marame: being less knowledgeable about vocabulary of a specific topic, or sometimes even if I have enough vocabulary about the topic sometimes, I don't have the time to practice the rules.so, sometimes I go to the teacher and tell her to give me some exercise to improve my skill.

Nabila: for me, vocabulary recall. My anxiety makes me forget a lot of stuff. Even my pronunciation is affected by that reason.

Nawale: I think we are not familiar with developing reading skills. It is like we are not used to read a lot. So, it is a little bit hard to focus and keep reading a book for, for example, one hour. We get bored.

[00:17:09]

Q8: The researcher will distribute cards that list various factors that may impede students from developing mature sentences. Participants are asked to: rank these factors in terms of significance, using numbers from 1 to 9, where 1 represents the most significant factor and 9 represents the least significant factor.

- Limited vocabulary.
- Lack of grammar knowledge.
- Insufficient practice in writing.
- Traditional methods of teaching sentence structure.
- Fear of making mistakes.
- Lack of feedback.
- Time constraints during writing.
- Influence of first language.
- Poor exposure to complex texts (lack of reading).

Karima: the first one is lack of grammar knowledge. The second is fear of making mistakes. The third is lack of exposure to complex texts or lack of reading. The last one is the traditional methods of teaching sentence structure.

Marame: for me it's limited vocabulary, then time constraints during writing and then traditional methods of teaching sentence structure and also insufficient practice in writing.

Nabila: traditional methods of teaching sentence structure, limited vocabulary, lack of grammar knowledge and fear of making mistakes.

Unknown participant A: first, fear of making mistakes. Second, limited vocabulary. Third, lack of feedback. Forth, lack of grammar knowledge.

Unknown Participant B: insufficient practice in writing, fear of making mistakes, poor exposure to complex texts and limited vocabulary.

Marwa: first limited vocabulary, second lack of grammar knowledge, third fear of making mistakes and fourth poor exposure to complex texts.

Nawale: first, insufficient practice in writing, second limited vocabulary, and then lack of feedback.

Doha: first, insufficient practice in writing, second limited vocabulary, third is lack of grammar knowledge, and fourth is lack of feedback.

Said: fear of making mistakes, then poor exposure to complex texts and third lack of grammar knowledge.

[00:23:06]

Q9: What specific reasons or experiences led you to rank one factor as the most significant in impeding the development of mature sentences?

Marame: I think limited vocabulary because if you don't have the vocabulary, you can't technically write a full sentence. So, you have to enrich your vocabulary in order to write a complex sentence.

Nabila: for me traditional methods of teaching sentence structure in which some ways of teaching aren't really helpful for many of students, so they may not know the right structure to write a full sentence so they tend to use simple words that lead to shorter sentences.

Unknown Participant A: lack of grammar knowledge because grammar is the most important skill to learn.

Doha: I choose the insufficient practice in writing because when I write in the exam of writing expression and I see that the last part is an essay and I can't describe my ideas about this paragraph, I start to ask myself where I spent all of my time when I don't do some practice when I have a lot of time.

Nawale: for me the lack of feedback because even if you practice and you have the vocabulary and English is a foreign language, if there is no one to give you feedback or to evaluate your writing, it won't be that good because you may make mistakes. When there is no one to correct for you, then it is hard to develop your skills.

Said: fear of making mistakes. There are a lot of people who have rich vocabulary and grammar knowledge, but when they speak or write the fear making mistakes and feeling ashamed and embarrassed and stressing out may make them sound less engaging.

Unknown Participant B: same as me. I experienced fear of making mistakes in my first year. When I speak or write I feel that words are flying. I feel anxious.

[00:27:24]

Q10: How do you feel about learning sentence complexity through activities like sentence combining as opposed to traditional methods?

Nabila: it seems a great way of teaching sentence structure.

Moderator: why do you think so?

Nabila: by combining many parts of sentences, it makes you more knowledgeable about how to create a full sentence in your own.

Marame: it will give you a memory of combining these sentences, so when you write on your own you will remember how you combined those sentences and you will write them as efficient as possible.

Nawale: it seems a challenging activity. Like, I always put an excuse that we are not English native speakers, so this activity obliges you to put effort to combine and to write complex sentences and when you write a correct and good complex sentence, it is really good. It gives you good feeling about your abilities.

Nabila: I think it is good activity of learners who are kinesthetic. They enjoy this type of activities, as it makes it too much easier for them to learn sentence structure.

Marame:[unclear].....i mean if you don't know the rule you can't apply the exercise, we have to combine both.

Said: it depends on the learner. There are learners who prefer engaging in such activities and there are others who prefer traditional methods. So, it depends on their learning style.

Moderator: we have reached the end of our focus group. thank you all for your valuable time and input! It was a really and interesting discussion.

Appendix 6: Head of the Department Consent Letter**Head of the Department Consent Letter**

Dear Head of the Department,

I am undertaking a study on implementing the sentence-combining technique to improve English as a foreign language learners' written syntactic maturity. In the course of this study, I will be carrying out a treatment on third year EFL students, specifically group 01, to investigate the effect of such technique on developing their written syntactic maturity.

