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# Analysis of syntactic errors in the persuasive essays of grade 10 learners as basis of contextualized intervention material

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***Abstract***

This study analyzed the syntactic errors present in the persuasive essays of Grade 10 learners and identified the factors contributing to these errors. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were collected from 50 learners who produced two persuasive essays. Content analysis was employed to identify syntactic errors, while a validated questionnaire determined contributing factors such as interlanguage interference, cognitive processing limitations, and insufficient exposure to academic writing conventions. Findings revealed that common errors included incorrect word choice, missing punctuation, faulty parallelism, run-on sentences, and subject–verb agreement errors. Insufficient exposure to academic writing conventions emerged as the most significant factor. Based on the findings, a contextualized intervention material was developed to improve learners' syntactic competence. The study highlights the need for explicit grammar instruction, guided writing practice, and contextualized learning resources to enhance writing proficiency. In response, the Contextualized Intervention Material (CIM) was developed and validated, offering leveled activities designed to improve learners' performance. The CIM was found to be very highly valid in addressing syntactic errors. Recommendations include utilization of the CIM, emphasis on teaching vocabulary, parallelism, punctuation, cohesive devices, pronouns, and subject-verb agreement in grammar lessons, providing feedback, and future studies to explore other dimensions of writing development.

***Keywords:*** syntactic errors, persuasive writing, interlanguage interference, academic writing, intervention material

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# Analysis of syntactic errors in the persuasive essays of grade 10 learners as basis of contextualized intervention material

## 1. Introduction

English plays a crucial role in academic and professional communication, making writing proficiency an essential skill. Writing requires coherence, cohesion, and syntactic accuracy, with syntactic competence serving as the foundation of clear communication. In the Philippine context, learners frequently encounter difficulties in constructing grammatically correct sentences, particularly in persuasive writing tasks that require logical reasoning and syntactic complexity. Grade 10 learners are expected to demonstrate a higher level of language skills and proficiency in their writing. At this level, learners should engage in more complex tasks such as research papers, creative writing projects, and persuasive essays, which demand a deeper understanding of syntax and structure. With these higher demands, many learners display significant challenges in mastering these skills. Research indicates that Grade 10 learners commonly utilize simple sentence structures, leading to a reduction in the overall quality of their writing (Rashidi & Razavi, 2018). Errors such as subject-verb agreement, incorrect verb tense usage, and poorly structured sentences are prevalent, suggesting a gap in effective grammar instruction at earlier grade levels.

This study examined the common syntactic structures used by Grade 10 learners in their persuasive essay writing, identified the prevalent syntactic errors, and analyzed the factors contributing to these errors. Moreover, the development of an effective intervention material to enhance their syntactic competence is crucial. Lastly, assessing the level of validity of the developed Contextualized Intervention Material in Writing ensured its effectiveness in addressing these linguistic challenges. The specific research gaps that this study aims to address: Much of the existing research in syntactic analysis has concentrated on younger learners, such as those in elementary grades. There is a dearth of studies specifically targeting Grade 10 students, who face increased academic expectations and challenges in writing proficiency. This study sought to fill this gap by focusing on this crucial transitional year, where learners are expected to demonstrate higher-level writing skills.

By analyzing the syntactic errors commonly committed by learners, the research identifies specific linguistic difficulties that hinder effective written communication. The findings may assist educators in developing targeted instructional strategies and interventions that enhance learners' writing proficiency. In doing so, the study supports the improvement of teaching practices and promotes better learning outcomes, which are essential components of quality education. As a teacher in the public school, the quest for innovations to cater to the needs of learners must not stop. The contextualized intervention material developed will serve as an aid and tool to improve the writing skills of learners specifically in persuasive essays. The study is significant because it does not only identify learners' errors—it explains why they occur and provides a concrete solution through a validated intervention material, making it highly useful for both classroom application and educational improvement.

