Journal of Education and Learning Technology (JELT)
ISSN 2720-7730 Volume 7 Issue 10 2026, 1169- 1181
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/jelt/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/jelt.20267101

Check for updates

The prevalence of morphosyntactic features in simple sentence construction among FAL learners in English essay writing tasks

Mzamani Steven Khosa[1], Emmanuel Sikitime[1] & Innocent Zitha[1]

[1] Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Venda, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Mastering the construction of simple sentences is essential for effective communication in various contexts, including academic environments, narrative storytelling, and routine correspondence. Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to investigate the construction of simple sentences by Grade 10 learners of First Additional Language in a South African secondary school. A qualitative research design was employed for this analysis, utilising document analysis as the principal data collection method. The learners' essay scripts were collected and analysed thematically to derive meaningful insights. The study comprised a sample of 15 Grade 10 First Additional Language learners from the Malamulele Northeast circuit. Stratified random sampling, in conjunction with purposive sampling, was employed to select this sample for the investigation. This research was grounded in the Communicative Competence Theory by Swain and Canale (1980). The findings indicated that Grade 10 First Additional Language learners in South Africa utilise various types of simple sentences, including (Subject + Verb), (Subject + Verb + Object), (Subject + Verb + Adjectival), (Subject + Verb + Complement), (Adverbial + Subject + Verb), (Subject + Verb + Object + Complement), and (Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object). Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the participants predominantly did not employ extended simple sentences, characterised by double or triple structures in the subject, verb, and object positions. Additionally, the results indicated that some learners have difficulty constructing simple sentences. Understanding and applying the principles of sentence construction can enhance learners' language skills and improve their overall linguistic proficiency. This study contributes to the existing literature by addressing the knowledge gap concerning students' comprehension of morphosyntactic sentence patterns.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, Essay, First Additional Language learners, sentence construction**,** simple sentences.

INTRODUCTION

The South African 2011 Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) places heavy emphasis on sentence-level conventions, including syntax, grammar, and mechanics. First, Additional Language learners rely heavily on writing as an integral skill in language learning. Sentence construction skills are central to academic achievement, employment, and effective communication. The CAPS document

---

CORRESPONDENCE – Innocent Zitha **Email**: Innocent.Zitha@univen.ac.za
PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received : 12th March, 2026 | Accepted: 19th August, 2026 | Published: 12th November, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Khosa, Mzamani Steven, Emmanuel Sikitime and Innocent Zitha."The prevalence of morphosyntactic features in simple sentence construction among FAL learners in English essay writing tasks." *Journal of Education and Learning Technology* 7, no.10 (2026): 1169 - 1181 . https://doi.org/10.38159/jelt.20267101
COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING - © 2026 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.
This is an open access article under the CCBY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

assumes that by the time learners enter Grade 10, they should be reasonably proficient in their First Additional Language (FAL) in both interpersonal and cognitive academic skills. This implies that learners are expected to write in English, using a variety of grammatically correct sentence types, to convey their messages. All Learners in Grade 10 are expected to have mastered writing using all types of sentences for effective communication with their educators and peers. English has three main sentence types based on their functions: simple, complex, and compound. Though writing a good essay involves combining all types of sentences, this study focuses on simple sentence construction in English essays.

According to Chauke et al., the single best measure of learners' success or failure is their ability to construct sentences.[1] Prospective employers select qualified candidates with proficient writing skills for both employment and promotions.[2] In Mensah et. al.'s view, sentence construction in a second or foreign language is even more difficult, as it is a complex, challenging process, since writers are expected to produce written samples that are syntactically accurate, semantically acceptable, and culturally appropriate.[3]

Simple sentence construction is an essential aspect of writing, as it allows writers to convey their ideas clearly and effectively. By focusing on straightforward sentence structures, readers can easily grasp the meaning without getting lost in complex syntax. Additionally, simple sentences can create a more dynamic rhythm, making a piece of writing more engaging. Whether in academic contexts, storytelling, or everyday correspondence, clarity and simplicity are key to successful writing. Fitria asserts that a simple sentence comprises 'one independent clause and expresses one idea', must have a subject-verb combination, and the subject can be single, compound, or complex; it can have a single or compound verb, and when only the subject-verb combination is used, commas are not used.[4] A sentence can be considered an English sentence if it fulfils certain principles, which include having both a subject and a predicate and conveying a clear or understandable meaning. The subject serves as the sentence's central theme and can refer to a person.

Saddler and Asaro-Saddler assert that it can be very difficult for less experienced writers and those with learning difficulties to create coherent, well-structured sentences. Some studies reveal how learners use simple sentences.[5] For instance, a study conducted by Imaniah among Indonesian students found that students relied on simple sentences when writing their English essays.[6] The study shows that students understand how to construct simple sentences using several formulas, such as Subject + Verb + Complement (S + V + C), Subject + Verb + Adverb (S + V + Adv), Subject + Verb + Object (S + V + O), and Subject + Verb + Object + Adverb (S + V + O + Adverb).

However, besides using simple sentences, the students also still use other sentence forms to support information in their paragraphs, such as 1) compound sentences by using coordinating conjunctions such as: so, and, but, etc. 2) complex sentences by using subordinating conjunctions such as after, before‖, so that‖, if, that, because‖, even though, although‖, when, while, etc. 3) compound-complex sentences by using both coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. A study by Hendrawati examined sentence errors in students' essays.[7] The results revealed that the least frequent sentence pattern errors among students were simple sentences, accounting for 10.13%. errors. Another study focused on students' errors in writing simple sentences was conducted by Zitha and Lambani.

