

Challenges of Short Sentence Writing Encountered by First-Year Saudi EFL Undergraduate Students

Ahmed Ibrahim Alsalami

Department of English, Faculty of Science and Arts in Qilwah
Al-Baha University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Email: A.alslamei@bu.edu.sa

Received: 10/14/2021

Accepted: 3/10/2022

Published: 3/24/2022

Abstract

This paper is set up to outline the most common challenges in writing short sentences encountered by the first-year students at the English language departments at Al-Baha University campuses. The study is considered necessary because it raises the awareness of both students and instructors to improve their sentence writing. A mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative) was used to collect the data using questionnaires and interviews. Approximately 122 students who study English as a Foreign Language (EFL), (%50.4 females and %49.6 males), together with 30 EFL instructors (15 males and 15 females) who were randomly selected. The paper addresses three questions. They are: 1) What common challenges do students face when writing short sentences?, 2) What are the most frequent challenging short sentence components among the students?, and 3) What are the differences between male and female students regarding difficulties in writing short sentences?. The study found significant challenges in constructing short sentences, distinguishing between active and passive voice, and using conjunctions, punctuation, quantifiers, and appropriate auxiliary verbs. Additionally, students encountered difficulties in building short sentences. Moreover, the study revealed that a high percentage of students have very low English writing skills practice. To overcome any obstacles and push students forward in their learning later, this study highly recommended that EFL instructors should pay more attention to the development of writing skills. Thus, extra written activities and peer assessment must be granted to students in writing short sentences. Moreover, more research should be done to explore and evaluate the most prevalent problems and barriers that first-year students encounter using written samples and paperwork.

Keywords: EFL students, first-year students, sentence structure, short sentences, writing challenges, writing skill

Cite as: Alsalami, A. I. (2022). Challenges of Short Sentence Writing Encountered by First-Year Saudi EFL Undergraduate Students. *Arab World English Journal*, 13 (1) 534-549.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no1.35>

Introduction

Out of the four essential skills that make up a language, writing is an important aspect that should be mandatory to guarantee proficiency (Brown, 2000; Ikeda, 2000). For academics, having good writing skills is a necessity. That being considered, writing in English has brought about difficulties for most Second Language Learners (SLLs) in the aspect of writing well-structured paragraphs. Students understand that writing, being productive, and having it as a skill helps one come up with well-articulated sentences and connect them in a given order. Second language learners find it challenging to develop complete sentences, considering how complex the construction of a sentence maybe for them. Because of this, they fall back towards adopting different subskills and strategies pertaining to the language in question. It should also be noted that writing is a complex procedure since the writer must move repeatedly backward and forward through their ideas and the written texts (Harris & Cunningham, 1996). A two-way interaction is established between the learner and the text, and thus, knowledge is developed as the learner comes up with written texts (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

This complexity is due to the requirement of operating a high level of language control, generating ideas, monitoring, and assessing the written production (Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Moreover, Nunan (1999) argues that production of a coherent piece of writing is an enormous challenge, especially in one's second language. It should be considered that the crucial topics that need to be discussed within the Second Language (L2) writing research include the analysis of L2 students' difficulties in writing.

According to Bryson (2020), short sentence structuring decides how the significant components are placed together, from punctuation to word order, while still adhering to simple word order laws. There are several other considerations to address when writing correctly constructed sentences. Moreover, Bryson went on to say that there have been two common grammar and sentence structure mistakes:

- a) Once incorrect punctuation is used to link different portions of a sentence, run-on sentences happen.
- b) Sentence fragments are sentences that have no elements needed to establish a comprehensive sentence that makes sense.

The truth is that learners create a list of common errors despite having functional theoretical grammatical skills and can recognize such mistakes if they are attentive enough to do so. Datchuk and Kubina (2013) concluded that it does not seem unusual when the first-year students experience difficulties in writing since their first language substantially impacts second-language learning. English has become one of the main classes and essential in university curricula (Demirezen, 2012). Students are expected to learn English compulsively in the first and second semesters in Saudi universities (mainly in preparatory year). Thus, there are issues in the structuring of English short sentences. The ambiguity in English written form by these students has created a misunderstanding in their writings (Al Fadda, 2012). A wrongly written sentence makes a misinterpretation of the intended message that is to be conveyed. Therefore, this study is very significant in adhering and improving the writing performance of students, and helps instructors to be aware of the common errors that occur in students' writings.