## 2. Literature Review

Syntactic errors are common in second language writing and include subject–verb agreement errors, tense inconsistencies, run-on sentences, and word order problems. These errors reduce clarity and coherence, affecting the effectiveness of written communication (Hyland, 2019; Ferris, 2011). One major factor influencing syntactic errors is interlanguage interference, where learners transfer structures from their first language to the target language (Ellis, 2015). This often results in incorrect sentence patterns and grammatical inconsistencies. Another factor is cognitive processing limitations, which affect learners' ability to apply grammatical rules while generating ideas. According to Cognitive Load Theory, limited working memory leads learners to prioritize meaning over form, resulting in syntactic errors (Sweller, 1994).

Additionally, insufficient exposure to academic writing conventions contributes to learners' difficulties. Learners with limited experience in formal writing tend to rely on simple sentence structures and informal language, leading to errors in syntax and organization (Biber et al., 2021). Intervention materials have been shown to improve writing skills by providing structured and contextualized learning experiences. Contextualized materials, in particular, enhance engagement and allow learners to apply grammar rules in meaningful contexts.

## 3. Methodology

***Research Design -*** This study used quantitative descriptive research design. Quantitative descriptive research is a method that involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to describe a population or phenomenon. It is a systematic investigation that uses numerical data and statistical analysis to explore, explain, and predict phenomena, often aiming to test hypotheses and generalize findings to larger populations. This research method involves collecting numerical data through various methods such as surveys, experiments, or secondary data analysis, and then analyzing the data using statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques (Creswell, 2014). In addition, developmental research design was used in the study since a contextualized intervention material was developed. Developmental research is a systematic and rigorous process focused on the design, development, and evaluation of educational products, programs, or intervention materials intended to improve practice (Richey & Klein, 2007). Developmental research is commonly used in education to create contextualized learning resources and intervention materials that address identified learner needs, followed by expert validation, pilot testing, revision, and effectiveness evaluation.

***Respondents -*** The study covered 50 Grade 10 Cookery and ICT learners of Dona Francisca Lacsamana De Ortega Memorial National High School (DFLOMNHS), of school year 2025-2026. Purposive sampling was used to determine the respondents who were the top 25 and bottom 25 of the class in their final grades in English during Grade 9. This sampling technique was appropriate because the study aimed to examine variations in syntactic errors across different proficiency levels. By including both high-performing and low-performing learners, the researcher was able to capture a wide range of syntactic performance, from minimal to frequent errors, compare error patterns between more proficient and less proficient learners, and generate data-driven insights for the development of contextualized intervention materials tailored to learners' needs. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The respondents were not forced or coerced to take part in the research. They were informed about the purpose of the study and were given the freedom to decide whether or not to participate.

***Data Collection -*** To collect the primary data, the researcher conducted two scheduled writing sessions. During the first session, the learners were instructed to write a persuasive essay on the topic, "Why mental health awareness should be prioritized in Philippine schools." On the second session, they were tasked to write on the topic, "Why stricter penalties for bullying in schools should be enforced." These topics were carefully selected as they are relevant to the learners' experiences and aligned with the Grade 10 English curriculum, particularly the third-quarter competency on persuasive writing. The contextual relevance of the topics aimed to encourage authentic responses and meaningful engagement from the learners. For the analysis of syntactic errors, the researcher employed textual or content analysis. Errors identified in the essays were classified into categories such as incorrect word choice, missing punctuations, faulty parallelism, subject–verb agreement errors, misplaced modifiers, incorrect pronoun usage, and incorrect verb forms or tense. The classification of errors was guided by Shaughnessy's framework in *Errors and Expectations* (1977), which provides a systematic approach to analyzing common writing errors among learners. Likewise, the study utilized Ellis' Error Analysis (2015) as a key basis in examining and explaining the syntactic errors found in the learners' persuasive essays. Ellis' framework was used in the study to understand that learners' syntactic errors are systematic and part of their language development rather than random mistakes. It guided the identification of key factors affecting errors, such as interlanguage interference, cognitive processing limitations, and insufficient exposure to academic writing. The framework also helped explain how errors arise from L1 transfer, developmental stages, and cognitive constraints during writing tasks.

