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The Correlation between Syntactic Awareness of EFL University Teachers and Students' Writing Performance

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Abstract

The current study is aimed at finding out the correlation between syntactic awareness level of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance. The problem of this study is most of teachers as language teachers do not recognize the importance of syntax in teaching their students . Accordingly, students' problems in writing lie in their lack of

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understanding the nature , process, and requirements of academic writing . The problems of the current study are best identified by answering the following research question : To what extent can an efficient writing of college students be affected by the level of syntactic awareness of EFL university teachers? The sample of the study consists of (30) teachers from different specializations , and (100) students from fourth year at University of Tikrit , College of Education for Women , English Department. The current study includes three instruments after being validated and approved by a jury of experts. These are: **1)** a questionnaire and a diagnostic test are applied to measure teachers' syntactic awareness , and **2)** a diagnostic test is used to measure the performance of students in writing. The obtained results have shown that there is a positive correlation between teachers' syntactic awareness and the performance of students in writing . In the light of the obtained results , some conclusions are drawn .

Keywords: Grammatical orientation, correlational relationship.

العلاقة الارتباطية بين الوعي النحوي لتدريسي الجامعة للغة الانجليزية (لغة اجنبية) والاداء
الكتابي للطلبة

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المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى ايجاد العلاقة الارتباطية بين مستوى الوعي النحوي لتدريسي اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة وأداء الطلبة الكتابي . وتتمثل مشكلة هذه الدراسة في إن معظم التدريسيين لا يدركون أهمية النحو في تدريس طلبتهم وما يقدمه لهم . وبناء على ذلك فإن مشاكل الطلبة في

الكتابة تكمن في عدم فهمهم لطبيعة الكتابة الأكاديمية و متطلباتها . تشمل عينة الدراسة (30) مدرسا" ومدرسة من تخصصات مختلفة و(100) طالبة من طالبات السنة الرابعة في جامعة تكريت، كلية التربية للبنات، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية للعام الدراسي 2021-2022 . تتضمن الدراسة الحالية استخدام ثلاث أدوات، بعد التحقق من صحتها والموافقة عليها من قبل لجنة تحكيم من الخبراء . وهي: (1) تطبيق استبيان واختبار تشخيصي لقياس الوعي النحوي لدى التدريسيين، و (2) استخدام اختبار تشخيصي لقياس أداء الطلبة في الكتابة . وقد أظهرت النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها أن هنالك علاقة ارتباطية بين الوعي النحوي وأداء الطلبة في الكتابة. وفي ضوء النتائج المستخلصة من الدراسة تم التوصل إلى بعض الاستنتاجات التي وردت في سياق البحث.

الكلمات الدالة: الوعي النحوي، الكتابة، العلاقة الارتباطية.

1- Introduction

1.1 The Problem of the Study

Syntactic awareness (SA) is an important variable in the present study. It deals with the ability to understand the grammatical structures of language within sentences (Tunmer & Hoover, 1992). Moreover, learning syntax will enable the prospective teachers to have good linguistic knowledge to make them teaching language well. Thus, by having sufficient syntactic knowledge (SK), teachers are able to explain it to students or take it into consideration in teaching practice. As a result, most teachers do not recognize the importance of syntax, because they have no idea what syntax can present to them as prospective language teachers.

In addition, writing is the process of using symbols to communicate ideas. It is considered as a cognitive process because its aim is to test memory, language, and thinking ability. Without learning writing, students will face a difficulty in achieving clarity which is the aim of any writing exercises. Consequently, many students have the ability to understand language, but most of them face the problem of communicating their ideas effectively. This problem is related to the lack of English vocabulary, and creativity in writing. Therefore, students' lack of understanding the nature and process of academic writing, is considered the source of difficulties for them in writing (Clerehan & Walker, 2004).

Therefore , the problems of the present study are best identified by answering the following research questions :

- 1- What is the relationship between the level of SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance ?
- 2- To what extent can an efficient writing of college students be affected by the level of SA of EFL university teachers?

1.2 Aims of the Study

The research aims at finding out :

- 1- Relationship between the level of SA of EFL university teachers and the performance of students in writing .
- 2- Correlation between the level of SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance .

1.3 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to :

- 1- The correlation between SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance .
- 2- Teachers and 4th year students at English department / College of Education for Women / University of Tikrit for the academic year 2021-2022.
- 3- The writing skill that gives a wide opportunity for the students to express their ideas and opinions.
- 4- SA model that is adapted from (Kim & Crossley, 2018) , and students' writing performance model that is adapted from (Bachman, 1990) .

1.4 Value of the Study

This study is hoped to be of value to :

- 1- EFL university students to raise their awareness of how their TD may be correlated with their performance in writing , which may be helpful to improve their writing .
- 2- The English language teachers to shed light on the important role of their speech in improving and developing their students' writing , and to avoid their weakness in this this variable.
- 3- Educators , syllabus designers , and researchers who may benefit from the findings of this research in approaching investigation of the variable involved in the research from

different perspectives.

1.5 Procedures of the Study

The procedures of this descriptive study can be illustrated as follows :

- 1- Present an introduction about the whole study , and theoretical background about the concepts of SA with reference to college students' performance in writing . In addition to the previous studies that are concentrating on this variable.
- 2- A questionnaire and a test are designed and adapted to measure the SA of teachers . These tools are applied on teachers from the English Department , College of Education for Women , Tikrit University .
- 3- Construct a test for the sample of students in the same department in order to measure the correlation of this variable to their writing performance .
- 4- The collected data are analyzed statistically.
- 5- Results are computed and stated along with conclusions , recommendations, and suggestions for further studies.

