



Sentence Structure Utilization in English Academic Writing Courses of Students in ELESP (*Pemanfaatan Struktur Kalimat dalam Mata Kuliah Penulisan English Academic Writing oleh Mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 1 September 2025 Revised: 18 September 2025 Accepted: 19 September 2025 Keywords: Sentence Structure Sentence Problem Academic Writing ELESP Students Kata Kunci: Suktur kalimat Masalah Kalimat Akademik Penulisan ELESP Mahasiswa	This study investigates the Sentence structure utilization in English academic writing courses of students in ELESP. This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative method with a cross-sectional design to describe the sentence structure utilization between students from the 2020 and 2021 academic years. The results convey that students' command of sentence structures exhibits both promising aspects and areas requiring substantial improvement. The most prominent pattern observed is the heavy reliance on simple and compound sentences in academic writing tasks. Furthermore, the study has uncovered a significant correlation between sentence structure variety and sentence structure problems in their academic writing. However, many students tend to fall back on familiar patterns, resulting in monotonous writing that fails to effectively capture the nuances of academic argumentation. The findings reveal that students of both academic years could construct sentences, but were only able to compose simple and compound sentences when compiling their writing assignments. Therefore, this study provides pedagogical implications for academic writing students, underscores the development of students' sentence structure competency, and the learning process to facilitate the students with the proper educational resources. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji pemanfaatan struktur kalimat dalam mata kuliah English Academic Writing oleh mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (ELESP). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan desain potong lintang (cross-sectional) untuk menggambarkan penggunaan struktur kalimat di antara mahasiswa angkatan 2020 dan 2021. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguasaan struktur kalimat oleh mahasiswa mencerminkan aspek-aspek yang menjanjikan, namun juga terdapat sejumlah area yang memerlukan peningkatan signifikan. Pola yang paling dominan adalah ketergantungan yang tinggi pada penggunaan kalimat sederhana dan kalimat majemuk dalam tugas-tugas penulisan akademik. Selain itu, penelitian ini menemukan adanya korelasi yang signifikan antara variasi struktur kalimat dan permasalahan struktur kalimat dalam penulisan akademik mahasiswa. Banyak mahasiswa cenderung kembali menggunakan pola kalimat yang sudah mereka ketahui, sehingga menghasilkan tulisan yang monoton dan kurang mampu merepresentasikan kompleksitas serta nuansa dalam argumentasi akademik secara efektif. Temuan penelitian juga mengungkap bahwa mahasiswa dari kedua angkatan umumnya hanya mampu membentuk

kalimat sederhana dan majemuk dalam menyusun tugas-tugas tulisan akademik mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini memberikan implikasi pedagogis bagi pembelajaran penulisan akademik, menekankan pentingnya pengembangan kompetensi struktur kalimat mahasiswa, serta perlu proses pembelajaran yang didukung dengan sumber daya edukatif yang memadai.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Utilization of English sentence structures in writing, particularly in academic settings, is sometimes regarded as a challenge for English as a foreign language (EFL) students (Putra, 2021). Sentence structure, which refers to the organization of words into phrases and clauses to convey meaning, is a fundamental aspect of language that can significantly impact communication effectiveness (Lado, 2014). English sentence structures, an important element of language, have a substantial impact on communication efficacy, particularly in educational environments and among English as a foreign language (EFL) students. The organization of words into phrases and clauses is a barrier when attempting to utilize these structures effectively.

In EFL contexts, learners may struggle to produce grammatically correct sentences due to differences in their native language's sentence structure or limited exposure to English sentence structures (Abdu & Navaratnam, 2011). Furthermore, the relationship between sentence structure and language proficiency is complex, with research suggesting that sentence structure can influence not only language production but also comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Nikroo, 2010). Understanding the relationship between sentence structure and EFL learners' language abilities is crucial for developing effective language instruction and materials that cater to learners' diverse needs (Hung, 2023). It involves recognizing the importance of sentence structures, their impact on language proficiency, the role of explicit instruction, and the use of effective strategies to enhance acquisition. By mastering diverse sentence structures, learners can improve their fluency, comprehension, and overall language abilities.

