

The Essential Techniques Affecting the Performance of Sudanese EFL Learners in Writing: A Case Study of Three Eastern Universities of Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the English language learners' weakness in writing because most of them do not know how to combine their sentences correctly. The paper was devoted to Sentence Combining (SC) as an essential technique or method that affects EFL learners' performance in writing English. Using the case study on fourth-level students majoring in English, the descriptive-analytical method has been applied, representing the three eastern universities in Sudan: The University of Kassala, University of Gadarif and Red Sea University. The researcher used an objective test of (83) items in Sentence Combining in English. The frequency tables and percentage were used for the five areas in the students' test (pass-fail). According to the students' outcomes, they have been proved that the Sudanese learners of English at the three eastern universities lack the awareness of methods and techniques of combining English sentences. They are not well-informed of combining English sentences by means of punctuation, coordination, subordination, reduction and apposition. The concept of sentence combining is unconsciously neglected by the teachers themselves, who are unaware of its importance.

1. Introduction

In short, by sentence combining in different grammatical forms, the writer can specify the exact logical connections as well as create a more sophisticated style. Research over the past three decades indicates that methods of writing as Sentence Combining (SC) can improve the writing abilities of the elementary, secondary and college students. Palacas (1971) argued that the red comments in the margins of students' compositions fail to teach writing because teacher observations do not provide explicit linguistic descriptions which can help students improve their writing. In working with learning English, Nutter and Safran (1984) said that we have more specific structured methods for teaching and for assessing reading than for writing.

1.1 Aims of the paper

The paper aims to find if there is a relationship between the EFL university students' weak performance in English writing and their weakness in using methods and techniques of combining English sentences in their writing, to check whether the students in question are aware of the methods and techniques of English writing skills, and to provide teachers with ideas to overcome difficulties facing their students in how to use methods of teaching English writing skills.

1.2 The Scope of the Study

The main focus of this study is limited to learners of the English language at three universities in East of Sudan, namely the University of Kassala, the Red Sea and Gadarif.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In teaching undergraduates who are preparing to be teachers, the researcher has often found that these students do not show much concern for combining their sentences accurately. When they are asked to write an essay, for instance, the majority of them cannot express their ideas clearly, which results in poor writing. Students lack a good knowledge of sentences combining

techniques because they did not learn language items communicatively. Also, the teachers do not draw their students' attention to methods and techniques of combining short sentences to develop their writing ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Sentence Combining

Sentence Combining (SC) combines two or shorter, basic sentences called kernels into a longer, more complex sentence so that the important information from each short sentence is retained. O'Hare, (1971) defined sentence combining as a type of pedagogy involving extensive sequence practice of specially formulated print-based exercises through which a student is said to acquire dexterity in writing complex sentence structure. Savage (1980) described SC as a technique of "putting together strings of basic Kernel sentences into more complex, syntactically mature, and fluent sentences". O'Hare, (Ibid) says that sentence combining is based on three major premises:

- 1- Written English differs from spoken English and needs teaching methods based on language acquisition processes.
- 2- The process of sentence development is dynamic and not static.
- 3- Activities are easier to complete when divided into smaller components.

Yearwood (1979) described SC as a process that all writers and other language users employ intuitively; we join sentences unconsciously in both oral and written language. Hunt, (in Yearwood, (ibid)) writes that sentence combining takes one sentence of a certain sort and another of a certain sort and combines them to produce one new sentence.

The definitions we looked at share one thing in common: they all imply that SC is an organized set of short sentences in long ones. The goal of the SC is not only to produce longer sentences but rather to develop more effective and interesting readable ones to help the writer become more accurate and readable.

In more recent times, sentence-combining researchers such as Mellon (1969); Nutter, (1984) and Strong (1986) attributed sentence combining research to the work of Chomsky. Mellon (ibid) credits the year 1957 with the beginning of sentence combining. He said: Transformational grammar still in its infancy, was known only to Noam Chomsky and a few dozen other linguists, and no English teachers whatever.