1.6 Definitions of Basic Terms

1.6.1 Syntactic Awareness

SA is dealt with the awareness of sentence structure. Bowey and Patel(1988) define SA as the capability of controlling word order within the sentence context depended on the application of syntactical rules . In addition, Cain(2007) defines SA as the ability to regard the structure rather than the meanings of the sentence. In other words , SA is the ability to understand the syntactic structures and rules within the sentence level. As a result , the operational definition of SA that is adopted in this study is the definition of Bowey & Patel(1988) .

1.6.2 Writing Skill

Writing is one of the four language skills besides reading , listening, and speaking. It is a productive skill because it enables writers to produce written texts. According to Brown (2004), writing is a thinking process, because it is concerned with putting ideas down on paper to transform thoughts into words , and give them structure and coherent organization . Flores et al. (2012) state that writing is a process by which people transfer their thinking, ideas, and experiences into written form. It includes many different elements such as grammar, vocabulary, organization of ideas, content , purpose,

audience, spelling, and punctuation marks. In the current research, the operational definition of writing that is adopted is the definition of Flores et al. (2012).

2.Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1 Theoretical Background

2.1.1 Syntactic Awareness of EFL University Teachers

2.1.1.1 What is Grammar?

Grammar has its importance in language teaching, particularly in English as a foreign language and English as a second language. It is regarded important for many language teachers and learners because it is associated with the accurate use of language for effective communication (Ahangari & Barghi, 2012). Therefore, Richards (1992) defines *grammar* as the organization of a language (i.e., it is the manner by which units of language like words and phrases are combined to form sentences). Thus, grammar is the set of rules that determine the correct order of words at the sentence level (Nunan, 2003).

Also, Crystal (2010) says that grammar linguistically refers to descriptive rules of language. Generally, from all these definitions of grammar, it is the system or the rules of a language. Besides, Freeman and DeCarrico (as cited in Schmitt & Rogers, 2020) state that for linguists grammar has several types such as:

1- Prescriptive grammar: It deals with rules that make distinctions between correct and incorrect forms. They tell us how we ought to speak, as in 'It is I', and how we ought not to speak, as in 'It is me'.

2- Descriptive grammar: It does not make these distinctions, and aims at describing language as it is actually used. It also concerns with the rules the speakers' use that represent their unconscious knowledge, or 'mental grammar' of the language. This type focuses on describing how native speakers actually do speaking, and does not prescribe how they ought to speak. In addition, descriptive grammar deals with a language that includes: syntax, morphology, phonetics, phonology, and semantics. This study is concerned with syntax only as the core aspect to deal with.

3- Pedagogical grammar is the concern of applied linguists. It is more eclectic, depending on insights from formal and functional grammars, as well as working on corpus linguistics, DA, and pragmatics. Accordingly, students should not only produce grammatical structures that are formally accurate, but also use them meaningfully and appropriately as

well (Freeman & DeCarrico , as cited in Schmitt & Rogers, 2020) . From all the explanations above , grammar is seen as the study of syntax and morphology of sentences. So, grammar is considered as the umbrella of syntax.

2.1.1.2 Dimensions of Grammar

In order to produce accurate and correct grammatical forms of language , Larsen-Freeman (2003) identifies that there are three dimensions of grammar should be dealt with as follows :

1- Form (Morphosyntax)

The form of a language includes the visible or audible units: the sounds, written symbols, inflectional morphemes (e.g. , the –ing of the present participle), function words (e.g. , the) , and syntactic structures.

2- Meaning: Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning encoded in language. In language teaching some syllabus developers may want to involve general types of meaning which are called *notions*. Notions include : space (location, distance, size) , and time (indications of time, duration, sequence) .

3- Use: Pragmatics

Pragmatics is not the meaning encoded in language, but what people mean by the language they use. It includes social functions (e.g. , promising, inviting, agreeing, disagreeing, and apologizing) , and discourse patterns (e.g. , those that contribute to the cohesion of texts) .

2.1.1.3 Grammatical Knowledge

In order to transmit an idea or message in spoken or written forms, words need to be arranged in a sentence according to the rules of grammar (Debata, 2013) . Thus , grammatical knowledge plays a main role in learning a language , and if the knowledge of the grammatical structure of a language is not accessible, effective communication cannot be achieved in all skills. Students with poor grammatical knowledge cannot produce good written texts. In addition , Debata (2013) indicates that grammar knowledge will support students in correcting mistakes, and improving the quality of written texts. As a result , grammatical knowledge is concerned with teachers' explicit knowledge of grammar in terms of morphology and syntax.

2.1.1.4 Discourse Grammar

Discourse grammar is the analyses of the functional roles of grammatical structures in discourse . Discourse is the organization of language at a level above the sentence or individual conversational turn . Speakers and writers make grammatical choices that depend on how they interpret and wish to represent the context , and how they wish to position themselves in it (Larsen- Freeman , 2002) . For instance , speakers use the past perfect tense – aspect combination in English , not only to identify the first of two past events , but also to give a justification for the main events of the narrative. Finally , grammar has an important role at the discourse level.

2.1.1.5 Spoken and Written Grammar

Carter and McCarthy (1995) state that the differences between spoken and written grammar are especially important for pedagogical grammars , since " descriptions that rest on the written mode or on restricted genres and registers of spoken language are likely to omit many common features of everyday informal grammar and usage" (p.154). For instance , they give examples of the reporting verb in the simple past tense (X , said that Y) , and yet in their spoken corpus they find various examples of the reporting verb in past continuous (X was saying Y). However, Larsen-Freeman (2003) indicates that there are some features of spoken grammar such as : face-to-face interaction, allows for ellipsis, some parts of a sentence are omitted , since they can be retrieved from the context. As a result, students who learn English as a foreign language should be neutral in using spoken and written grammar.