This study aims to outline and investigate common writing problems associated with short sentence construction for the first-year English-major undergraduate students. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to increase instructors' awareness of students' challenges in writing well-structured sentences. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- 1) *What common challenges do students face when writing short sentences?*
- 2) *What are the most frequent challenging short sentence components among the students?*
- 3) *What are the differences between male and female students regarding difficulties in writing short sentences?*

Literature Review

Previous Studies Addressing Challenges in Sentence Construction

Ahmed (2010) investigated the institutional issues that Egyptian students face when writing in English. Excessive usage of coordinate sentences and misapplication of topic sentences are examples of these issues. According to the findings of this study, "Egyptian students struggle with the use of cataphoric and anaphoric references, ellipsis, substitution, and genre-related organizational ties" (p. 213). Lack of drive, self-confidence, and writing nervousness are also issued for Egyptian ESL students. Additionally, Yemez and Dikilitaş (2022) researched the difficulties that Arab students face when writing a well-developed paragraph in English. He mentioned that individuals should fill the gap between these challenges such as content quality, organization, intent, audience, and vocabulary. Moreover, Yemez & Dikilitaş (2022) discovered that students write clauses that do not adhere to the punctuation and sentence structures. According to the researcher, simple, compound, and complex sentences present another challenge for ESL learners. Demirezen (2012) investigated the frameworks that cause problems in simple sentences for Turkish university students. The researcher has explained the fundamental elements of a simple sentence and its various patterns. As per the research, a simple extended sentence, defined as double or triple structures in subjects, verbs, and objects, is a source of difficulty for Turkish students. According to the research scientist, double predicates in a simple sentence also confuse students. The primary emphasis of this research is on the neglected and underutilized structures known as simple sentences with extended phrasal elements, as defined by the researcher.

Sentence Structure

Sentence structure governs how various segments of a sentence are placed together from punctuation to word order. In addition to upholding simple word order guidelines, there are several other factors to consider when writing accurately and precisely constructed sentences (Malaca-Sistoza, 2016). Alduais (2012) stated that there had been two prevalent sentence construction errors. First, run-on sentences are formed by using incorrect exclamation marks to connect various sections of a sentence. The second issue is sentence fragments, which lack the required components to create a complete, coherent sentence. According to Al-Seghayer (2014), sentence form is influenced by more than just grammar; it is also influenced by style and rhythm. Several sentence lengths and structures are used in effective academic writing. Excessive long sentences can be frustrating for readers, but too many concise sentences can render the text sound choppy and incoherent.

Run-on Sentences

Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) defined an independent clause as a string of words that can stand alone to function as a complete sentence and is associated with several methods. However, run-on sentences come into view as they are associated and missing correct punctuation. Thus, they occur due to grammatical errors rather than length; short sentences are involved too (Gundel, 1981; Tauguchi, 2006).

Sentence Fragments

In Adewusi's study (2021), a fragment sentence is described as a collection of words that do not have all the components that compose grammatically correct sentence. A subject and a predicate are two primary components that comprise a string of words to create a sentence. Murray and Karcher (2000) suggest that even though sentence fragments are primarily used in style by journalists for creative writing, they seldom apply in sentence construction in academic or any other form of formal writing. Below are examples of issues with sentence fragments.

Missing Predicate

According to Yemez and Dikilitaş (2022), a typical simple example of a sentence fragment is when a sentence has no main verb. Noun phrases are not like a sentence to be grammatically correct, thus it requires a predicate. For example:

After they received the delivery, they became satisfied. A long day of waiting.

Dependent Clause

According to Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016), even though a dependent clause does not fully express a comprehensive idea, it typically contains subject and predicate. However, when added to an independent clause, it can be considered as a complete sentence. Subordinating conjunctions like 'when, after, because, while, since, if, or although' are used to form dependent clauses, but when they were found at the beginning, then the clause will change to a dependent clause (Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson, & Reddy; 2006).

Misuse of Present Participle

A present participle is known as a type of verb that ends in 'ing' form (e.g., stretching, walking, and eating). However, there are instances where present/past is used instead (Hameed, 2016). A progressive verb can show no grammatical coherence, as is shown before a predicate.

Split up Overly Long Sentences

According to Chambers and Yunus (2017), there are instances whereby a long sentence meets the grammar requirements. However, its length is hard to follow. To achieve a more straightforward and easy-to-read sentence, there is a need to avoid overly long sentences. Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010) suggest that sentence length is considered correct if it carries fifteen to twenty-five words. An excess of over 30 words in a sentence makes a sentence long and ambiguous thus needs revising.