---

[1] Gezani Thomas Chauke et al., "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa.," *International Journal of Language Studies* 20, no. 1 (2026): 97.

[2] Vincent Ndishunwani Demana et al., "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University," *Journal of English Language Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 23–36.

[3] Gifty Serwah Mensah, Ernest Kwesi Klu, and Ndishunwani Vincent, "An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana," *Learning Technology (JELT)* 6, no. 6 (2025): 382–96.

[4] Tira Nur Fitria, "Non-EFL Students' Ability in Writing Simple Sentences of Descriptive Paragraphs," *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistic* 4, no. 1 (2022): 1–9.

[5] Bruce Saddler and Kristie Asaro-Saddler, "Writing Better Sentences: Sentence-Combining Instruction in the Classroom," *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 54, no. 3 (2009): 159–63.

[6] Ikhfi Imaniah, "A Critical Review of English Essay Writing in Studies of Critical Thinking, Reading Habits, and Sentence Structure Mastery," *Indonesian EFL Journal* 8, no. 1 (2022): 53–62.

[7] Nurmala Hendrawati, "An Analysis on Students' Errors in Writing Sentence Patterns," *Loquen: English Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 63–85.

The results revealed three types of errors related to writing simple sentences.[8] These are: 1) Mistakes in using the verb form, based on the review of English structure and conformity to the subject of the sentence. 2) The use of types of words in the subject and/or subject complement. 3) The incompleteness of elements in simple sentences (no subject, verb, and/or subject complement). The tendency for FAL learners to rely on simple sentence structures in their English essay writing tasks is quite prevalent. This observation opens a fascinating discussion about the writing styles and challenges these learners face. Exploring this trend reveals valuable insights into their learning processes and the ways they express their thoughts. This study, therefore, aims to investigate how Grade 10 English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in the Malamulele Northeast circuit utilise simple sentences in their English essay projects.

The following research questions underlie the study:

- What types of simple sentences do Grade 10 learners in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit use in their English essays?
- How are these types of simple sentences utilised in English essays by Grade 10 learners in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Simple sentences in English are the basic sentence structure that can be developed into other types, such as compound and complex. Of all types of sentences, simple sentences are the only type of sentence with just one independent clause. According to Ruday, the other three types of sentences consist of one independent clause and an additional clause.[9] Along with Burhanuddin, a sentence is a 'set of words that includes a subject and a verb and communicates a complete thought.'[10] Thus, the simple sentence has only one subject and one predicate. Paknahad asserts that the subject and the predicate can be either simple or compound.[11]

According to Chauke et al., the basic parts of a sentence are the subject, verb, predicate, and direct or Indirect object.[12] A sentence contains at least one subject-verb combination. The verb of a sentence is the action word. For example: "The man reads"; the word "reads" is the verb of the sentence because it tells the man's action. "A sentence is a group of words that form an independent thought, usually including at least a subject and a verb."[13] A sentence is a textual unit that has been convenient to adopt as the largest grammatical unit for the purpose of syntactic analysis.[14] "The specific sort of knowledge can be represented as a set of rules called the "phrase structure and discuss several important properties which make them useful for describing the syntactic competence of language users."[15]

Mensah et al. elucidate that the subject and verb must agree in number; that is, a singular subject needs a singular verb, and a plural subject needs a plural verb.[16] The subject of a sentence is the person, place, or thing that is acting in the sentence. The subject represents what or whom the sentence is about. The simple subject typically consists of a noun or pronoun and may be accompanied by modifying words, phrases, or clauses.

---

[8] Innocent Zitha and Matodzi Nancy Lambani, "Register Competence in Academic Writing of Student Teachers Specialising in English Didactics at the University of Venda," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 42, no. sup1 (2024): S85–104.

[9] Sean Ruday, *The Middle School Grammar Toolkit: Using Mentor Texts to Teach Standards-Based Language and Grammar in Grades 6–8* (CRC Press, 2020).

[10] Ahmad Burhanuddin, "Error Analysis of English Sentences Written by Indonesian College Students," *Jurnal Lingua Idea*, 2020.

[11] Mohammad Paknahad, "Simple Sentences with Two Predicates in Persian Language," *Research in Teaching Persian Language and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2019): 111–25.

[12] Chauke et al., "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa."

[13] Demana et al., "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University."

[14] Thifhelimbilu Emmanuel Sikitime, "Multimodal Representation and Its Implication for Reading and Writing Practices," *African Perspectives on the Teaching and Learning of English in Higher Education*, 2023, 101–17.

[15] Mzamani Steven Khosa, Hlaviso Motlhaka, and Ernest Klu, "The Use of Grammatical Devices to Achieve Cohesion in Grade 12 EFAL Learners' Essays in Malamulele South Circuit," *Learning Technology (JELT)* 7, no. 6 (2026): 683–95.

[16] Mensah, Klu, and Vincent, "An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana."

Khosa et al. further state that to find the subject of a sentence, one has to "identify who or what is doing the action," and if there is no subject, the sentence is a fragment.[17] The third part of the sentence is called a predicate. According to Zitha et al., a predicate tells something about the subject. It consists of the verb and any complements, which can include the object and adverbial phrases, for example.[18] A simple predicate comprises a verb, along with modifying words, phrases, or clauses. Additionally, the subject or predicate contains various elements that add meaning or detail to a sentence. These elements include the direct object, indirect object, and subject complement; they can also be expanded and combined to form simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences.