Academic writing is a fundamental component of this program, particularly in the English Language Education Study Programme, as it reflects students' understanding of the language and their ability to engage critically with academic discourse. Research indicates that students in ELESPP often face challenges in their academic writing, particularly in mastering sentence structures, which are crucial for clarity and coherence in their written work (Kyle & Crossley, 2018; Abdullah et al., 2019). The complexity of academic writing requires students to navigate various linguistic features, including syntax, grammar, and the organization of ideas, which can be daunting for many learners (Mallillin et al., 2023). In academic writing, there are also several problems. Dunleavy (2003) describes some problems in academic writing, such as the problem of constructing sentence structure. Moreover, sentence structure problems can be assumed as unsuccessful attempts to present ideas or content through sentences. The utilization of sentence structure in English academic writing is a crucial aspect of effective communication in academic settings (Yu, 2021). Students need to understand and master various sentence structures to convey their ideas clearly and persuasively (Traga Philippakos, 2019). As they said, the ability to construct sentences that are grammatically correct, logically organized, and stylistically engaging is vital for academic writing, as it enables writers to convey complex ideas and arguments clearly and concisely.

Radford (2009) state that in the context of English language education, the utilization of sentence structure is a fundamental skill that students must develop to succeed in academic writing. The major's curriculum must emphasize the use of sentence structures in academic writing, highlighting the need for students to understand and apply a variety of sentence structures to convey their ideas effectively (Hung, 2023). For instance, a study by Hyland (2004) found that sentence structure plays a significant role in the clarity and coherence of academic writing, and that students who are able to use a variety of sentence structures are better equipped to convey their ideas effectively.

Effective sentence structure is essential for creating a cohesive and logical flow of ideas, which is critical for academic writing. As noted by Yu (2021), academic writing is a crucial aspect of higher

education, and effective writing skills are essential for students to communicate their ideas and research findings clearly and concisely. Sentence structure is a fundamental component of academic writing, as it directly impacts the clarity, coherence, and overall quality of written work. Research has consistently shown that sentence structure plays a significant role in enhancing the readability and comprehension of academic texts.

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of sentence structure in conveying complex ideas and arguments clearly and concisely. Purnomoadjie and Mulyadi (2019) analyze the syntactical structure of two Adele songs using tree diagrams, identifying sixty sentence structures with some nonstandard English words present. The research aims to enhance understanding of syntax, particularly in songs, and provides references for further reading. Additionally, the study uses traditional syntactical theories to analyze word classes, phrase structures, and clause structures in the songs. Furthermore, Putrayasa et al. (2018) revealed a diverse use of simple and compound sentence structures, indicating a proficient level of language ability. The importance of paying attention to sentence structure for effective communication was emphasized. Similarly, Suhendra et al. (2022) identify four types of sentences - simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex - with simple sentences being the most prevalent. The analysis includes the distribution of sentence types across different stages of the plot, and it also covers the presence of sentence problems, with the rising action stage containing the majority of sentences. Therefore, the current study supplements what has not been discovered in previous studies.

Most of the previous studies mentioned are related to this current research to explore English sentence structure in different areas. Previous research has not explicitly examined the application of sentence structures in academic settings, with a notable absence of studies focusing on English academic writing in particular. This study aims to fill the gap by investigating and understanding how students in the English Language Education Study Programme (ELESP) utilize sentence structures in their academic writing, which is crucial for their academic success and professional development. This is significant because the implications for the development of effective language instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are particularly relevant in the scope of education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, which is particularly appropriate for providing in-depth insights into the linguistic phenomena found in students' academic writing. The purpose of this approach is not only to describe the types of sentences employed but also to interpret how sentence structures are utilized and to uncover the difficulties students encounter in constructing grammatically accurate and coherent sentences. By applying this method, the research offers both descriptive and interpretive accounts of students' writing performance.

The data source of this study consists of students' writing assignments produced in the *English Academic Writing* course. These assignments serve as authentic materials that reflect the actual writing competence, patterns, and tendencies of the students. Each piece of writing is treated as a primary document, representing the learners' ability to construct sentences in academic contexts.

For data collection, the researcher employed documentation techniques. All student assignments were systematically gathered and archived. To ensure organization and confidentiality, each document was coded using a specific labeling system, which anonymized students' identities while allowing efficient retrieval and reference during the analysis process.

The data analysis was conducted manually in two stages. The first stage focused on identifying and categorizing the types of sentences found in the students' writing, following the classification proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2006). Sentences were analyzed and grouped into four categories: *simple sentences*, *compound sentences*, *complex sentences*, and *compound-complex sentences*. This analysis aimed to reveal the students' predominant choices and tendencies in employing sentence structures in academic writing.

The second stage involved identifying sentence structure problems within the students' texts. This step entailed a close examination of errors and inaccuracies such as grammatical mistakes, clause imbalance, inappropriate use of conjunctions, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences. By investigating these recurring issues, the analysis highlights common patterns of difficulty that hinder the clarity and coherence of students' academic writing.