Linking Together Overly Short Sentences

Having short sentences is good since they are more transparent and more readable. However, excessive short sentences can make the written work appear choppy, disjointed, and repetitive (Bryson, 2021). For example:

Incorrect: *The assignment was marked on the first day. The results were also out within a week. The results were posted at 12 noon. This will be done for all quizzes.*

Correct: *The assignment was marked on the first day, the results released within a week, and posted at 12 noon. This will be done for all quizzes.*

Writing Problems within Saudi Context

Previous researches have been conducted on the Saudi students, who studied English as a major subject, investigating writing difficulties encountered by them. Among them, some researchers concluded writing strategies, while others analyzed the common errors committed by learners.

A study was carried out by Al-Khairi (2013) concluded that students showed some weakness in writing skills, mainly at the sentence level. This study was conducted to investigate problems that Saudi EFL learners at Al-Taif University faced. The study collected the point of view Al-Taif University population (both instructors/faculty members and students). To collect his data Al-Khairi (2013) used interviews and questionnaires. His recommendations offered suggestions including diagnosis of the students' writing issues from the beginning of their university study.

Within the same Saudi context (Tabuk University), another study was done by Bani Younes and Albalawi (2015) in which they discussed common problems that faced female students who were studying in English Language and Translation Department. Collected data was achieved through the use of writing documents and questionnaires. The findings indicated that the issues found fell under three categories. The first was grammatical errors (specifically tenses, prepositions, syntax, subject-verb agreement), and how to utilize articles in sentence structure. The second category is punctuation issues whereby they were not applied where needed, misused, or added where they are not required. The third category was spelling in terms of omission, substitution, disordering, addition, unrecognizable words, and segmentation.

A study conducted by Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) focused on probing the difficulties that students at Najran University had in skills of writing. The collected data was achieved using questionnaires and analyzing writing examples of the participants. It performed an analysis of 50 students in the preparatory year program. The main focus was on capitalization, punctuation, use of language, grammar and spelling. The study revealed that students mostly memorized the answer paragraphs during exams instead of reading and applied what they had learned as they answered each question. The remedial measures offered by the study included the use of learner-centered teaching techniques, including the demand of students to write more descriptive paragraphs, especially on the topics they preferred.

A study in 2017 by Alhaisoni, Gaudel and Al-Zuoud did research on the issues of article use of Ha'il University students in Saudi Arabia. The sample for the study was made up of

preparatory year students. The collected data was achieved by using written samples from 150 students. The participants were obligated to write descriptive paragraphs on one of four topics. An analysis of the written samples showed that students tended to eliminate the definite, including indefinite articles, insert unnecessary articles or substitute the articles with each other. Moreover, the article elimination was a frequent issue that affected the students.

Methods

This study was conducted using descriptive statistics and utilizing the frequency technique to determine the common challenges of writing short sentences encountered by the first-year English-major undergraduate students. The study began at the second term of the academic year 2021. A 25-item questionnaire was used to collect data from students. Concurrently, from a qualitative research point of view, interviews were conducted with 30 instructors within the English language departments at Al-Baha University to determine the awareness of the issues faced by students in the construction of short sentences. The instruments (questionnaire and interviews) were dispatched to the participants 15 days before the end of the second term to ensure that students learnt and acquired all writing skills practice that assist to write well-structured sentences. The feedback of the participants was received by the end of the second term of the academic year 2021.

It is worth mentioning that there are five different English departments in Al-Baha University, as the University comprises five branches located in five different localities.

Participants

The population includes all first-year English-major undergraduate students in Al-Baha University colleges. For more generalization of the results, the probability (random) sampling method was used. The study sample was consisted of 30 instructors from the English language departments and 122 first-year English-major undergraduate students from the English language departments at Al-Baha University campuses. Among them, 62 were females (%50.8), whereas 60 were males (%49.2). All students were chosen from the first-year English-major undergraduate students from the English language departments.

Table 1. *Distribution of study sample (Students)*

	Gender	Total	percent
First-Year Students	Male	60	49.2
	Female	62	50.8
	Total	122	100%

Table 2. *Distribution of study sample (Instructors)*

	Gender	Total	percent
English Department Instructors	Male	15	50%
	Female	15	50%
	Total	30	100%

Research Instruments

In this study, data collection was done using an online questionnaire for the 122 study participants and interview questions answered by 30 instructors within the English Departments of Al-Baha University. The online questionnaire (contains 25 items) was intended to collect data regarding the difficulties in constructing short sentences among the first-year students in English

department. There were 25 questions to be answered based on five-Likert-scale coded: Strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree (see Appendix A).