In addition to essay analysis, a questionnaire was administered to identify the factors affecting syntactic errors. The instrument was adapted from Ellis (2008) and underwent pilot testing with 50 learners from Casa Cristo National High School (CCNHS) to establish its validity and reliability. The results of the reliability test showed high internal consistency as follows:

| Indicators | Reliability Coefficient | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Interlanguage Interference | 0.871 | Reliable |
| Cognitive Processing Limitations | 0.879 | Reliable |
| Insufficient Exposure to Academic Writing Conventions | 0.764 | Reliable |

***Data Analysis -*** For problem 1, content analysis was used to interpret textual data on the syntactic errors prevalent in the persuasive essays of Grade 10 learners. Content analysis is one of the tools or methods used in quantitative research to study data. By examining the actual sentences and structures in learners' essays, the researcher identified, categorized, and interpreted the types of syntactic errors that commonly occurred. For problem 2, using the survey questionnaire, weighted mean was used to identify the factors that affect the syntactic errors of Grade 10 learners. This method allowed the researcher to use structured questionnaire or checklist to gather measurable information on potential factors affecting learners' syntactic errors, enabling statistical analysis to determine which factors were most significant. Likewise, for problem 3, mean was used to measure the validity of the contextualized intervention material developed based from the prevalent syntactic errors of the learners. The validators' expertise and judgment through rating scales ensured an objective assessment of the contextualized intervention material's validity.

## 4. Results and Discussion

***Prevalent syntactic errors -*** The analysis identified a total of 362 syntactic errors, with bottom learners committing significantly more errors than top learners. The most frequent errors included incorrect word choice, missing punctuation, faulty parallelism, run-on sentences, and subject–verb agreement errors. Top learners demonstrated notably fewer and less severe errors. Their writing reflected clearer sentence construction, stronger control over grammar, and higher awareness of academic writing conventions. Incorrect word choice is the most common error with 30 occurrences. The mistakes were typically subtle—often issues of diction, formality, or phrasing rather than incorrect grammar. These errors appear more stylistic than structural. An example to this, top learner 1 wrote:

> *"At my age many students are experiencing different bullies like cyber bullying, they were taking a photo of a student then post it online to make fun of it." (TL1)*

From the statement of TL1, "experiencing different bullies" can be better expressed as "experiencing different types of bullying." With 32 instances, top learners showed difficulty with parallelism, although errors tended to be minimal and embedded within otherwise strong sentences. Top learner 2 wrote:

> *"There are a lot of ways people are getting bullied like physical, verbal, social, and cyber bullying." (TL2)*

Apparently, there is a missing parallel structure for the list because "lot of ways people are getting bullied" suggests that what follows should describe ways or forms of bullying in a consistent structure. "Physical, social, and verbal" are adjectives while "cyber bulling" is a noun phrase, hence, there is no parallelism.

Top learners committed 24 punctuation errors, mostly involving optional commas before conjunctions or introductory clauses. Unlike the bottom learners, these errors rarely affected meaning or sentence clarity.

> *"In the end you will realize that you are lucky because God guide you." (TL16).*

A comma is needed after "For me" in the statement of TL 12 and a comma should be placed after the phrase "In

the end" in the statement of TL16. Top learners produced only isolated error cases of incorrect pronoun (6), misplaced modifier (4), sentence fragment (2), and run-on sentence (2). No top learners committed errors in subject-verb agreement, incorrect verb tense, wrong spelling, dangling modifier, and inappropriate conjunction. This indicates a high level of grammatical proficiency and awareness of standard writing conventions.

Bottom learners produced high concentration of errors in several categories: incorrect word choice, missing punctuation, faulty parallelism, run-on sentences, subject–verb agreement, pronoun errors, and spelling issues. Incorrect word choice was the most frequent error, with 84 instances among bottom learners. For example, bottom learners stated:

> *"We prioritized the safety of our Philippine schools and support them as they doing for the safety of their lives." (BL1)*

In the statement of BL1, "safety of their lives" is an unclear phrasing which can be changed properly to "for their own safety." Incorrect word choice as the most frequent error (84 in bottom learners; 30 in top learners) is strongly tied to academic writing exposure. Learners unfamiliar with formal writing conventions tend to rely on conversational vocabulary. This observation reflects Nation's (2013) findings that weak academic vocabulary predicts inappropriate lexical choices.

