



The Role of Syntactic Structures in Developing Academic Writing Skills of Libyan EFL University Students

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Abstract

Mastering English syntactic structures remains a persistent hurdle for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduates in Arab academic contexts. This study investigates the primary syntactic difficulties encountered by Libyan EFL university students, explores the underlying linguistic and pedagogical causes of these obstacles, and proposes practical instructional remedies. Employing a convergent mixed-methods design, data were gathered at the Faculty of Education (Al-Ghurifa), University of Sebha, from a randomly selected sample of 30 undergraduate EFL students and 5 experienced faculty members. Quantitative data were collected via a 20-item five-point Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed using IBM SPSS to compute means and standard deviations, whereas qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews with instructors and examined using thematic analysis. Quantitative findings revealed high levels of student agreement across four core dimensions: sentence structure comprehension ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.12$), grammatical application ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.13$), confusion regarding sentence types and constituent elements ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.13$), and causal factors ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.15$). Specifically, learners exhibited pronounced struggles in differentiating between complex and compound structures ($M = 4.20$), mastering preposition placement ($M = 4.20$), maintaining subject-verb agreement ($M = 4.20$), and distinguishing noun phrases from prepositional phrases ($M = 4.10$). These difficulties were primarily attributed to insufficient practice with complex constructions ($M = 4.20$), low self-confidence ($M = 4.20$), first-language (Arabic VSO vs. English SVO) structural interference ($M = 3.90$), and limited authentic exposure ($M = 3.90$). Qualitative findings indicated that combining explicit rule instruction, contextualized authentic texts, interactive multimedia, collaborative peer editing, and explanatory error analysis effectively mitigates syntactic deficits. The study concludes with targeted pedagogical recommendations for curriculum designers and EFL instructors.

Keywords: Academic Writing, EFL Learners, Error Analysis, L1 Interference, Pedagogical Strategies, Syntactic Structures.

ملخص البحث

تواجه تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي عقبات بنيوية وتربوية عميقة تعيق كفاءة الطلبة في الكتابة الأكاديمية. تبحث هذه الدراسة في أبرز العقبات والتدخلات التربوية المرتبطة بتطوير مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية والتراكيب النحوية لدى طلبة المرحلة الجامعية بجامعة سبها. باستخدام تصميم بحثي مختلط، جُمعت البيانات من عينة ممثلة قوامها 30 طالباً وطالبة و5 من أعضاء هيئة التدريس ذوي الخبرة. جُمعت البيانات الكمية عبر استبانة منظمة من 20 فقرة وفق مقياس ليكرت، وحُللت إحصائياً باستخدام برنامج SPSS لحساب المتوسطات الحسابية والانحرافات المعيارية، بينما جُمعت البيانات النوعية عبر مقابلات شبه مقننة مع الأساتذة وحُللت موضوعياً. أظهرت النتائج الكمية موافقة عالية على حدة العقبات اللغوية، بارزة التحديات في تكوين الجمل المعقدة (المتوسط = 4.20)، وتحديد مواقع حروف الجر (4.20)، والحفاظ على توافق الفاعل والفعل (4.20)، ونقص الثقة بالنفس لدى الطلبة (4.20). وأكد التحليل النوعي على فاعلية التدخلات التربوية المستهدفة، بما في ذلك التدريس الصريح للقواعد، والموارد الرقمية المتعددة الوسائط، والتحليل اللغوي

التقالي، ورش عمل التحرير التعاوني للأقران. وتختتم الدراسة بتقديم توصيات مستندة إلى الأدلة لتطوير المناهج وتحسين التدريس في التعليم العالي الليبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية، العقبات، طلبة المرحلة الجامعية، التداخل اللغوي، التدخلات التربوية، جامعة سبها

1. Introduction

Linguistics, as the systematic and scientific inquiry into human language, investigates the intricate dimensions of linguistic structure, functional usage, and historical evolution. Among its core sub-disciplines—phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics—syntax holds a central architectural role by governing how words are combined, ordered, and hierarchically organized into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Mastering syntactic principles equips language learners with the cognitive tools necessary to generate coherent propositions and decode complex written and spoken discourse. Without a firm grasp of syntactic configurations, lexical knowledge remains fragmented, rendering communication ambiguous and susceptible to misinterpretation.

