



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring the Difficulties in Constructing Complex and Compound-Complex Sentences by Undergraduates in Pakistan

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)1.58](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)1.58)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

October 19, 2021

Accepted:

December 28, 2021

Online:

December 31, 2021

Keywords:

Complex Sentences, Compound-Complex Sentences, GTM, Syntactical Errors, Task-Based Activities

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This study aimed to analyze the errors made by undergraduates in composing complex and compound-complex sentences with multiple subordinate clauses (noun clauses, adjective clauses and adverb clauses), and explored the grammatical and syntactical difficulties faced by students while constructing complex syntactical structures with proper use of co-ordinating, subordinating conjunctions and punctuation marks. This study also investigated to find out some practical strategies that could facilitate students to learn complex syntactical structure effectively. To achieve the objectives of this research mixed method was used. 50 students from one Pakistani university were randomly selected and asked to compose 5 complex sentences and 5 compound-complex sentences. Tests were marked by adapted iRubric. To find out the perception of students regarding difficulties in composing a proper complex syntactical structure Google Survey Form was used to collect responses from 113 students and finally some task-based activities were implied to control and reduce the errors in constructing complex and compound complex sentences. This study recommends some modern and task-based activities with strong drills and practices should be used to minimize errors in writing good sentences because GTM isn't improving good grammatical writing skills in Pakistan.

Introduction

A very basic sentence is the arrangement of words in a specific order. We can examine a sentence with two aspects one is the functionality of a sentence and the other is structure of a sentence. A sentence can perform various functions in spoken or written communication. These functions are assertive, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory. Structurally a simple sentence is consisted of two parts i.e. subject

and predicate (verb). English language has four sentence structures i.e. simple structure, compound structure, complex structure and compound complex structure. The type of clauses and the number of clauses constitute sentence structure. Simple structure has one independent clause, compound structure has two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS), complex structure is consisted of one main (independent) and two or more sub-ordinate (dependent clauses), independent and dependent clauses are joined by coordinating conjunctions while compound-complex sentence has two independent and one or more than one dependent clauses. Grammar is a set of rules that define how words, parts of words are combined to construct meaningful units within a language (Penny, 2000).

Writing is a very important, active, productive and complex skill. Writing is very systematic and purposeful activity. Writing process involves three stages i.e. pre-writing, while writing and after writing and each stage follows some steps. Good writing involves clear purpose, specific audience, thought and structure clarity, unity and logical and grammatical coherence. Writing is a biggest genre that includes more than 80 different formats and every format needs a specific writing style. In academic and professional writing KISS (keep it simple and short) formula is preferred and recommended for instance in e-mail, application, letter, short story and essay writing, but mature writing expression need complex syntactical structure to build structured background and organized and elaborate information.

In Pakistan GTM is used to teach English language from primary to higher level. GTM is very old teaching methodology which is used to teach foreign language. The basic purpose of GTM is to teach reading and writing skills and put focus on correct use of grammar and correct sentence structures. Hedge (2000) defines GTM is an explicit symbol to producing correct structures and can speed up the learning process among students. GTM is an old teaching method which is still common in many countries and educational institutes across the world. GTM is still useful in foreign language learning from an intellectual and linguistic perspective. Mansoor, S. (2018) revealed the importance of GTM as an effective teaching method also suggested that GTM should be used along with other modern teaching strategies to facilitate those students who belong to different socio-economic background to learn target language in a very easy way. The researchers and views of scholars' emphasis on the importance of GTM as an effective tool for learning target language. The research includes the following hypothesis and null hypothesis:

Hypothesis

If undergraduates will be taught by task-based approach, self-evaluation quizzes, writing drills and practices, use of punctuation marks and correct use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions with dependent and independent clauses they will be able to construct correct complex and compound complex sentences, develop mature and rich expression in writing, use good effective writing

skills to build structured background in written communication.

Null Hypothesis

If undergraduates will not be taught by task-based approach, self-evaluation quizzes, writing drills and practices, use of punctuation marks and correct use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions with dependent and independent clauses they will not be able to construct correct complex and compound complex sentences, develop mature and rich expression in writing, use good effective writing skills to build structured background in written communication.