2.1.1.6 What is Syntax ?

Syntax is one of the main components of grammar. It is the study of the processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages. Haegeman (2006) defines *syntax* as " the branch of linguistics that concentrates on the formation of sentences" (p. 4) . Besides , Crystal (2011) defines *syntax* (the adjective form is syntactic) as the inter-relationships between aspects of sentence structure , and the governing regulations of organizing sentences. Thus , syntax is the system of rules that cover the orders of words in a sentence. Consequently , the operational definition of syntax is the study of the structure of sentences , and how these sentences are built grammatically without effecting on meaning . Pedagogically, syntax is taught in English departments in order to develop the prospective teachers with linguistic knowledge to be able to teach language well.

2.1.1.7 Explicit and Implicit Processing of Syntax

Explicit processing of syntax means that people have consciously aware of thinking about , and applying syntactical rules of the language (Layton et al., 1998) . While, implicit processing of syntax means that people do not consciously have aware of comprehending and producing syntactical structures of phrases/ sentences (Brimo & Hall-Mills, 2019) .

2.1.1.8 What is SA

SA means the capability of controlling word-order within the sentence context depended on the application of syntactical rules (Bowey & Patel, 1988) . It indicates the ability to comprehend the grammatical structures of language within sentences (Tunmer & Hoover, 1992) . In other word , SK means one's capability of comprehending and producing different syntactic structures in a sentence context (Cutting & Scarborough, 2006) . So, Brimo et al. (2017) say that SA and SK are two different but related terms , both of them are dealing with word order depending on the application of grammatical rules. Consequently , the operational definition of SA is that it is the ability to arrange the words and structures of a sentence in a correct order.

2.1.1.9 Activities of Measuring SA

There are some instructional activities that used to measure SA can be illustrated as follows :

1. Sentence Anagrams

An anagram means that a form of word in which letters of a word or phrase are rearranged in a way that a new word or phrase is formed. For example, cinema from iceman. In this activity, a set of words from a sentence that are out of order are given to students . Students are required from them to rearrange these words in a grammatically correct sentence. No additional words may be added or deleted.

2. Sentence Elaboration

Sentence elaboration activities are concerned with helping students to use a growing number of words in sentences. They are used for the purpose of developing SA for subordinate clauses, prepositional phrases, and adverbial phrases. Adams(2011) indicates that in this activity, teachers use six question words: **who, what, where, why, which, how**. This activity can be achieved with a large group of students in order to make

suggestions while the teacher writes the sentences. But for older students, this activity can be achieved with small groups. It starts by giving students just two or three 'WH' words, then gradually the task will be expanded .

3. Sentence Combining

Sentence combining is an effective activity for helping students of all ages (i.e., from elementary stages to college ones) to develop SA in order to support understanding and writing of sentences (Graham & Perin, 2007) . Students are given a number of simple sentences, and required from them to apply SK to combine the sentences into a more complex, grammatically correct sentence.

4-Grammatical Judgment Activity

This activity can be used to assess students' ability to generate grammatically suitable text (Gutiérrez, 2013). Besides , in this activity , students should recognize the grammatical mistakes in sentences. They will see a series of sentences, each of which has four or more underlined words or phrases. They are required to choose the underlined word or phrase that is **incorrect** . Each sentence has only ONE error, in terms of incorrect word usage or syntax. The students should indicate the error by underlining or circling one of these possible answer choices .

5- Correct Derivation Activity

This activity includes sentence completion tasks which required from students to present the correct morphological change of the word to fit the sentence. In the sentence, the word in brackets should be put in its correct form.

6- The Writing Activity

In this activity , students are asked to write a composition , describe some pictures which are given , or write about their preferences by using their own words ... etc. Finally , these activities or tasks that are mentioned above are very important in testing SA especially in writing skill which is the core of the current study .

2.1.1.10 The Model of SA and its Relation to Writing

The Latent Variable Model for Second Language Writing Quality developed by Kim and Crossley (2018) , will be used in the present study. SA is one of the main components which examined in this model. However, Lu (2011) states that

when students make many syntactic errors in their writing, this will be considered as a predictive for English writing proficiency. Thus, SA is regarded as an important language skill in developing the ability of EFL students' writing. Moreover, in the current study, this model is adapted and modified in order to suit the aim of the study. The original model contains many aspects such as: lexical feature, syntactic feature, cohesive feature, lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity, and cohesion. All these aspects affect L2 writing quality. But, this study just deals with syntactic features and its effect on writing, and leaves the other aspects. level of students' writing performance.

2.1.2 Students' Writing Performance

2.1.2.1 Definitions of Writing

Writing is one of language skills besides speaking, listening, and reading. It is an important element in most English courses. It is considered as a communicative thing, and used to express idea in the written form. Thus, it will enable readers to understand and know the aim of our written. According to Longman (1999, p.1222), writing is defined as “works of literature or other written material, produced by the stated person”. Furthermore, Nunan (1989) states that writing is a complex cognitive activity because the writer should control on a number of variables at the sentence level, these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, and punctuation, while beyond the sentence, the writer should be able to construct and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and texts.

2.1.2.2 Forms of Writing

There are two forms of writing: functional and creative writing. Abdallah (2014) defines *functional writing* as the activity of giving real information to a particular of readers, and does not require imagination such as: formal letters, notes, instructions, advertisements, emails, and reports. While, Palmer et al. (1994) define *creative writing* as any writing that differs from scientific, academic, or technical forms of literature. It is concentrated on story technique, character development, and the use of literary themes.