The questions were tailored to determine the challenges that the first-year English-major students face in constructing short sentences. A five-Likert scale was used to assess the degree of agreement; in percentage, students had with each question posed from 'strongly agree,' 'agree,' 'disagree,' 'Strongly disagree,' with neutral choice coded 'Not sure.'

Table 3. *Correlation between learning practices and student attitudes towards structuring short sentences*

	Sentence Structure	Achievement Test
Pearson Correlation	1	.078*
Sig (2-tailed)		.058**
N	600	600

*. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table three above shows that the correlation coefficient between learning habits and sentence structure is negative and not significant. This means that the correlation is not statistically valid. It also demonstrates that the students' attitudes and success in learning the construction of short sentence structure through literature are highly correlated. Their language proficiency is unsatisfactory, indicating that they have not demonstrated exceptional results.

Analysis and Findings

Findings from the student questionnaire

The explanatory variables for this can be emphasized by the reality that while students have been educated on constructing sentence structure via literature, they cannot create their forms or any technique for grasping them. Furthermore, instructors should not allow students to research with their peer groups to generate ideas, improving their ability to produce grammatically correct structures. Above all, the program does not encourage the driving factors associated with creating sentence structures, such as evaluation, reasoning, discovery, creativity, awareness, and comprehensive systems.

Table 4. *Independent t-test based on first-year students and level of university education*

Variable		Mean	SD
Sentence Structure	First-Year Students	Male (N=60)	41.13
		Female (N=62)	53.15
	University Education	1 st Year (N=122)	64.38

An Independent-Samples T-Test was used to investigate the correlation between difficulties in short sentence structure and university education level and the first-year students. The first independent-samples T analysis was conducted on the mean score of the sentence structure and the first-year students' attitudes to measure the hypotheses between university education levels and their challenges in learning sentence structure via literary works. According to Table four, the gap in mean scores between the first-year students is very high, i.e., 53.15. It demonstrates that the first-year students do not outperform the other students in different levels of university education in learning short sentence structure courses.

Table four indicates that the mean score and standard deviation vary so little depending on the parameters and learners in the English department. This means that this research demonstrates no association regarding student gender and their understanding of short sentence structure through literary works. The mean score between variables and level of university education differs by 17.62 points.

There was a disagreement about various questions. Considering that most students learn English as a foreign language (EFL), about 69.6 percent agreed that there was no substantial vocabulary that could help them writing short sentences. About 74.5 percent of the students disagreed that there are no sufficient homework exercises for the first-year students majoring in English. Meanwhile, 46.7 percent of the students disagreed that instructors do not encourage the first-year English-major students to practice written English effectively and constantly. Moreover, it appears that 42.6 percent of the students disagreed that students who major in English are not motivated to practice written English to improve the construction of short sentences. Concurrently, 37.7 percent of the students majoring in English are not provided with appropriate curricula for learning short sentence construction. Lastly, 41.9 percent of the first-year students majoring in English are good in written English, writing skills, and sentence construction (see Appendix A).

Table 5. *Results of the independent sample t-test (first-year students and level of university education)*

Achievement Test		Mean	SD	Std. E.M.	TValue	Sig.	E Size
First-Year Students	Male (N=60)	41.13	29.21	1.56	-5.832	.000	.228
	Female (N=62)	53.15	31.25	2.09			
University Education	1 st Year (N=122)	64.38	46.13	2.31	.639	.000	.319

Table four indicates that female students' mean score (53.15) is substantially higher than that of male students (41.13). The explanation for this disparity is self-evident: female students take their responsibilities more seriously than male students. Table five shows a slight gap in the mean score of the first-year students and other learners at different university levels of education. The mean achievement test score for all first-year English students is 64.38. The variation in the t-value between the achievement test and the degree of university education is shown in Table five.

Students were not aware of how to answer specific questions, such as English-major students were not obtaining the necessary writing techniques for constructing the short sentences in the classrooms, which accounted for 20.5 percent of the students, as well as 20.5 percent out of students were unsure if the English department focuses more on spoken English but not written. Additionally, 23.8 percent of the students were unsure whether instructors always express their satisfaction with the first-year students' standard in writing short sentences and writing skills. While 18.9 percent of the students were unsure if there are no suitable lessons for teaching and writing skills for students majoring in English (see Appendix A).

About 86.9 percent of the students agreed that there is a need for improvement on how students majoring in English are taught accuracy in the basics of writing skills. This was the most challenging issue contributing to students having a problem constructing short sentence parts, including grammar concepts (see Appendix A).

