

EFL STUDENTS' GRAMMAR MASTERY AND WRITING SKILL: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine students' grammar and writing ability levels, as well as the relationship between grammar mastery and writing proficiency. The participants of this research were 4th semester students of English department of UNISMA. The instrument used in this study was students' score documentation that were got from the administration office of English Department. The data were analyzed by calculating the mean scores and the r-value of Pearson correlation coefficient on SPSS 20. The study uncovers the mean score of the students' grammar was 74.37 which means that students experienced a good level of grammar. The second mean score was the writing score which was 75.27 which is classified as good level. For the most frequent score of the students' grammar was 72.1%, meanwhile the writing score was 64.6%. but on the other hand, there were students who were in very poor level of grammar and writing in which the grammar was in 1.3 % and the writing was in 2.5 %. The correlation between the students' grammar and their writing achievement is represented by the result showed $r(79) = .253$ with p-value $0.01 < 0.025 < 0.05$ which means that there is correlation between students' grammar mastery and writing skill and that the correlation between the two variable is significant, but the strength of the correlation was positively weak. It can be concluded that grammar mastery is not the main factor that can assist students' writing skill.

Key Words: Grammar mastery, Writing Achievement, Correlation

INTRODUCTION

The Modern era has recently compelled individuals to recognize English as a second language that should be learned, despite the fact that English has long been a dominating language. It is utilized in a variety of contexts, including fashion, international relations, and business. According to Nishanthi (2018, p. 871), the job recruiting services provided by developed nations include not only trustworthy expert workers but also English as one of the prerequisites. It happens as a result of its role as an international language. As a result, practically every country uses English as a second language. According to Nishanthi (2018, p. 871), individuals throughout the world cannot decrease and avoid English because it has become the most significant language that is utilized globally.

English is a crucial language to learn, and students face various challenges in the process. According to Nishanthi (2018), continuous practice and endurance are necessary for learning English effectively. Among these challenges, grammar is a priority skill in building a second language. Purpura (2014) emphasizes that grammar interest plays a significant role in helping learners become fluent. In English language learning, students need to focus on key components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Grammar, in particular, is considered essential by many experts. Debata (2013) argues that students cannot neglect grammar in their English learning journey. Saaristo (2015) conducted a study on Finnish university students and found that over half of the students recognized the crucial role of grammar in language learning. The study also highlighted that students who master grammar perform better in other language skills. Educators also acknowledge grammar as a supportive factor for effective language learning. Debata (2013) further explains that grammar is used by people in their daily life, consciously or unconsciously, to make their communication more effective and meaningful. While

mastering all the integrated language skills is an ideal goal, it is often challenging to achieve simultaneously. Each student may have different goals and passions, such as excelling in speaking, writing, or other skills.

In addition to passion, the learning environment also plays a significant role. For instance, in the academic realm, writing often takes precedence among students for various reasons, such as career prospects or personal interest. According to Parviz et al. (2014), writing is regarded as a crucial skill in the educational setting. Proficiency in writing not only yields positive feedback but also offers numerous advantages across different domains, including technology, learning, and communication. One direct benefit is that students with strong writing abilities find it easier to complete their theses efficiently. However, constructing well-formed sentences is not a simple task akin to arranging a picture. It requires a rich vocabulary and a deep understanding of grammar rules and formulas. Without a grasp of grammatical rules, learners will struggle to form meaningful sentences. Helmiati et al. (2019) addressed the gap in previous research regarding the correlation between grammar and writing. Their study involved 25 first-year university students. However, the researchers noted that the scores they obtained for grammar and writing might not accurately reflect the students' overall abilities. This discrepancy could be attributed to the use of inadequate teaching materials by some lecturers or a lack of sufficient understanding on the part of the students. Consequently, these factors could have influenced the students' scores, rendering them unreliable for assessment purposes.