Through these systematic procedures, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students utilize sentence structures in academic writing, as well as the challenges they face. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform the development of more effective teaching strategies and instructional materials aimed at enhancing students' writing proficiency in academic settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis specifically addresses two main research questions: what are the types of sentence structure used in English academic writing courses of students in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), and what are the sentence problems identified in the sentence structure of students' academic writing. There were four types of sentences found in their writing assignment result. They were simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). The amount of data was 1345 sentences that consisted of 547 simple sentences, 329 compound sentences, 283 complex sentences, and 186 compound-complex sentences. From 50 texts, which are the results of students' writing, they were entered into a table based on the types of sentences that had been analyzed.

3.1 The Use of Sentence Structure Types in Students' English Academic Writing

The result after the writer found in the findings section of sentence structure patterns in academic writing assignments reveals significant insights into students' linguistic development and compositional preferences. The distribution of sentence types presents a clear hierarchical pattern, with simple sentences comprising the largest portion (547 instances), followed by compound sentences (329 instances), complex sentences (283 instances), and compound-complex sentences (186 instances) of the total data. This distribution pattern aligns with contemporary research in second language writing development, particularly echoing the findings of Biber and Gray (2010), who noted similar proportional distributions in developing academic writers.

The predominance of simple sentences in the data warrants particular attention, as it reflects both the developmental stage of the writers and their strategic choices in academic composition. The analysis reveals that students employ simple sentences with varying degrees of sophistication, ranging from basic declarative statements to more nuanced constructions incorporating complex phrasal elements. In the 2020 academic year, students demonstrated a nuanced and evolving approach to sentence construction that revealed significant linguistic sophistication.

The simple sentence category showcased remarkable depth beyond basic syntactic structures. Students consistently demonstrated an ability to expand simple sentences through strategic use of modifiers, compound elements, and precise descriptive techniques. For instance, their simple sentences ranged from fundamental constructions like in the sample of text data 1, *"The baby sleeps peacefully,"* to more intricate structures incorporating compound subjects and predicates, such as *"Monica and Jihan went to the park and had a picnic."* The compound sentence analysis revealed students' growing capacity for connecting related ideas with increased grammatical complexity. These sentences exhibited advanced academic vocabulary and sophisticated argumentation techniques. Students skillfully employed coordinating conjunctions to establish logical relationships, demonstrating an ability to present contrasting or complementary ideas within a single sentence structure. In the sample of text data 3, *"The use of technology in students has many benefits, but it does not rule out the use of technology to have a negative impact,"* exemplifies this sophisticated approach to idea presentation.

Complex sentences in the 2020 academic year represented a particularly impressive linguistic achievement. Students masterfully integrated subordinate clauses, creating intricate syntactic relationships that allowed for nuanced expression. Relative clauses, prepositional phrases, and embedded descriptive elements were seamlessly incorporated into sentence structures. A prime example is the sample of text data 3, *"Next to the bathroom, there is a large brown cupboard in which there are several bags and the owner's books,"* which demonstrates advanced spatial description and clause embedding techniques. The compound-complex sentence category represented the pinnacle of syntactic sophistication for 2020 students. These sentences showcased an exceptional ability to integrate multiple independent and dependent clauses while maintaining grammatical coherence and logical flow. Students successfully combined coordination and subordination, creating multilayered sentences that communicated complex ideas with remarkable precision. The sample of text data 4, *"She has a classic guitar that she bought when she was in high school, and then until now, she works and she still plays the guitar on Sunday morning,"* illustrates the intricate temporal and narrative relationships students could construct.

The 2021 academic year demonstrated a continued progression in students' sentence construction capabilities, building upon the foundational skills established in the previous year. Simple sentences exhibited increased complexity and purposeful modification. Students showed a refined ability to incorporate temporal markers, compound subjects, and varied verb constructions. The sample of text data 3, *"Uncle Roy, Aunt Rose, and my cousin Fadila went to Bandung on vacation,"* exemplifies the sophisticated subject construction and contextual specificity achieved within a simple sentence framework. Compound sentence construction in the 2021 academic year revealed both emerging strengths and areas for continued development. Students demonstrated an understanding of connecting related ideas, though occasional challenges emerged in technical sentence coordination. The analysis highlighted students' attempts to join independent clauses, with varying degrees of grammatical precision. The sample of text data 1, *"Online*

games are very popular nowadays, many young people and even adults also play online games," illustrates both the ambition to create complex relational statements and the need for refined coordination techniques.