Missing punctuation emerged as second major difficulty with 76 errors. Many bottom learners failed to use commas after introductory phrases or before conjunctions, while others omitted end punctuation entirely. This reflects limited understanding of sentence boundaries and clause separation, contributing to sentence flow issues.

> *"When someone feels depressed they need a person to talk to." (BL8)*

The sentence sounds rushed because apparently, commas are missing where they should be placed. In the statement of BL8, a comma should be placed after the dependent clause "When someone feels depressed." Missing punctuation errors align with cognitive processing limitations, where learners fail to recognize clause boundaries due to limited working memory. Truscott (2007) and Ferris (2011) both argue that punctuation errors often emerge when learners cannot attend to accuracy while focusing on ideas—mirroring the frequent run-ons in bottom learners' essays.

A notable 38 errors involved parallel structure. Learners often combined verbs, nouns, or phrases that did not follow a consistent grammatical pattern.

> *"Mental health affects their ability to learn and attending in the school regularly." (BL3)*

In the statement of BL3, "to learn" and "attending" are uneven and mismatched in form. This weakness suggests difficulty in constructing syntactically balanced and cohesive sentences, a skill which requires higher-level linguistic control. The high number of parallelism errors across both groups (38 bottom; 32 top) supports two factors: learners' insufficient familiarity with advanced writing conventions (Hinkel, 2004); and cognitive strain when combining multiple ideas in one sentence (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). This makes parallelism a developmental challenge rather than merely a grammatical one.

The contrast between the two groups is pronounced. Bottom learners struggle with basic syntax and errors revealed difficulties with sentence construction, lexical selection, punctuation rules, and maintaining grammatical consistency. The findings are consistent with the study of Lahuerta (2018), claiming that less advanced learners commit more syntactic errors and show weaker syntactic complexity compared with more advanced learners. This suggests limited mastery of English grammar and limited exposure to structured academic writing. Top learners exhibit strong syntax control with fewer errors mostly related to style, minor lapses in parallelism, and optional punctuation choices. Their writing shows coherence, syntactic maturity, and strong structural awareness. These findings corroborate the study of Crossley, et al. (2011); Casal & Lu (2019) which shows that higher-proficiency learners tend to use more complex and accurate syntactic structures than lower proficiency learners. This suggests

that advanced learners exhibit stronger syntactic control, with fewer basic grammatical errors and greater linguistic complexity, whereas errors at higher levels are more often related to style or lexical choice rather than fundamental syntax.

***Factors Affecting Syntactic Errors***

**Table 1**
*Factors Affecting Syntactic Errors of Grade 10 Learners*

| Factors affecting syntactic errors | Mean | DR |
|---|---|---|
| A. Interlanguage Interference | | |
| 1. My first language (L1) influences the way I construct English sentences. | 3.60 | A |
| 2. I find it difficult to apply correct English sentence structures because they differ from my L1. | 3.46 | A |
| 3. I often use direct translations from my L1 when speaking or writing in English. | 3.84 | A |
| 4. I struggle with subject-verb agreement rules in English. | 3.18 | U |
| 5. The complexity of English sentence patterns makes it difficult for me to avoid errors. | 3.54 | A |
| Sub-mean | 3.52 | A |
| B. Cognitive Processing Limitations | | |
| 1. I have difficulty remembering English grammar rules while speaking or writing | 3.42 | A |
| 2. I find it hard to recognize and correct my own syntactic errors. | 3.42 | A |
| 3. Learning new sentence structures is overwhelming for me. | 3.12 | U |
| 4. I tend to make the same grammatical mistakes repeatedly. | 3.04 | U |
| 5. I feel anxious when using English, which affects my ability to form correct sentences. | 3.16 | U |
| Sub-mean | 3.23 | U |
| C. Insufficient Exposure to Academic Writing Conventions/Educational Factors | | |
| 1. The way English grammar is taught in my school helps me understand correct sentence structures. | 4.24 | SA |
| 2. I need more practice in constructing sentences to improve my grammar skills. | 4.18 | A |
| 3. I have limited exposure to English-speaking environments at school. | 3.24 | U |
| 4. The learning materials provided in my school help me understand English syntax better. | 4.20 | A |
| 5. Feedback from my teachers helps me recognize and correct my syntactic errors. | 4.22 | SA |
| Sub-mean | 4.02 | A |
| Overall Mean | 3.59 | A |