Nutter and Safran (1984:450) also acknowledge Chomsky's contribution stating that sentence combining derives from Noam Chomsky' theory (1965), that the basis of grammar is the irreducible sentence (the "Kernel ") and that the structure of grammar is the syntactic operations (the " transformations") we perform on Kernels to generate new sentences.

Referring to Chomsky in his recollections about composition research in early 1960, Strong (1986) said:" Undoubtedly, Chomsky's work on transformational grammar paved the way for the use of sentence-combining and other innovative approaches in the teaching of written composition.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the study of transformational grammar replaced structural grammar. Weaver (1996) emphasized how surface structures can be generated from hypothesized deep, underlying structures and how underlying structures can be transformed into different stylistic variants. For this shift to transformation and an emphasis on sentence combining O'Hare, (1973) suggested that sentence-combining practice alone can enhance syntactic maturity and writing quality; without grammatical terminology or the study of grammar. Halliday and Hassan, (1976) confirmed that focusing on using grammar in context is more relevant to writing.

Saddler and Graham (2005) claimed that sentence combining can provide systematic instruction in sentence construction skills within an overall writing workshop framework. In fact, researchers have found that sentence combining practice can help young writers create qualitatively better stories and increase the amount and quality of revisions.

2.2 The Need to Combine Sentences

Sentences have to be combined to avoid monotony which occurs if sentences were brief and of equal length. Also, the writer combines sentences to avoid primer style (too many short sentences). For example, the following sentences:

My sister is very clever. My sister is an engineer. My sister works for the state.

The above sentences can be combined to read:

* My sister who is very clever works as an engineer for the state.

Escalas (1999) wrote that a paper containing sentences of one short pattern bores both the writer and the reader for two reasons:

1. Repetition of a single, simple sentence pattern draws attention to itself, not to the ideas in the paper .
2. Simple, short sentences cannot show the reader the many relationships that exist among ideas of different importance.

Saddler, (2007) mentioned that writers particularly inexperienced ones, sometimes create a series of short sentences that sound choppy and lack good connection. If a writer conveys the length and complexity of his sentences, he will increase his readers interest in his ideas.

Richard (2007) said that the goal of sentence combining is not to produce longer sentences but rather to develop more effective sentences and help you become a more versatile writer. Sentence combining calls on the writer to experiment with different methods of putting words together. Because there are countless ways to build sentences, the writer goal is not to find the one "correct" combination but to consider different arrangements before he/ she decides which one is the most effective.

How and When to Combine Sentences

The overall how to combine the sentences is probably the learner's biggest headache. In many grammar books there are no separate sections for the main ways, or techniques of sentence-combining , especially in EFL curriculum they ignore this technique. Most modern grammarians have at least one general section such as "sentence structure" Zandvoot, (1975) or " clauses and sentences" (Frank, 1972).

The SC operation begins with a simple form, a single, or kernel sentence. In order to increase the length of the sentence, one has to add a word, clause, or phrase. This follows the pattern of chunking O'Hare (1971). Correct sentence-combining cannot happen automatically; it requires taste, skill, and thought. In general, a writer tries to make his/her essay more logical and his/her sentences more connected. When presented as a revising strategy, sentence-combining activities help students identify short, choppy sentences in their own writing, leading them to combine their ideas in more fluid and sophisticated ways. As students generate more complex sentences from shorter ones, they discover how the arrangement of phrases and clauses, for example, affects meaning and its impact on their readers.

2.3 Advantages of Sentence Combining

As students move into educational contexts, they need to organize more complex sets of sentences and develop fluency with a wide range of genres and formal structures of written essays and discourse (Kaplan & Grape, 1996).

From the definitions of Sentence Combining, we can say it is the strategy of joining short sentences into longer and more complex sentences. As students engage in sentence-combining activities, they learn how to vary sentence structure in order to change meaning and style. Numerous studies (Mellon, 1969; Hillocks, 1986, Strong,1994) show that the use of sentence combining is an effective method for improving students' writing. The value of sentence combining is most evident as students recognize the effect of sentence variety (beginnings, lengths, complexities) in their own writing.

