APPRAISING EFL STUDENTS' SYNTACTIC COMPETENCY OF WORD FORMATION IN ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

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A B S T R A C T S

EFL teaching participants must learn the uncommon language, so that teachers or educators need to discover several problems in conveying the material. This research investigated syntactic labels in recognizing word formation in simple sentences such as subject, verb/predicate, object, and adverb. In previous times, two researchers have investigated EFL students' capability in identifying parts of speech (noun, adverb, and adjective) and the use of punctuation (comma, full stop, and exclamation mark). Current research aims to fill this gap. This study probes EFL students' propensity to determine syntactic parts of word formation in simple sentences within argumentative texts. This research is applying questionnaires distributed to 51 learning participants. The findings explain that 75% of pupils precisely labeled subjects, verbs, objects, and adverbs. However, challenges remain in differentiating between subjects and objects, as only 25% achieved perfect accuracy. The study concludes that while a larger number of students signified a detailed understanding of syntactic labeling, planned and further interventions are necessary to address continuing obstacles. Hoping that this study could be significant in uncovering the latest techniques in EFL teaching and learning activities, such as the discovery of any media for conveying material on basic syntax for beginner students.

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INTRODUCTION

EFL learning participants started learning from the level of beginner (R.A & Indriani, 2020). This process starts in early or preschool (Faraj, et.al., 2024). In Indonesia, English subjects and materials have been commonly applied for more than 10 years. The new foreign language features, like lexical, syntactic, and word formation, were being learned (Crossley, 2020; Zhang & Kang, 2022). Detailed components of these features were such as new morphological structure, unpopular phonetic transcription, new grammatical structures, and unfamiliar topic content (Atmowardoyo, et.al., 2023; Zhou, 2023; Ningsih & Rahman, 2023). Nevertheless, this long journey did not automatically reveal the prominent result/output. Commonly, these mistakes have often been found in the types of spoken and written (Lee & Xie, 2023; Mirahayuni & Garnida, 2019; Aslamiah, 2022; Sujana, 2023).

In order to reach a structural understanding, in this written article, the current researcher provides a fundamental literature review. The first term was word order and word formation. Most experts concluded that word order was a group of meaningful parts of speech (Panggabean, et.al., 2023; Adha & Dania, 2020). Some experts regarded this group as a

collaboration of subject, verb/predicate, object, and adverbs (Moehkardi, 2017; Zuhri, et.al., 2022). When these components are systematically organized, grammatical sentences will be shaped (Jelimun, 2024).

The second primary theory was simple sentences. This early style of sentence was commonly delivered for the beginner level (Merina, 2017). The reasons were simple sentences; they were easy to understand and commonly contained a single component of subject and predicate (Sari & Dafit, 2021; Ilyas, et.al., 2020; Subur, et.al., 2023). Nevertheless, although a simple sentence only represented a single subject and single predicate, this one was comprehensive in revealing the idea, concept, and goal of a meaning (Azkiyyah & Purnamasari, 2023; Melyana, et.al., 2024; Ummah, 2019).

The third basic literature was an argumentative text. This kind of text accommodates clear ideas and statements (Putri & Ahmad, 2022; Winarti, et.al., 2021). Hence, besides clear ideas, argumentative passages commonly use declarative sentences, which are composed in a persistent and progressive composition (Özdemir, 2018; Nurjannah, et.al., 2023).

The last one is a common grammatical mistake by EFL Learners. Two main points that will be focused on are vocabulary and grammar. Muhammad stated that EFL learners commonly made trouble with phrasal, clauses, and conjunctions (Ahmad, et.al., 2023). These mistakes mean that EFL students achieve low understanding in recognizing the status/label of every single word (Emodi, 2022). This status refers to the subject, verb/predicate, object, and adverb (Wijaya, et.al., 2023; Carnie, 2021). Noun as subject means that the figure who doing something in a sentence (Edri, 2021; Tampangella & Rokhayati, 2021). Verb represents the activity done by the subject (Suwandi, 2024; Hayati & Sutrisno, 2024). Adjectives have usually been inserted into an object or subject as noun phrases (Suyatmi & Muhammad, 2023). The last component would be an adverb. The adverb was the additional and complementary in a sentence, so that the sentence would be understandable (Huda, 2022; Sarifuddin, 2023). The next problem came from a misunderstanding of word mastering, word interpretation, and sentence pattern (Maamuujav, et.al., 2021; Arendholz, 2022). Word mastery expresses vocabulary acquisition, and then word interpretation would continuously support the EFL learners' understanding (Senvita, 2023; Aki & Rorintulus, 2023).