In the Libyan higher education landscape, English Language Teaching (ELT) programs place substantial emphasis on developing undergraduate students' syntactic competence and academic writing skills. University curricula routinely introduce foundational syntactic constructs, including parts of speech, canonical word order patterns, phrase structure rules, and clause subordination. However, theoretical familiarity with isolated grammatical rules does not automatically translate into accurate syntactic production. Constructing grammatically sound English sentences requires learners to synthesize multiple linguistic constraints—such as word order, tense, aspect, and concord—simultaneously and cohesively. Even when Libyan EFL students can successfully define nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions in isolation, they frequently struggle to assemble these constituents into well-formed English structures.

At the heart of syntactic organization lie two indispensable building blocks: phrases and clauses. A phrase functions as a unified syntactic constituent built around a lexical head element—such as a noun in a Noun Phrase (NP) or a verb in a Verb Phrase (VP)—which projects its grammatical properties onto the entire construction. Clauses, conversely, represent higher-level syntactic units comprising a subject and a predicate that express a proposition. Syntactic theory distinguishes primarily between independent (main) clauses, which encapsulate complete thoughts capable of standing alone as grammatical sentences, and subordinate (dependent) clauses, which rely on a matrix clause for contextual and structural completeness. Achieving fluency in academic writing requires EFL learners to manipulate these phrasal and clausal hierarchies effortlessly, particularly when adhering to English Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) patterns.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Because syntax serves as the structural backbone of linguistic comprehension and written expression, deficiencies in syntactic mastery severely compromise EFL students' academic trajectory and writing proficiency. Empirical observations within Libyan universities reveal that undergraduate English majors experience persistent difficulties in internalizing and applying English syntactic rules. Traditional, teacher-centered grammar instruction, coupled with scarce opportunities for authentic communicative practice, leaves many learners unable to transition from basic sentence formation to advanced academic writing.

Specifically, despite years of prior English instruction at the secondary and tertiary levels, Libyan EFL undergraduates continue to exhibit high error rates when constructing compound and complex sentences, positioning prepositions, maintaining subject-verb concord, and distinguishing between phrasal categories. As coursework demands increase in advanced semesters, these unresolved syntactic deficits manifest in fragmented essays, structural ambiguity, and heightened writing anxiety. Consequently, conducting a rigorous diagnostic investigation into the specific syntactic obstacles faced by Libyan EFL students, their root causes, and instructor-validated remedies is imperative for reforming grammar and writing pedagogy.

1.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Derived directly from the statement of the problem, this investigation addresses one overarching research question and two subsidiary questions:

1. **Main Question:** What are the primary difficulties encountered by Libyan EFL undergraduate students in mastering syntactic structures for academic writing?
2. **Sub-Question 1:** What are the underlying linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical reasons behind these syntactic difficulties?
3. **Sub-Question 2:** What instructional strategies, resources, and feedback mechanisms can effectively improve EFL students' syntactic and academic writing knowledge?

Based on these questions, the study tests two foundational hypotheses:

1. **H1:** Libyan EFL undergraduate students encounter statistically significant difficulties across structural, grammatical, and constituent dimensions of English syntax.
2. **H2:** A primary driver of these syntactic difficulties is students' persistent confusion in differentiating between various types of phrases, clauses, and sentence structures due to cross-linguistic and pedagogical factors.

1.3 Objectives and Significance of the Study

This study aims to: (a) systematically identify and categorize the syntactic difficulties experienced by EFL undergraduates at the University of Sebha; (b) uncover the causal factors contributing to these learning barriers; and (c) formulate practical, evidence-based pedagogical solutions to enhance syntactic instruction and academic writing.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the body of Arab applied linguistics literature by linking generative syntactic frameworks (X-bar theory and Transformational Generative Grammar) to empirical error patterns among Libyan learners. Practically, the findings provide EFL university instructors and curriculum developers with actionable diagnostic data to redesign syntax syllabi, integrate multimodal teaching resources, and implement constructive error-feedback protocols that bolster student confidence and writing proficiency.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Syntax in Linguistic Theory

Within modern linguistics, syntax is conceptualized as the formal system of rules, principles, and parameters that govern how words are combined into phrases and how phrases are integrated into grammatically well-formed sentences. Heuer et al. (2010) characterize syntax as the structural mechanism responsible for regulating linear word order, morphosyntactic agreement, and clausal subordination. Extending this perspective, Miller (2016) and Von Stechow (2012) emphasize that syntactic rules do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they govern the relational interplay among grammatical categories—such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions—to encode precise semantic and pragmatic meanings.