Therefore, I am seeking your consent to occupy room 28 in the FLL faculty to teach third year EFL students over a period of one month. Within this period, one session per week will be organized. A focus group, pre-test, treatment, and a post-test will be held to examine the impact to the said technique on enhancing students' written syntactic maturity.

We have agreed that the weekly treatment session will take place on Wednesdays from 11:20 to 12:50 am, which coincides with the students' extra-teaching time.

Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of students' personal information and data gathered throughout the process of conducting this research work will be guaranteed.

If you consent to the participation of the previously mentioned EFL students in this study, please sign the attached consent form. Your permission and cooperation will be highly appreciated.

For further inquiries, you are welcome to contact the researcher.

Yours truly,

The researcher's Contact Details:

Omra Ben Dahmane

Email : omrabendahmane.2001@gmail.com

Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

Department of English

I have read and clearly understood the researcher's request.

I consent to the participation of master students at the section of English in the research project being undertaken by Omra Ben Dahmane.

Name:

E-mail:

University:

Faculty:

Department:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix 7: Treatment Informed Consent

Informed consent

Dear participant,

I am undertaking a study on implementing the sentence-combining technique to improve English as a foreign language learners' written syntactic maturity. In the course of this study, I will be implementing a series of writing activities with third-year EFL students to examine how these activities may support their development in written expression.

Accordingly, you are invited to participate in this study. Within an eight-week period, two sessions per week will be scheduled, each lasting one hour and a half. A pre-test, treatment, posttest, and attitudinal questionnaire will be held.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study, though you may experience some time commitment from attending sessions and completing the exercises and a questionnaire.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or negative consequence. All data collected will remain confidential, and your personal information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Your privacy will be fully respected.

If you consent to participate in this study, please sign the attached consent form. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please feel free to contact me directly.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Omra Ben Dahmane

Email: Omrabendahmane.2001@gmail.com

Supervisor: Prof. Ahmed Chaouki Hoadjli

Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

I have read and clearly understood the researcher's request. I consent to participate in the research project being conducted by Omra Ben Dahmane.

Name:

E-mail:

University:

Department:

Date.....

Signature.....

Appendix 8 : The Mini-syllabus

Unit 01: Compound Sentences

Lesson 01: Using Coordinating Conjunctions.

objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students are expected to:

- get a clear picture of sentence combining.
- Combine simple sentences using coordinating conjunctions to create more complex sentences.

Introduction:

In the first session, the teacher begins by establishing the foundation for the course, emphasizing the importance of sentences as the fundamental building blocks of effective communication. This introductory talk aims to motivate participants by highlighting how mastering sentence structure can enhance their writing clarity, impact, and versatility.

The teacher then introduces the **sentence-combining technique** as a practical and engaging method for improving sentence complexity. By presenting this technique as a solution to common challenges in constructing sophisticated sentences, the teacher sets a clear purpose for the session and the course as a whole.

Reminder:

- *Compound sentence:* is made up of two independent clauses, which are complete thoughts that can stand alone as sentences. When combined, they create a single, more complex sentence.
- In order to be effectively joined, a type of connectors is often added between two independent clauses, referred to as: coordinating conjunctions or “fanboys”.

Coordinators

For: Mary enjoys math, for it is challenging.

And: Thuy has won several trophies, and she is an honor student.

Nor: Judy doesn't work, nor does she want a job.

But: Nabil is pretty good at gymnastics, but he prefers tennis

Or: Jaime needs a vacation, or he'll go crazy.

Yet: Irma doesn't earn much, yet she spends money like a millionaire.

So: The coach praised the team excessively, so the players

Logical Relationships

cause\effect

addition

addition of negatives

contrast

alternative

contrast

cause/effect

stopped believing him.

➤ **PUNCTUATION:** When coordinators join sentences, commas come before the coordinators, following this pattern: *sentence + comma + coordinator + sentence*.

Activity 01:

_Combine the sentences below into one cohesive sentence using coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So). Pay attention to the relationship between the ideas to choose the most appropriate conjunction.

Example:

uncombined: The library is quiet, the library is well-lit. Perfect for studying.

Combined: The library is quiet and well-lit, so it is perfect for studying.

1. The restaurant is crowded. The restaurant is noisy. It's hard to enjoy a meal.
2. She woke up early. She was excited. She was going on a trip.
3. The park is beautiful. The park has blooming flowers. It is relaxing to walk there.
4. She doesn't enjoy spicy food. She doesn't enjoy very sweet food either.
5. The movie was interesting. The movie was emotional. Many people cried during it.
6. He studied hard for the exam. He did not score as high as he hoped. He decided to review his mistakes and try again.
7. The store is expensive. The store has unique items. It is worth visiting occasionally.
8. The car is old. The car is reliable. It still runs smoothly.

