



THE COMPLEXITY OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE ON ENGLISH TEXTS DEVELOPED BY INDONESIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Complexity of sentence structure may depend on the type of text being developed. This research explored the sentence structure on English procedural text made by the Indonesian students, with focus on investigating common sentence types also as the error on students' writings. This research took the work of students at a public senior high school in Sidoarjo as the source of data. It reveals that the common sentences used by the students are simple sentences with a total of 70% of the texts. High preference on simple sentence structure shows a good understanding of procedural text, which prioritizes clarity and directness for making instructions that are easy to follow for the readers. In addition, the research also indicates few grammatical errors on verb tense and subject-verb agreement, but there are still some occurrences in which students' occasionally make errors in pronoun-agreement, which suggest room for improving their English writing skills. The findings imply that balancing simple and complex sentences can help an instructional sentence become easier to understand by providing deeper information while maintaining clear instruction. Additionally, further research could explore different sentence structure and how it can be used effectively. Similar research on different genres is also worth considering.

Keywords: *English Writing, Indonesian Students, Sentence Structure*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the important aspects in writing is sentence structure or the arrangement of words and phrases that can affect the meaning that will be conveyed by the sentence. The arrangement of the sentence structure can make a sentence more complex and clearer. Simple sentences can be good since it's easy to understand; however, the use of complex or compound sentences is helpful, especially to convey more information that needs more explanation.

Despite the importance of sentence structure, a study of student interference by Puspita (2021), found that Indonesian students tend to use grammatical structures from Bahasa Indonesia in their English writing. This means that the grammatical patterns can influence the complexity of sentence structures in English since it is applied to students' writing. As a result, Indonesian students may face the challenge of producing coherent English texts while navigating the target language's rules due to the strong influence of their mother tongue (Hung, 2006). Given this linguistic interference, Indonesian students not only struggle with basic sentence construction but also face particular difficulties in specific genres, such as procedural texts, which demand precision and clarity. Precise and clear procedures written can be pretty much influenced by the complexity of the sentences used in the procedure texts. When the sentences used in procedural texts are complex, it can make it more difficult for readers to understand and follow. It can lead to misinterpretation or errors for readers who attempt to follow the instructions. On the other hand, when the sentences used in procedural texts are simpler and more straightforward, it can make the instructions easier to understand and follow properly.



Sentence complexity can be understood as the linguistic elements that contribute to the overall clarity and effectiveness of a sentence. The way a sentence is organized can determine its meaning or emphasis. It can aid the reader in comprehending the sentence's meaning. Therefore, sentence structure suggests the level of difficulty or complexity related to comprehending sentence complexity. On this ground, grammar lays the foundational rules for sentence construction. This includes the arrangement of words to form a sentence and the structure of words. For Indonesian students, mastering these elements in English is crucial, as their native language has different grammatical rules and sentence structures (Burton, 2023). Such differences may lead to challenges in transforming first language structure to English.

The complexity of a sentence can be influenced not only by grammatical rules and sentence structure but also by the vocabulary items used in the text. For example, using more technical or specialized vocabulary can make a sentence more complex and difficult to understand, especially for less-skilled readers or non-native speakers. The use of vocabulary and technical terms in particular fields, idioms, and figurative language with obvious meanings that often rely on figurative usage can contribute to the complexity of sentence structure and result in longer, more complicated sentences (Hinkel, 2017). By bringing meanings that are initially unclear from the literal definitions of the terms involved, the use of technical terms can add to the complexity of sentences.

Sentence constructions become more complicated and require readers to draw links between the literal and figurative meanings, increasing cognitive burden (Gaballa & Al-Khayri, 2014). This is in line with Prapobratanakul (2024) who states that among the challenges in language use is sentence structure. It could be difficult for students to put together complex sentences. Combining clauses, using subordinate clauses, and utilising a variety of sentence types (simple, compound, complex) are common examples of sentence structure complexity. Students' writing may become less complex and varied if they utilize simpler phrases because they lack confidence in their ability to use language.