Literature Review

The basic structure of English sentence is consisted of subject as a noun phrase (NP), and predicate as a verb phrase (VP). An English sentence starts with a capital letter and it ends with a full stop. (Radford, 1997). A sentence is composed of noun phrase, verb phrase, an object or other elements. With reference to structure English sentences can be classified into simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences (Azar, 1999). A simple sentence is consisted of one independent clause. A complex sentence contains at least one independent clause and one dependent clause. (Azar, 1999). A compound sentence is consisted of two or more independent clauses. A compound-complex sentence contains two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. Complex sentences are further classified into two categories: embedded structure and coordinate structure. When the dependent clause is embedded in the independent clause it is called embedded structure. The second is called coordinate structure. Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction or punctuation marks (a comma or a semicolon) or a conjunctive adverb. (Folse, Solomon, & Muchmore-Vokoun, 2004).

Rahma & Rosa (2021) conducted research on 30 students from Universitas Negeri Padang Indonesia. They explored the students' ability in constructing compound-complex sentence in essays writing. The researcher analyzed 30 essays and found good ability of students in writing compound-complex and also found the most students had problems in using correct punctuation mark comma and fragments and run-on sentences. The researcher recommended that an intensive attention should be given by the lecturer to facilitate the students to practice both writing and grammar by using peer correction. Din & Gania (2017), highlighted the problems of Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) students in composing correct sentence structure. The findings explicitly revealed that the EFL learners can develop grammatical and syntactical skills when they are taught by application oriented and task-based strategies and activities. Subekti (2018) analyzed errors through thematic analysis made by Indonesian undergraduate students in writing complex sentences with subordinating adjective, noun and adverb clauses, and complex syntactical structures in an Essay Writing class. The researcher found four

major errors, lack of tense consistency, errors of omission, errors of addition, and errors of incorrect verb formations. The researcher' support the idea teaching contextual grammar which can influence students' L2 writing proficiency.

Kamran et al. (2016) analyzed the most common errors made by Pakistani students at postgraduate level in English writing essay. 90 students from six different universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were asked to write narrative essay 250 to 300 words. The researchers found four types of errors made by students: subject verb agreement, insufficient vocabulary, spellings and use of proper grammatical rules. The study suggested positive and regular feedback of teachers, instill positive attitude towards writing skills, modern teaching strategies and implicit teaching of grammatical rules. Bilal & Fareed (2016) explored the difficulties in writing skills faced by Pakistani undergraduate ESL students' and explored the factors that affects their writing skills. The found insufficient linguistics proficiency, weak grammar, syntax and vocabulary are the of ESL students which are the reasons of writing anxiety. To overcome these problems they recommended change in teaching strategies, exam system and writing competitions. Hagiwara (2011) investigated while composing complex sentences Japanese learners showed interferences of L1 on constructing complex sentences but with the help of visual aid in the form of pictures learners produced complex sentences more accurately. The study concluded that when students' understanding is clear they can write correct sentences.

Tsang and Wong (2000) interesting study also focuses on the relevance of meaning understanding and correct sentence constructions. They investigated the impact of explicit teaching of grammar on the students' ability in writing in terms of correct complicated syntactical structures, long essays and appropriate strong expressions. Tsang and Wong (2000) revealed that after explicit teaching of grammar students improved their writing skills and they wrote with more complex syntax in terms of longer and more accurate units and more complex sentences. Thus, Tsang and Wong (2000) suggested that the students' proficiency in writing is actually linked with their grammatical skills to compose complex sentences. In Pakistan Educational system mostly in public schools and public universities GTM is used to teach English language. GTM is meant for proficiency in correct use of grammar, effective reading comprehension and good writing. Other researches support this view. Khan, Bari (2018) in Malaysia explored the significance of GTM to teach intermediate students to him GTM can facilitate those students who belong to backward areas through GTM they can learn target language easily. Chang (2011) explored GTM is an effective teaching method to enhance grammatical and linguistic competence among students it also improved confidence in students to learn English language. As GTM is used teaching method in Pakistan so, undergraduates should show good level of proficiency in composing complex and compound-complex sentences. Demirezen, M. (2019) discovered difficulties faced by Turkish Intermediate students in composing complex sentences which is the biggest barrier in their writing skills. Amrina, Mukminatien and Yudi Cahyono (2016) found fair proficiency of Indonesian

students' in constructing complex sentences.