Activity 02:

Read each "*Would You Rather*" question carefully. Choose an option and explain your choice by **combining sentences using a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)**. Make sure your sentence clearly expresses the relationship between your ideas.

Example:

- *Would you rather travel to space or explore the deep ocean?*
"I would rather travel to space, for I have always been fascinated by the universe."
- *Would you rather be able to fly or become invisible?*
"I would choose to fly, but I would still need to be careful not to be seen".

Would you rather have the ability to time travel or read minds?

Would you rather be incredibly wealthy but have no free time or have a simple life but plenty of time for yourself?

Would you rather live in a world without music or a world without books?

Would you rather explore a new planet or dive to the deepest parts of the ocean?

Would you rather be able to speak every language fluently or play every musical instrument perfectly?

Would you rather have the ability to never feel tired or never feel hungry?

Would you rather live in a city full of people or in a peaceful countryside?

Would you rather have a job that pays a lot but is boring or a job that is exciting but doesn't pay much?

Would you rather give up social media for a year or give up watching TV shows and movies for a year?

Would you rather be able to teleport anywhere instantly or have the power to be invisible?

Activity 03:

pair up and interview each other to gather basic information (e.g., hobbies, interests, favorite activities). Then, use this information to create complex sentences about your partner, but with a focus on incorporating coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Use this paragraph as a model to get inspired by:

My partner, Sara, enjoys reading novels, **and** she especially loves mystery books. She doesn't like watching horror movies, **nor** does she enjoy action films. She spends most of her free time painting, **but** she also likes going for evening walks. She wants to learn a new language, **so** she recently started taking French lessons. She is very social, **yet** she sometimes prefers quiet moments alone. She hopes to travel to Japan one day, **for** she is fascinated by its culture and history.

Source: adapted from *Creative approaches to sentence combining* by William strong.

Lesson 02: Using Coordinating Adverbs

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students are expected to:

- **Know** how to combine various syntactic units (modifiers, phrases, clauses) using coordinating adverbs to create more complex sentences.
- **Combine** sentences using cues and without using them
- **Identify** coordinating adverbs (e.g., *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *consequently*, *nevertheless*, *furthermore*) and their logical relationships (e.g., addition, contrast, cause/effect).
- **Collaborate** with peers to produce a coherent and cohesive paragraph that incorporates coordinating adverbs to express logical relationships between ideas.

Reminder:

- Coordinating adverbs (also called conjunctive adverbs) are used to join two independent clauses, showing the relationship between them. These adverbs clarify the connection between ideas and enhance sentence flow.
- They are another tool for joining independent sentences

Placement: Coordinating adverbs often appear at the beginning of the second clause. However, they can also be placed mid-clause for emphasis.

Mid-clause example: The weather was pleasant; we, *however*, decided to stay indoors.

Punctuation Rules: *When combining two independent clauses with a coordinating adverb, use a semicolon (;) before the adverb and a comma (,) after it.*

Example: *The presentation was delayed; however, the audience remained patient.*

Coordinating adverb	Logical relationship	example
therefore	cause\effect	The company faced severe losses; <i>therefore</i> , it had to lay off many employees.
consequently	cause\effect	The team didn't prepare well; <i>consequently</i> , they lost the match.
furthermore	addition	The book is well-written; <i>furthermore</i> , it provides valuable insights.
moreover	addition	The new policy improved efficiency; <i>moreover</i> , it boosted employee morale.
however	contrast\exception	The product was expensive; <i>however</i> , it was worth every penny.
nevertheless	contrast\unexpected result	The road was slippery; <i>nevertheless</i> , she drove carefully and arrived on time.

Activity 01:

work individually to combine the following sentences, using the cues provided:

- capitalized words: they must be omitted
- words between parentheses (): they should be used in that same line.
- the word SOMETHING: it should be omitted and replaced by another information found in the next line.
- the symbols (-\-): means that an information found in the next line should be placed there.

Example: uncombined: Sophia launched a small online business.

THE BUSINESS offers handmade jewelry. (WHICH)

THE JEWELRY IS crafted from recycled materials.

The Business grew rapidly

THE GROWTH WAS to due to strong social media marketing.

SOPHIA decided to expand her product line. (AS A RESULT)

Sophia inspired other young entrepreneurs. (THEREFORE)

Combined: Sophia launched a small online business, which offers handmade jewelry crafted from recycled materials. The business grew rapidly due to strong social media marketing; as a result, she decided to expand her product line. Therefore, Sophia inspired other young entrepreneurs.

1) The author wrote an intriguing novel.

THE NOVEL IS about time travel.

TIME TRAVEL IS a fascinating topic. (WHICH)

THE NOVEL WAS translated into several languages.

THE LANGUAGES ARE diverse.

THE AUTHOR BECAME internationally known. (AS A RESULT)

THE AUTHOR WORK influenced a wide range of audience (THEREFORE)

2) The artist created a stunning painting.

THE PAINTING IS of a sunset.

THE SUNSET IS vibrant.

THE PAINTING WAS displayed in a gallery.