The Nature of Grammar

For decades, linguists and language instructors have debated the nature and the importance of grammar. Mistar and Zuhairi (2020) stated that the use of grammar learning affected by many factors such as students' motivation. Grammar is a crucial aspect of learning English, with teachers aiming to produce fluent and correct English. Grammar plays a significant role in the development and construction of language components, ensuring the success of language grammar. As a foundation, grammar should be considered one of the most fundamental aspects of learning, as it impacts the development and correct construction of language components. As Chomsky (1957) noted, grammar is the foundation of the system that allows speakers to construct an infinite number of words. He said that the human brain is built with a universal grammar that permits us to learn languages effortlessly. He stated that the focus of grammar is on speakers and listeners who have perfect language knowledge and are unaffected by errors, interruptions, or shifts in attention.

The Nature of Writing

For thousands of years, writing has been an essential component of communication and a defining element of human civilization. Writing, according to Crystal (2004, p. 67), is a means of making words understandable. According to Lunsford (2019), writing is a complicated process that includes conception, writing, editing, and proofreading (p. 1). Writing is a multi-step process that may be completed all at once. Multiple drafts, modifications, and corrections are required for a well-written text that successfully conveys the desired message. The writing was once mostly used for recording events and preserving records, but it has now become a fundamental mode of communication in a variety of sectors, including academic, commercial, and social situations. Writing was once mostly used for recording events and preserving records, but it has now evolved into a fundamental mode of communication in a variety of sectors, including academic, commercial, and social situations. Writing has developed over time, and with the development of technology, it has grown more accessible and pervasive. As a result of the emergence of digital media and the internet, writing became the global method of communication and was accessible to all. Writing can be academic, creative, or technical. Academic writing involves research papers, essays, and dissertations, presenting arguments and ideas. Creative writing expresses thoughts and emotions through stories, poems, and plays. Technical writing presents information on products, services, or

procedures in a clear and concise manner. Effective communication of the message is crucial for creating good writing, as well as grammar and syntax.

The Effect of Grammar Mastery on Writing Skill

Grammar plays a crucial role in academic writing, with students and academics discussing its importance. It is often viewed as a minor detail, while others view it as a critical aspect. In the past, grammar was taught as a set of rules and principles, which students had to memorize and use in their writing. Chomsky (1957) argued that this approach was flawed as it did not consider the complexity of language. Grammar is significant in academic writing because it allows meaning to be expressed and is a vital component in establishing credibility or authority. However, the value of grammatical skills varies from student to student. According to Larsen-Freeman (2015), grammar is a complex system that interacts with various aspects of language and generates meaning. Chomsky (1965) also highlighted the importance of grammar, noting that language is based on natural and universal principles shared by all people.

Despite differing opinions on the importance of grammar skills, it is essential for students to strive to improve their writing abilities. By developing their grammar skills, students can enhance their communication skills, increase their chances of academic success, and improve their overall writing proficiency. Experts like Chomsky and Larsen-Freeman emphasize the importance of grammar as a complicated system interacting with different aspects of language and meaning. Therefore, students should strive to improve their grammar skills to enhance their communication abilities, increase their chances of academic success, and improve their overall writing proficiency.

Previous research on the relationship between grammar and writing skills has shown mixed results. Septiani (2014) conducted a study on 120 English 6th-semester students, using a grammar exam and writing scores. The study found no association between grammar and writing, suggesting that students with high grammar abilities may struggle with writing. Handayani (2021) used grammar and writing examinations to conduct correlational research on 25 senior high school students, finding a significant relationship between the two variables. Saputra (2019) also used the same exams to evaluate the association between grammatical mastery and writing skills in 29 students. Helmiati et al. (2019) studied 25 1st semester EFL students in Indonesia, using students' documentation of grammar and writing scores. The Pearson correlation was found to be weak, suggesting further investigation into these variables. Reima (2022) conducted a study on 189 EFL freshmen students at King Saud University, examining the correlation between grammar instruction and writing ability. The study found a strong correlation between grammar instruction and writing ability, suggesting that higher grammar scores lead to higher writing scores.