Hillocks (1986:150) states that "sentence combining practice provides writers with systematic knowledge of syntactic possibilities, the access to which allows them to sort through alternatives in their heads as well as on paper and to choose those which are most apt". Research also shows that sentence combining is more effective than free writing in enhancing the quality of student writing.

Hillocks and Smith (1991) show that systematic practice in sentence combining can increase students' knowledge of syntactic structures and improve the quality of their sentences, particularly when stylistic effects are discussed. Sentence-combining exercises can be written or oral, structured or unstructured. Structured sentence-combining exercises give students more guidance in ways to create the new sentences; unstructured sentence-combining exercises allow for more variation, but they still require students to create logical, meaningful sentences. Hillocks (ibid) reported that sentence-combining exercises produce significant increases in students' sentence-writing maturity in many studies.

Given Noguchi (1991) stated that grammar choices affect writing style, sentence combining is effective methods for helping students develop fluency and variety in their own writing style. Students can explore sentence variety, length, parallelism, and other syntactic devices by comparing their sentences with sentences from other writers. They also discover the decisions writers make in revising for style and effect.

Morenberg, Daiker, and Kerek (1978: 401) said that sentence combining exercises prepare students to write original compositions because students receive "disciplined writing practice, without the sometimes paralyzing pressure to be 'creative' ". Richard Gephardt (in Daiker: 210) said that sentence combining could give composition teachers a way to address the overload that many students face when writing. With sentence combining exercises, students can work on a writing task which is easier to manage than a five-hundred-word composition.

Gephardt (ibid: 211) identifies several other advantages of sentence combining: Sentence combining gives structure to what a student must do. By being definite, a sentence-combining assignment can protect inexperienced students from the stress they may feel at the open-ended paper assignment. Sentence combining also lets teachers structure exercises, moving from the brief and straightforward, to longer and more complex, so that we can help students build up their capacities to handle the simultaneous demands of producing, reading, judging, and modifying words.

2.4 Is Combining Sentences a Complex or an Easy Concept?

Combining is a complex concept; it involves lists of heavily redundant sentences that require combining groups of three or four sentences as a single more complex sentence. The list of sentences when combined in this way, should form a reasonably complex paragraph. We create more complexity through coordination, subordination, punctuation, which are needed syntactic maturity. Yearwood (1979) claimed that combining little sentence into bigger ones can be repeated an indefinite number of times so that two, three, four, five, and even twenty can be combined into one complicated sentence. He added that the joining of sentences partially indicates linguistic maturity. A student moves from the simple:

I saw the spot. The spot was running.

To the more complex: I saw spot running.

SC practice in Year Wood view produces students who write longer sentences, and thus express their linguistic maturity.

Students with poor writing skills often write sentences that lack 'syntactic maturity' (Robinson & Howell, 2008). In public schools, grammar skills have traditionally been taught in isolation to give students the advanced writing knowledge required to master a diverse range of sentence structures. However, isolated grammar instruction appears to have little or no positive impact in helping poor writers become better ones (Graham & Perin, 2007).

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The subjects are EFL learners in three Eastern states in Sudan namely: red Sea, Kasala, and Gadarif. The nations of over 10 ethnic groups and more than 10 native languages. According to level at university, they are at level four (final year) of the English language Departments. The total number of the students is (50), they are males and females, they possess the same characteristics, their entry qualifications are nearly the same, they are nearly the same age, ranging from 20 to 23 years.