THE GALLERY IS famous.

THE ARTIST DID NOT sell the painting.(HOWEVER)

THE ARTIST gained recognition for their work.(NEVERTHELESS)

3) Exercising daily (-\-) is important for staying healthy.

A habitual physical activity that benefits the body and mind.

Some people don't enjoy working out. (HOWEVER)

Finding a personal coach or a constant companion can make exercise more appealing. (THEREFORE)

Regular exercise can improve mood and reduce stress levels.

IT CAN ALSO boost energy levels and enhance overall productivity. (IN ADDITION)

4) Adopting a balanced diet is essential for SOMETHING.

It supports physical and mental health.

Many people struggle to maintain consistent eating habits.

SOMETHING can make following a healthy diet easier. (HOWEVER)

learning to cook simple, nutritious meals

Healthy eating reduces the risk of chronic diseases.

It ALSO improves quality of life and increases energy levels. (IN ADDITION)

it can enhance cognitive function and boost longevity. (MOREOVER)

5) Space exploration (-\-) is a monumental achievement.

IT IS driven by innovation and determination.

Early missions faced immense challenges. (DESPITE THIS)

THE CHALLENGES included limited technology and high costs.

Modern space missions rely on cutting-edge technology. (HOWEVER)

Astronauts become able to undertake complex missions. (CONSEQUENTLY)

THE MISSIONS include studying distant planets and searching for alien life.

Activity 02:

Work in pairs to create rich and complex sentences by combining multiple independent and dependent clauses, as well as phrases (e.g., appositive, adjective, or prepositional phrases). Use **coordinating adverbs** (e.g., *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *consequently*, *nevertheless*, *furthermore*) to express logical relationships between the ideas.

Uncombined Version:

1. Artificial intelligence is transforming various industries.
2. Some fear that AI will replace human jobs.
3. AI can also create new job opportunities.
4. Workers need to develop new skills to stay relevant.

Combined Version:

Artificial intelligence is transforming various industries; **however**, some fear that AI will replace human jobs. **Nevertheless**, AI can also create new job opportunities; **therefore**, workers need to develop new skills to stay relevant.

1. Generation Z grew up surrounded by rapid technological advancements.

Generation Z is known for their digital fluency.

Many may feel pressure to succeed in this world.

The world is highly competitive.

2. Smartphones are now essential tools for daily lifestyle

smartphones have revolutionized communication

many people find it hard to disconnect

difficulty of disconnecting is a habit that affects their productivity and mental health

researchers are studying the long-term impact of technology dependence
technology dependence is an area that has sparked concern
concern is growing

3. Language learning apps have made it easier for people to learn new languages.

Language learning apps offer lessons in a wide variety of languages
many of these apps use methods to engage users
these methods are interactive and dynamic
some critics claim that these apps lack the depth of traditional language courses.

4. AI is revolutionizing many industries like: healthcare and transportation

AI can automate routine tasks
automating routine tasks can save time and resources
there are concerns about AI replacing human workers in various fields
some believe AI could lead to job placement
job placement can happen in a large, massive scale.

5. she wanted to publish her first book before the age of 30

publishing a book is a goal she set during her teenage years
she struggled to find a publisher willing to work with a new author.

Activity 03:

Group Formation and Topic Selection

- The class will be divided into small groups, each consisting of 4 students.
- Each group will be assigned one of the following topics to write a short paragraph.

Possible Topics:

- *Give three reasons why YouTube is the best social media platform.*
 - *Discuss the impact of AI on the future of work.*
 - *Explain why Generation Z prefers using TikTok over other social media platforms.*
 - *Argue the importance of having a personal brand in the digital age.*
 - *Give three reasons why remote working is beneficial for employees and companies.*
- **Brainstorming and Sentence Creation**

- Groups will begin by brainstorming key points related to their assigned topic.
- They will list ideas and examples they want to include in their paragraph. Each group will create a set of **uncombined sentences** based on their ideas. For example:
 - *Social media platforms offer a variety of content formats.*
 - *YouTube allows for long-form video content.*
 - *Other platforms may focus on shorter, more digestible content.*

Sentence Combining with Coordinating Adverbs

The groups will then combine their uncombined sentences using **coordinating adverbs** (therefore, however, moreover, consequently, etc.).

Students should focus on logically connecting ideas and adding complexity by using adverbs such as "therefore," "moreover," "however," etc., to demonstrate the relationship between ideas.

Writing the Paragraph

Once sentences are combined, groups will work together to organize the sentences into a coherent **short paragraph**.

The paragraph should logically flow and clearly convey the group's main argument or points, while also demonstrating their ability to use coordinating adverbs to enhance sentence complexity.

Peer Review Process

After completing their paragraph, each group will **exchange their written paragraph** with another group.

Groups will provide **written feedback** to each other, focusing on:

The appropriate use of coordinating adverbs.

The overall **flow of ideas** and how well the sentences are connected.

The **complexity of sentences** and the correct use of dependent and independent clauses.