To illustrate how syntactic organization directly dictates semantic interpretation, Hartsuiker and Bernolet (2017) point to thematic role assignment in transitive constructions: the sentence "John gave Mary a book" utilizes identical lexical items as "Mary gave John a book," yet the syntactic positioning of the arguments completely reverses the agent and recipient roles. Similarly, violating canonical word order—such as producing "The cat the mouse chased" instead of "The cat chased the mouse"—disrupts cognitive parsing and breaks down communication. Furthermore, cross-linguistic typological research demonstrates that while all human languages rely on systematic syntactic rules, they diverge in their surface parameter settings, such as English adhering to a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order while Japanese utilizes Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) and Arabic frequently employs Verb-Subject-Object (VSO).

2.2 Generative Syntactic Frameworks: TGG and X-Bar Theory

The formal analysis of sentence structure has been revolutionized by Noam Chomsky's generative enterprise, complemented by data-driven perspectives on linguistic universals. Two interrelated theoretical models—Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and X-bar Theory—provide the analytical foundation for understanding syntactic complexity in EFL contexts.

2.2.1 Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG)

Introduced by Chomsky in the 1950s and refined in subsequent decades, TGG posits that human linguistic competence stems from an innate biological endowment termed Universal Grammar (UG). UG equips speakers with a finite system of computational rules capable of generating an infinite array of novel, grammatically accurate sentences. A cornerstone of TGG is the bifurcation of syntactic representation into two distinct levels:

1. **Deep Structure:** The abstract, underlying syntactic-semantic representation where core thematic relations are established.
2. **Surface Structure:** The final phonological or orthographic form of the sentence as actually spoken or written.

Bridging these two levels are transformational rules—formal operations involving constituent movement, insertion, and deletion. For instance, through transformational operations, a declarative active kernel sentence ("The dog chased the cat") can be

systematically converted into an interrogative construction ("Did the dog chase the cat?") via auxiliary movement, or into a passive construction ("The cat was chased by the dog") via argument advancement. For Libyan EFL learners, understanding transformational mechanics is vital for mastering question formation, negation, passivization, and relative clause embedding.

2.2.2 X-Bar Theory

Developed by Chomsky in the late 1970s and expanded by syntacticians such as Koster (2011) and Haegeman (2006), X-bar Theory establishes a universal, hierarchical template for internal phrase structure across all natural languages. Rather than treating phrases as flat strings of words, X-bar theory posits that every phrase is an endocentric projection of a lexical head (X)—where X represents a variable standing for Noun (N), Verb (V), Adjective (A), Adverb (Adv), or Preposition (P). As detailed by Isaac et al. (2024), phrasal architecture unfolds across three universal hierarchical tiers:

1. **The Head Level (X):** The core lexical item that determines the grammatical category and semantic nature of the phrase.
2. **The Intermediate Projection (X'):** The structural level formed by merging the head (X) with its subcategorized complements (elements required to complete the head's meaning).
3. **The Maximal Projection (X" or XP):** The highest phrasal node, formed by combining the intermediate projection (X') with optional specifiers (such as determiners or degree words) and modifiers.

By capturing the underlying structural symmetry across diverse phrase types, X-bar theory provides EFL educators with a powerful visual and analytical tool (tree diagrams) to demonstrate how complex sentences are hierarchically assembled.

2.3 Taxonomy of English Syntactic Constituents

Within the hierarchical framework of English syntax, functional categories—such as Determiners (Det), Auxiliaries (Aux), Coordinators (Coord), and Complementizers (Comp)—do not project independent content phrases on their own, but rather operate as structural glue within five major phrasal projections:

1. **Noun Phrase (NP):** Constructed around a head noun (N) accompanied by optional determiners, pre-modifying adjectives, and post-modifying prepositional phrases or relative clauses (e.g., "The moon" or "the big brown dog"). NPs function primarily as subjects, direct/indirect objects, or prepositional complements, serving as the primary referential anchors in discourse.
2. **Verb Phrase (VP):** Headed by a lexical main verb (V) and potentially expanded by auxiliary verbs encoding tense, aspect, and modality, alongside NP complements and adverbial modifiers (e.g., "Meet a friend" or "will have been running"). VPs form the predicative core of the clause, expressing actions, processes, or states of being.