Material and Methods

The nature of current research was mixed method. Quantitative and qualitative instruments were used for data collection and data analysis. For descriptive analysis SPSS Version 21 was also used. To explore the ability of undergraduate student to construct the complex and compound-complex sentences study 50 undergrads (female students) were selected from a public university as participant of research study and to explore the perception of undergraduate students regarding the grammar learning and teaching difficulties responses from 113 students through Google Form were collected and task- based activities were used on experimental group to enhance their understanding and concepts about English complex syntactical structures.

Sampling Procedure

Fifty students were selected randomly and they were asked to compose 5 complex sentences and 5 compound complex sentences. Papers were marked by using iRubric. A questionnaire by using Google Form was distributed and 113 responses were collected and presented through pie-charts. Finally, task-based activities, pictorials youTube learning channel (Fun & Learning) links (Appendix C) were used in class room (50 female students) for teaching complex syntactical structures. These students were selected to evaluate the strong effect of task-based activities on teaching grammar in relation to research hypothesis.

Research Instruments

To conduct the study four instruments were used:

1. iRubric to mark tests
2. A Questionnaire consisted of 16 statements to measure the perception of students in relation to research questions.
3. Pictorial demonstration for syntactical structure
4. YouTube links for easy self- assessment and conceptual clarity of complex and compound-complex sentences

Data Analysis

To explore the perception of students about grammar teaching, importance of task-based teaching and problems in composing complex and compound-complex sentences Google Survey Form was used to collect data. Students' responses towards questionnaire revealed that almost 87% students think that grammar is very important component in English writing skills and 69% students are convinced that grammar should be taught effectively at school level. More than 85% students think

that clear grammatical rules can help them to compose correct complex and logical sentences with proper use of coordinating, subordinating conjunctions and punctuation marks and obviously this learning will enhance their strong written expression while more than 43% students disclosed that they are not having clear grammatical concepts. More than 40% reveals that they face difficulties in using proper punctuation signs like semicolon and colon while almost 78 % students are convinced that proper use of punctuation marks and coordinating and subordination conjunctions can help them to compose sentences correctly and it can help them to express their thought correct grammatically and logically. More than 75% students suggested that if they are taught by using task-based approaches, quizzes and drills they can get good grip on grammatical knowledge which ultimately improves their writing skills.

The tests of 50 students were evaluated by applying adapted iRubric to ensure correct marking. The results were analyzed through SPSS. Results showed 4.63 mean and 46% students qualified the test while 54% were failed.

Results and Discussion

Summary of Descriptive Statistics on Pre-Test Scores

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Marks	27	2	8	4.63	1.523
Valid N (listwise)	27				

Table 2
Breakdown of Pre-Test Scores

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	4.0	7.4
	3	4	8.0	14.8
	4	8	16.0	29.6
	5	5	10.0	18.5
	6	5	10.0	18.5
	7	2	4.0	7.4
	8	1	2.0	3.7
Total	27	54.0	100.0	
Missing System	23	46.0		
Total	50	100.0		

Table 3
Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Pre-Test Marks	27	54.0%	23	46.0%	50	100.0%

Table 4
Pre-test Report

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
4.63	27	1.523

Table 5
One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test Marks	27	4.63	1.523	.293

Table 6
One-Sample t Test

	Test Value = 5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pre-Test Marks	-1.264	26	.218	-.370	-.97	.23

H_0 = Task-based approach is NOT useful for effective complex syntactical structure teaching

H_a = Task-based approach is useful for effective complex syntactical structure teaching

The One sample t-test is not rejected the null hypothesis, $p < .218$. Hence it is concluded that without task based approach students are having difficulties in clear grammatical concepts.

Post-Test results were analyzed by applying one-Sample t-test to test alternative hypothesis.

Table 7
One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-Test Marks	50	8.24	1.238	.175

Table 8
One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 5					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Post-Test Marks	18.503	49	.000	3.240	2.89	3.59

H_0 = Task-based approach is NOT useful for effective complex syntactical structure teaching

H_a = Task-based approach is useful for effective complex syntactical structure teaching

The One sample t-test has rejected the null hypothesis, $p < .001$. Hence it is concluded that with task based approach student can learn complex syntactical structures better.