Suggestions for improving the paragraph if needed, such as adding more details, improving transitions, or refining sentence structures.

Group Presentations

After completing the peer review process, each group will **present their paragraph** to the class.

Unit 02: complex sentences

lesson one using subordinating conjunctions.

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students are expected to:

- learn how subordinating conjunctions link dependent and independent clauses to show relationships such as cause, time, condition, and contrast.
- practice combining simple sentences into complex sentences using the appropriate subordinating conjunctions.
- combine sentences to create cohesive paragraphs, using both subordination and coordination to form well-structured ideas.

Reminder:

- Subordinating conjunctions join a dependent clause (subordinate clause) to an independent clause, establishing a specific logical relationship such as cause, time, condition, or contrast.
- **Punctuation Rules:**
 - ✓ Use a **comma** if the dependent clause comes **before** the independent clause.

Example (Dependent Clause First):

Although it was raining, they went for a walk.

- ✓ No comma is needed if the dependent clause comes **after** the independent clause.

Example (Dependent Clause Second):

They went for a walk although it was raining.

Subordinating conjunction	Logical relationship	example
Because, since, as	cause\reason	She left early because she wasn't feeling well.
When, while, after, before, until	time	When the bell rang, the students rushed out
If, Unless, Provided that, As long as, In case	condition	If you study hard, you'll pass the test.
Although, Even though, Though, Whereas, While	Contrast/Concession	Although the movie was long, it was enjoyable.
So that, In order that	purpose	I studied hard so that I can succeed in the exam.

Activity 01:

Read the unfinished story below and complete it by adding logical details and expanding the ideas using subordinating conjunctions (e.g., because, although, while, since, unless....etc).

A Competition Surprise

Liam entered the cooking competition **because**.....

Although he had practiced for weeks.....

He realized something was wrong **when**.....

He wouldn't have won **if**.....

Starting a business

Since Daniel had always dreamed of starting his own business,
he

.....
He felt nervous before the presentation **because**.....

Even though he had prepared for weeks.....

He knew he had made an impact **when**.....

A Competition Surprise

Liam entered the cooking competition **because**.....

Although he had practiced for weeks.....

He realized something was wrong **when**.....

He wouldn't have won **if**.....

Starting a business

Since Daniel had always dreamed of starting his own business,
he.....

He felt nervous before the presentation **because**.....

Even though he had prepared for weeks.....

He knew he had made an impact **when**.....

Activity 02:

Combine each of the following sentences into one complex sentence using the subordinating conjunctions provided in parentheses. Use the subordinating conjunction **before the** clause it introduces. Remove the **capitalized words** from the combined version. Remove the word **SOMETHING** and replace it with information provided in the next line.

1.The local art museum held an exhibition yesterday.

THE EXHIBITION featured paintings by local artists. (WHICH)

it was free, the museum was packed.(BECAUSE)

Many people attended the event.(AND)

My sister loved the paintings.

MY SISTER IS an art student.

2.We planned a birthday party for Emily.

THE PARTY WAS HELD in her backyard.

We Arrived early to set up decorations.

THE DECORATIONS included balloons, banners, and lights. (WHICH)

She walked into the yard. (WHEN)

Emily Was surprised.

Her friends shouted, "Happy Birthday!" (AND)

3.We had handed out the tests. (AFTER) (,)

The students moaned.

The moaning was loud.

THEY WANTED to let us know SOMETHING.

They were surprised at SOMETHING.

The test was difficult. (HOW)

4.Sarah enjoys working in groups.

SHE IS a social and outgoing student.

Liam prefers to work alone. (WHEREAS)

LIAM IS a reserved and introverted student.

HE LIKES a quiet environment. (AND)

5.Nora spends her free time reading novels. (ALTHOUGH)

SHE IS a quiet and imaginative student.

Her brother Jake prefers playing video games.

THE GAMES ARE fast-paced and competitive. (WHICH)

JAKE ENJOYS challenging himself.

6.Emily woke up late this morning.

EMILY IS a full-time employer on a tech-company. (WHO)

Her alarm did not go off. (BECAUSE)

she missed the 8:00 AM train.

She had to take a taxi to work.

she would arrive on time. (SO THAT)

Activity 03:

Combine these set of sentences into a cohesive paragraph. Use **subordination** (e.g., *because*, *who*, *where*, *although*) and **some coordination** (e.g., *and*, *but*, *however*). Focus on making the ideas complex and connected by integrating the information provided. Avoid leaving any details.

A Cooking Competition

The cooking competition took place last Saturday.

THE COMPETITION WAS HELD at a large event hall in the city center.

Contestants had been practicing their recipes for weeks.

they wanted to perfect their dishes and end up with a unique one.(BECAUSE)

They were given two hours to finish cooking. (WHILE)

The judges tasted each dish carefully.

They were looking for SOMETHING.

THEY FOCUSED ON flavor, creativity, and presentation.

Liam won first place. (ALTHOUGH)

His dish was simple.

It had exceptional flavor and a creative presentation. (AS)

His family was proud of his achievement.