3. **Adjective Phrase (AdjP):** Built around a head adjective (Adj) modified by degree specifiers (Deg) or complements (e.g., "Very good" or "extremely happy"). AdjPs function attributively within NPs or predicatively following copular verbs to enrich descriptive precision.
4. **Adverb Phrase (AdvP):** Centered on a head adverb (Adv) preceded by degree modifiers (e.g., "very quickly"). AdvPs modify verbs, adjectives, or entire clauses to specify temporal, spatial, manner, or frequency parameters.
5. **Prepositional Phrase (PP):** Comprising a head preposition (P) merged with an obligatory Noun Phrase complement (e.g., "On the table"). PPs establish crucial spatial, temporal, directional, and possessive relationships across sentence constituents.

2.4 Cognitive, Linguistic, and Affective Barriers in Learning Syntax

Acquiring L2 syntactic competence is widely recognized as an arduous, time-intensive process fraught with cognitive and structural obstacles. Literature identifies four primary sources of syntactic difficulty for EFL learners:

1. **Cross-Linguistic Interference (L1 Transfer):** Learners habitually rely on their native language (L1) grammatical architecture when attempting to construct or translate L2 sentences. For Arab EFL learners, typological divergence is particularly acute: whereas Arabic naturally permits Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) ordering and nominal verbless sentences, English mandates a strict Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sequence ("The boy ate the apple") with an overt finite verb. Furthermore, differences in definiteness marking and preposition usage trigger persistent syntactic errors.
2. **Working Memory Constraints:** Constructing multi-clause sentences requires learners to hold and process numerous morphosyntactic dependencies simultaneously—including subject-verb concord, tense sequences, and subordinator constraints. When cognitive load exceeds working memory capacity, grammatical accuracy breaks down.
3. **Syntactic Ambiguity:** Structural ambiguity arises when a single linear sequence of words can be parsed into multiple hierarchical tree structures yielding distinct interpretations. For example, in the classic ambiguous construction "Amir saw a man with a telescope," the prepositional phrase ("with a telescope") can attach either to the VP (indicating the instrument Amir used) or to the NP (indicating a characteristic of the man). Navigating such attachment ambiguities severely challenges EFL learners.
4. **Abstractness and Low Perceived Relevance:** Because syntax deals with abstract structural formulas rather than concrete lexical meanings, many EFL students perceive grammar rules as tedious and less important than vocabulary acquisition, leading to diminished motivation.

2.5 Pedagogical Strategies and Empirical Precedents

To counteract these barriers, applied linguistics scholarship advocates a multifaceted instructional model combining five core strategies:

1. **Exposure to Authentic Language Input:** Immersing learners in natural spoken and written discourse enables implicit internalization of sentence rhythms and word-order patterns.
2. **Explicit Syntactic Instruction:** Providing systematic, transparent explanations of phrase structures, clause types, and transformational rules helps learners demystify complex grammatical patterns.
3. **Deliberate Practice and Constructive Feedback:** Engaging students in regular parsing drills, sentence-combining tasks, and error-identification exercises consolidates mental syntactic representations, especially when paired with explanatory teacher feedback.
4. **Technological and Multimedia Integration:** Leveraging interactive grammar apps, digital quizzes, audio-visual clips, and drag-and-drop sentence builders provides immediate personalized feedback and heightens learner engagement.
5. **Collaborative Learning and Peer Editing:** Structuring group sentence-editing workshops and peer-review circles reduces affective anxiety and fosters collective syntactic problem-solving.

Empirical studies across diverse EFL contexts reinforce these theoretical insights. Tahang (2019) investigated fifth-semester EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong using pre-observations and semi-structured interviews (N = 6), revealing that emotional barriers (fear of error, shame, sensitivity), motivational deficits (procrastination, unsupportive environments), and writing anxieties significantly impeded syntax acquisition. Similarly, Sari (2020) examined fifth-semester English majors at IAIN Metro Lampung via qualitative interviews and documentation, finding that students struggled to identify adjectival functions within complex sentences due to limited vocabulary depth, sentence length complexity, and rote memorization habits.