A number of research has put particular attention on sentence complexity. Lavarone et al (2021) studied sentence complexity in context. The findings highlight that context contributes to the variation of complexity of sentences as perceived by humans. Montaq (2019) investigated the complexity of sentences in children's picture books and child-directed speech. The data suggests that passive sentences and those with relative clauses contribute to more complex sentences in picture books compared to child-directed speech. Studying the abstracts section, Mubshirah et al (2023) found that the abstracts of scientific papers developed by students in a state Islamic university in Indonesia have relatively equal use of simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence and compound complex. Although there are different percentages, they are still within the ranges of 23% to 26% each. A quantitative study on the correlation between sentence complexity and structure found that the complexity of the sentences rises in Chinese used in a newspaper for more than six decades (1949-2025). The structure that positively correlates to lexical density is declarative sentence while interrogative and



exclamatory structure shows a negative correlation to lexical density. Other researchers developed a system enabling the automation of text complexity evaluation that can analyze the syntactic and lexical complexity of English text (Megna et al, 2021) and sentence complexity assessment for text simplification (Ormaechea et al, 2023). Jagaiah et al (2020) found that it is difficult to conclude whether higher writing ability positively correlates to syntactically more complex sentences. In fact, more complex syntax makes the sentence less intelligible but simpler words may result in misunderstanding (Hui et al, 2019). A study by Sukanob-Nicolau & Sukanto (2016) examined the sentence complexity in narrative accounts and discovered that students' levels of difficulty in creating complex sentences varied sequentially. This finding indicates that Indonesian students encounter some difficulties when it comes to the usage of imperative forms, sequential connectors, and technical vocabulary in procedure texts. Such difficulty may root from the nature of procedure text that calls for precise and unambiguous instructional language in explaining a process. Therefore, this research aims to address sentence complexity in procedural texts.

A procedure text provides instructions on how to do a task or build something by going through a set of steps. Usually, it employs imperative phrases like "cut," "place," "use," and other comparable imperative words or phrases for more clear instruction. It implies that rather than only using a basic imperative term for particular actions, the procedural text can also include synonyms or similar words. For example, if a procedural document uses the word "cut" it may also use "chop", "trim", "slice", "divide" or "carve" among others. These terms are similar to "cut," but they can be used to give more detailed and varied directions. A procedure text typically includes three basic components: the purpose, the materials needed, and the steps (Helmi, 2009). In advance of procedure text structure typically consists of five components. It begins with a title that makes it very evident what the procedure entails. Subsequently, an introduction provides background information and an explanation of the procedure's significance to the reader. The second one is the list of the materials required to finish the procedure. Then, the procedural major body is made up of thorough instructions that are presented in an understandable order. Lastly, a conclusion brings everything together and may provide a summary, additional advice for greater success, or results. This method aids in providing the data in an understandable and structured manner (Bachtiar, 2010 in Syafrizal, 2019). A procedural text contains imperative sentences, chronological order, and technical vocabulary, along with the need for clear and straightforward language of procedure text. As a result, this type of text might be especially difficult for Indonesian students who are still working on their English as foreign language.

Understanding and analysing sentence structures in procedure text can help reveal important information about how Indonesian students write English text that is still widely unexplored in some genres. This research is trying to fill this gap by exploring the sentence complexity with focus on procedure texts written by Indonesian students. The choice of procedural texts because this text uses a particular structural component



that could draw attention to the intricacy and difficulties that learners encounter when writing a sentence for explaining a process.

Therefore, the formulated research question is: How is the complexity of sentence structure manifested in English texts developed by Indonesian students? By investigating this, the research aims to explore the nuances of sentence building as formed by Indonesian students, providing insights into their learning process and contributing to the development of more effective teaching methods.