2.1.2.3 Characteristics of Writing

Reid (1993) says that good writing has two main requirements : the main topic , and sentences within a paragraph. Besides, he enumerates several points of the characteristics of writing as follows:

a. Unity

The unity of text means the relevance of sentences in a paragraph. A text has unity if all sentences in the text indicate one main idea.

b. Cohesion and Coherence

Halliday and Hasan (1985) define *cohesion* as " is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text" (p.4) . They divide cohesion into two types of cohesive relations: ***grammatical and lexical cohesion*** . Grammatical cohesion includes reference , substitution, ellipsis , and conjunction. While lexical cohesion is basically words that are lexically cohesive, which means that they are semantically connected to each other , and about the same topic. Lexical cohesion is divided in to two types : *reiteration and collocation*. Moreover, Irwin(1980) defines *coherence* as " the extent to which the ideas in a text are interrelated" (p.325). Generally , coherence refers to the text quality as to whether it makes sense, because its parts fit well with one another and in a logical manner.

c. Paragraphing

Reid (1993) states that paragraphing involves organizational structure of the text, regularity, and appropriateness in beginning new paragraph. It should be clear , unity , consistent , and make the text easy to understand.

d. Grammar

It is the main language skill that is used in writing , which includes tenses, active-passive voice, subject-predicate agreement, and grammar agreements. The writer must use correct grammar in order to make the written text easy for the reader to understand (Reid , 1993) .

e. Spelling

Spelling is related to the correctness of words the writers use in the text.

f. Punctuation

Punctuation is used to indicate the meaning of structured sentences.

g. Capitalization

Capitalization is used to determine the beginning of a sentence , and to identify all types of proper nouns, names, and titles (Reid ,1993) .

2.1.2.4 Elements of Writing

Writing has some important elements. Written communication elements consist of content, paragraph structure , and mechanics that can be summarized as follows :

a. Content

Content is associated with the flow of ideas in a text.

b. Paragraph Structure

Paragraph structure or pattern of organization is associated with a set of procedures of constructing ideas in paragraphs. A good paragraph structure should include a beginning, middle, and end. It should also contain transitional devices, details, examples, clear language, and many word choices.

c. Mechanics

The use of favorable mechanics in writing will enable the readers to understand the conveying ideas or the messages stated in the writing easily . It includes capitalization, punctuation, and spelling (Bryne, 2010).

2.1.2.5 Types of Writing

Writing is an important skill in language learning and writing. It has **four** types as follows:

1- Descriptive Writing

A descriptive writing is a style of writing which concentrates on describing a character, an event or a place in great details.

2- Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing contains justifications and reasons to make the readers understand an issue from their perspective. Fredrick (2011) defines persuasive writing as any piece of writing that aimed to conclude the results. So, the aim of this type is to convince the reader to accept the writer's point of view or recommendation.

3- Expository Writing

In this type, the writer will explain topics, use facts, statistics, and examples. It does not use personal comments, thoughts and ideas , but it uses only facts. For example , academic journals, newspaper articles, textbooks, manuals for electronic use, ...etc. It concentrates on cause/ effect , true/ false, positive/ negative , general/ particular, ...etc. It

uses connectives such as: therefore, however, besides, but, in fact, for example, ...etc. (Thomas, 2000).

4- Narrative Writing

A narrative type of writing refers to a written composition whose story is told from a writer's point of view. It is usually written in the first person (I, me). The writers depend on their memories, life, ideas. Thus, Thomas(2000) clarifies that narration is a series of related events story. It emphasizes on arranging the events in a sequence of time, and revealing their significance such as: novels, poetry, biography, short stories, ...etc.

In addition, there are another types of writing can be illustrated as follows: *formal and informal writing*. Formal writing depends on the writing process. It usually takes the shape of essays, explanation, analysis papers, and research reports. The writing process includes five steps or stages that are used to produce a piece of written form that clearly conveys the thoughts of a writer(Waring,2007). The five steps of writing can be clarified as:

a- Pre-writing

Pre- writing is an important stage in the writing process. It will help the writer to think about, develop a topic, and get words on paper.

b- Drafting

Drafting is regarded as the first point at writing the piece. It is the process of moving ideas from pre-writing to printed form.

c- Revising

It is the stage of rewriting. Nordquist(2019) defines *revision* as the process of rewriting any piece of writing to make changes in sentence structures, organization of ideas, and language selection in order to improve the work.

d- Editing

Nordquist indicates that editing is the stage in which a writer or editor tries to improve a draft by correcting errors, and making words or phrases clearer, more effective, and precise. This stage contains modifying, adding, removing, and rearranging words in order to reduce clutter, and maintains a logical framework(Gebhard, 2007). In addition, the final stage of editing is proofreading. It deals with correcting spelling, grammatical and mechanical errors, and formatting citations, coversheets, footnotes, and references correctly (Levisdohn, 2019).

e- Publishing

Publishing means that the final draft is produced , and ready for the suitable readers. It is the last stage in the process of writing. The final form is distributed to others as part of publication.

While informal writing does not have any constraints. Note-taking, lists, diagrams, and summaries are examples of informal writing . It can also be named free writing because it does not need to be grammatically correct, spell checked or written in complete sentences . Thus, the focus of free writing is on content and fluency rather than on accuracy and form . Free writing means the act of writing quickly for a set of time from ten to fifteen minutes. It deals with putting down whatever is in mind, without pausing and worrying about what words to use, and without going back to modify what has been written because the aim of this writing is the process, not the product (Elbow, 1986) . Consequently , the process of writing requires the writer to be able to brainstorm, organize ideas, review, edit and others. The steps of writing are connected to each other so that the students can move freely through the creative process of arranging ideas on a piece of paper.

2.1.2.6 Approaches of Writing

According to Schmitt and Rodgers(2020) , this section concentrates on a number of approaches of L2 writing that can be illustrated as follows:

1- Controlled Composition

It is related to audio-lingual approach in L2 teaching. It has two ideas: Firstly, language is speech (i.e. , structural linguistics) , and secondly , learning is habit formation (i.e. , behaviorist psychology) . Linguistic analysis deals with this approach by focusing on *contrastive analysis* which is the early work in the linguistic analysis of second language writers' texts(i.e. , comparing the grammatical structures of two languages, for instance , Arabic and English to show the differences in structures which are regarded the main problems for L2 writers) , and *error analysis* (i.e. , determining the type of errors in written texts) . Besides, in classroom , the main emphasis of controlled composition is on formal accuracy. It concentrates on accuracy rather than fluency .