3.2 Instrument

A test for EFL students to combine English sentences using the areas of punctuation, co-ordination, subordination, reduction and apposition, was modeled to be familiar to the students. The test aims to test the students' ability to combine the given sentences in a given situation and directions. The test was modeled to be familiar to the students

The total mark of the test is (100) marks, was distributed between (SC) methods, the punctuation (14 marks), the coordination has (15 marks), the subordination, the greatest one has (45 marks), the reduction has (16 marks), and the apposition has (10 marks); pass in each exercise is the half of the given mark.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher distributed the test to the EFL learners under the same examination conditions. In the classroom, the time allotted was 2 hrs. Then the researcher collected the test to correct the students' responses. The errors they commit would be analyzed and discussed

3.3 Data collection Techniques

The researcher used the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS), the frequency tables and percent were used for the five areas in the students' test (pass-fail) in the analysis of the results of the five (SC) methods, so as to fulfill the aims and the objectives of the study.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of the Punctuation

The punctuation contains three exercises on semi-colon, semi-colon/conjunctive adverbs, and colon. The semi-colon section included five pairs of sentences for combining a correct answer takes one mark, likewise five pairs of sentences for combining on the semi-colon/conjunction section, a correct answer takes one mark, and two pairs on the colon exercise, a correct answer takes two marks. The full mark for punctuation Ex.1 is 14.

Table 1 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.1.1) on Semicolon

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	26	52.0
Fail	24	48.0
Total	50	100.0

A glance at the table will reveal that (26) of the students passed to combine the pair of sentences in (Ex.1. 1), whereas (24) of them failed to combine the sentences correctly.

Discussion

Some of the students (24) in table 1 use wrong punctuation marks to combine sentences. - They are using the comma when a semicolon is needed.

For example, the following sentences from students test Ex.1.1

- * *Eltayib Salih wrote a novel. It was published in London.*
- *Eltayib Salih wrote a novel, it was published in London. (Incorrect)*
- *Eltayib Salih wrote a novel; it was published in London. (Correct)*

Table 2 (See the appendix), (16) of the students failed to combine the sentences by using the semicolon / Conjunctive adverb correctly; they use the conj. Adv. Only for combining the two sentences. A conjunctive adverb is not strong enough to join two independent clauses without the aid of a semicolon, and a comma following the conjunctive adverb.

Examples of Students erroneous sentences from Exercise 1-2

- * *He had never been to China. It had always been one of his ambitions.*
- *He had never been to China nevertheless, it had always been one of his ambitions. (Incorrect)*
- *He had never been to China; nevertheless, it had always been one of his ambitions. (Correct)*

In table 3 (See the appendix) Ex.1. the majority of the students fail to combine the sentences by using a colon. For example:

- * *We are planning to set up the tables. We are planning to set up the chairs. We are planning to put up the decorations. We are planning to bake the cake.*
- *We are planning to set up the tables, we set up the chairs: we put up the decorations, we bake the cake. (Incorrect)*

A colon is used to add more information and especially to give examples of something in the sentence.

- *We are planning: to set up the tables, to set up the chairs, to put up the decorations and to bake the cake. (Correct)*

4.2 Co-ordination

Table 4 (Ex.2) on coordination, contained five pairs or groups for combining sentences. (One mark has been assigned for the correct answer to make a total of 5 marks for the full answer), table 2 (**See the appendix**) shows the statistical results on the co-ordination.

Table 4 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.2) on Coordination

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	13	26.0
Fail	37	74.0
Total	50	100.0

The Frequency table shows that in Coordination (37), the students failed to choose the correct coordinating conjunction to combine the pairs of the sentences where only (13) of them passed.

Discussion

Table (4) above and (Ex.2) show that most of the students (37) failed to use the correct conjunction to combine the sentences, because they confused the coordinating conjunctions. **When the writer combines** two sentences using a coordinating conjunction, he/she drops the first period, changes the capital letter that begins the second sentence to a small letter, and inserts **a comma before the coordinating conjunction** Escalas, (1999: 423).