From those explanations, the previous researchers have presented findings about EFL learners' competency in covering grammatical problems. The first study released by Ramadhani & Ovilia (2022) that EFL learners 'ability to identify parts of speech was challenging. EFL learners recognized the three parts of speech inappropriately: noun, pronoun, and preposition. Those investigators only required familiar parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and interjections. The students as research objects could successfully determine the parts of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Despite that, the word order and word formation have not been the main object of investigation.

The second foregoing experimentation came from Nuriyanti and Yuliawati. These investigators determined the competency of EFL learners in applying the basic punctuation, internal punctuation, external punctuation, mixed ones, and special punctuation (Nuriyanti & Yuliawati, 2017). The research findings showed that 73% of students could apply those punctuations suitably. Nonetheless, the rest of the subjects of this study could maintain their mastery in using the signs of external and internal punctuation, such as full stop, comma, exclamation mark, and question mark. Anyhow, there is none of no identification of EFL students' mastery in syntactic classification.

Based on those backgrounds of study, this study aims to fill this gap. The current researcher wanted to determine EFL students' capability in labeling syntactic elements within simple sentences as focusing subject, verb/predicate, object, and adverb. This notion was considered the goal of the research on the ability of EFL learners to recognize and label syntactic formation and word order.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

Current researcher regard quantitative study as a research design. This type of research was fit for any kind of research, such as scientific, social, public policy, medical field, finance, and also language teaching (Barella, et.al., 2024). Several numerical data were identical characteristics of quantitative data (Ratnasari & Sidiq, 2024; Disman, et.al., 2017). In this study, several diagrams represent the findings and discussion. The sample of numerical description was statistical (Purwanto, et.al., 2021). Statistical data ensures readers get the validity and reliability of data analysis (Sinu & Atti, 2024).

Population and Sample

In this study, the observer engaged the 49 informants with varied backgrounds: 20 students from the third semester and 29 students from the first semester. These research subjects came from several majors as Islamic Education and Teaching Program, Islamic Banking, Islamic Management Program, and Islamic Elementary Teaching Program. All the students have confirmed that they have passed the English subjects for the third semester, and partly students have been learning English subjects. The researcher chose first and third-semester students because they have recent memories and fresh recordings of English. In the related college (a place where the researcher conducted this study), the subjects of English as a primary material were delivered in the first and third semesters (English 1 and English 2). So, they could counter all the research questions well because these questions in the questionnaires reflected previous material that the students had covered.

Instruments

In order to get the research objective, questionnaires, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice statements were identical samples in this quantitative study (Wang et al., 2020; Sturgis, P. & Luff, 2020). The recent researcher composed 10 big questions in online questionnaires. All questions from the textbook entitled (Darwis, 2013). Whole questions focused on only syntactic labels of subject, verb/predicate, object, and adverb. This study limits the scope of the research question to ensure the research objective.

Questions numbers 1 & 2 asked about the participant's identity (name and major). Questions numbers 3, 4, & 5 required the informant's knowledge about three parts of speech (noun, verb, and adjective). Please, identify which one could be classified as a noun from these entities (Prophet, invite, Muhammad, establish, social, people). The next question was choosing verbs among several lexemes (Religion, belief, respect, Islam, example). The last one will be pointing out adjectives among these words (Eternal, kind, merciful, obey, prophet, God).

Question number 6 had 2 sub-questions that asked about the subject of the sentence. They derived into 5 sub-questions as follows: a) He creates the world for us, and b) Allah knows everything. Furthermore, question number 7 interrogates students' confirmation of the predicate by using 2 sub-questions: a) Islam seeks peace, and b) His messenger instructs all people.

Next, question number 8 asked about the object of the sentence: a) All Muslims accept guidance from Allah, and b) Muslims achieve a happy life. Question number 9 confirmed the students' analysis of adverbs of sentences; a.Muslims should read the Qur'an daily, and b) Ali read the Quran at home yesterday.

Data Analysis

To achieve a detailed analysis of the data, the researcher used descriptive analysis by engaging quantitative data. This type of method is applied to display the percentage of EFL students' competency in classifying syntactic labels. The descriptive method was appropriate

for the study, which focused on providing data description and category (Ismiyati, 2013). Additionally, according to Sugiyono (2010), the descriptive approach is commonly used to present data in the form of percentages, which allows for a clearer understanding of classification patterns (Yulianti et al., 2020; Handaryani & Pudjawan, 2021).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings

In this part, the present examiner has formulated findings and visual data displays. Tracy regarded visual data displays as tools for getting specific research findings (Tracy, 2020). This one must have included a chart, table, diagram, and figures. A percentage description supported findings in order to make the data clear. Based on the questionnaires the researcher announced, the observer formulated the research findings as below. For numbers 1 and 2, the informants/respondents only fulfill identities *(complete names and majors)*. The primary research question will start as question number 3.