2- The Paragraph Pattern Approach

Raimes(1983) explores what has been called the *paragraph pattern approach*, which focused on the importance of organization at the above-sentence level. This approach also emphasizes on the notion of *contrastive rhetoric*(i.e. , the notion in which the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the writers will be reflected in their rhetoric) . Furthermore, this approach concerns on the construction and arrangement of discourse forms.

Consequently, in this approach , writing is regarded as a matter of arranging sentences , and paragraphs into particular patterns.

3- The Process Approach

This approach deals with composing process which is seen as a recursive, exploratory , and generative process in which ideas are discovered , and meaning made. Thus , in order to communicate, content will determine form to convey meaning successfully(Raimes,1985) . The process approach is concentrated on person (i.e. , the writer) , and the process (i.e. , strategies) that found in writing. It concerns with sub-processes and elements of the composing process such as: planning, drafting, revising, and editing as well as translating, restructuring, formulating, monitoring, and using dictionaries when composing (Manchón, 2001) .

4- Genre- Based Approach

This approach is concerned with the study of genre in L2 writing which has become very popular. Thus, there are many studies of particular written genres have appeared. Some of these studies deal with the general types of writing such as: narrative, descriptive, argumentative, personal, academic, business, and technical and legal texts. Also, there are other specific text types such as : summaries, essay examinations, research papers, theses, dissertations, research articles, ...etc.

To sum up , from all these approaches of writing that mentioned above , writing is a complex process that cannot be mastered easily . Writing process should depend on three main elements the writer, reader , and the text . So, learning to write should follow several processes , steps , and strategies in order to present a perfect and accurate text.

2.1.2.8 Writing Model

Bachman's model(1990, as cited in Brown , 2007) is adapted in this study to measure writing skill. It is concerned with language competence which consists of two main

competences : *Organizational Competence* which is the concern of this study, and *pragmatic competence*. So, the mastery of organizational competence which includes *grammatical competence and textual competence* by teachers and students will enable them to master the reading and writing in the English language, and be proficient in the target language. The grammatical competence includes vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology), while textual competence includes cohesion, coherence, and rhetorical organization (Rose & Kasper, 2001). Consequently, this study is concerned with grammatical competence and textual competence which are the branches of organizational competence, and left the other components.

2.2 Previous Related Studies

2.2.1 Layton et al. (1998)

This study is designed to examine the relationship between SA and reading performance. The major aim is to provide an estimate of the effect of syntactic training that is not confounded with training that focused on semantic features of words. The sample of the study consists of (30) children that are taken from two Grade Four classes in a public primary school in Adelaide, South Australia. Concerning the instruments of the study, there are various measures used such as: 1 and 2 are standardized Australian tests of reading ability. Measures 3 and 4 are involved some tasks that tapped levels 1 and 2 SA, and are also standardized tests with high levels of reliability. In addition, the results of this study indicate that SA can be improved through training.

2.2.2 Brimo (2011)

This study is conducted to examine the contributions of SA and SK to reading comprehension. The aim of this study is to examine the direct and indirect effects of SK and SA on adolescents' reading comprehension. The sample of the study consists of (193), 9th and 10th grade students who attended a high school located in a Southeastern state. The study includes various variables to measure such as: the **predictor variables** which involve firstly reading comprehension. It is measured through passage and sentence levels. Secondly, SA is measured by using two tasks: syntactic judgment and correction, and syntactic word-order. And thirdly, SK is measured by the listening comprehension subtest from the Group Reading Assessment Diagnostic Evaluation.

Besides, the other variables are called **control variables** which include vocabulary knowledge, word-level reading skills, and working memory that have contributed to reading comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge is measured by using the vocabulary subtest of the GMRT. Word level reading is evaluated by using the word identification, and word attack subtests of the Test of Word Reading Efficiency. Finally, working memory is measured by using digits and non- word repetition subtests of the Comprehension Test of Phonological Processing. The results of the study show that SK do not have an indirect or direct effect on reading comprehension. This study has confirmed the important contribution of SA to reading comprehension among adolescent students.

3. Methodology and Procedures

3.1 Study Design

A study which is designed to determine relationships between two or more variables, and to explore their implications for cause and effect, is called correlational study (Fraenkel et al., 2009).

3.2 Population and Sample Selection

The population of university teachers includes (100) teachers in the Departments of English at the Colleges of Education for Women, Education for Human Sciences / University of Tikrit, and College of Education / University of Samara, for the academic year 2021-2022. The population of teachers is distributed according to their different fields of specialization which involve literature, linguistics, and methodology. In addition, the population of college students is (450) students from fourth-year who are studying in the morning studies in the same universities that mentioned above.

The sample of the current research includes the teachers and fourth year students in the English Department at College of Education for Women, University of Tikrit. The number of sample of teachers is (40). (30) of them are the main sample of the current study, and (10) of them are the sample of the pilot study that are chosen randomly from different specializations to achieve the aim of this research. While, the number of the sample of 4th year college students is (150). (100) of them are the main sample of the current

study , and (50) of them are the sample of the pilot study that are chosen randomly.

3.3 Study Instruments

3.3.1 Teachers' SA Scales

3.3.1.1 Teachers' SA Questionnaire

A questionnaire is the first tool that used in the current study to measure the ability of teachers in syntax. SA questionnaire that used in this study is adapted from (Layton et al. , 1998) scale. So, SA questionnaire by Layton is adapted , modified , verified , and changed to suit the aim of the current study which is the correlation between the level of teachers' SA and performance of students in writing. Moreover, It consists of **two** domains to measure the SK of teachers , and how this knowledge relates to the performance of their students in writing. These domains can be illustrated as follows:

First Domain / It is entitled *Formulating the Rules of Syntax and Identifying it*

In this domain teachers should answer statements by choosing one of the options that mention in the table in order to check the teachers' SK , and how this knowledge affects their students. These options relate to a 5 point Likert scale which ranging from (strongly agree 5) , (agree 4) , (neutral 3) , (disagree 2) , and (strongly disagree 1) . This part contains (10) items .