After evaluation of tests and analysis of students' responses task-based approach with different YouTube links for self-assessment and pictorial demonstrations were used to teach how to compose correct complex and compound-complex sentences with proper use of grammatical, logical connectors and punctuation marks. For better understanding and conceptual clarity the following pictorial illustration was given to students (Figures 1,2,3,4,5 & 6).

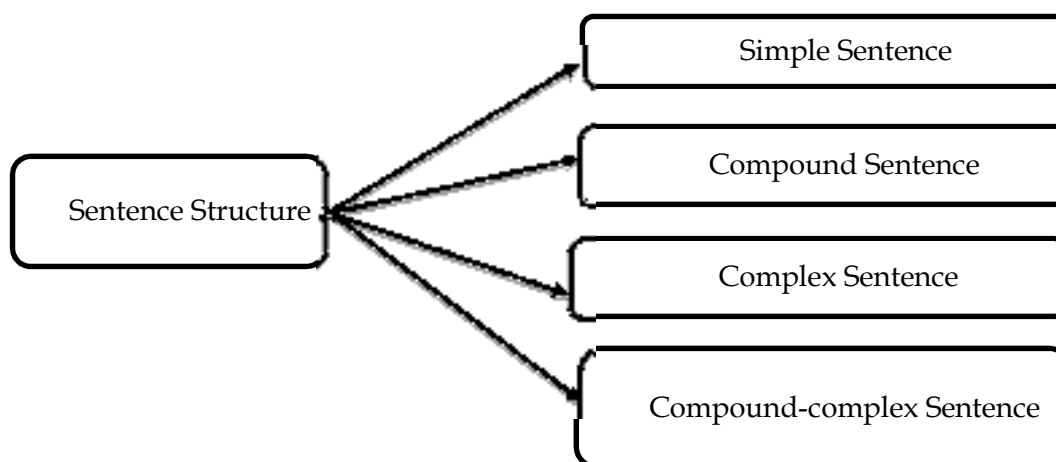


Figure 1. Sentence Structure

After evaluation of tests and analysis of students' responses task-based approach with different YouTube links for self-assessment and pictorial demonstrations were used to teach how to compose correct complex and compound-complex sentences with proper use of grammatical, logical connectors and

punctuation marks. For better understanding and conceptual clarity the following pictorial illustration was given to students (Figures 1,2,3,4,5,6). Post-Test results were analyzed by applying one-Sample t-test to test alternative hypothesis.