The coordinating conjunctions create different relationships between two ideas. When the writer coordinates clauses, e.g. when he/she join clauses with *and*, *or*, or *but* you signal that the ideas in the clauses are related and of relatively equal importance. Some of the students’ co-ordinate clauses that are unrelated or use co-coordinating conjunction that signals the wrong relationship, as *but*s in the following examples from the students’ final exam:

* *The theatre in Sudan has national respect for years. But Alfadil Saeed was a major figure in this success (Incorrect).*

- *The theatre in Sudan has national respect for years, and Alfadil Saeed was a major figure in this success. (Correct)*

4.3 Subordination

The exercise on subordination area represents the largest group of sentences for combining. It contains test Exercises on the adjective clauses, noun clauses, and adverbial clauses which are divided into clauses for time, purpose, causes, place, result, condition and concession, respectively. Each group contained five groups of sentences for combining. Five marks have been assigned for each type of sentences. The full mark for subordination Ex.3 is 45.

Table 5 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.1) on Adjective Clauses

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	11	22.0
Fail	39	78.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (11) of the students combine the adjective clause correctly whereas (39) of them fail to combine them correctly.

Discussion

Table (5) above on Adjective Clauses (Ex 3.1), and tables (6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13) (**See the appendix**), on (Exs.3: ,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, and 9) show that most of the students failed to use the correct adverbs to combine the sentences, same reasons that caused them to choose incorrect subordination conjunctions apply to this adverbial.

The researcher attributes these results to the fact that English adverbs are confusing to non– native speakers. **Many difficulties face students with subordination.** Many sentences have subjects and verbs, but the subject and the verb are independent clauses. The following example from students’ Exam essays:

You can't learn English with motivation. Because there is no English labs for learning (Incorrect).

You can't learn English with motivation because there are no English labs for learning. (Correct)

Errors of this kind reflect the ignorance of the learner, of how to use subordination to combine the two clauses.

Subordinating conjunctions are used to combine a subordinate dependent clause to a main clause. For example:

It was a difficult exam. We got good grades.
Although it was a difficult exam we got good grades.

Table 10 (See the appendix), in (Ex.3.6) Adverb Clauses of Place; most of the students write the subordinating conjunction (where) to combine the sentences at the beginning of the sentence.

As in the following examples:

- * *That is the place. The accident occurred there.*
- *Where the accident occurred that is the place. (Incorrect)*
- *That is the place where the accident occurred. (Correct)*

Adverbs can make writing more effective. An adverb clause is made up of a Subject and everything else that comes with the verb or predicate part of the sentence and is introduced by one of the conjunctions. Adverb Clauses can begin a sentence in the first or initial position, or they can end the sentence in the final position, or they can sometimes be used with the verb in the middle position of the sentence to show manner, for example. According to its use in regard to time, cause and effect, opposition, or condition, the adverbial clause can come either before or after the main clause. It is introduced by a subordinating conjunction.

Students do not write precisely when using subordinate conjunctions because, although, unless while—to express relationships clearly and **place emphasis where it belongs in the main clause.**

Look at the following example from the student's test:

- * *The road was slippery and we went into the ditch. (Incorrect)*

Compared to:

- *Because the road was slippery, we went into the ditch. (Correct)*

Note that as well as imprecision and misplaced emphasis, logical problems can result from faulty subordination, as the following example shows:

- * *I studied hard for my final exams although it was very important that I should do well on them.*

Here, although should be replaced by because or as.

- *I studied hard for my final exams because it was very important that I should do well on them.*

Subordination allows the writer to express the relationship between two unequal ideas within a single sentence. Methods for subordinating ideas include the use of an adjective clause, an adverb clause, and a noun clause. Mastering these methods of subordination will improve the variety and clarity of the writer writing.

Exercise 3.1 (Table 5) Adjective Clauses: Adjective clauses, like adjectives, modify nouns or pronouns. To combine sentences by using an adjective clause, you must first decide which idea to emphasize. Then you must choose the correct relative pronoun to join the sentences.

Examples from students' test:

- * *The book is mine. It is on the table.*
- *The book is mine which it is on the table. (Incorrect)*
- *The book which is on the table is mine. (Correct)*
- * *She is the woman. I told you about her.*
- *She is the woman who I told you about her. (Incorrect)*
- *She is the woman whom I told you about. (Correct)*

Adverb clauses can express a relationship of time, cause, purpose, or condition between two ideas within a single sentence.