2. METHOD

With a focus on procedural writings of students in a public senior high school in Sidoarjo, this research used a qualitative research method to investigate the complexity of sentence structure. The qualitative method makes it possible for the researchers to explore details of the issues under investigation (Patton, 2005). In the context of this research, the qualitative approach enabled the researchers to capture the complex ways in which students formulate sentences. By collecting detailed examples and analysing patterns within English text, researchers aimed to look for sentence structure in student's text to understand what is happening.

The primary data of this research was generated from English procedure texts developed by students at the 11th grade in a public senior high school in Sidoarjo. Although a total of 20 procedure texts were submitted by 11th-grade students, only 5 texts were selected for in-depth analysis. This selection was based on random sampling. The administration of writing assignments under a classroom setting can ensure that the students created their writings under regular circumstances.

While a formal rubric was not employed, the text was carefully examined collectively based on predefined structure types such as simple, compound, complex, compound-complex. The style of sentence problems such as fragmented, and run-on sentences were also identified. Additionally, investigating some grammatical errors like incorrect verb tense and subject-verb agreement, were identified. To help the processing of the data, a coding scheme was developed to categorize different sentence structures and identify errors. The coding categories included simple sentences (S), compound sentences (C), complex sentences (CX), compound-complex sentences (CCX), fragmented sentences (F), and run-on sentences (R). Common grammatical errors such as incorrect verb tense (VT) and subject-verb agreement (SVA) were also coded.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis of written samples of procedure text developed by the students reveals a variety of sentence structures in scholarship-related topics. Below is an example of a text-1 about tips for getting a scholarship precisely on the structure of the steps part of the procedure text.



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|--|------|
| 1. <i>Determine your education plan</i> | (S) |
| 2. <i>Consultation with mentor</i> | (F) |
| 3. <i>Checking all documents</i> | (F) |
| 4. <i>Practice interview with mentor</i> | (F) |
| 5. <i>Search on Youtube, Instagram, or another social media</i> | (S) |
| 6. <i>Don't forget to ask about a study program that they have</i> | (CX) |

The first sentence '*determine your education plan*' (S) is an imperative sentence with one independent clause. The subject "you" is implied, and the sentence has one verb "*determine*" and one object "your education plan" and has no dependent clauses. This is followed by the 2nd step, '*consultation with mentor*' (F). This is a sentence fragment because it does not have a verb. The sentence should have been "*Have a consultation with a mentor*" or "*Consult a mentor*" to form a simple sentence. A similar case occurs in the 3rd step '*checking all documents*' (F). This sentence also does not have a subject and a complete verb. To be a simple sentence, it should be rephrased to "*Check all documents.*". Steps 4 and 5 use imperatives. Sentence 4 reads '*practice interview with mentor.*' In the 5th step '*Search on YouTube, Instagram, or another social media*' this is an imperative sentence with one independent clause. The subject "you" is implied, and the sentence consists of one verb "*search*" and one object "*on YouTube, Instagram, or another social media*" with no dependent clauses. Therefore, it is considered a simple sentence. The next step is expressed through the sentence '*Don't forget to ask about a study program that they have.*' This is a complex sentence because it contains a main clause "*Don't forget to ask*" and a dependent clause "*that they have*" which adds extra information about "*a study program*".

Out of 5 sample procedural texts, simple sentences are the most commonly used (70%). The remaining 30% are made up of other types of sentences such as compound or complex sentences. For example, in a text describing how to find scholarships, in the text-1, "*search on YouTube, Instagram, or other social media.*" This finding is somewhat different from Mubshirah, et al., (2023) that found a relatively equal number of sentences across different types. The different genres being the source of data may contribute to this different finding. This suggests that type of genres may contribute to the complexity of the sentence structure.

Data also shows that while this simplicity using simple sentences can ensure that instructions are clear and easy to follow, it fails to capture the nuances or complexities of the task, particularly in how it affects user understanding in more intricate contexts. Similar finding is also highlighted by Hui et al (2019). The two studies together highlight that simple and less complex structure of sentences need particular attention in the use. Hence, the main message conveyed can still be well presented.