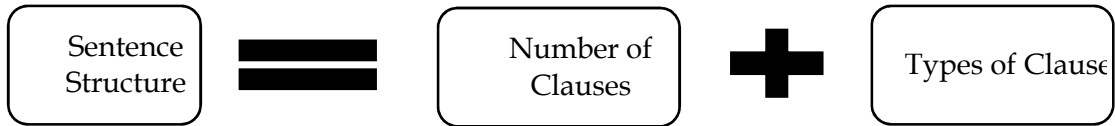


Figure 2. Sentence Structure Based on Clauses

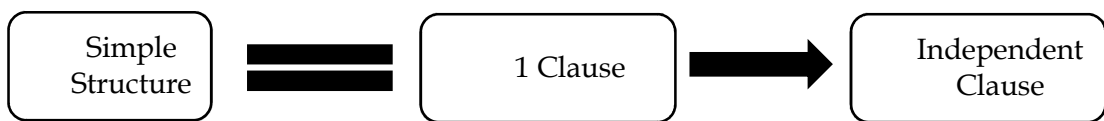


Figure 3. Simple Sentence Structure

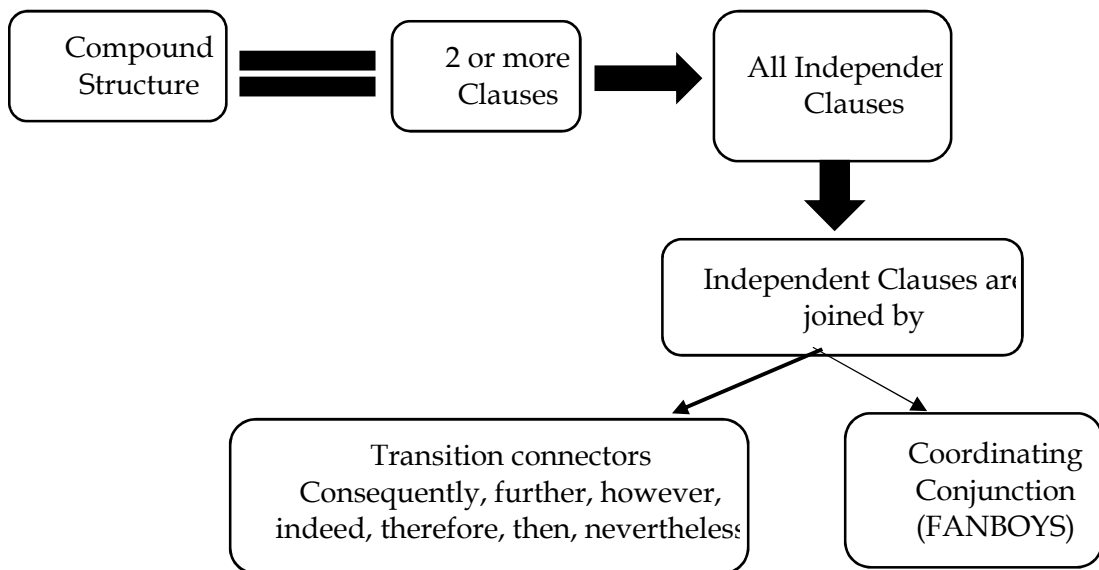


Figure 4. Compound Structure

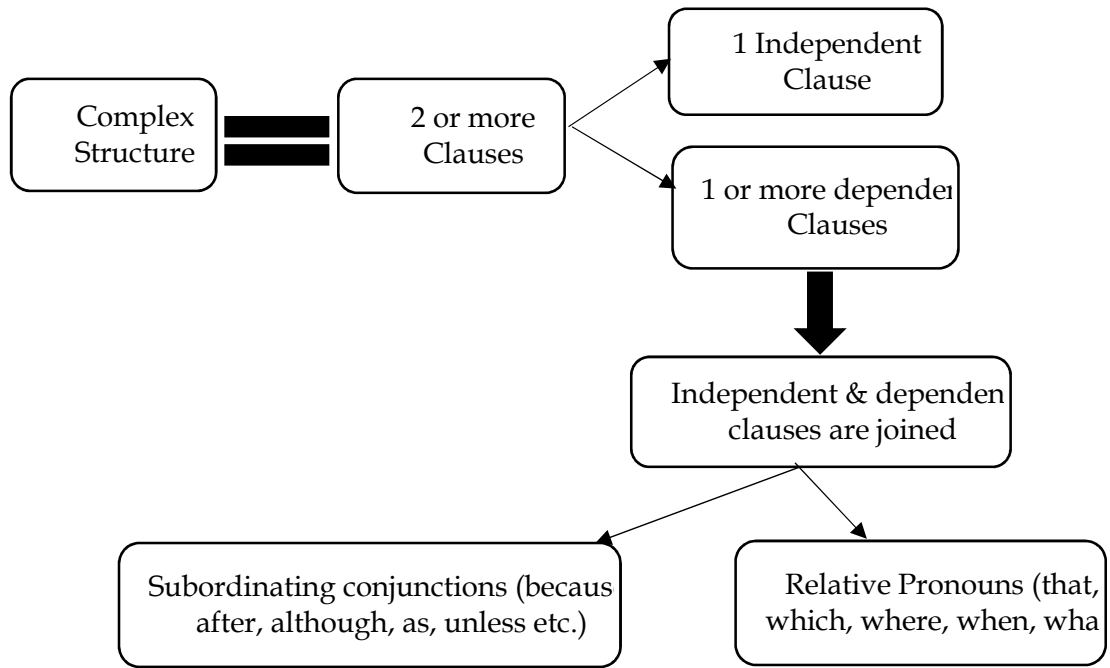


Figure 5. Complex Structure

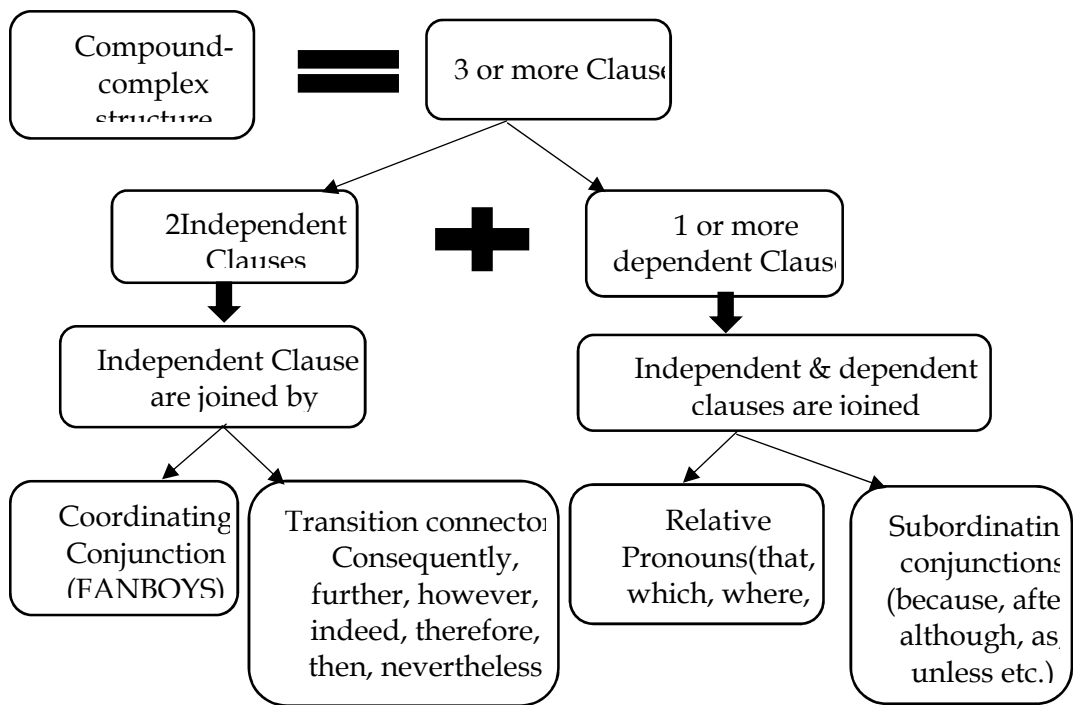


Figure 6. Compound Complex Structure

Discussion

Findings from questionnaires show that though in Pakistan Public schools and Universities are using GTM teaching method but still students are having difficulties in clear grammatical knowledge and correct composition of sentences. If undergrads are facing difficulties in composing complex and compound-complex sentences than teaching strategies should be modified and GTM should be used with Task-based strategies. This study also revealed that pictorial demonstration is extremely useful for better conceptual clarity. Students can develop clear concepts with drilling, practice, and self-assessment and express their complex thoughts clearly and logically. Teachers can use good learning and educational YouTube channels to teach grammatical concepts. To overcome the difficulties in composing correct complex and compound complex sentences faced by students it is recommended that teaching methods should be investigated and revised to produce proficient English learners especially profound writers. As writing is very important skill and writing is used for global contribution of knowledge (Mansoor, 2005; Mahboob, 2014; Marlina & Giri, 2014; Rahman, 2002). Teachers should use task-based approach to teach English grammar because task-based activities help students to learn complex structures easily. This study also supports the fast and accurate learning of grammar through task-based teaching than traditional grammar teaching methods. Willis & Willis (2007) reveals that task-based grammar teaching boost students' confidence by providing them different opportunities to use and apply grammatical rules in writing skills without being afraid of committing mistakes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that writing is very important and complex skill. It involves cognitive and metacognitive process and activities. The basic elements for good writing are: correct use of grammatical rules, proper use of logical and grammatical connectors, punctuation marks and the use of cohesive devices to create coherence in text. In Pakistan students face difficulties in composing complex syntactical structures which is a biggest huddle in their good writing skills even they face difficulties in academic writing. Students can overcome these difficulties if teaching task-based activities with other modern teaching methods are involved with GTM.

Recommendations

It is recommended:

- Good writing and correct sentences construction practice is most important.
- For better and easy conceptual clarity the use of pictorial demonstration is required.

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