To combine sentences by using an adverb clause, the writer must first decide which idea should become subordinate. He/she must then decide which subordinating conjunction best expresses the relationship between the two ideas.

A noun clause is a subordinate clause used as a noun.

Examples:

* *They thought that they did not need help. This was a very foolish idea.*

- *That they did not need help was a very foolish idea. (Incorrect)*

* *The novel is very powerful. It concerns the rights of women in the twentieth century.*

- *The novel, which concerns the rights of women in the twentieth.*

Century is very powerful. (Incorrect)

Tables (6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13) (See the appendix), on (Exs.3: (3.2), (3.3) ,(3.4) ,(3.5), (3.6), (3.7),(3.8),and (3.9) which contain noun clauses, and adverbial clauses which are divided into clauses for: time, purpose, causes, place, result, condition and concession respectively, show that most of the students failed to use the correct adverbs to combine the sentences correctly.

4.4 Reduction

The exercise on reduction (Ex.4) contains test questions on combining sentences using gerund phrases, infinitive phrases, prepositional phrases, and participial phrases, respectively. Each section of these contains four pairs of sentences for combining. The full mark for each section is (4 marks).

Table 14 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.4.1) on gerund phrase

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	2	4.0
Fail	48	96.0
Total	50	100.0

The frequency table above shows the students who answered the Ex.4.1 of the gerund phrase, only (2) of them got the answer right whereas (48) of them got the answer wrong.

Discussion

In Table 14 above, 48 of the students got the answers wrong, only (2) of them got the answer right.

In (Ex.4.1) Gerund Phrases the students combine the following sentences by using wrong Gerund Phrases.

* *There is a path at the end of the street. The path leads to the river.*

- *There is a path at the end of the street. The path leads to the river.*

* *The employee asked for a raise. The employee found out about the boss's temper.*

- *The employee asking for a raise, he found out about the boss's temper. (Incorrect)*

- *Asking for a raise, the employee found out about the boss's temper. (Correct)*

In the table (15), (Ex.4.2) on Infinitive Phrase; (See the appendix), (23) of the students failed to get the right answer to the infinitive phrase, whereas (27) of them passed.

In (table 16), (Ex.4.3) on prepositional phrases; **(See the appendix)**, (33) of the students passed, whereas (17) of them failed to get the right answer to prepositional phrase in Ex.4.3. No punctuation is needed for a prepositional phrase. The students combine the two sentences by using a comma:

- * *We enjoyed the party. The party was at your house.*
- *We enjoyed the party, the party was at your house. (Incorrect)*
- *We enjoyed the party at your house. (Correct)*

In table 17, (Ex.4.4) on the participial phrase; **(See the appendix)**, only (9) of the students passed, while the majority (41) of them failed to combine the phrases correctly, this means that: Participial phrases are often a useful way to combine sentences and to express ideas concisely. The following two sentences can be combined by using a participial phrase.

* *The bride accepted the wedding present. The wedding present was wrapped in silver paper.*

The second sentence has been turned into a participial phrase, *wrapped in silver paper*. Unnecessary words have been deleted.

- *The bride accepted the wedding present wrapped in silver paper. (Correct)*

A participle or participial phrase must always be placed close to the noun or pronoun it modifies. Otherwise, the sentence may confuse the reader.

4.5 Apposition

The last exercise (Ex.5) of the students' test contains five pairs of sentences for combining through the use of the apposition technique. This mark is distributed over the five questions in this section. The statistical results appear in the table (18) below:

Table 18 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.5) on apposition

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	14	28.0
Fail	36	72.0
Total	50	100.0

The table above shows that the students who combine the appositive sentences right were only (14) whereas (36) failed to combine them right.

Discussion

Two sentences can often be combined through the use of an appositive or an appositive phrase.

By looking at the table (5) we can see that the students who combine the appositive sentences right were only (14) whereas (36) were failed to combine them right.