Another issue raised was that 77 percent of students who were majoring in English had difficulty using irregular verbs in sentence construction correctly. Moreover, 64.8 percent of students had difficulties using conjunctions properly. Additionally, 65.5 percent of the students who were majoring in English had difficulty using punctuation marks such comma (,), semi-colon (;), colon (:), and apostrophe ('), with 73.7 percent of the students having difficulty in constructing passive sentences. Also, 68.8 percent of students had difficulty using irregular plural nouns in sentence construction correctly (see Appendix A).

Findings from the interviews

The second instrument in this study was the interview. Consistent with the same results concluded from the questionnaire (see Appendix A), the instructors agreed that the first-year English department students were below average in writing skills. Instructors were advised to be aware of this situation and help solve these common mistakes. They revealed that students had no general understanding of a sentence and were unaware of what a complete sentence is. They added that students are still unable to identify the components of a sentence. Sometimes they confuse sentences in English and Arabic, mainly when they write sentences without verbs. They mentioned that students seem to apply the 'negative transfer' concepts of SLA using the sentence structure in Arabic, which allows a nominal sentence, into English. Students have some difficulties in English vocabulary, so they should increase their language by practicing them while writing English. Moreover, they advised that students should pay attention to the tense, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling.

Considering students confusion about the sentence structure, instructors believed that the students were not able to write good conjunctions and punctuation marks. Many students use a lot of 'and' so that they also seem to depend on the Arabic grammatical rules. Looking back at the questionnaire analysis (item 22), the students also expressed frequent errors or mistakes of punctuation and conjunctions, especially adversative, temporal, and causal conjunctions. They are more familiar with additive conjunctions (and, but). Even though they know how to use these two critical sub-skills of writing, many students cannot apply conjunctions and punctuation marks when writing short sentences in a paragraph. Another issue highlighted is that to a certain extent students have relevant information about using active voice, but have many difficulties in applying the passive voice. Passive voice is generally avoided by most students when writing sentences. The students also had obstacles in using irregular verbs and nouns in sentence construction.

The first-year students use pronouns, but they confuse them, especially the objective and the possessive ones. All students have no difficulties using first-person pronouns, but many of them encounter challenges in writing possessive adjectives and reflexive pronouns. As observed, students showed weakness in the subject and object pronouns and using the types of pronouns by the first-year students. There is almost unanimity among participants that female students are better than male somewhat, in terms of vocabulary, diversity in the use of conjunctions, and

seriousness in developing English writing skills, and this is a strong prove as an evident in their written works compared with male students' ones. All these issues presented were used as the baseline results for a discussion on the right way to assist them in constructing correct short sentences.

According to instructors' responses, the following are common issues that students encounter when they construct short sentences:

- Categories in general, punctuations and capitalizations
- Using the correct auxiliary.
- Using quantifiers countable and uncountable nouns and adjectives with them like little, much, more, few, a lot of, less, many, etc.
- Comparative and superlative degrees
- Pronoun Disagreement.

Discussion

The above results showed the common challenges students face while constructing short sentences. The most challenging aspect for novice writers in English is a verb in the sentence. Students also find it challenging to understand the difference between 'is' and 'are' as main and helping verbs. For most of them, these verbs cannot be main verbs. The most difficult challenge can be concluded in tense, number, pronoun, preposition, capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement. This finding is in agreement with (Yemez and Dikilitaş, 2022). Students' other problems include the frequent application of the mother-tongue structure, lack of vocabulary knowledge, insufficient knowledge of grammar and weak in writing practice which are examples of the common writing challenges, the same difficulties were found in previous studies done by (Ahmed, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Instructors assured the importance of sitting down and discussing students' mistakes to help them figure out where exactly they lack writing skills and highlight the differences between English and Arabic concerning sentence structure (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Bryson, 2020; Yemez & Dikilitaş, 2022). The most helpful strategy is error correction to improve their level efficiently and effectively. Generally, when teaching writing skills, instructors must avoid any complexity and try to help learners express their ideas in straightforward ways. So, it is better to apply every strategy that pays attention to more practice through copying, dictation, words/sentences re-ordering, sentence completion, and other available simple techniques and integrated method (Alhaisoni, et al. 2017).

Based on the circumstances, each person has a dominant learning style. Indeed, there are a maximum of eight types: aural learners, visual learners, verbal learners, and so on (Somji, 2018). Instructors should encourage students to give examples imitating the ones provided by their instructor, arrange the separated parts of the grammatically correct short sentence, and deconstruct the correct short sentence into its components (Tauguchi, 2006). Lastly, unexpectedly, the study found that female students scored higher than male students. The reason seems to be because of the ability of female students to handle any task more seriously than male students do (Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2015).