According to a study by Hendrawati, students use simpler sentence structures in the descriptive genre than in the argumentative genre. Their study also confirmed that complex sentences were widely used in the argumentative genre; however, a significant difference in their use was found only in Grade 10.[19] When it comes to compound sentences, it has been found that fewer compound sentences were used in the argumentative genre across all three grade levels.

According to Sikitime, a simple sentence consists of one independent clause.[20] A simple sentence consists of only one independent clause containing a subject and a verb (finite verb), and it provides a complete meaning. A simple sentence has no dependent clause.[21] According to Demana, a simple sentence comprises at least a topic and a comment, also called the subject and the predicate.[22] Zitha and Nendauni indicate that "a simple sentence has the most basic elements that make it a sentence: a subject, a verb, and a completed thought."[23] A simple sentence can vary in length but expresses only one thought and may contain more than one subject and verb. "Examples of simple sentences include the following: Joe waited for the train." 'Joe' is the subject of the sentence. 'Waited' is the verb, and the 'train' is the object. Using too many simple sentences can make writing "choppy" and prevent it from flowing smoothly. However, simple sentences can be lengthened by using compound subjects, compound verbs, and prepositional phrases. The simple sentence has different forms such as subject + verb (s + v), subject + verb + complement (s + v + c), subject + verb + adverb (s + v + adv), subject + verb + object (s + v + object), and subject + verb + object + adverb (s + v + o + adverb).

Many studies have explored the use of simple sentences. For instance, Fitria (2022) found that students understand how to construct simple sentences using several forms such as Subject + Verb + Complement (S + V + C), Subject + Verb + Adverb (S + V + Adv), Subject + Verb + Object (S + V + Object), and Subject + Verb + Object + Adverb (S + V + O + Adverb). The study further revealed that, in addition to using simple sentences, the students also employed other sentence forms to strengthen their arguments in their essays. Other sentences used include compound sentences in which students used coordinating conjunctions such as so and but. This study was not limited to simple sentences; it also found that students used complex sentences and compound-complex sentences.

Another study was conducted by Sari on the students' essays. The research findings revealed that students used simple sentences more frequently than compound or complex ones.[24] In addition, Silawati claims that 'essay writing skills are positively influenced directly by sentence structure knowledge.[25] So, increased knowledge of sentence structure will improve essay writing skills. Another study by Burhanuddin focused on errors in English sentences written by Indonesian college students.

---

[17] Khosa, Motlhaka, and Klu, "The Use of Grammatical Devices to Achieve Cohesion in Grade 12 EFAL Learners' Essays in Malamulele South Circuit."

[18] Innocent Zitha, Ditshego Masete, and Sarah Matsetela, "Using Artificial Intelligence Tools for Providing Feedback as A Strategic Response to Addressing Challenges in Students' Academic Writing," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6 (2025): 1096–1111.

[19] Hendrawati, "An Analysis on Students' Errors in Writing Sentence Patterns."

[20] Sikitime, "Multimodal Representation and Its Implication for Reading and Writing Practices."

[21] Chauke et al., "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa."

[22] Demana et al., "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University."

[23] Innocent Zitha and Lutendo Nendauni, "Linguistic Misconceptions of Tautology in the English Second Language Context among Student Educators," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 43, no. 3 (2025): 353–65.

[24] Eka Resty Novieta Sari, "An Error Analysis in Writing the Sentence of Simple Past Tense on English Subject," *English Education: Journal of English Teaching and Research* 4, no. 1 (2019): 39–44.

[25] Linda Silawati, "The Influence of Students Sentence Structure Knowledge on Writing Essays," in *International Conference on Educational Sciences and Teacher Profession (ICETeP 2018)* (Atlantis Press, 2019), 84–87.

The study revealed that error patterns are distributed across verbs, articles, spelling, adjectives, prepositions, sentence structure and ordering, word formation, word selection, nouns, pronouns, and ambiguous communication.[26] Furthermore, Aprilia conducted a study focusing on the usage of simple sentences in essays written by Thai students.[27] The study showed that students were able to use all forms of simple sentences, such as 1) Subject-Verb (SV), 2) Double Subject-Verb (SSV), 3) Double Subject and Verb (SSVV), and 4) Subject-Double Verb (SVV). A study by Alsalami on sentence writing found that first-year Saudi EFL undergraduate students struggle to construct simple sentences. The study reveals that amongst their challenges are their failure to construct short sentences, distinguish between active and passive voice, and use conjunctions, punctuation, quantifiers, and appropriate auxiliary verbs.[28]

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain's communicative competence.[29] Communicative competence consists of four components: strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and linguistic competence. However, this study primarily uses two components of communicative competence: grammatical and discourse competence.

Grammatical competence is pertinent to the study because it emphasises the grammatical rules of language and "the rules that govern the combination of words and phrases to structure sentences." This study focuses on sentence construction, in which a meaningful sentence is one in which grammatical and syntactic rules are correctly applied. In other words, without grammar and syntax rules, there is no sentence.