Second Domain / It is called *Reflecting One's Knowledge and Performance in Relation to Syntax*

In this domain teachers should answer questions by determining their choice , and give a reason for choosing this answer in a brief way. This part contains (10) items . Therefore, the total number of items in teachers' SA questionnaire is (20)

3.3.1.2 Teachers' SA Test

The second tool in the current study to measure teachers' SA is a diagnostic test . It has been constructed according to the behavioral objectives of Bloom's taxonomy to find out the SA of teachers. In the current study , Hammil et al. (2007) scale is adapted to measure the syntactic and written ability of teachers and its relation to the written ability of students. So, this scale is adapted , modified , and verified to suit the purpose of the current study. The SA test of the current study includes **eight** questions about different

topics in grammar which tend to measure the syntactic ability and grammatical knowledge of teachers. The total mark of this test is (100) . Therefore, the divisions of the questions with their marks have been enumerated as follows:

1. **First question** includes (5) items out of (10 Marks). This question requires from teachersto replace the underlined phrase with the correct one that best completes the sentence.
2. **Second question** contains (5) items out of (10M) . This question includes a mistake either in grammar or usage , so the teacher should recognize the correct answer by choosing one of the options.
3. **Third question** contains (5) items out of (10M) . This question is about the use of conjunction. Teachers are asked to choose the sentence that best combines the underlined sentence.
4. **Fourth question** also contains (5) items out of (20M) . It requires from teachers to indicate the correct form of verb (i.e., about tenses) .
5. **Fifth question** contains (5) items about agreement among parts of speech. Teachers in this question are asked to choose the underlined part of the sentence that includes a grammatical error especially in concord. This question takes (10M) .
6. **Sixth question** contains (5) items out of (10M). Teachers are asked to answer either *true* or *false* for the statements about general grammatical information of the English language.
7. **Seventh question** is concerned with choosing the correct sentence order to make good paragraphs. It includes (5) items out of (10M) .
8. **Eighth question** wants the teachers to write an essay in (3) paragraphs about a given statement . It takes (20M) .

3. 3.2 Students' Writing Performance Scale

A diagnostic test is used to measure the level of college students' performance in writing . Brown and Abeywickrama(2018) is the adapted scale in this study. It

contains many tasks to test writing such as: cloze test , picture-cued, sentence completion , multiple- choice technique, dictation, grammatical transformation , picture description, ordering sentences, paragraph writing, ...etc. So , this scale is verified, and modified to suit the aim of the current study which is the performance of students in writing. The test includes **six** questions about different topics in writing , which tend to measure the correlation between TD and their students ' writing performance.

1- **First question** wants the students to write an essay in (2) paragraphs. It takes (20M).

2- **Second question** contains (5) items. It takes (10M). It requires from students to re-arrange the words to make grammatical sentences(i.e., word order task) .

3-**Third question** contains (5) blanks. This question in the form of a close test which contains a paragraph with (5) deleted words or phrases. The students should fill the blanks with suitable words or phrases from their own in order to measure their knowledge in recognizing different vocabulary and grammatical rules. This question takes (10) marks.

4- **Fourth question** involves re-formulate the sentences into meaningful ones. This question takes (10M) . It contains (5) items.

5- **Fifth question** is about punctuation exercises. It contains (10) items with (20M)

6- **Sixth question** includes two parts. Part(A) is about describing preference. It includes (5) items (a , b , c , d , e) out of (10M) . While, part (B) includes two- pictures. It is required from students to write a short paragraph about each picture. So, the score of this part is (20) . The total mark of this question is (30).

3.4 The Validity of the Study Instruments

3.4.1 Face Validity

Face validity refers to the extent to which examinees believe that the instrument is measuring what it is supposed to measure. In order to ensure the validity of the study instruments, they have been submitted to the jury members of university teachers and specialists in the teaching of English

(i.e., in methodology and linguistics). The jurors have been asked to decide the face validity of the study instruments, and the suitability of the scoring schemes used in scoring the instruments. They agree on the scoring schemes, and the whole instruments' items with few changes and recommendations before preparing the final instruments.

3.4.2 Construct Validity

The other type of validity dealt with in this study is construct validity. Construct validity for all instruments can be achieved through the process of item analysis, including item discrimination, item difficulty, the correlation between item score and the total score of the test, the correlation between item score and the component to which it is related (i.e., internal consistency), and the internal correlation matrices.

3.5 Pilot Administration of Study Instruments

3.5.1 Pilot Administration of SA Questionnaire and Test

In order to perform a pilot administration of the questionnaire and a test, the sample of teachers that are chosen for this pilot study is (10) from different specializations, qualifications, experiences, and academic ranks at University of Tikrit, College of Education for Women, English department. They are chosen randomly. The teachers of the pilot sample are chosen from the entire basic study sample. The results show that there is no ambiguity within items as well as instructions for questionnaire and test. Also, the time needed for completing the answers ranges between (1- 3 hours). The papers of these tools are collected and marked by the researcher.

3.5.2 Pilot Administration of Writing Performance Test

The test is applied on sample of (50) 4th year students at English department, College of Education for Women. This sample is chosen randomly from the sample of the study which is (150) students. The time of answering test items is (3) hours. The sheets of the test are collected and corrected.

3.6 Statistical Analysis of Instruments

3.6.1 Statistical Analysis of Teachers' SA Scales

The statistical analysis of teachers' SA scales scores of the sample that represented by (30) participants emerges the following:

3.6.1.1 Statistical Indicators

The results have indicated that the values of teachers' SA scales items are consistent , and the scores of the scales are approximating the normal distribution curve.