HIS FAMILY celebrated with him after the event. (AND).

Lesson 02: using subordinating conjunctions (review and practice)

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students are expected to:

- **Identify and use a wider range of subordinating conjunctions** to show more complex relationships in sentences (e.g., time, condition, contrast, reason).

- **Expand and modify base sentences** by adding descriptive phrases, relative clauses, and various subordinating conjunctions, enhancing sentence complexity and detail.
- **Create cohesive, logically organized paragraphs** by combining sentences with both subordination and coordination

Activity 01:

Students are provided with cards with different parts of the same sentence. Then, they are required to match main clauses with their appropriate dependent clauses or phrases. Students will be divided into 5 groups, in which they have 4 minutes to finish matching 2 sentences.

1. Although Emma struggled with public speaking, she practiced consistently, and when the time came, her presentation was both confident and engaging.

Since Liam decided to pursue his dream of starting a business, he has faced numerous challenges, yet he remains determined to succeed.

2. Because artificial intelligence is revolutionizing industries, companies are investing heavily in its development, although concerns about ethical misuse persist

When the new software update was released, users experienced smoother functionality; however, some features were removed, which frustrated long-time customers.

3. While the opposing team dominated the first half, Liam's team made a dramatic comeback after their coach implemented a new strategy.

Although she had injured her ankle during practice, Sarah competed in the final race and managed to secure third place.

4. Since scientists discovered the benefits of gene editing, medical research has advanced significantly, and many diseases are now treatable.

While renewable energy sources are increasingly adopted, storage solutions remain a challenge because battery technology still has limitations.

5. Although disagreements can arise in teams, they can be resolved when members communicate respectfully.

Though managing time can be challenging, it is an essential skill for achieving personal and professional success.

Activity 02:

Expand and modify the following base sentences by adding details to make them more complex. Use **subordinating conjunctions** (e.g., because, although, when), **relative clauses** (e.g., who, which, that), and **descriptive phrases** (e.g., prepositional, appositive). You can add details about:

- **Why?** (reason)

- **When?** (time)
- **Where?** (place)
- **What kind?** (description)
- **How?** (manner)

Example:

Base Sentence: The scientist announced her discovery.

Expanded Sentence: The scientist announced her discovery during the international conference, which was attended by hundreds of experts, because it was a breakthrough in renewable energy technology.

1. The teacher introduced a new topic in class
2. A book was left on the table.
3. John waited for the bus.
4. Sophia wrote a letter to her best friend.
5. The journalist interviewed a famous athlete.
6. A group of friends went camping in the mountains.
7. James opened a mysterious old book.
8. The doctor explained the treatment plan to the patient.

Activity 03:

Combine the following fragmented sentences into a cohesive and logical paragraph. Use:

- **Subordinating conjunctions** (because, although, since, while, etc.),
- **Relative pronouns** (who, which, where, etc.),
- **coordinating conjunctions** (and, for, but, so..., etc.), and
- **coordinating adverbs** (therefore, however, moreover, etc.).

Focus on making the paragraph flow smoothly while adding variety and complexity to your sentence structures.

Example of Fragmented Sentences:

Topic: A Day at the Science Fair

1. The students arrived at the science fair early in the morning.
2. They were excited to showcase their projects.
3. One of the projects was a robotic arm.
4. The robotic arm could lift small objects.
5. The judges were impressed by the innovative designs.

6. The winners received trophies and certificates.

Combined Paragraph:

The students arrived at the science fair early in the morning, excited to showcase their projects. One of the most impressive entries was a robotic arm, which could lift small objects with remarkable precision. The judges, who were experts in various fields of science, were impressed by the innovative designs. As a result, the winners were awarded trophies and certificates, making the event an unforgettable experience for everyone involved.

1.Social Media and Productivity

1. Many students spend hours scrolling through social media.
2. Social media platforms are designed to grab attention.
3. Some students struggle to focus on their studies.
4. They feel pressured to respond to messages and notifications.
5. Taking breaks from social media can help improve concentration.
6. Productivity apps can also help students manage their time.

2.Planning a Dream Vacation

1. Emily and her friends decided to plan a trip abroad.
2. They chose Italy because they loved its culture and history.
3. They saved money by booking flights in advance.
4. They made a list of must-visit places, including Rome and Venice.
5. They tried Italian dishes like pizza and gelato.
6. The trip created memories they would cherish forever.

Lesson 03: using subordinating conjunctions (review and practice)

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students are expected to:

- **Refine the use of subordinating conjunctions** to create complex sentences.
- Raise students' awareness of the features of a mature writing style.
- transform simple paragraphs into more sophisticated ones, incorporating subordination, relative clauses, and coordination.
- **Develop persuasive arguments** in group discussions, applying subordinating conjunctions and complex sentence structures to support and elaborate on ideas effectively.

Activity 01:

Read the two following paragraphs carefully and answer the questions below.