Discourse competence is a mastery of rules that determine ways in which forms and meanings are combined to achieve a meaningful unity of spoken or written texts. Cohesion brings unity to a text, and the text exhibits unity in form and meaning. Furthermore, cohesion can be achieved through devices such as pronouns, conjunctions, synonyms, and parallel structures. According to Modhish, cohesion devices help to link individual sentences and utterances to a structural whole.[30]

Discourse competence is the knowledge of how to produce and comprehend oral or written texts in the modes of speaking and writing, and listening and reading, respectively.[31] It includes understanding how to combine language structures into cohesive and coherent oral or written texts of diverse types. Zitha et al. explain that "discourse competence deals with organising words, phrases, and sentences to create conversations, speeches, poetry, email messages, and newspaper articles, to mention a few.[32] According to Stubbs, in agreement with Swain and Canale's theory, discourse competence refers to the logical connection of sentences in larger patterns for meaningful discourse (spoken or written).[33] He further claims that "discourse competence attempts to study the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause and larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written text. Unveiling the intricacies of simple sentence construction in FAL learners' English essay writing offers a captivating glimpse into their morphosyntactic journey. This exploration not only highlights the familiar challenges they face but also illuminates the remarkable strategies they employ to shape their thoughts into coherent expressions.

---

[26] Burhanuddin, "Error Analysis of English Sentences Written by Indonesian College Students."
[27] Putri Kurniawan Aprilia, "Analysis on Sentence Patterns in Thai Students Essay," *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, Dan Pembelajaran* 16, no. 17 (2021).
[28] Ahmed Ibrahim Alsalami, "Challenges of Short Sentence Writing Encountered by First-Year Saudi EFL Undergraduate Students.," *Arab World English Journal* 13, no. 1 (2022): 534–49.
[29] Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, "Theoretical Bases of Commuicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing," 1980.
[30] A. S. Modhish, "Use of Direct and Indirect Feedback in Improving EFL Students' Writing," *English Language Teaching* 5, no. 3 (2012): 78–89.
[31] Chauke et al., "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa."
[32] Zitha, Masete, and Matsetela, "Using Artificial Intelligence Tools for Providing Feedback as A Strategic Response to Addressing Challenges in Students' Academic Writing."
[33] Michael Stubbs, "Can I Have That in Writing, Please? Some Neglected Topics in Speech Act Theory," *Journal of Pragmatics* 7, no. 5 (1983): 479–94.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The study adopted the action research method. This research was conducted within the teachers' environment with students and at schools in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. The researcher works as a teacher in one of the sampled schools in Malamulele Northeast.

Population And Setting

The study population comprised 200 Grade 15 learners from the sampled high school in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. The Malamulele Northeast Circuit is located in the Vhembe district, in the Collins Chavani Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Sampling

In this research study, a stratified random sampling technique was utilised to select participants from a pool of learners. A total of 15 Grade 10 First Additional Language learners were chosen from an overall group of 200 students within the Malamulele North East Circuit. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges learners face in sentence construction, the selected participants were categorised into three distinct groups based on their essay performance in the English First Additional Language Paper 3.The first category included learners who achieved above-average scores, demonstrating a strong command of language skills and sentence structure. The second group comprised those who obtained average scores, indicating a moderate level of proficiency in their writing. Finally, the third category comprised learners with below-average scores, indicating specific difficulties in sentence formation.This stratification was intentionally designed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and challenges related to essay writing, ensuring the study could provide a nuanced analysis of participants' varying skill levels. The classification was based specifically on the learners' performance and marks in the essay-writing section, enabling targeted exploration of sentence-construction issues across different proficiency levels.

Data Collection

The researcher employed document analysis to collect qualitative data, using an essay task as the data collection instrument. An essay writing task was used as an instrument to evaluate sentence construction in English essays written by Grade 10 First Additional Language learners in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. The test was the 2019 final examination, and it was appropriate because it was a common test for all Grade 10 learners in South Africa and was administered under strict invigilation. Furthermore, the researcher used an essay analysis schedule or rubric to comment on the scripts.

Data Analysis

In this study, qualitative data were collected. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis, grouping respondents' responses into themes according to the study's objectives. The procedures employed were primarily designed to reduce and categorise copious quantities of data into more meaningful units for interpretation.

Ethical considerations

The participants were provided with informed consent documentation prior to their enrollment in the study. This documentation thoroughly explained the study's objectives, methodologies, potential risks, and benefits, ensuring that all participants had a clear understanding of their involvement. Additionally, all protocols were strictly adhered to in accordance with the university's ethical guidelines, thereby safeguarding participants' rights and well-being throughout the research process.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a discussion on the types of simple sentences and errors observed in the Grade 10 First Additional Language learners' essay scripts. The simple sentence in English can take several forms, such as (Subject + Verb), (Subject + Verb + Object),(Subject + Verb + Adjectival), (Subject +

Verb + Complement), (Adverbial + Subject + Verb), (Subject + Verb + Object + Complement), (Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object) and compound subject simple sentences.

1. Simple Sentences (Subject + Verb)

Participant wrote 1: **"I cried."**

This is a complete English sentence. In this example, the word "I" serves as the subject of the sentence, indicating who is performing the action. The verb "cried" conveys the action being taken. The sentence also concludes with a full stop, signalling that the thought is complete. To ensure grammatical correctness, a sentence must maintain subject-verb agreement; this means that a singular subject, like "I," should be paired with a singular verb, such as "cried." Adhering to these grammatical rules helps convey clear, coherent meaning in a sentence.

Participant 2: "**He ate".**

This sentence exemplifies a simple structure by incorporating the essential elements that constitute an English sentence. The term "He" serves as the subject, denoting the individual who is executing the action, while the word "ate" functions as the verb, indicating the action being performed. Together, these components convey a clear, direct message: a male is eating. This simplicity enhances comprehension, making it an effective representation of basic English sentence structure.

Participant 3: **"We went."**

This is a straightforward example of a simple sentence. In this case, "We" serves as the subject, indicating who is performing the action. The verb "went" expresses the action taken by the subject. Together, these components create a complete thought that conveys a clear meaning. A simple sentence like this typically contains only one independent clause, making it easy to understand.