In a broad sense, the study discovered that almost in every English Language Departments, students had very low-level skill practice of English writing skills. Consistent with

findings concluded by other researchers on Saudi context, as in (Al-Khairy, 2013; Bani Younes & Albalawi, 2015), this appears to imply that both male and female students have little or no fundamental English language writing skills. As a result, this study strongly recommends that EFL instructors of the first-year students enrolled pay further emphasis on the development of writing skills. This would almost undoubtedly lead to the students trying to overcome any difficulties they may experience and would almost surely propel them towards their education at the English department later.

Interestingly, the instructors' responses to the interview and the students' responses to the questionnaire were identical to a large extent, in terms of difficulties of short sentence writing faced by the first-year EFL undergraduate students. Such outcomes seem to prove that students did not obtain sufficient writing skills practice, whether in pre-university level or after joining the English language departments at the University. Thus, more practice of writing short sentences would be beneficial to students in their later stages of the English language program.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, this study aims to identify the major obstacles in composing short sentences experienced by 1st-year English-major undergraduate students in the English language departments and to increase EFL instructors' awareness of students' challenges in writing well-structured sentences. Thus, after carefully studying the data, it was found that students' writing skills were below average (i.e., they were unable to identify the components of a sentence). Concurrently, female students in the English department were found to do better than male students, unexpectedly due to their self-evident (i.e., female students take their responsibilities more seriously than male students). Therefore, it is the instructors' duty to highlight this situation and help them solve these common mistakes. Additionally, students showed a negative transfer of concepts of SLA using the sentence structure in Arabic besides their difficulties in English vocabulary. So, it is better to pay attention to English tenses, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. Moreover, it is found that students were not able to write good conjunctions and punctuation marks. Besides students were found to be unable to differentiate between active and passive sentences and had difficulties in using irregular verbs and nouns in sentence construction. These difficulties can be attributed to the mother-tongue structure, lack of vocabulary knowledge, and insufficient understanding of grammar. Thus, this study highly supports the use of error correction strategy to improve the sentence writing level efficiently and effectively.

About the Author:

Ahmed Ibrahim Alsalam is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at the department of English, Faculty of science and Arts in Qilwah, Al-Baha University in Saudi Arabia. He obtained his BA in English language from King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia, MA (Applied Linguistics) from The University of Newcastle, Australia, and his Ph.D. (Applied Linguistics) from University of Western Sydney, Australia. He is currently The Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, and The Head of English Language Department. His interests include EFL, ESP, SL Writing, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. **ORCID ID:** 0000-0002-0989-3752

References

- Adewusi, D. (2021). *Learn Everything about Sentence Fragments*. Scientific Editing. Retrieved from <https://www.scientific-editing.info/blog/sentence-fragments/>
- Ahmed, A. (2010). Students' Problems with Cohesion and Coherence in EFL Essay Writing in Egypt: Different Perspectives. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, 1(4), 211-221.
- Alhaisoni, E., Ram Gaudel, D., & M. Al-Zuoud, K. (2017). Article Errors in the English Writing of Saudi EFL Preparatory Year Students. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(1), 72-78. Doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.72>
- Alduais, A. M. S. (2012). Simple sentence structure of standard Arabic language and standard English language: A contrastive study. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(4), 500-524. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i1.2621>
- Al-Fadda, H. (2012). Difficulties in academic writing: From the perspective of King Saud university postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3), 123-130. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n3p123>
- Al-Khasawneh, F., & Maher, S. (2010). Writing for Academic Purposes: Problems Faced by Arab Postgraduate Students of the College of Business, UUM. *ESP World*, 9(2), 1-23. Available at <http://www.esp-world.infor>
- Al-Khairy, M. A. (2013). Saudi English-Major Undergraduates' Academic Writing Problems: A Taif University Perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 6(6), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n6p1>
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2014). The four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(5), 17-26. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v4n5p17>
- Bani Younes, Z., & Albalawi, F., (2015). Exploring the Most Common Types of Writing Problems Among English Language and Translation Major Sophomore Female Students at Tabuk University. *Asian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 3(2) 7-26.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1987). *The psychology of written composition*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brown San, H. D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th ed., Vol. xi). Pearson Education, Inc All.
- Bryson, S. (2020). *How to write effective headings*. Scriber. Available at <https://www.scribbr.com/author/shane/>
- Bryson, S. (2020). *How to Improve Your Sentence Structure: Avoid Common Errors*. Scriber. Retrieved from <https://www.scribbr.com/author/shane/>
- Chambers, G. J., & Yunus, M. M. (2017). Enhancing Learners' Sentence Constructions via "Wheel of Grammar". *Pertanika Journals Social Sciences & Humanities*, 25(4), 1641-1650
- Datchuk, S. M., & Kubina, R. M. (2013). A Review of Teaching Sentence-Level Writing Skills to Students with Writing Difficulties and Learning Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 34(3), 180-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932512448254>
- Demirezen, M. (2012). An Analysis of Problem-Causing Structures of Simple Sentences for Turkish University Students. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(3), 136-146. URL: http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_2_No_3_February_2012/19.pdf