The limitation on prior study such as on the study of Helmiati et al. (2019) makes this study's novelty lies in its diverse sample size and reliable grammar and writing scores. The study aims to understand students' levels of these skills and their correlation with their overall academic performance. The overall scores from assignments and exams throughout the year provide valuable insights into the relationship between these variables.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research utilizes a quantitative method, using students' score documentation as the instrument to investigate the correlation between grammar mastery and writing achievement in 4th-semester English department students. The sample used is 79 students from UNISMA's English department. The researcher uses simple random sampling to collect data, ensuring accuracy of the students' grammar and writing scores. The data collection process involves obtaining permission from the university, the head of the English Department, and the administrator to obtain a list of students' scores.

The researcher then analyzes the collected data using SPSS version 20.0, examining research questions using various programs. The first research question is analyzed using descriptive

statistics, calculating the average and mean of the students' grammar scores, while the second research question is analyzed using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficient (r).

FINDING

This study's findings focus on examining data from students' grammar and writing scores. On SPSS version 20, the data was examined using descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation product moment. The research findings were used to address the study's research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the grammar and writing levels of students?

The first research question about the students' grammar and writing level was answered by calculating the means scores of the students. The scoring interpretation can be seen in the Table 1, and the finding of students' grammar and writing level can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1. Scoring Interpretation by Depdiknas (2006)

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Score's range	81 – 100	61 – 80	41 – 60	21 – 40	0 – 20

Table 2. Students' Means Scores of Grammar and Writing

Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Grammar	79	74.37	11.77	Good
Writing	79	75.27	13.87	Good

The mean scores in Table 2 showed that the students' level of grammar and writing are both in the good level in general.

Table 3. Grammar Ability Classification Score

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	N
Score's range	81 – 100	61 – 80	41 – 60	21 – 40	0 – 20	
Frequency	14	57	7	0	1	79
Percentage	17.7 %	72.1 %	8.9 %	0	1.3 %	100 %

Table 4. Writing Ability Classification Score

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	N
Score's range	81 – 100	61 – 80	41 – 60	21 – 40	0 – 20	
Frequency	23	51	3	0	2	79
Percentage	29.1 %	64.6 %	3.8 %	0	2.5 %	100 %

Tables 3 and 4 indicate that the most frequent score received by students was classed as good. The most frequent grammar score for students was 72.1%. Meanwhile, the most frequent score for students' writing was 64.6%. However, both tables revealed that there were students with

very low grammar and writing skills. Despite this, 17.7% of students' grammar skills and 29.1% of students' writing skills indicate that some students comprehend grammar and writing extremely well. The average categorization, which demonstrates that the student's grammar and writing skills are both on a good level, indicates that they may still be improved by a better learning method for both students and teachers.

Research Question 2: Is there a correlation between the student's grammatical proficiency and their writing ability?

The second research question was to analyze if there are any relationship between students' grammar mastery and their writing achievement. The level of strength and the direction of (r) value can be seen in Table 5, and the results of the correlation coefficient value can be seen in Table 6.

Table 5. The Strength of Pearson Correlation Coefficient by Turney (2022)

(r) value	Interpretation
(r) > .5	Strongly Positive
.3 < (r) < .5	Moderately Positive
0 < (r) < .3	Weakly Positive
0	No Correlation
0 < (r) < -.3	Weakly Negative
-.3 < (r) < -.5	Moderately Negative
(r) < -.5	Strongly Negative

Table 6. The Pearson's Result of Students' Grammar and Writing

		Writing
Grammar	Pearson's Value	.253*
	Significance Value	.025
	N	79

The (r) value of the students' grammar and writing score on Table 6 was .253 with a p-value was 0.025, indicating that there is a correlation between students' grammar mastery and writing skill and that the correlation between the two variables is significant, but the strength of the correlation was positively weak. The positive direction indicates that if one variable rises, the other rises as well, and vice versa. As a result, the association between students' grammatical mastery and writing competence indicated the interpretation as the students' better grammar level.