Participant 4: **"Nobody care."**

The sentence under examination highlights an interesting aspect of English grammar: it features the singular subject "nobody" in conjunction with the plural verb "care." This construction, while unconventional, is grammatically correct and illustrates how English can occasionally deviate from standard subject-verb agreement rules. The phrase conveys a sense of collective indifference or lack of concern, thereby enriching our understanding of linguistic expression. This example invites further reflection on the complexities of language and its capacity to communicate nuanced meanings.

All the sentences from participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 are simple according to Mensah et al.'s definition of a sentence.[34] According to Khosa et al., a sentence expresses a complete thought and contains at least one subject-verb combination.[35] Moreover, a sentence has boundaries: the first word begins with a capital letter, and the last word is followed by a terminal punctuation mark such as a period, a full stop, an exclamation mark, or a question mark.[36] However, according to Demana et al., a complete sentence is one in which the subject and verb agree in number; that is, a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject needs a plural verb.[37] In light of this definition, participant 4's sentence does not qualify because "nobody" is the singular subject, whereas the verb "care" is plural.

2. Simple Sentences (Subject + Verb + Object)

Participant 5 wrote, **"We received the parcel."**

According to Sikitime, the basic parts of a sentence are the subject, the verb, the predicate and the direct or Indirect object.[38] Based on this definition, this sentence is a simple English sentence because it meets

[34] Mensah, Klu, and Vincent, "An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana."
[35] Khosa, Motlhaka, and Klu, "The Use of Grammatical Devices to Achieve Cohesion in Grade 12 EFAL Learners' Essays in Malamulele South Circuit."
[36] Mensah, Klu, and Vincent, "An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana."
[37] Demana et al., "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University."
[38] Sikitime, "Multimodal Representation and Its Implication for Reading and Writing Practices."

the basic requirements of an English sentence. It has a subject, "we," a past tense verb "received," and the object "the parcel."

Participant 6 wrote, "**Drove the car.**"
According to Eberhard, a sentence expresses a complete thought and contains at least one subject–verb combination.[39] In terms of the definition, participant 6's entry does not qualify as a sentence. It has a past-tense verb "drove" and the object "the car," but there is no subject. According to Chauke et al., to identify the subject of a sentence, one must determine who or what is doing the action; if there is no subject, the sentence is a fragment. If one asks, who drove the car?[40] The answer cannot be found in the entry; therefore, it is not known who drove the car. Therefore, this cannot be a sentence, as it does not meet the basic requirement of English sentence construction. As stated by Zitha and Nendauni, a sentence expresses a complete thought and contains at least one subject–verb combination.[41] "Drove" is the verb and "the car" is the object. Who drove the car is unknown; therefore, this cannot be an English sentence.

Participant 7 wrote, "**She cleaned the house**." As noted by Demana et al., the essential components of a sentence include the subject, verb, predicate, and either a direct or indirect object.[42] This sentence is complete and adheres to all the necessary criteria for a correct English sentence. It includes a subject, "she," a past tense verb, "cleaned," and a direct object, "house."

Participant 8 wrote, "**She cut the tree.**"
The sentence qualifies as a simple sentence. It has the subject, "she", the verb "cut" and the direct object, "the tree." Furthermore, the sentence is grammatically correct when its verb is in the past tense. To check if the sentence is correct, the sentence must provide an answer to the following questions: 1. Who cut the tree? 2. What is she doing? 3. What is being cut? When the sentence is able to answer all the questions, it means that the sentence is grammatically correct. Analysis of the sentences above shows that some learners have mastered the art of constructing a simple sentence with a subject, verb, and object.

3. Simple Sentences (Subject + Verb + Adjectival)

Participant 9 stated, **"He came to the party."**
This sentence serves as a clear example of a simple sentence in English. According to Pandapatan, sentences often contain additional elements within the subject or predicate that provide depth and context.[43] In this case, the sentence structure can be analysed further. The subject "he" refers to a specific individual, while the verb "came" is in the past tense, indicating an action that has already occurred. The phrase "to the party" acts as an adverbial modifier, specifying the destination of the action. This combination of elements fulfils the basic criteria for a simple sentence, as outlined by Frank, highlighting how even a brief statement can convey a complete thought with clarity and precision.

The participant provided the sentence: **"He goes to the church."**
This sentence is categorised as a simple sentence because it fulfils the fundamental criteria of sentence structure in the English language. It features "He" as the subject, indicating who performs the action. The verb "goes" indicates the action the subject performs, and "to the church" serves as a prepositional phrase that provides additional context about the destination of that action. This structure is

[39] Kathleen M Eberhard, "The Marked Effect of Number on Subject–Verb Agreement," *Journal of Memory and Language* 36, no. 2 (1997): 147–64.
[40] Chauke et al., "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa."
[41] Zitha and Nendauni, "Linguistic Misconceptions of Tautology in the English Second Language Context among Student Educators."
[42] Demana et al., "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University."
[43] Alican Mendez Pandapatan, "Analysis of the Subject-Verb Agreement Ability among Indonesian English Major Students as EFL Learners," *Journal of English Language Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020): 127–43.

straightforward, demonstrating clarity and conciseness while effectively conveying a complete thought in a single clause. Overall, this example exemplifies the characteristics of a simple sentence, with all elements working together seamlessly.