- Elander, J., Harrington, K., Norton, L., Robinson, H., & Reddy, P. (2006). Complex Skills and Academic Writing: A Review of Evidence About the Types of Learning Required to Meet Core Assessment Criteria. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31, 71-90. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930500262379>
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., & Bilal, M. (2016). ESL Learners' Writing Skills: Problems, Factors and Suggestions. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4, 81-92. <https://doi.org/10.20547/jess0421604201>
- Gundel, J. K. (1981). Syntactic Argumentation and the Structure of English. Scott Soames and David M. Perlmutter. Pp. 602. University of California Press, 1979. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 15(1), 36-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/007542428101500108>
- Harris, J. G., & Cunningham, D. H. (1996). *Simon & Schuster Guide to Writing: Full Edition* (2nd ed.). Prentice Hall College Div.
- Hameed, P. F. M. (2016). A study of the spelling errors committed by students of English in Saudi Arabia: Exploration and remedial measures. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(1), 203-207. Doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.1p.203
- Ikeda, E. (2000). *Discourse and Context in Language Teaching: A Guide for Language Teachers* by Marianne Celce-Murcia and Elite Olshtain. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, viii+279 pp. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 11(2). 277-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/L4112005031>
- Malaca-Sistoza, J. (2016). English sentence construction ability of the students of Cagayan State University at Gonzaga, Cagayan. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, 5(6), 544-554.
- Mohammad, T., & Hazarika, Z. (2016). Difficulties of learning EFL in KSA: Writing skills in context. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 6(3), 105-117. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v6n3p105>
- Murray, L. L., & Karcher, L. (2000). A treatment for written verb retrieval and sentence construction skills. *Aphasiology*, 14(5-6), 585-602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026870300401333>
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching & learning*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Saddler, B. (2007). Improving sentence construction skills through sentence-combining practice. In S. Graham, C. A. MaCarthur, & J. Fitzgerald (Eds.), *Best practices in writing instruction* (pp. 163-178). Guilford Press.
- Somji, R. (2018). *Teaching Strategies for the 8 Different Learning Styles*. VirtualSpeech. Retrieved from <https://virtualspeech.com/blog/teaching-strategies-different-learning-styles>
- Tauguchi, H. L. (2006). Deconstructing and reconceptualizing academic writing towards a more 'just' teacher education. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/hp/Desktop/Difficulties%20in%20Academic%20Writing.pdf>
- Ur Rahman, M. M., & Alhaisoni, E. (2013). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia: prospects and challenges. *Academic Research International*, 4(1), 112-118.
- Yemez, N., & Dikilitaş, K. (2022). Development of verbal creativity by bilingual and English as foreign language learners in kindergarten to 8th grade schools. *Creativity Studies*, 15(1), 25-39. <https://doi.org/10.3846/cs.2022.12603>

Appendices

Appendix A

Students Questionnaire with responses (percentages).

Please choose the best describes your opinion about the following. Please, write 1=Strongly agree; 2=agree; 3=Not sure; 4=Disagree; or 5=Strongly disagree.

No.	Questionnaire Items	1	2	3	4	5
	Percentage	%	%	%	%	%
1	Students majoring in English are not provided with appropriate curricula for learning short sentence construction in the first year.	23	22.1	26.2	11.5	17.2
2	In the first year, English-major students do not obtain the necessary writing techniques for the construction of the short sentences in the classrooms.	15.6	32	22.1	9.8	20.5
3	In the first year, English-major students are not aware of what are the parts of a sentence.	17.2	31.1	27.9	10.7	13.1
4	In the first year, English-major students have no adequate vocabulary helping the students in writing many short sentences.	35.2	34.4	18.9	8.2	3.3
5	There are no sufficient homework exercises are given to first-year students majoring in English.	7.4	10.6	41.8	33.6	6.6
6	In the first year, the English-major students are not given enough time to exercise writing in the classrooms.	19.7	27.9	25.4	9	18
7	Instructors do not encourage the first-year English-major students to practice written English effectively and constantly.	18.9	24.6	24.6	22.1	9.8
8	In the first year, Students-major in English do not have any motivation for practicing written English to improve the construction of short sentences.	14.8	27	34.4	8.2	15.6
9	In the first year, the English department focuses more on spoken English but not written.	22.1	30.3	18	9	20.5
10	In the first year, there are no sufficient lessons for teaching written English and writing skills for students majoring in English.	21.3	27	24.6	8.2	18.9
11	In the first year in the English department, Instructors do not insist on checking and correcting sentence construction in the exercises and assignments.	9.8	25.4	26.2	27	11.5
12	There is a need for improvement on how students majoring in English are taught accuracy in the basics of writing skills.	50	36.9	3.3	3.3	6.6
13	Instructors focus on ensuring students' complete taught lessons, but not the necessity and importance of mastering sentence construction.	20.5	34.4	22.1	9.8	13.1