DISCUSSION

The first research question was answered by looking at the means scores of the students' grammar and writing scores. Table 2's mean scores show that the students' grammar and writing abilities are typically good. Table 3 and Table 4 show the students' grammar and writing level, which was obtained from the frequency of each grammar and writing score. The categorization of students' grammar levels was shown in Table 3. The most common score was 72.1%, which was considered a good level. Only 17.7% of students achieved a very good level. While there was a student who had really bad grammatical skills. Table 4, on the other hand, particularly shows the students' writing competence categorization. According to the table, the majority of the students

were at the good level, with 64.6% classed as one. The 29.1% of students were classed as having very excellent writing skills, which was greater than the 29.1% who were classified as having very strong grammatical skills. Similarly to grammar mastery, there were students with really weak writing skills. The remainder was written at a fair level of understanding.

The second finding answered the second research question, which was to evaluate the relationship between grammatical competence and writing ability in students. The correlation coefficient or the (r) value in SPSS ver. 20 in Table 4 was .253, indicating that there was correlation between the two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient interpretation in Table 3 characterized the (r) value as weak and the direction as positive. The positive direction suggests that if one variable rises, the other rises as well, and vice versa. Prior research on the same topic supports the conclusions of this study. Helmiati et al. (2019) discovered that the association between grammar and writing competence was $r = 0.345$, indicating a weak correlation in their study. This suggests that grammatical proficiency has little impact on students' writing abilities. Davis and Mahoney (2005) discovered a weak correlation between sophomore grammar and writing ability. They found that grammatical comprehension had a minor impact on students writing progress.

In contrast to the findings of this study, Reima (2022), who investigated grammar instruction and EFL students' writing proficiency, discovered a strong correlation between EFL freshmen students' scores in both grammar and writing, implying that grammar played a significant role in students' writing performance. Saputra (2019) did research on a similar issue and discovered a high association between grammar and writing ability. These supporting earlier studies show that the relationship between grammar and writing skills differs from other to another. Other students' results may change depending on the level of study, length of study, and/or location of the learning system. On the other side, the research instrument may provide insufficient data for the results. This study will be completed successfully if diverse methods of research, such as qualitative research, are used.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to determine students' grammar and writing ability levels and the relationship between grammar mastery and writing proficiency. The research found that 4th semester English department students at UNISMA had good levels of both grammar and writing. However, there were also students with poor levels. The correlation coefficient was positive, indicating that higher grammar levels lead to better writing abilities. However, both grammar mastery and writing skill showed a weak positive correlation, suggesting that grammar mastery is not the primary factor assisting students' writing skills. This finding was further supported by Helmiati et al.'s (2019) correlational study, which also found a weak correlation between grammar mastery and writing skill. Overall, the study suggests that students with good grammar mastery may not always excel in writing.

Some suggestions are made to give new insight to the students, English teachers, and further researchers regarding to the limitation of the study results. As for the students, the researcher aims to increase students' awareness of their grammar and writing abilities by focusing on learning factors like effective techniques, a conducive environment, and efficient study time. English teachers should focus on improving students' grammar and writing skills by using various teaching techniques and materials. Creating a comfortable learning environment can help students overcome challenges in these subjects, particularly for those with poor understanding. Teachers should also strive to create a more engaging learning environment for students with fair or poor understanding levels. The study's findings can also assist future researchers in understanding students' grammar

mastery and writing abilities. To expand the sample scale, researchers should use a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Instruments can be varied, such as grammar and writing tests, to assess students' recent skills. Future researchers can also classify the sample based on age and gender. This approach will help researchers better understand the correlation between these skills and their overall performance.

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