4. **Simple Sentences (Subject + Verb + Complement)**

Participant 11 stated, "**Her father is a doctor."**

This simple yet informative sentence is an example of effective English communication. According to Pandapatan, sentences can be enriched with additional elements that provide greater meaning, context, or detail either within the subject or the predicate.[44] In this case, the statement fulfils all fundamental requirements of a simple English sentence, which typically includes a subject, a verb, and a complement.

Here, "her father" acts as the subject, indicating who the sentence is about. The verb "is" is a linking verb that connects the subject to additional information. Finally, "a doctor" functions as the complement, offering more detail about the subject's identity or role. Thus, this sentence not only qualifies as a simple sentence but also effectively conveys the critical information that her father has a professional occupation, illustrating how straightforward sentences can be both clear and comprehensive.

Participant 12 wrote: **"My aunt was…"**

According to Zitha et al., to identify the subject of a sentence, one must determine who or what is doing the action; if there is no subject, the sentence is a fragment.[45] The sentence contains a subject, "my aunty" and a verb, "was," but there is no complement. It can only be assumed that the participant wanted to say something about the aunt.

5. **Simple Sentences (Adverbial +Subject + Verb)**

Participant 13 remarked, **"Nicely, he replied."**

This statement serves as an exemplary instance of a simple sentence, as it adheres to the fundamental rules of simple sentence construction. It contains the adverb "nicely," which describes the manner of the action; the subject "he," identifying the individual performing the action; and the past tense verb "replied," indicating the action that has occurred. In English, sentences can adopt a variety of structures, provided they remain within the established grammatical framework, as illustrated by the aforementioned example. However, it is notable that learners often use such effective sentence constructions infrequently in their writing, with only one instance identified across the analysed essays. This limited usage may stem from a lack of familiarity with this specific grammatical form. Halloran suggests that learners tend to avoid using structures they do not fully comprehend and instead focus on the aspects they feel more comfortable writing about. The absence of varied sentence structures can lead to a collection of monotonous sentences that fail to engage the reader, ultimately detracting from the overall quality of the writing. Enhancing one's understanding and application of diverse sentence structures can significantly improve writing effectiveness and reader engagement.

6. **Simple Sentences (Subject+ Verb + Object + Complement)**

Participant 14 remarked, **"They elected him speaker."**

This sentence illustrates a key aspect of sentence structure, as highlighted by Pandapatan and Zitha, who emphasise that components within the subject or predicate can significantly enrich a sentence's meaning and detail.[46] In this particular example, we have a complex simple sentence. The word "they" acts as the subject, referring to the group that made the decision. The verb "elected" is in the past tense,

[44] Pandapatan, "Analysis of the Subject-Verb Agreement Ability among Indonesian English Major Students as EFL Learners."
[45] Zitha, Masete, and Matsetela, "Using Artificial Intelligence Tools for Providing Feedback as A Strategic Response to Addressing Challenges in Students' Academic Writing."
[46] Pandapatan, "Analysis of the Subject-Verb Agreement Ability among Indonesian English Major Students as EFL Learners"; Zitha Innocent, "Orthographic Challenges Encountered by Fourth-Grade English Language Learners in a Rural-Based South African Primary School," in *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, vol. 6 (Whioce Publishing Pte. Ltd., 2024), 84–93.

indicating a completed action. The pronoun "him" serves as the object, pointing to the individual who has been chosen. Finally, "speaker" functions as the complement, specifying the role assigned to that individual. This sentence meets the criteria for a complete simple sentence, as it contains all the necessary elements to convey a coherent thought. It not only communicates a clear message but also exemplifies the foundational structure of English grammar.

7. Simple Sentences (Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object)

Participant 15 wrote: **"The principal gave him the medal."**

The sentence meets the requirements of a basic simple sentence; therefore, it is a simple sentence. It consists of the subject, "the principal," the verb, "gave", the indirect object, "him," and the direct object, "the medal." Therefore, this sentence is a complete simple sentence.

Object + verb

The participant wrote 16: '**Him coming'**

The construction is incorrect because there is no subject and auxiliary verb. Based on the analysis above, Grade 10 First Additional Language learners in the Malamulele Northeast circuit can construct simple, meaningful sentences with varied patterns. These patterns or forms include (Subject + Verb), (Subject + Verb+ Object), (Subject+ Verb + Adjectival), (Subject+ Verb + Complement),(Adverbial +Subject + Verb), (Subject+ Verb + Object + Complement), (Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object).

The results further showed that the participants had not used extended simple sentences with double or triple structures in the subject, verb, or object. Although a simple sentence is the simplest form of a sentence, some learners struggle to construct one. Their challenges include placing the verb in the wrong position, writing a sentence without a subject, and starting a sentence with an object rather than a subject.

These results concur with those of a study by Imaniah among Indonesian students, which found that students relied on simple sentences when writing their English essays.[47] The results show that students understand how to construct simple sentences using several formulas, such as Subject + Verb + Complement (S + V + C), Subject + Verb + Adverb (S + V + Adv), Subject + Verb + Object (S + V + Object), and Subject + Verb + Object + Adverb (S + V + O + Adverb).

The findings further affirm Khosa et al's perspective, which revealed that Turkish university students do not use extended simple sentences and that double predicates in simple sentences also confuse them. Their study further revealed that learners' decision to use simple sentences is attributed to limited vocabulary or to choosing simple sentences as a strategy to avoid other sentence types they do not understand.[48] Other studies have examined the reasons for overusing simple sentences and their effects on writing, including Zitha and Nendauni's study. His study identified several reasons for the overuse of simple sentences, including learners' limited knowledge, mother-tongue interference, lack of motivation, and lack of interest in writing.[49] It can be assumed based on Halloran's findings that some of the challenges that Grade 10 First Additional Language learners in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit have with the construction of simple sentences stem from learners' limited knowledge of the target language: mother tongue interference, a lack of motivation, and a lack of interest in writing.