Most of the students combine the following sentences in Ex. 5 incorrectly:

- * *Nadine Gardiner is a South African writer. She published her first stories at the age of fifteen.*
- *Nadine Gardiner, is a South African writer. She published her first stories at the age of fifteen. (Incorrect)*
- *Nadine Gardiner is a South African writer. She published her first stories at the age of fifteen. (Incorrect)*
- *Nadine Gardiner, a South African writer, published her first stories at the age of fifteen. (Correct)*
- * *My favorite teacher is a fine chess player. My favorite teacher won several medals.*
- *My favorite teacher is a fine chess player, my favorite teacher, won several medals. (Incorrect)*
- *My favorite teacher, a fine chess player, won several medals. (Correct)*

* *Eltayeb Salih was the author of several books. He lived in London.*

- *Eltayeb Salih was the author, of several books, lived in London. (Incorrect)*

- *Eltayeb Salih was the author of several books, lived in London. (Incorrect)*

- *Eltayeb Salih, the author of several books, lived in London. (Correct)*

As reflected in tables above, descriptive statistics reveal that, the results displayed in the tables reveal that in reduction Ex.4 all the students failed.

Failure in each area indicates that there is a problem in all 5 methods. The percentages of pass cases are very low.

College students of the Universities of Eastern States, namely: Kasala, Red Sea and Gadarif are not aware of how to combine their sentences when writing English, using the five methods of punctuation, co-ordination, subordination, reduction and apposition.

5. Findings

The results of the students' test revealed that all sentence-combining techniques or methods got a low percentage. The percentage for the punctuation: in table 1, (48%) of the students failed to answer to (Ex.1.1) on semicolon. Table 2 (Ex.1.2) on semicolon /Conjunctive - Those percentages clearly indicate failure and sheer weakness of students in their performance in all methods of sentence-combining included in this paper, namely of punctuation and co-ordination subordination, reduction and apposition.

It seems that the area of sentence-combining is either neglected by the learners or the teachers themselves are unaware of its importance and techniques.

This is a serious problem when thinking in the general field of grammar and composition writing. A student cannot write a sound composition or a piece of writing without being well-informed of the concept and techniques of sentence combining to make structurally strong sentences.

Increased understanding of the English language allows EFL teachers the freedom to use sentence-combining to help their students become English writers.

6. Conclusion

The study results confirmed a strong relationship between the EFL University students' weak performance in English writing and their weakness in using methods and techniques of English Sentence Combining in their writing.

The study has discovered that the students in question are not aware of the methods and techniques of Sentence Combining, and the technique is very effective in improving students writing skills.

The study might be beneficial and significant to EFL learners in all Universities, Educational Institutions and Schools in Sudan and all over the world who concerned with learning English writing.

The researcher hopes that a thorough understanding of Sentence Combining techniques in EFL students' written works would offer insight to EFL teachers in Universities, Educational Institutions and Schools in Sudan and EFL learners, all over the world, to benefit from the analysis of the type of errors committed by their students when combining English sentences.

The researcher hopes that the finding of this study would be of importance to the English Language syllabus designers in and out Sudan, as it is hoped to make them aware of the linkage between Sentence Combining techniques, English grammar and writing. The researcher notices that this study achieves its aims and objectives and highlights the role of Sentence Combining techniques.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the results of this paper, the researcher would like to recommend that:

1- For the sake of improvement of the situation about Sentence Combining techniques as part of English grammar and writing, and to make students better aware of English Sentence Combining techniques, more exercises should be given to them by their teachers by means of punctuation, coordination, subordination, reduction and apposition.

2- Sentence combining techniques practice is a useful tool for teachers, but initial increases in errors occur, especially syntactic errors, until students master the techniques. Teachers, therefore, need to develop a variety of techniques and teaching methods to ameliorate the situation with regard to Sentence Combining techniques.