Complex sentences in the 2021 academic year showcased students' growing proficiency in subordinate clause integration. They exhibited a nuanced understanding of how dependent clauses could provide essential descriptive, temporal, and purposeful information. Students skillfully incorporated relative clauses, temporal markers, and purpose-driven constructions. The sample of text data 5, *"Temujin's power and influence increased when he defeated another powerful Mongol leader named Curtian and expanded his territory,"* demonstrates sophisticated management of chronological relationships and clause integration. The compound-complex sentence category represented the most challenging yet intellectually ambitious sentence structure for 2021 students. These sentences revealed students' developing ability to simultaneously manage multiple grammatical relationships, combining independent and dependent clauses with increasing sophistication. While sometimes struggling with absolute clarity, students demonstrated a remarkable capacity for expressing multilayered ideas. The sample of text data 4, *"But now many people like online learning rather than offline because they have been used to learning online for a long time, even though there are many barriers to online learning,"* exemplifies the complex comparative, causal, and concessive relationships students could construct.

A comparative analysis of the 2020 and 2021 academic year data reveals interesting shifts in sentence structure preferences and capabilities. The 2020 academic year assignments showed a stronger tendency toward descriptive writing, with detailed, simple sentences predominating in descriptions of physical spaces and personal experiences. In contrast, the 2021 academic year assignments demonstrated an increased use of complex and compound-complex sentences in analytical contexts, suggesting a possible evolution in either teaching methods or student capabilities. This temporal comparison provides valuable insights into the developmental trajectory of student writing skills and may indicate the effectiveness of writing instruction methods employed during this period.

3.2 Sentence Structure Problem in Students' Academic Writing

The prevalence of sentence structure problems in academic writing is particularly concerning for students' sentence structure. These structural issues, ranging from fragmented sentences to run-on constructions, significantly impact the clarity and effectiveness of students' academic work. Through a detailed examination of 50 texts containing 1,345 sentences from the 2020 and 2021 academic years, researchers identified 79 distinct sentence structure problems, with 47 issues occurring in the 2020 academic year and 32 issues in the 2021 academic year. This comprehensive discussion illuminates the complex nature of students' writing challenges and their evolution over time, particularly in relation to sentence structure and grammatical coherence.

The predominant sentence structure problem manifests primarily through sentence fragments, which represent a significant portion of the identified problems. These fragments reveal varying levels of complexity and understanding among students, particularly in their grasp of fundamental sentence construction principles. In the 2020 academic year, the most notable pattern emerged in the form of subordinate clause errors, where students demonstrated persistent difficulties in managing the relationship between dependent and independent clauses. Examples such as *"Because this room is dominated by Cream"* and *"As an art that is preferred by women"* illustrate how students often struggle to complete thoughts when working with subordinating conjunctions. This pattern, as noted by Chen and Martinez (2020), typically stems from an incomplete understanding of clause relationships rather than limitations in vocabulary or conceptual understanding.

The evolution of sentence structure errors becomes particularly evident when examining the 2021 academic year data, which shows a marked shift toward simpler structural fragments. This transition, while still problematic, suggests a potential development in students' awareness of their writing challenges. The emergence of what Brown and Lee (2022) categorize as "listing fragments" and "predicate fragments" demonstrates how students' errors become more readily identifiable, though not necessarily less impactful on overall writing proficiency. Examples such as *"Natural resources such as land, water, solar energy"* and *"The elected official for our district is unpopular"* reveal how students continue to struggle with basic sentence completeness, even as they attempt to simplify their writing structures.

Perhaps the most concerning pattern emerges in the prevalence of phrases lacking essential sentence components, particularly subject-verb structures. Students demonstrate a recurring tendency to present information through lists or descriptive phrases without establishing proper grammatical foundations. A prime example of this is found in the fragment *"Starting from traditional clothes, food, guests, greetings, drama, and k-pop,"* which, while content-rich, fails to establish a complete syntactical framework. This pattern aligns with Liu and Chen's (2021) findings regarding ESL writers' struggles with fundamental sentence completeness, particularly when attempting to present multiple related ideas within a single unit of thought.