Legend: U- Undecided A- Agree SA- Strongly Agree

Based on the table, interlanguage interference obtained a sub-mean of 3.52 described as Agree, suggests that learners recognize the influence of their first language (L1) on their English sentence construction. This aligns with Odlin's (1989) theory of language transfer. Cognitive Processing Limitations obtained a mean of 3.23 described as Undecided. Learners were uncertain about the role of cognitive factors, but error patterns suggest otherwise. According to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994), learners struggle to manage multiple tasks simultaneously, leading to syntactic errors. Insufficient Exposure to Academic Writing obtained a mean of 4.02 described as Agree, having the highest influence. Limited practice and exposure to academic writing hinder learners' ability to apply grammatical rules effectively. This supports Hyland's (2019) assertion that writing proficiency requires extensive practice.

***Validity of the contextualized intervention material***

**Table 2**
*Validity of the Contextualized Intervention Material*

| CRITERIA | MEAN | INTERPRETATION |
|---|---|---|
| A. CONTENT | | |
| 1. The material is aligned with the learning competencies or curriculum standards. | 4.6 | VHV |
| 2. The content reflects the principles of persuasive writing. | 4.6 | VHV |
| 3. The examples and texts used reflect the local context and culture of the learners. | 4.6 | VHV |
| Sub-mean | 4.6 | VHV |
| B. CLARITY AND LANGUAGE | | |
| 4. Instructions are clear and easy to follow. | 4.6 | VHV |
| 5. Language used is age-appropriate and suitable to learners. | 4.8 | VHV |
| Sub-mean | 4.7 | VHV |
| C. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE | | |
| 6. There is a logical flow from one activity to the next. | 5.0 | VHV |
| 7. Activities follow a clear and consistent format. | 4.6 | VHV |
| Sub-mean | 4.8 | VHV |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| D. INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY | | |
| 8. Activities encourage critical thinking and creativity. | 4.8 | VHV |
| 9. Exercises provide opportunities to practice thesis statement writing, counter-arguments, and supporting details. | 4.4 | VHV |
| Sub-mean | 4.6 | VHV |
| E. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS | | |
| 10. The material can potentially improve learner's writing skills. | 4.4 | VHV |
| 11. The CIM is appropriate for the target learner's needs and context. | 4.8 | VHV |
| Sub-mean | 4.6 | VHV |
| Overall Mean | 4.7 | VHV |

Legend: VHV- Very Highly Valid

The contextualized intervention material was rated Very Highly Valid (Mean = 4.7) across all criteria: content relevance, clarity and language, organization, instructional quality, and overall effectiveness. This indicates that the material is effective in addressing learners' syntactic needs and improving writing skills. The findings highlight the specific syntactic difficulties of Grade 10 learners—particularly in word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure. By identifying these weaknesses, learners become more aware of their errors and can improve their writing skills. The study also provides a contextualized intervention material that directly addresses these difficulties, helping learners develop clearer, more coherent, and grammatically correct persuasive essays.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The essays reveal consistent syntactic deficiencies across multiple grammatical domains. This implies that there is a need for more explicit, structured, and sustained grammar instruction in the classroom. The learners' struggle with fundamental aspects of syntax such as word choice, punctuation, and sentence construction suggest that current instructional practices may not sufficiently emphasize the application of grammatical rules in authentic writing tasks.

2. Insufficient exposure to academic writing conventions is a major factor contributing to learners' syntactic difficulties. This implies that learners need continuous exposure to structured writing practice to develop their syntactic competence. The persistence of errors such as incorrect word choice and missing punctuation indicates that learners may lack sufficient academic vocabulary and familiarity with formal writing conventions.

3. The contextualized intervention material developed from the findings was validated as highly appropriate and effective. This suggests that instructional materials should be based on actual learner errors, designed with progressive difficulty, and contextualized to learners' experiences to enhance engagement and understanding. The success of the intervention material implies that data-driven material development is more effective than using generic grammar resources.

(Note: Chatgpt was used to generate some ideas and references which were verified though google search.)

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