3- English language departments and Higher Education officials in Sudan need to revise the university syllabus of English and try to accommodate grammar courses mixing up between English writing, grammar and Sentence Combining techniques at all levels, considering students' training exercises.

7. Suggestions for Future Research.

The researcher would like to suggest the following further research and studies in the area of Sentence Combining techniques:

1. The Impact of Sentence Combining Techniques Instructions on the Writing Ability of University Students.
2. The Effect of Sentence Combining Techniques in improving the writing skill at pre-university levels.
3. More research may be conducted in the field of Sentence Combining, using other techniques different from the techniques in the present study.

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Appendix

Tables of the Students' Answers to the Test

Punctuation (Ex.1)

Punctuation area contains three exercises on semi-colon, semi-colon/conjunctive adverbs, and colon.

Table 2 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.1.2) on Semicolon /Conjunctive adverbs:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	34	68.0
Fail	16	32.0
Total	50	100.0

If we look at the Frequency in the above table, we can see that the students who got the answers on Semicolon /Conjunctive adverbs correct (34) whereas the students who got the answers incorrect were (16).

Table 3 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.1.3) on Colon:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	34	68.0
Fail	16	32.0
Total	50	100.0

If we look at the results in the above table, it shows us that the students who got the correct answers were (43) whereas the students who got the answers incorrect were (16).

Subordination (Ex.3)

The Exercise on subordination area represents the largest group of sentences for combining. It contains test questions on the adjective clauses, noun clauses, and adverbial clauses which are divided into clauses for: time, purpose, causes, place, result, condition and concession respectively.

Table 6 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.2) on Noun Clauses:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	17	34.0
Fail	33	66.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (17) of the students combined the noun clauses correctly whereas (33) of them fail to combine them correctly.

Table7 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.3) on Adverb clause of Time:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	8	16.0
Fail	42	84.0
Total	50	100.0

A glance at the table above will reveal that the majority of students (42) failed to combine the correct adverb in Ex. 3. Only (8) of them combined them correctly.

Table 8 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.4) on Adverb clause of Purpose:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	40	80.0
Fail	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0

This table indicates that students who combined the adverb clause of purpose right are (40) whereas (10) combined them wrong.

Table 9 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.5) on Adverb clause of Cause

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	19	38.0
Fail	31	62.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (19) of the students combined the adverb clause of cause correctly whereas (31) of them fail to combine them correctly.

Table 10 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.6) on Adverb clause of Place

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	21	42.0
Fail	29	58.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (21) of the students combined the adverb clause of place sentences correctly whereas (29) of them failed.

Table 11 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.7) on Adverb clause of Result

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	29	58.0
Fail	21	42.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (29) of the students combined the adverb clause of result sentences correctly whereas (21) of them failed.

Table 12 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.3.8) on Adverb clause of Condition

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	1	2.0
Fail	49	98.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that only one of the students combine the Adverb clause of Condition sentences correctly whereas (49) of them fail.

Table 13 Frequency distribution of Students' answers to (Ex.3.9) on Adverb clause of Concession

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	38	76.0
Fail	12	24.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that only (38) of the students combined the Adverb clause of concession correctly while (12) of them fail to combine the clauses correctly.

Reduction (Ex.4)

The exercise on reduction (Ex.4) contains test exercises on the combination of sentences by using: gerund phrases, infinitive phrases, prepositional phrases and participial phrases respectively.

Table 15 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.4.2) on Infinitive Phrase:

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	27	54.0
Fail	23	46.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (23) of the students failed to get the right answer to infinitive phrase, whereas (27) of them passed.

Table 16 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.4.3) on prepositional phrases

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	33	66.0
Fail	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that (33) of the students passed, whereas (17) of them failed to get the right answer to prepositional phrase Ex.

Table 17 Frequency distribution of students' answers to (Ex.4.4) on participial phrase

Result	Frequency	Percent (%)
Pass	9	18.0
Fail	41	82.0
Total	50	100.0

The table shows that only (9) of the students combined the participial phrases correctly while the majority (41) of them combine the phrases incorrectly.