3.6.1.2 Item Discrimination and Item Difficulty Indecies

Item discrimination index for teachers' SA questionnaire items is estimated by using the extreme groups method. After calculating the mean score and the standard deviation of the two groups, t-test for two independent samples is used to find out the significance of variance between the two groups . The computed t-value of all items is higher than the critical one (2.12) at a degree of freedom (28) and level of significance (0.05) which identifies that all the items are statistically significant.

In order to measure item discrimination index for teachers' SA test , item discrimination statistical equation is used. So, results show that the item discrimination values range between (0.31) to (0.81) , which are acceptable. Furthermore, the results obtained show that the difficulty level of the items of teachers' SA test varies from (0.37) to (0.84) which is acceptable .

3.6.1.3 Internal Consistency

Internal consistency of teachers' SA test and questionnaire is measured by using Pearson correlation coefficient which is applied on (30) teachers. The results indicate that all correlation values are statistically significant at a level of significant(0.5) , degree of freedom (28) , and r table is (0.361) . Moreover, the independency of the components of teachers' SA questionnaire is examined, so there is an internal correlation matrices between the total score and the total scores of the components . By using Pearson correlation coefficient , it is concluded that the correlations are statistically significant when compared to r table (0.361) at a degree of freedom (28) and a level of significant (0.05). They identify that all the components are interrelated, and can be treated as a whole score.

3.6.2 Statistical Analysis of Writing Performance Scale

3.6.2.1 Statistical Indicators

The statistical indicators of writing performance scale are estimated to provide data related to the mean score, standard deviation, variance, medium, ...etc., and to investigate their approximation to the normal distribution. As a result, the values of these indicators show that they are consistent with their frequencies, and are approximating the normal distribution curve.

3.6.2.2 Item Difficulty Index and Item Discrimination Index

In order to calculate item difficulty index, item difficulty equation is used to obtain results which is shown that the level of difficulty for all items of test ranges between (0.28) and (0.81) that is considered acceptable. The item discrimination level of the items of the test is also estimated. Results calculated determine that the item discrimination values are acceptable as they range between (0.37) and (0.81).

3.6.2.3 Internal Consistency

In order to measure the internal consistency, Pearson correlation coefficient is used and results indicate that all the correlation values are statistically significant when compared with r table which is (0.195) at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = \text{alpha} = 0.05$), for $N = 100$ with a degree of freedom = $N - 100$, $100 - 2 = 98$.

3.7 Reliability of the Study Instruments

The current study is concerned with two types of reliability: test – retest and internal consistency.

3.7.1 Test – Retest

SA and writing tests are administrated to pilot samples of (10) teachers and (50) students that are chosen randomly from English department, College of Education for Women, University of Tikrit. After a month, the same tests are applied on the same samples in order to estimate reliability. Thus, by using Pearson correlation coefficient or r – value between the two sets of answers, results illustrate that r- value for SA test is (0.846), while for writing performance test is (0.861) which are indicators of a good reliability because the values of reliability are higher than (0.70).

3.7.2 Internal Consistency Reliability of SA questionnaire and Test and Writing

Performance Test

In order to obtain the reliability of these tools, SPSS 26.0 program is used to find out whether or not this tool is reliable. The Cronbach's Alpha value for SA questionnaire is (0.930). The Chronbach's coefficient is (0.84) for teachers' SA test , and for students' writing performance test is (0.82) . As a result, the reliability of these tools are very high according to Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency .

3.8 Final Administration of SA Questionnaire and Test and Writing Performance Test

This questionnaire is conducted to measure the SK of teachers and its' relation to their students' performance in writing . The final administration of SA questionnaire has taken place at 7th of December during the first semester of the academic year (2021-2022) , in Tikrit University/ College of Education for Women/ English department. The test is applied on the same sample of teachers(i.e. , 30 teachers) at 10 / 1 / 2022 in the first semester of the year in order to assess their ability in syntax and writing , and to discover their linguistics background. The time that is allotted to answer the items of questionnaire and test is (3) hours from 10.30 morning until 1.30 evening . The printed sheets of questionnaire and test are distributed among teachers . After that , the sheets of responses are collected and corrected .

Writing performance test is designed to assess the college students' ability in writing , and how the variable of SA correlates to their performance in this skill. The final application of the test is taken place at 20 / 4 / 2022 in the second semester of the year. The test is applied on the sample of students which is (100) students . The time that is specialized for completing this test is (3) hours, from 10.30 morning until 1.30 evening . The printed sheets of test are distributed among students , after that these sheets are gathered and corrected .

4- Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results

4.1 Results Related to the First Question

To analyze the data related to the first question namely: **What is the relationship between the level of SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance?** The researcher has calculated the

score of each item that is based on 5-point Likert scale . Consequently, the first aim of the study undoubtedly: **The relationship between the level of EFL university teachers' SA and the performance of students in writing**, will be achieved . University teachers' SA questionnaire includes two domains which can be identified as follows:

First Domain : *Formulating the Rules of Syntax and Identifying it.*

In this domain, teachers should answer statements by choosing one of the options that mention in the table in order to check their SK , and how this knowledge affects their students. This domain contains (10) items. Starting with this part , the first item (**have problems in grammatical explanations or in defining aspects of syntax**) , 83% of teachers are neutral in having problems in grammatical explanations or in defining aspects of syntax. The results of the second item (**make connections between grammar and writing , i.e. , link grammatical structures to the teaching of writing**) show that 53% of teachers agree with making connections between grammar and writing, i.e. , link grammatical structures to the teaching of writing.