More recently, Ismahani et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative inquiry across Indonesian learners and educators, demonstrating that L1-L2 syntactic divergence heavily obstructed comprehension of complex English clauses, tenses, and idioms, while highlighting the efficacy of digital tools and immersive input in relation to Chomsky's UG and Krashen's Input Hypothesis. Furthermore, Tsutada (2015) implemented a semester-long authentic English news grammar intervention among 45 Japanese university students (TOEIC 550–700), documenting statistically significant gains in grammatical knowledge that transferred directly into enhanced reading and writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Finally, Mahayani et al. (2018) and Tosin et al. (2023) conducted multi-cycle Classroom Action Research (CAR) projects utilizing Lesson Study-based learning management at Pakuan University and STKIP PGRI Sidoarjo, respectively. Both investigations proved that collaborative lesson planning, contextualized media, and peer interaction significantly elevated undergraduate students' syntax achievement scores across consecutive instructional cycles.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Setting

To achieve a rigorous, multi-dimensional understanding of the research problem, this study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design. As established by Fraenkel et al. (2018), integrating quantitative survey metrics with qualitative interview narratives capitalizes on the complementary strengths of both paradigms, enabling statistical generalization alongside deep contextual interpretation. The empirical fieldwork was executed during the 2023/2024 academic year at the Department of English, Faculty of Education (Al-Ghurifa), University of Sebha, located in southern Libya. This institution was purposively selected due to its established history of EFL instruction and the researcher's direct academic familiarity with the syntactic challenges prevalent within its undergraduate cohorts.

3.2 Target Population and Participant Demographics

The target population encompassed all undergraduate EFL students and faculty members within the English Department at the Faculty of Education, Al-Ghurifa. Using random sampling procedures to ensure representativeness and eliminate selection bias, a total operational sample of 35 participants (N = 30 undergraduate students and N = 5 EFL instructors) was recruited.

The demographic breakdown of the participants is structured as follows:

1. Undergraduate Students (N = 30):

- a. Gender: Male (5 students, 17.0%), Female (25 students, 83.0%).
- b.
- c. Academic Semester: Fourth Semester (2 students, 7.0%), Fifth Semester (4 students, 13.0%), Sixth Semester (7 students, 23.0%), Seventh Semester (9 students, 30.0%), Eighth Semester (8 students, 27.0%).

2. EFL Faculty Members (N = 5):

- a. Gender: Male (4 instructors, 80.0%), Female (1 instructor, 20.0%).
- b.
- c. Age Group: 30–40 Years (1 instructor, 20.0%), 41–50 Years (2 instructors, 40.0%), 51 Years and Above (2 instructors, 40.0%).
- d. Academic Qualification: Master's Degree - MA (4 instructors, 80.0%), Doctorate Degree - PhD (1 instructor, 20.0%).
- e. Teaching Experience: 10–15 Years (1 instructor, 20.0%), 15–20 Years (3 instructors, 60.0%), 21 Years and Above (1 instructor, 20.0%).

The student sample was predominantly female (83.0%) and concentrated in advanced undergraduate levels—specifically the 6th, 7th, and 8th semesters, which collectively

accounted for 80.0% of respondents—ensuring substantial prior exposure to university syntax courses. Furthermore, 80.0% of the interviewed faculty members possessed over 15 years of university ELT experience, lending high credibility to their pedagogical evaluations.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Two primary research instruments were systematically developed and validated through expert supervisory review:

1. **Students' Closed-Ended Questionnaire:** Designed to quantify learner difficulties and causal factors across four domains: Difficulty in Understanding Sentence Structure (Items 1–6), Difficulties with Grammar (Items 7–10), Confusion with Sentence Types and Elements (Items 11–15), and Reasons Behind Difficulties in Learning Syntax (Items 16–20). Rated on a 5-point Likert continuum (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree).
2. **Teachers' Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** Constructed to elicit qualitative insights regarding classroom strategies, instructional resources, and error-correction mechanisms.