14	In the first year, English-major students are well taught and are aware of the basics of sentence construction.	13.9	35.2	19.7	14.8	16.4
15	In the first year, students majoring in English are given enough units of teaching that offer lessons on sentence structure.	18.9	38.5	23	7.4	12.3
16	In the first year, students majoring in English are good in written English, writing skills, and construction of a sentence.	13.1	28.7	23	18.9	16.4
17	In the first year, instructors focus on discussing and correcting grammar and sentence construction mistakes with them.	27	36.1	13.9	10.7	12.3
18	Students are given more written feedback as well as written exercises to be able to write more effective short sentences.	16.4	36.1	22.1	9	16.4
19	Instructors always express their satisfaction with the first-year students' standard in writing short sentences and writing skills.	19.7	26.2	23.8	6.6	23.8
20	In the first year, students-major in English have difficulty using irregular verbs in sentences construction correctly.	43.4	33.6	6.6	4.9	11.5
21	In the first year, English majoring students have difficulty using irregular plural nouns in sentences construction correctly.	35.2	33.6	13.9	3.3	13.9
22	In the first year, English majoring students have difficulty using conjunctions in sentences construction properly.	24.6	40.2	13.9	4.9	16.4
23	In the first year, English majoring students have difficulty in constructing passive sentences.	35.2	38.5	10.7	4.1	11.5
24	In the first year, students-major in English have difficulty in using punctuation marks such as comma (,), semi-colon (;), colon (:), apostrophe ('), etc.	31.1	34.4	14.8	6.6	13.1
25	In the first year, students-major in English have difficulty identifying parts of speech in sentences such as adverb, adjective, verb, noun, preposition, etc.	27.9	33.6	19.7	6.6	12.3

Appendix B Structured Interviews Questions

As you have been teaching writing courses in the English language department, you are kindly invited to participate in a research study titled "*Challenges of Short Sentence Writing Encountered by First-Year Saudi EFL Undergraduate Students*".

The purpose of this study is to specify and investigate common writing problems related to short sentence structure among first-year English students. The study also aims to increase instructors' awareness of the challenges students face in writing well-structured sentences.

Your answers will be anonymous and will never be linked to you personally. The questions will take approximately 25 minutes to be answered.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and support.

• **Biographical Information**

Name (Optional):	
Academic Rank:	
College:	
Gender:	
Underline/Circle which section have you been teaching?	(Boys' section – Girls' section or Both sections)

• **The interview questions.** Please provide your point of view about the following:

How fluent are your first-year English department students in written English?

Answer: _____

Are the EFL students able to define or explain the meaning of a short sentence?

Answer: _____

To what extent are the EFL students able to identify the parts of a short sentence?

Answer: _____

To what extent are the EFL students able to construct a short sentence in correct written English?

Answer: _____

To what extent are first-year EFL students aware of the proper use of conjunctions and punctuation marks as well as their application in their short sentences?

Answer: _____

To what extent are first-year EFL students able to correctly identify and apply active and passive voices in short sentences?

Answer: _____

To what extent are first-year EFL students able to use pronouns accurately such as object, possessive, reflexive pronouns, and possessive adjectives and follow the necessary rules of using pronouns in their short sentences?

Answer: _____

What teaching method or strategy do you think is most preferable for teaching constructing grammatically correct short sentences?

Answer: _____

What common challenges do your EFL students face while constructing short sentences?

Answer: _____

Are there any significant differences between male and female students concerning difficulties in writing short sentences? If yes, please mention them in detail.

Answer: _____

I would be very grateful if you could provide me with some short sentences from your students' work; preferably short sentences including some common mistakes. (Kindly, list a sample of your students' work below or alternatively email it to me).

Thank you for your valuable contribution