Another example of a simple sentence is "*research and identify scholarships.*" This sentence is also clear and direct but exemplifies the same simplicity. While it is easy to understand, it lacks elaboration on the steps or criteria involved in researching and identifying suitable scholarships. The frequent use of simple sentences implies that



although students may be able to explain the fundamentals of a procedure, they may find it difficult to explain directions that are more complex or nuanced. But this ease of use could also result in an oversimplified comprehension of the tasks, thereby omitting important elements that could have an impact on the user's effectiveness in practical applications. Given that the procedure text mainly uses imperative forms, this data also shows that students seem to have difficulty in using imperative, a similar finding to Suganob-Nicolau & Sukanto (2016).

The frequent use of simple sentences shows that students value directness and clarity when providing directions. Since it fits in well with the purpose of procedural texts, which need to provide the reader with clear, simple instructions in order to effectively guide them. Without giving the reader too much information at once, these sentences enable the addition of crucial details that improve comprehension. In addition, it indicates that students has high proficiency in constructing simple sentences. Panos and Datchuk (2019) state that simple sentences are essential for students because they provide a solid foundation for constructing more complex sentences. By starting with simple sentences, students can build their skills and gradually learn to express their ideas in richer, more varied ways.

In contrast, the complex structure is often used in descriptive paragraphs, such as in the introduction. Cahyono et al. (2016) found that students who write more sentences in their essays are likely to include more complex sentences. For example in text-2, *“you can learn about getting scholarships in several ways, including contacting the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend and checking information in a public library or online.”* More examples were discovered in the step section, *“Then if the scholarship provider doesn't have explicit guidelines, it's best to just follow the standard professional style writing format and formatting.”*

With the use of the complex sentence structure, students can express several possibilities and actions in a single statement. Aligned with Tam (2021) complex sentence structure allows for more detailed and nuanced expressions of ideas, it helps students to conveying complex relationships and information effectively in a sentence. The student offers a more thorough and sophisticated explanation of how to obtain scholarship information by including phrases like *“including contacting the financial aid office at the school you plan to attend’* and *‘checking information in a public library or online.’* This shows the students' capacity to incorporate several pieces of guidance into a cohesive sentence in addition to successfully communicating the knowledge. There was another example of a simple sentence found in the conclusion, *“By following [these] steps, you can hopefully increase your chance of securing financial aid to achieve your academic goal.”*

One notable pattern observed in the students' writings is the use of a simple sentence followed by a complex sentence. This combination seems to be a way that allows students to present a clear introduction to an idea before going into greater detail or elaboration. For example in text-4: *“writing a [scholarship] essay can be a daunting task. But with [the] right approach, you can create an essay that stands out and increases your chances of securing funding for your education.”*



The way in which students combine these structures is to both introduce and elaborate the topic. It demonstrates the use of a simple sentence “*writing a scholarship essay can be a daunting task*” followed by a complex sentence “*But with [the] right approach, you can create an essay that stands out and increases your chances of securing funding for your education*”, as coded in the analysis. This combination of simple and complex sentences allows for a more detailed discussion of the topic, which allows the student to express the difficulties involved in writing a scholarship essay as well as possible winning techniques. Similar to research by Zipoli (2016) a combination of sentences that add the complexity of sentence structure enhances the content of the original sentence and provides more depth and information. The use of complex sentences demonstrates that students may include the information or explanations that are needed in their text.

During the analytic process, it was noted that run-on sentence, compound sentence, and compound-complex sentence were conspicuously absent from the student writings, a finding slightly different from Mubshirah et. al., (2023). This lack of variety in sentence structure suggests a tendency toward simpler sentence forms in the students’ writing.