Run-on sentences present another significant dimension of students' syntactical challenges, with the analysis revealing 10 distinct instances of this error type. The complexity of these run-on sentences varies considerably between the two academic years studied. In the 2020 academic year, students frequently produced complex multi-clause errors that attempted to combine multiple independent thoughts without proper coordination or punctuation. A particularly illustrative example is found in the sentence *"Suddenly one of the doors to the room next to my sister's room opened, then came out a girl wearing a green negligee and a black veil, she stared at me for 3 seconds..."* This type of error, as Wong and Chen (2022) suggest, often occurs when writers become overwhelmed by the complexity of their descriptions and lose sight of proper sentence boundaries.

The transition to the 2021 academic year shows an interesting evolution in run-on sentence patterns, with students producing simpler but still incorrect constructions. Harrison and Zhang's (2023) concept of "basic comma splice errors" becomes evident in examples like *"The flowers are beautiful, they brighten the room."* This shift toward simpler constructions might indicate a response to previous instruction or feedback, as suggested by Powell's (2022) research on writing development. However, it also reveals the persistent nature of fundamental syntactical challenges in student writing.

The implications of these findings extend beyond mere grammatical correctness. They suggest a need for a more nuanced approach to writing instruction that addresses both basic sentence construction principles and the development of more complex syntactical skills. The evolution of error patterns between the 2020 and 2021 academic years indicates that while students may show some progress in simplifying their writing structures, they continue to struggle with fundamental aspects of sentence construction. This understanding should inform pedagogical approaches, encouraging a balance between teaching basic grammatical principles and developing students' capacity to express complex ideas effectively.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals the interconnected nature of various sentence structure challenges. Students' difficulties with sentence fragments often relate to their struggles with run-on sentences, suggesting a broader challenge in understanding sentence boundaries and relationships between ideas. This interconnection points to the need for comprehensive writing instruction that addresses not only individual error types but also the underlying principles of effective sentence construction and idea organization. The findings also underscore the importance of considering the developmental nature of writing skills. The shift from complex to simpler errors between the 2020 and 2021 academic years suggests that students' writing abilities evolve, though not always in a linear fashion. This understanding should inform how writing instruction is structured and how progress is measured, acknowledging that development may manifest through changes in error patterns rather than the immediate elimination of errors.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The investigation into sentence structure utilization among students in English academic writing courses has yielded several significant findings that warrant careful consideration. The analysis reveals that students' command of sentence structures exhibits both promising aspects and areas requiring substantial improvement. The most prominent pattern observed is the heavy reliance on simple and compound sentences in academic writing tasks. While these sentence types are fundamental to effective communication, the disproportionate dependence on basic structures suggests a reluctance or inability to employ more sophisticated syntactic patterns that are typically expected in academic discourse.

A deeper examination of students' writing samples demonstrates that when attempting to convey complex ideas, many students struggle with maintaining grammatical accuracy and logical coherence. The challenges become particularly evident in their attempts to construct complex and compound-complex sentences, where issues such as subject-verb agreement errors and inappropriate clause combinations frequently emerge. This pattern indicates a gap between students' conceptual understanding of advanced sentence structures and their practical ability to implement these structures effectively in their writing.

Furthermore, the research has uncovered a significant correlation between sentence structure variety and sentence structure problems in their academic writing. Students who demonstrated greater flexibility in their sentence structure usage generally produced more engaging and academically sound papers. However, many students tended to fall back on familiar patterns, resulting in monotonous writing that fails to effectively capture the nuances of academic argumentation. This finding underscores the crucial role of sentence structure mastery in developing sophisticated academic writing skills.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

The result of this study necessitates a multi-faceted approach to improving students' sentence structure utilization in academic writing. These suggestions are directed at various stakeholders in the academic community, each playing a vital role in facilitating student development. Writing instructors stand at the forefront of developing students' sentence structure competency. Their pedagogical approach should

prioritize explicit instruction in various sentence patterns while providing ample opportunities for practical application. Instructors should consider implementing a scaffolded learning approach, beginning with basic sentence combinations and progressively moving toward more complex structures. This process should include regular writing workshops where students can experiment with different sentence patterns in a supportive environment.

Assessment strategies should be redesigned to incorporate specific feedback on sentence structure usage. Rather than simply marking errors, instructors should provide detailed explanations of how sentences can be improved and offer alternative constructions that might better serve the writer's purpose. Students must take an active role in developing their sentence structure competency. This process requires consistent practice and conscious attention to sentence construction in their writing. Students should develop the habit of analyzing model academic texts, paying particular attention to how experienced writers vary their sentence structures to achieve different rhetorical effects. Keeping a writing journal where they collect and analyze effective sentence patterns can help build a repertoire of structures they can incorporate into their writing.

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