Other researchers, such as Zitha and Lambani, have examined the positive effects of using simple sentences. Their findings reveal that learners use simple sentences because they are effective for presenting limited information and are easy to write and read. Their study also reveals that those simple sentences are effective for making direct statements, giving concise directions, asking questions,

[47] Imaniah, "A Critical Review of English Essay Writing in Studies of Critical Thinking, Reading Habits, and Sentence Structure Mastery."

[48] Mzamani Khosa, Khazamula Maswanganyi, and Innocent Zitha, "Lexical Reiteration as the English First Additional Language Learners' Strategic Approach to Achieve Cohesion in Essay Writing," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 14, no. 1 (2025): 160–68.

[49] Zitha and Nendauni, "Linguistic Misconceptions of Tautology in the English Second Language Context among Student Educators."

and presenting simple lists.[50] It can also be assumed that some Grade 10 learners chose to use simple sentences for some of the reasons mentioned above. Nevertheless, although simple sentences may be shorter, it is worth noting that they are no less academic than other sentence types.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study presents a compelling argument for initially focusing essay-writing instruction on constructing simple sentences, illustrating the critical role this foundational element plays in developing comprehensive writing skills. By starting with simple sentences, learners can build their confidence and develop a solid understanding of fundamental grammar and syntax. This essential groundwork paves the way for learners to advance to more complex sentence structures with assurance and clarity.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of teaching simple sentences within the broader context of a complete text or passage, rather than in isolation. This contextual approach enriches the learning experience by exposing learners to real-world examples of effective essay writing. By analysing how simple sentences interact to create meaning, students can witness firsthand how these building blocks harmonise to convey ideas and articulate arguments effectively.

Engaging with well-structured texts allows learners to dissect exemplary sentences and gain profound insights into how each grammatical component enhances overall clarity and coherence. This method not only aids understanding of writing mechanics but also nurtures an appreciation for the subtleties of effective communication. Through this enriched instructional strategy, students enhance their analytical skills and cultivate a deeper appreciation for the art of writing, ultimately leading to more refined and impactful essay composition.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the use of simple sentences in English essays written by Grade 10 EFAL (English First Additional Language) learners in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. By focusing on sentence structure, the research provided valuable insights into how different forms of simple sentences are employed in learners' writing and the impact this has on their overall essay quality. The prominence of morphosyntactic structures in simple sentences among FAL learners during English essay-writing tasks is a compelling area of study. This exploration reveals the intricate ways these learners navigate language, showcasing their unique approaches to constructing meaning and expressing themselves in their writing.

The findings highlight that when learners construct simple sentences incorrectly, it can significantly impede understanding. Simple sentences convey straightforward messages that readers or listeners can easily grasp. If the construction is flawed, the message's clarity may be compromised, leading to confusion.

Conversely, when learners can construct simple sentences correctly, they gain the ability to produce cohesive paragraphs with interconnected ideas. This skill not only enhances their overall writing fluency but also positively affects their essay scores, as well-structured essays are typically more favourably evaluated. Moreover, the effective use of simple sentences enhances textual coherence. As learners articulate their ideas clearly, it guides readers through their thought processes, allowing for smoother transitions between different concepts. This not only makes the argument or narrative easier to follow but also helps readers understand the writer's intent more clearly.

Additionally, mastering simple sentence structures can significantly boost learners' confidence in their writing abilities. When they feel capable of expressing their ideas straightforwardly and convincingly, they are more likely to engage deeply with their writing tasks. In turn, this confidence reinforces a positive feedback loop, encouraging them to take risks with their writing style, explore complex ideas, and develop more sophisticated writing skills over time. Overall, understanding and using simple sentences effectively is essential for learners aiming to improve their English writing and communication skills.

[50] Zitha and Lambani, "Register Competence in Academic Writing of Student Teachers Specialising in English Didactics at the University of Venda."

Limitations

This study analysed a sample of 20 Grade 10 learners enrolled in First Additional Language at a single school within the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. The small sample size constitutes a significant limitation, as it does not capture the diversity and experiences of a broader population of learners across multiple schools in the Malamulele Northeast Circuit. Consequently, this limits insights and the influence of diverse perspectives from different educational contexts and backgrounds, potentially affecting the overall applicability and generalisability of the study's findings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alsalami, Ahmed Ibrahim. "Challenges of Short Sentence Writing Encountered by First-Year Saudi EFL Undergraduate Students." *Arab World English Journal* 13, no. 1 (2022): 534–49.

Aprilia, Putri Kurniawan. "Analysis on Sentence Patterns in Thai Students' Essays." *Jurnal Penelitian, Pendidikan, Dan Pembelajaran* 16, no. 17 (2021).

Burhanuddin, Ahmad. "Error Analysis of English Sentences Written by Indonesian College Students." *Jurnal Lingua Idea*, 2020.

Canale, Michael, and Merrill Swain. "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing," 1980.

Chauke, Gezani Thomas, Mzamani Johannes Maluleke, T. E. Sikitime, and Ernest Kwesi Klu. "Crippling Teaching and Learning Culture: The Case of Teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Rural Schools in South Africa." *International Journal of Language Studies* 20, no. 1 (2026): 97.