Furthermore, in order to explore the complexity of sentence structure in English texts developed by Indonesian students. Examining the grammatical correctness is similarly crucial, in line with Puspita (2021) because the grammatical correctness on students’ writing directly affect the students’ ability to deliver information especially with regard to verb-tense and subject-verb agreement, since these components have an impact on how understandable and useful the instructions are. The analysis revealed no significant verb-tense or subject-verb agreement errors in the students’ procedural texts. However, many words could be written in a different way to improve clarity. This suggests that even if the students were aware of the regulations, they might have trouble using words and phrases that clearly express what they want to say.

In Text-1, some sentences can actually be written more effectively to improve clarity and coherence. For example, ‘*Consultation with mentor*’ (F) can be written as “*Consult with your mentor*” the word ‘consultation’ (Noun) should be replaced with ‘consult’ to turn it into imperative sentence, for serial structure the word ‘you’ can be muted because it does not need to be explicitly stated because each step naturally addresses the reader. The next step “*Checking all documents*” can be written as “*Check all documents*” even it’s not strictly necessary to replace ‘checking’ into ‘check’, for consistency in verb tense and direct instruction for clearer and more concise, the word ‘check’ is suitable for step-by-step instructions or procedural writing where writer want to give clear and actionable guidance. Then “*Practice interview with mentor*” can be written as “*Practice interviewing with your mentor*” for clarity and grammatical correctness. “*Practice interview*” can mean different things to different people; it could mean practising conducting interviews or being ready for one. It becomes obvious that the emphasis is on practice being the interviewee when it is rewritten as “*Practice interviewing*.” According to Burton (2023), a grammatical choice can add to the clarity



and precision impact the students wanted to express, and these errors indicate a need for improvement to minimise ambiguity and probable misunderstanding of a sentence.

An additional observation was the occurrence of pronoun agreement error. Three out of the five samples (60%) had errors in this regard. For example, in the sentence "*By following [these] steps, you can hopefully increase your chance of securing financial aid to achieve your academic goal*" the pronoun "*this*" should be "*these*" to match the plural noun "*steps*." Although less common, this kind of mistake shows where students can still need help to improve their writing. It is possible to enhance students' writing proficiency. These findings imply the importance of providing ongoing guidance to help students refine their sentence structure and word choices for better clarity and coherence. This is in line with Cahyono et al. (2016), who emphasized that teaching complex sentences explicitly can significantly boost students' grammatical skills and lead to more precise and effective writing.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of the investigation conclude simple sentences are frequently used by the students, in particular instructional settings of procedure text. These sentence structures promote clarity, but it may lack more complex information. On the other hand, the deliberate use of complex sentences in some areas shows that students can provide comprehensive instruction in a single statement, by enriching the content without becoming too dense for the reader. The tendency of students' preference on using simple sentence structures could be advantageous for procedural texts writings which need a clear sentence for its instruction. This could also indicate the students' hesitation and challenge to write more complicated phrases that could express more complex or detailed information. In addition, some of the fragmented sentences that make the overall messages of the text become unclear.

The grammatical analysis of students' writing shows that while the 11th-grade students have a good grasp of basic grammar rules like the implementation of verb-tense and subject-verb agreement, there are some mistakes indicating rooms for improving how they can use words to make their instructions more understandable. For instance, some sentences that could be simplified were commonly found in student's writing. It suggests that they might find challenges to apply grammar in a way that makes their writing precise and effective. In addition, occasional mistakes in pronoun agreement were also found where it indicates a support is needed in this area for further learning.

The findings suggest that striking balance between simplicity and complexity in academic writing, using a simple sentence can help the sentence be easier to understand, using a complex sentence also can make the sentence more informative. In addition, to enhance the present status of students' writing abilities within procedural texts, there is a need to equip students for the demands of academic and professional communication. This can be done by focussing on the areas where students need to enhance their writing skills. Guidance on how students' can use simple, complex, compound or mixed sentences in their writings is crucial. Future researchers could explore a broader range



of sentence structures, focusing on identifying not only the presence but also the functional use of sentence structure. Research in other genres is also crucial for better understanding of the varieties of sentence structure across genres.

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