There are 49 participants who could answer question number 3 clearly that 13 students could mention 3 right nouns as the answers *(prophet, Muhammad, & people)* (26,53%); 24 students mentioned only 1 right noun *(prophet/Muhammad/people)* (48,97%); 11 students mentioned wrong answers as a noun *(social/establish)* (22,44%); 1 student mentioned two right answers (2,04%). For a detailed description, it can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Students' Competency in Labeling Nouns (Question Number 3)

No.	Indicator **Which Ones Are Nouns?** *(Prophet, Invite, Muhammad,* *Establish, Social, People)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Answering three nouns; prophet, Muhammad, and people	13	49	26,53%
2	Answering two nouns; prophet & Muhammad or prophet &people or Muhammad or people	1	49	2,04%
3	Answering only one noun; people/Muhammad/prophet	24	49	48,97%
4	Answering wrong answers; invite, establish or social	11	49	22,44%

Question number 4 showed the result that 14 students could mention two verbs perfectly *(belief & respect)* (28,57%); 26 students only mentioned one verb *(belief/respect)* (53,06%); 9 students mentioned wrong answers *(example/Islam)* (18,36%). The complete table will be described in Table 2.

Table 2
Students' Competency in Labelling Verb (Question Number 4)

No.	Indicator **Which Ones Are Verbs?** *(Religion, Beliefs, Respect, Islam,* *Example)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Answering two verbs completely; *believe & respect*	14	49	28,57%
2	Answering one verb; believe or respect	26	49	53,06%
3	Answering the wrong answer; religion, Islam, or an example	9	49	18,36%

Next survey, the current researcher identified the students' participation in the fourth questionnaire. The 15 students could mention three adjectives clearly *(eternal, kind, merciful)*. The 9 students mostly answered the question clearly *(kind, merciful) (kind, eternal)*. The 22 students only mentioned one right adjective; the 3 students explained the wrong answers. The representative table is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' Participation in Labelling Adjectives (Question Number 5)

No.	Indicator **Which Ones Are Adjective?** *(Eternal, Kind, Merciful, Obey, Prophet, God)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Answering three adjectives completely *(eternal, kind, merciful)*	15	49	30,61%
2	Answering two adjectives; *eternal &kind or eternal &merciful, or kind &merciful*	9	49	18,36%
3	Answering only one adjective; *eternal, or kind, or merciful*	22	49	44,89%
4	Answering wrong answer; *obey, or prophet, or God*	3	49	6,12%

The further questions are the main topics of the issue. Questions numbers 6a and 6b are to ask the subject. In question number 6a, findings showed that only 3 students (6,12%%) mentioned the wrong subject, while almost all respondents (38 students) here expressed true answers (77,5%). Next, 43 students (87,75%) could get the right subject in a sentence of 6b *(Allah knows everything)*, and only 12,24 % or 6 students made a mistake. The representative table is shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
Students' Ability in Labelling the Subject of Sentences (Question Number 6a)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is Subject from This Sentence?** *(He Creates the World for Us)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Regarding *he* as subject	38	49	77,55%
2	Regarding *create* as subject	3	49	6,12%
3	Regarding *the world* as subject	2	49	4,08%
4	Regarding *us* as the subject	3	49	6,12%
5	Regarding abstain answer e.g. yes, subject, and subject	3	49	6,12%

Table 5
Students' Ability in Identifying Subject (Question Number 6b)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is the Subject of this Sentence?** *(Allah Knows Everything)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Revealing Allah as an answer	43	49	87,75%
2	Revealing another answer	6	49	12,24%

The further questions (numbers 7a and 7b) are predicates/verbs of sentences. Verb elaborated activity, which is done by the subject. The predicate had revealed the same concept as the verb. This kind of understanding made the teacher easier in convey the principles of the main verb. Question number 7a *(Islam seeks peace)* has been responded to well by participants; 38 students (77,55%) mentioned the right verb *(seeks)* while only five students did the wrong ones (10,20%). Besides, only six students answered by choosing the phrase (seeks peace). Principally, these informants had understood the concept of the predicate. The second question of 7b *(God sent Prophet Muhammad)* has also been finished by the respondents, as 16 students confirmed the wrong answers (32,65%) while 33 students stated the right answers (67,34%). It can be seen in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6
Students' Ability in Labelling Verb/Predicate of Sentences (Question Number 7a)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is a Verb from This Sentence?** *(Islam Seeks Peace)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Choosing *seeks* as an answer	38	49	77,55%
2	Choosing phrases as answers*; seeking peace*	6	49	12,24%
3	Choosing wrong answers	5	49	10,20%

Table 7
Students' Ability in Labelling Verb/Predicate of Sentences (Question Number 7b)

No.	Indicator **Which one is verb from this sentence?** *(God sent Prophet Muhammad)*	Factual answer	Whole answer	Percentage
1	Writing *sent* as predicate	33	49	67,34%
2	Writing wrong answers	16	49	32,65%