Following institutional approval from the University of Sebha, questionnaires were administered in person, and individual audio-recorded interviews were conducted with the five instructors. Quantitative data were analyzed via IBM SPSS (Means and Standard Deviations), while qualitative transcripts underwent thematic analysis.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Results: Students' Syntactic Difficulties and Causal Factors

Category 1: Difficulty in Understanding Sentence Structure (Total Domain Mean = 3.81, SD = 0.12, Agree)

1. Item 1 (Distinguishing phrase, clause, and sentence): Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.08 (Agree).
2. Item 2 (Word order neglect in English sentences): Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.11 (Agree).
3. Item 3 (Forming complex sentences): Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.14 (Agree).
4. Item 4 (Joining sentences to form compound sentences): Mean = 3.70, SD = 0.10 (Agree).
5. Item 5 (Distinguishing between complex and compound sentences): Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.17 (Strongly Agree).
6. Item 6 (Using identical sentence elements across different structures): Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.13 (Agree).

Category 2: Difficulties with Grammatical Rules in Syntax (Total Domain Mean = 3.82, SD = 0.13, Agree)

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1. Item 7 (Determining preposition position in sentences): Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.18 (Strongly Agree).
2. Item 8 (Subject-verb agreement usage): Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.15 (Strongly Agree).
3. Item 9 (Distinguishing definite and indefinite clauses): Mean = 3.50, SD = 0.08 (Agree).
4. Item 10 (Mastering definite and indefinite articles): Mean = 3.40, SD = 0.11 (Neutral)

Category 3: Confusion with Sentence Types and Constituent Elements (Total Domain Mean = 3.91, SD = 0.13, Agree)

1. Item 11 (Distinguishing declarative and exclamatory sentences): Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.12 (Agree).
2. Item 12 (Structuring words into a clause): Mean = 4.10, SD = 0.15 (Agree).
3. Item 13 (Preposition usage in prepositional phrases): Mean = 3.70, SD = 0.10 (Agree).
4. Item 14 (Differentiating Noun Phrases and Prepositional Phrases): Mean = 4.10, SD = 0.16 (Agree).
5. Item 15 (English-Arabic structural differences hindering formation): Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.13 (Agree).

Category 4: Reasons Behind Difficulties in Learning Syntax (Total Domain Mean = 4.03, SD = 0.15, Agree)

1. Item 16 (Lack of exposure to English sentence structure in media): Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.14 (Agree).
2. Item 17 (Limited practice with complex sentences): Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.18 (Strongly Agree).
3. Item 18 (Differences between English and native language structure): Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.13 (Agree).
4. Item 19 (Lack of confidence in correct sentence construction): Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.17 (Strongly Agree).
5. Item 20 (Struggling to understand sentence parts function): Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.15 (Agree).

4.2 Qualitative Results: Thematic Analysis of Faculty Interviews

1. **Theme 1: Classroom Instructional Strategies:** Teachers emphasized explicit rule decomposition, contextualized real-life application, iterative error correction, interactive gamification, and collaborative peer editing.

2. **Theme 2: Effective Instructional Resources:** Instructors utilized structured grammar workbooks, online interactive platforms, authentic literary and journalistic texts, audio-visual multimedia, and visual whiteboard aids.
3. **Theme 3: Error Feedback Mechanisms:** Faculty applied direct explanatory correction, reflective student error analysis, peer feedback circles, customized remedial drills, and positive affective reinforcement.

Discussion of the Findings

The quantitative results establish that Libyan EFL undergraduates experience substantial obstacles across all structural domains, particularly in distinguishing between compound and complex sentences ($M = 4.20$), mastering preposition placement ($M = 4.20$), maintaining subject-verb agreement ($M = 4.20$), and differentiating Noun Phrases from Prepositional Phrases ($M = 4.10$). Grounded in Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) and X-bar Theory, these findings indicate that learners struggle with maximal projection (XP) clausal embedding. Furthermore, cross-linguistic L1 interference (Arabic VSO vs. English SVO) alongside pedagogical and affective barriers (limited complex sentence practice and low self-confidence, $M = 4.20$) heavily impede syntactic acquisition. The qualitative faculty insights successfully corroborate these findings, advocating for multimodal input, explicit rule visualization, and collaborative error remediation.

Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

This study investigated syntactic difficulties among Libyan EFL undergraduates at the University of Sebha. Results confirm that learners face acute challenges with clause subordination, constituent boundaries, and word order due to L1 transfer and limited communicative drilling.

Practical Recommendations

1. **For Instructors:** Utilize contrastive linguistics to address Arabic-English structural divergence, employ visual X-bar tree diagrams, and incorporate weekly sentence-combining workshops.
2. **For Students:** Engage actively in peer-review circles and expand daily exposure to authentic English syntax through reading and digital media.

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