1. Exercise is good for your health. It helps you lose weight and stay fit. When you exercise, you feel better. It can also help you sleep well. Running and swimming are good types of exercise. Many people exercise every day because they want to be healthy. Exercise is important for everyone.
2. Regular exercise plays a vital role in maintaining overall health and well-being. Engaging in physical activities such as running or swimming not only helps individuals maintain a healthy weight but also improves cardiovascular health and strengthens muscles. Moreover, exercise triggers the release of endorphins, which enhance mood and reduce stress levels. It also contributes to better sleep quality by regulating the body's internal clock. Whether it's a daily jog or a weekend workout session, adopting an active lifestyle is essential for achieving physical fitness and emotional balance.

Questions:

- Which paragraph do you find more engaging?
- What features make the mature, complex paragraph more effective and engaging?
- Can you identify specific phrases or sentence structures in the mature paragraph that add detail or complexity?
- How could the first paragraph be improved to resemble the second one?

Activity 02:

Transform these paragraphs into a more mature and sophisticated one. Focus on combining sentences, adding details, and making the paragraph more coherent and engaging. Use subordinating conjunctions, appositive phrases, propositional phrases and modifiers to enhance the style and complexity.

1. Reading is fun. It is good for your brain. People who read learn new things. Reading helps you understand other people. Books are interesting. Some books are about adventure. Some books are about science. Reading is a good habit.
2. Exercise is good for you. It helps you stay healthy. People who exercise are strong. It keeps you fit. Exercise also helps your heart. It gives you energy. Some people run, and others do yoga. Exercise is important for everyone.

Activity 03:

➤ **Group Division:**

- The class will be divided into **three groups**:

The Opponents

The Supporters

The Jury

- Each group will be provided with the same controversial topic (e.g., Working while studying builds more life skills than academic focus alone).
- **Brainstorming and Argument Development:**

Opponents and Supporters:

- Your task is to brainstorm strong arguments **for** or **against** the given topic.
- Focus on developing complex, detailed arguments. You are encouraged to use **subordination, coordinating conjunctions, relative clauses, and modifiers** to build sophisticated sentences.
- Each argument should have at least **two supporting sentences**, one of which should include subordination or complex sentence structures.
- The more well-structured and convincing your argument, the better. Remember, your goal is to persuade the Jury!

- The **Opponents** and **Supporters** will present their arguments to the **Jury**.

- The **Jury** will evaluate the arguments based on the following criteria:

1.Complexity of Sentences: How well did the group use subordination and complex sentence structures?

2.Detail and Elaboration: Were the arguments detailed and supported with examples?

3.Coherence and Organization: How logically were the arguments structured?

- **Jury Decision:** After evaluating the arguments, the **Jury** will announce the winning team based on the strength, detail, and complexity of their arguments.

C) FAME

Look at pictures A, B, C. Each of these people obviously live a different lifestyle. Think about which lifestyle would be the best and why. Now write an essay of at least 400 words (from 10 to 15 lines) in which you convince the smartest person you know that the most important requirement for happiness is A) wealth, B) love, or C) fame. Remember that not only will a highly intelligent person judge you by the arguments you give, but also by how bright you seem to be by the evidence of intelligence you give in your style and expression in writing.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Good Luck!

Appendix 10 : Opinionnaire of the Attitudes Questionnaire**Opinionnaire**

1. Were the questions clear and easy to understand?

Yes

No

If no, please specify which questions were unclear and suggest improvements.

.....

2. Did you encounter any words or terms that were difficult to understand?

Yes

No

If yes, please list them and suggest clearer alternatives.

.....

3. Were there any repetitive questions?

Yes

No

If yes, please list them.

.....

4. Were any questions difficult to answer due to the way they were worded?

Yes

No

If yes, please list them and suggest improvements.

.....

5. Do you think the questionnaire is of appropriate length?

Yes

No

6. Are the instructions clear and easy to understand?

Yes

No

If no, please specify which part was unclear or suggest improvements.

.....

7. do you find the length of questions to be appropriate?

Yes ☐No ☐

If no, would you recommend any adjustments?

.....

.....

8. Do you find that the questionnaire layout visually appealing and well-organized?

Yes ☐No ☐

If no, what do you suggest for improvements?

.....

.....

9. Were there any sections of the questionnaire that felt redundant or unnecessary?

Yes ☐No ☐

If yes, please specify which sections and why?

.....

.....

10. Were the response options provided for each question adequate and comprehensive?

Yes ☐No ☐

If no, please specify which questions and suggest additional response options.

.....

.....

11. Do you have additional comments or feedback about the questionnaire?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

Appendix 11: Questionnaire Validation Form**The Attitudinal Questionnaire Validation Form**

I hereby certify that I have read the students' questionnaire questions in the study carried out by Omra BEN DAHMANE who is currently working on her MA dissertation at Biskra University. I have provided the researcher of the present study with remarks and comments regarding the questionnaire questions' clarity, relevance, structure and accuracy.