The next sentence is the object of the sentence. The object component was the supplement of syntactic formation and word order. The simple sentence only had one subject and one predicate. The EFL learners, as beginners, frequently recognized this one as a noun. From sentence 8a *(Muslims achieve happy life)*, 13 students (26,53%) decided the wrong answer while (73,46%) of 36 students chose the right answer. The second sentence, 8b *(Allah sent and protected Quran)* shows the result that 8 students (16,32%) explained the wrong objects (Muslims/ achieve) while 41 students (83,67%) reported the true one. It can be seen in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8
Students' Ability in Labelling Objects of Sentences (Question Number 8a)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is an Object from This Sentence?** *(Muslims Achieve Happy Life)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Writing *true answer as an object; life or happy life*	36	49	73,46%
2	Writing wrong answers	13	49	26,53%

Table 9
Students' Ability in Labelling Objects of Sentences (Question Number 8b)

No.	Indicator **Which one is an object from this sentence?** *(Allah sent and protected Quran)*	Factual answer	Whole answer	Percentage
1	Considering true answer as an object*; the Quran*	41	49	83,67%
2	Considering wrong answers	8	49	16,32%

The last component of the sentence would be questions numbers 9a and 9b. This question tells the adverb of the sentence. Adverbs, as additional components in simple sentences, were rather unpopular for EFL learners. In this question, the students showed variant answers, for example, in question number 9a, *(Muslims should read Qur'an daily)*, the 10 students (20,40%) reported wrong answers *(read Quran daily) (read Quran) (Quran daily)* and 39 students (79,59%) announced right ones. The second question, 9b, *(Ali reads Quran at home yesterday)*, was elaborated by the respondents. The 7 students (14,27%) announced the wrong answer because they only promoted the non-adverbial elements like *Ali, Ali reads, adverb, and read Quran,* while the 42 students (85,71%)could identify the right ones, although some of them only classified adverbs like only *at home or at home yesterday.* A detailed description would be attached in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10
Students' Ability in Labelling Adverbs of Sentences (Question Number 9a)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is an Adverb from This Sentence?** *(Muslims Should Read Quran Daily)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Considering the right answer as an adverb; *daily*	39	49	79,59%
2	Considering wrong answers	10	49	20,40%

Table 11
Students' Ability in Labelling Adverb of Sentences (Question Number 9b)

No.	Indicator **Which One Is an Adverb from This Sentence?** *(Ali Reads Quran at Home Yesterday)*	Factual Answer	Whole Answer	Percentage
1	Regarding true answers; *yesterday or at home yesterday*	42	49	85,71%
2	Regarding wrong answers	7	49	14,28%

Discussion

The results indicate that students relied on their fundamental understanding of sentence structure, particularly the sequential pattern of Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O), to identify syntactic components. While this approach led to relatively high accuracy rates in object identification (73.46% and 83.67%, as seen in Tables 8 and 9), it also revealed certain limitations in their syntactic competency.

A notable observation is that students exhibited higher accuracy in identifying adverbial elements (79.59% and 85.71%, as shown in Tables 10 and 11). This suggests that morphological cues played a crucial role in recognition. Adverbs such as *daily* and *yesterday* are morphologically

distinct and commonly encountered by EFL learners, making them easier to identify. This finding aligns with the concept of morphological salience (Ellis, 2022), which suggests that learners are more likely to identify and acquire linguistic features that are perceptually prominent.

However, despite their ability to identify major syntactic components, students encountered challenges in distinguishing between subjects and objects due to the dual function of nouns. This difficulty supports the notion proposed by (Radford, 2009) that EFL learners often struggle with syntactic ambiguity when a word can serve multiple grammatical roles. Furthermore, the reliance on a rigid S-V-O-Adverb structure indicates a procedural rather than conceptual understanding of syntax. This aligns with (Krashen, 1982) which suggests that explicit rule application does not always translate to deep syntactic comprehension.

These findings have important pedagogical implications. While structural awareness is evident, instructional approaches should focus on developing a more flexible and analytical understanding of sentence construction. Strategies such as contrastive analysis and corpus-based learning could be integrated to help students differentiate syntactic roles beyond formulaic patterns. Additionally, exposure to varied syntactic structures in authentic texts may facilitate deeper syntactic processing, reducing overreliance on fit word-order patterns.

CONCLUSION

From those findings and discussions, the current researcher formulated conclusions such follows. The data discussion in this research would be valuable as consideration for all English teachers. For strengthening EFL students' ability in determining syntactic labels, teachers should focus on differentiation among syntactic labels by drilling targeted tasks. These findings can be substantial evidence for deciding on teaching curriculum and material. Because this study has explored simple sentences, further researchers should discover a higher level of difficulty in recognizing syntactic labels of compound and complex sentences.

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