As for third item , (**find teaching syntax and grammar are interesting and attractive aspect**) , 33% of teachers agree and are neutral in finding teaching syntax and grammar are interesting and attractive aspect. Fourth item (**feel happy when learning something new in grammar subjects**) indicates that %83 of teachers strongly agree with feeling happy when learning something new in grammar subjects. Fifth statement (**speak clearly using suitable and correct grammar**) shows that 50% of teachers agree with speaking clearly by using suitable and correct grammar. Sixth item (**think that the prescribed grammatical rules help them to solve many of their language problems**) clarifies that 67% of teachers agree with thinking that the prescribed grammatical rules help them to solve many of their language problems.

In the seven item (**find learning and teaching syntax is one of their favorite subjects which can lead to accuracy**), %67 of teachers agree with finding learning and teaching syntax is one of their favorite subjects which can lead to accuracy. The results of the eighth item (**think that their students feels boring while teaching grammatical structure**) show that 23% of teachers agree that their students feel boring while teaching grammatical structure. As for ninth item, (**punish their students if they commit grammatical mistakes in speaking and writing**), 60% of teachers disagree with punishing their students if they commit grammatical mistakes in speaking and writing. The last item (**provide opportunities for students to focus on aspects of language at the sentence level (e.g. , grammar, syntax) that may be challenging for them in the lesson or text**) shows that %60 of teachers agree with providing opportunities for students to focus on aspects of language at the sentence level (e.g. , grammar, syntax) that may be challenging for them in the lesson or text.

Second Domain : *Reflecting One's Knowledge and Performance in Relation to Syntax*

In this domain, teachers should determine their choice , and give a reason for choosing this answer in a brief way. It contains (10) items

Beginning with this domain which includes (10) items from (11-20) . In the eleventh item(**According to your knowledge , which element of syntax is mastered more : a- Parts of speech, b- Joining two or more sentences with linking words (conjunction), and c- Using tenses**), 50% of teachers answer parts of speech . The results of the twelfth item (**From your experience, which rules of grammar do teachers face difficulty in : a-Understanding clauses , b- Sentence structure, and c- Noun phrase and verb phrase**) show that 60% of teachers choose (c) . As for the thirteenth item, (**According to your grammatical knowledge , teachers find some rules of grammar are simple in teaching for their students as: a- Sentence types , b- Morphemes and its types ,**

and c-Word forms) , 53 % of teachers choose (b) morphemes and its types. The fourteenth item (**According to your experience in teaching grammar , can grammar be learned by: a- Longtime , b- Chance , and c- Short time**) indicates that 100% of teachers choose (a) within long time. The fifteenth statement (**Which aspect according to your experience in teaching grammatical rules and syntax causes a big difficulty for teachers : a- Large class, b-Un sufficient time, and c- The syllabus book**) , shows that 50% of teachers choose (a) large class .

In addition , the sixteenth item (**From your experience in teaching, do you think the kinds of errors that most teachers make or may be weak in some aspects of syntax especially in their speaking and writing are in: a- Tenses , b- Concord and its types , and c- Overlapping the grammatical rules between two languages(i.e. , thinking in Arabic , while speaking in English)**) , indicates that 60% of teachers choose (a) tenses. The result of seventeenth item (**Through your grammatical knowledge , the level of students' weakness in grammar is due to : a- A subject teacher, b- Focusing on the rules of form , and neglecting the rules of use , and c- The weakness in teaching grammar from earlier stages of learning**) , shows that 50% of teachers choose (a) a subject teacher.

Moreover, the eighteenth item (**According to your syntactic knowledge , teachers should improve and develop their repertoire in grammar especially and in language generally by : a- Having more grammatical efficiency , b- Learning themselves by reading more grammar books , and c- Practicing a lot of exercises , and listening to specialists in grammar**) , clarifies that 50% of teachers choose (b) . The nineteenth item (**As a language experienced teacher, it is better to teach grammar : a- Contextually, b- Traditionally, and c- Following the text book , but taking the examples from life experiences**) , shows that 53% of teachers choose (a) contextually. Finally, the twentieth item (**According to your knowledge in teaching grammar, you prefer : a- Using real – life activities , b- Using different visual aids , and c- Following only the instruction of rules without using any media**) , shows that 50% of teachers choose (b) using different visual aids. The average mean score of teachers' SA is (2.211) of their students' performance in writing . Accordingly, there

is a statistical significant difference between the relationship of the level of SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance .

4.2 Results Related to the Second Question

To analyze the data related to the second question namely: **To what extent can an efficient writing of college students be affected by the level of SA of EFL university teachers?** , that is estimated by using Pearson's product moment coefficient of correlation . Consequently, the third aim of the study undoubtedly: **The correlation between SA level of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance**, will be achieved . For achieving this aim, diagnostic tests are applied on (100) students to measure their writing performance , and (30) teachers to measure their SA . The t-test is used to determine how significant the correlation between writing performance and SA . The findings have revealed that there is a significant correlation between the teachers' SA and students' writing performance , and the correlation is positive since the coefficient of (0.478) .

4.3 Discussion of Results

According to the findings of the current study, in the first aim, the results that are collected by using a questionnaire and a test show that , there is statistically significant relationship between the level of SA of EFL university teachers and students' writing performance . Besides, the results of second aim reveal that the teachers' SA have correlated with students' writing performance . Since the correlation is positive as well as the coefficient of (0.478) is positive (+) .

5- Conclusions

Depending on the results obtained , the following conclusions are drawn :

- 1- Students' level in writing performance is weak, since the mean score of writing performance is lower than the theoretical mean score .
- 2- The level of EFL university SA has a relationship with students' writing performance.
- 3- Teachers are able to convey syntax clearly for students because of the individual

differences. In addition , the college teachers have an efficient grammar. Some teachers focus on writing the grammatical rules, explain it , and give examples . So, it is considered as a traditional and weak method to teach grammar, and this regards as one reason for the weakness in the performance of students .

4- SA has a positive correlation with students' writing performance, and with students' general level in using the language.

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