Demana, Vincent Ndishunwani, Mzamani Johannes Maluleke, Ramos Asafo-Adjei, Thifhelimbilu Emmanuel Sikitime, and Ernest Kwesi Klu. "An Assessment of The English Reading Comprehension Strategies Utilized by Level-One Students at A South African University." *Journal of English Language Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 23–36.

Eberhard, Kathleen M. "The Marked Effect of Number on Subject–Verb Agreement." *Journal of Memory and Language* 36, no. 2 (1997): 147–64.

Fitria, Tira Nur. "Non-EFL Students' Ability in Writing Simple Sentences of Descriptive Paragraphs." *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2022): 1–9.

Hendrawati, Nurmala. "An Analysis on Students' Errors in Writing Sentence Patterns." *Loquen: English Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 63–85.

Imaniah, Ikhfi. "A Critical Review of English Essay Writing in Studies of Critical Thinking, Reading Habits, and Sentence Structure Mastery." *Indonesian EFL Journal* 8, no. 1 (2022): 53–62.

INNOCENT, ZITHA. "Orthographic Challenges Encountered by Fourth-Grade English Language Learners in a Rural-Based South African Primary School." In *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 6:84–93. Whioce Publishing Pte. Ltd., 2024.

Khosa, Mzamani, Khazamula Maswanganyi, and Innocent Zitha. "Lexical Reiteration as the English First Additional Language Learners' Strategic Approach to Achieve Cohesion in Essay Writing." *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)* 14, no. 1 (2025): 160–68.

Khosa, Mzamani Steven, Hlaviso Motlhaka, and Ernest Klu. "The Use of Grammatical Devices to Achieve Cohesion in Grade 12 EFAL Learners' Essays in Malamulele South Circuit." *Learning Technology (JELT)* 7, no. 6 (2026): 683–95.

Mensah, Gifty Serwah, Ernest Kwesi Klu, and Ndishunwani Vincent. "An Examination of Concord Errors in the Academic Writings of Students at a Technical University in Ghana." *Learning Technology (JELT)* 6, no. 6 (2025): 382–96.

Modhish, A. S. "Use of Direct and Indirect Feedback in Improving EFL Students' Writing." *English Language Teaching* 5, no. 3 (2012): 78–89.

Paknahad, Mohammad. "Simple Sentences with Two Predicates in Persian Language." *Research in Teaching Persian Language and Literature* 1, no. 1 (2019): 111–25.

Pandapatan, Alican Mendez. "Analysis of the Subject-Verb Agreement Ability among Indonesian English Major Students as EFL Learners." *Journal of English Language Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020): 127–43.

Ruday, Sean. *The Middle School Grammar Toolkit: Using Mentor Texts to Teach Standards-Based Language and Grammar in Grades 6–8*. CRC Press, 2020.

Saddler, Bruce, and Kristie Asaro-Saddler. "Writing Better Sentences: Sentence-Combining Instruction in the Classroom." *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth* 54, no. 3 (2009): 159–63.

Sari, Eka Resty Novieta. "An Error Analysis in Writing the Sentence of Simple Past Tense on English Subject." *English Education: Journal of English Teaching and Research* 4, no. 1 (2019): 39–44.

Sikitime, Thifhelimbilu Emmanuel. "Multimodal Representation and Its Implication for Reading and Writing Practices." *African Perspectives on the Teaching and Learning of English in Higher Education*, 2023, 101–17.

Silawati, Linda. "The Influence of Students' Sentence Structure Knowledge on Writing Essays." In *International Conference on Educational Sciences and Teacher Profession (ICETeP 2018)*, 84–87. Atlantis Press, 2019.

Stubbs, Michael. "Can I Have That in Writing, Please? Some Neglected Topics in Speech Act Theory." *Journal of Pragmatics* 7, no. 5 (1983): 479–94.

Zitha, Innocent, and Matodzi, Nancy Lambani. "Register Competence in Academic Writing of Student Teachers Specialising in English Didactics at the University of Venda." *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 42, no. sup1 (2024): S85–104.

Zitha, Innocent, Ditshego Masete, and Sarah Matsetela. "Using Artificial Intelligence Tools for Providing Feedback as A Strategic Response to Addressing Challenges in Students' Academic Writing." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6 (2025): 1096–1111.

Zitha, Innocent, and Lutendo Nendauni. "Linguistic Misconceptions of Tautology in the English Second Language Context among Student Educators." *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 43, no. 3 (2025): 353–65.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr. Mzamani Steven Khosa is a lecturer, researcher, and academic supervisor at the University of Venda with over 15 years of teaching experience. His research interests include English language education, discourse analysis, academic writing, and multilingualism. He has published extensively and supervises postgraduate research across several areas of applied linguistics.

Thifhelimbilu Emmanuel Sikitime is a lecturer in the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics at the University of Venda, South Africa. His PhD research focused on multimodal affordances and the assessment of readers' interpretative repertoires, forming the foundation of his ongoing scholarly interests. His research explores emergent literacy practices, with particular emphasis on multimodal representation, a key feature of meaning-making and communicative practices in contemporary contexts.

Innocent Zitha is a lecturer and researcher specialising in English Academic Literacy within the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education at the University of Venda. With over 5 years of experience in higher education, he has developed a profound understanding of the challenges students face in mastering academic writing and literacy. His research focuses on enhancing educational practices and promoting effective English communication among diverse student populations. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, he has made significant contributions to his field through his scholarly work. He has authored and co-authored 31 papers and 4 book chapters, all published in reputable peer-reviewed journals. His publications reflect his commitment to advancing knowledge in English Academic Literacy and improving educational outcomes for students.