Background Information on the Expert:

Name:

University:

Present Occupation:

Degree:

Telephone Number:

Email Address:

Signed:

Researcher Contact Details:

Omra Ben Dahmane

Email: omrabendahmane.2001@gmail.com

Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra

Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages

Department of English Language and Literature

Appendix 12 : Attitudes Questionnaire**Post-treatment Attitudes Questionnaire**

Dear Student,

You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire, which aims to gather your opinions on the implementation of the sentence combining technique to enhance learners' written syntactic maturity. In this attitudinal questionnaire, you will find a series of questions regarding your reactions and experiences during the treatment sessions conducted by the researcher. Your responses will help us better understand how the sentence combining technique has influenced your written syntactic maturity. Please tick (✓) the appropriate box or provide full statements where necessary.

Your responses will remain strictly confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

The Researcher,

SECTION ONE: STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SENTENCE COMBINING TECHNIQUE

1. Now I pay more attention to sentence structure when writing.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

2. I have improved my understanding of how to use coordination and subordination effectively.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

3. Sentence combining exercises helped me write more complex sentences.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Please explain, how sentence combining has (or has not) helped you write more complex sentences.

.....

.....

.....

4. I prefer sentence combining over direct grammar instruction to enhance my sentence complexity.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree

☐

Strongly agree

Please specify, why do you prefer (or not prefer) sentence combining over direct grammar instruction?

.....

.....

.....

SECTION TWO: STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT AND INTEREST IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SENTENCE COMBINING TECHNIQUE

1. Sentence-combining exercises were engaging and enjoyable.

☐

Strongly disagree

☐

Disagree

☐

Neutral

☐

Agree

☐

Strongly agree

2. Sentence combining made sentence construction more interesting to learn.

☐

Strongly disagree

☐

Disagree

☐

Neutral

☐

Agree

☐

Strongly agree

Please explain, how did sentence combining make sentence construction more interesting?

.....

.....

.....

3. I felt challenged in a positive way while completing sentence-combining exercises.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

4. I felt actively involved in the learning process during sentence-combining activities.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

5. Practicing sentence combining has increased my confidence in constructing complex sentences.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

6. Did you feel that the activities included as part of the treatment practice were effective?

☐

Yes

☐

No

SECTION THREE: CHALLENGES AND FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

1. Did you see that the teacher's methodology when explaining and delivering activities was suitable?

☐

Yes

☐

No

2. Sentence combining activities should be integrated into regular writing instruction.

☐

Yes

☐

No

Please explain, why you think sentence combining should (or should not) be integrated into regular writing instruction.

.....
.....

3. What challenges did you face when solving sentence combining exercises?

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. If you have any additional suggestion (s) regarding the application of the sentence combining exercises to improve learners' sentence complexity, please write it\them in the space provided.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for your effort and collaboration!

ملخص الدراسة

تُعتبر مهارة إنتاج جمل ذات تركيب نحوي متنوع ركيزة أساسية في أي عمل كتابي مُحكم التفكير. من السمات الجوهرية لهذه المهارة هي قدرة الكاتب على إنشاء جمل معقدة، التي من خلالها يمكن إيصال أفكار متداخلة والعديد من العلاقات بينها. على الرغم من الدور المحوري الذي يلعبه النضج التركيبي في تحويل أسلوب كتابي متواضع إلى آخر أكثر تميزاً، عدد معتبر من طلاب السنة الثالثة في اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة، لوحظ لديهم إلمام غير كافٍ بالتركيب النحوي المعقد، وصياغة أنماط تركيبية قصيرة أو مُفككة إلى حدٍ ما. استناداً إلى النموذج الفكري البراغماتي، والنهج متعدد الأساليب، والتصميم المختلط المدمج، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى قياس تأثير تقنية تركيب الجمل على تطوير النضج التركيبي للطلاب، وفحص اتجاهاتهم حيال تطبيق هذه التقنية، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف العوامل التي تحول دون تطويرهم لجمل ناضجة. بغرض جمع بيانات ملائمة من 20 طالباً في اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد خيضر بسكرة، تم استخدام جلستين من مجموعات التركيز، واختبار بعدي وآخر قبلي، إلى جانب توظيف استبيان الاتجاهات. تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها استدعى الاعتماد على التحليل الموضوعي، واختبار t للعينات المترابطة، وبرنامج SPSS 23 لاستنباط المعاني عبر كلٍّ من البيانات الكمية والنوعية. كشفت النتائج عن وجود العديد من العوامل التي قد تسهم في عرقلة النضج التركيبي للطلاب، كما أظهرت أن تقنية تركيب الجمل لم تؤثر بشكل مهم على تحسين قدرة الطلاب في بناء تراكيب معقدة. على الرغم من ذلك، أفصح الطلاب عن موقف إيجابي واهتمام بارز بعد التفاعل مع تطبيقات تركيب الجمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جمل معقدة، العوامل المسببة لضعف تعقيد التراكيب النحوية، تمارين تركيب الجمل، النمو التركيبي، النضج التركيبي.