

Students' Ability in Constructing English Sentences: A Case Study at The Eight Grade Students at SMP Swasta RK Santa Maria Pakkat in The Academic Year 2025/2026

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini menyelidiki kemampuan siswa dalam membangun kalimat Bahasa Inggris di antara siswa kelas delapan SMP Swasta RK Santa Maria Pakkat pada tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Studi ini berfokus pada mengidentifikasi pemahaman siswa tentang kalimat sederhana, kalimat majemuk, kalimat kompleks, dan kalimat majemuk-kompleks. Metode kuantitatif deskriptif diterapkan, melibatkan 27 siswa. Dalam membuat Kalimat Sederhana, 81,5% siswa benar-benar memahami apa itu kalimat sederhana. Saat menulis kalimat majemuk, 51,9% siswa mampu menulis dengan benar dengan menggabungkan dua klausa. Dalam menulis Kalimat Kompleks, 48,1% siswa sudah mampu menggabungkan klausa independen dan dependen. Dalam Menulis Kalimat Majemuk-Kompleks, 40,7% siswa mampu menulis kalimat majemuk-kompleks dengan benar. Ini menunjukkan bahwa semakin kompleks struktur kalimat, semakin besar kesulitan yang dialami siswa dalam menulis kalimat Bahasa Inggris.

This study investigates the students' ability in constructing English sentences among the eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta RK Santa Maria Pakkat in the academic year 2025/2026. The study focuses on identifying the students' understanding of simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence, and compound-complex sentences. A descriptive quantitative method was applied, involving 27 student. In making Simple Sentences, 81.5% students really understand what simple sentence is. When writing compound sentences, 51.9% of students were able to write correctly by combining two clauses. In writing Complex Sentences, 48.1% of students are already able to combine independent and dependent clauses. In Writing Compound-Complex Sentences, 40.7% of students are able to write compound-complex sentences correctly. This shows that the more complex the sentence structure, the greater difficulty students experience in writing English sentences.



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INTRODUCTION

Mastery of English has become the most important thing in facing the era of globalization. In the midst of increasingly fierce world competition, English language skills are not only needed in accessing information and technology, but also as a cross-cultural communication tool in the fields of business, technology, research and of course education. This makes the use of English one of the most valued and

sought-after competencies in the world of work and in the academic environment. As an international language, English contains complex grammatical structures. According to Haira and Niswatin (2015), sentences are a series of words that consist at least of subject and predicate, so, having a perfect meaning. A sentence can also be modified with the object as well as a place statement, time or way. In a sentence not all predicates have objects. This is because not all verbs require objects.

Based on the statement Haira and Niswatin it can be concluded that the sentence itself must have a clear meaning understood. For example, the meaning of a sentence is like explain a thing, to order, or to inform. Clarity in a sentence also has several elements, namely subject, title, object, complement and description. There are two types of sentences in general, namely verbal sentences (sentences that have a verb in it), and both non-verbal sentences (Sentences where predicate is not in the form of a verb but instead of a to be). Based on their structure, sentences are divided into four types, namely simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence, and compound-complex sentence. Based on the function of the sentence, it is also distinguished as 5 sentences, namely affirmative sentences, negative sentences, interrogative sentences, Imperative sentences, and exclamation sentences. But many types of sentences this study will only focus on the types of sentences in general and sentences based on the structure for junior highschool to see how deeply they know the sentence.

According from the explanation above and the title, this research thesis focuses on the ability students of SMP SWASTA RK SANTA MARIA PAKKAT in recognizing and making the sentence structure. To see satisfying results, students will be taught to remember the lessons of the sentences that have been taught. In order to take data quantitatively, where the last time of the study was carried out an exam test in the form of a test or a question of writing. Based on the background, the writer is interested in conducting a research entitled "Students' Ability In Constructing English Sentences: A Case Study At The Eight Grade Students Of Smp RK Santa Maria Pakkat In The Academic Year Of 2025/2026."

According to Subroto (2002), ability is the capacity or power to perform act, physical and mental, especially for academic field. Ability is also defined as cleverness and intelligence. Abilities can also be referred to as competence. The word competence comes from English "competence" which means ability, power, authority, skills, knowledge, knowledge, and skills, abilities and authority. So the competency word competent which means having abilities and skills in his field so that he has authority or otoritas to do something within the limits of the science. Competence is a combination of 3 education domains that include the realm of knowledge, skills and attitudes that form in mindset and act in everyday life. On this basis, competence can mean knowledge, skills and abilities controlled by a person who has become part of him so that he can carry out cognitive, affirmative and psychomotor with their best possible behaviors.

In addition to students being demanded, teachers as educators must also have the ability to manage teaching and learning processes, which are the ability or skills of educators in creating an educational atmosphere between students who include cognitive, affirmative, and psychomotor, as efforts to learn something based on planning until the stage of evaluation and follow-up to achieve teaching goals. Writing is one of the main skills in English learning that plays an important role in developing students' language skills. Writing is not only used for recording, but also to express ideas, feelings, and information in written form with proper structure and grammar. According to Harmer (2004), writing is a process that involves planning, drafting, revising, and editing, which helps learners to organize their ideas logically and communicate them effectively. The following section explains some important aspects of writing skills.

Writing in general can be defined as the activity of expressing ideas, thoughts, and feelings through written language that can be understood by others. It is not only about arranging words into sentences, but also about creating meaningful communication through text. According to Byrne (1991), writing is the act of forming symbols (letters or words) and arranging them according to certain rules to convey meaning. This means that writing involves both the physical activity of producing symbols and the mental activity of organizing ideas into coherent messages. Writing is not just the end result in the form of text, but also covers the thinking process, designing, structuring the writing so that it becomes effective and understandable by readers. Writing is a form of indirect communication that requires the author to understand the shape of the written language well.

Writing is one of the basic skills that is very important in mastery of language, especially in the context of English learning as a foreign language. Experts have a diverse view but equip each other in

explaining the nature of writing. Harmer (2004) states that writing is a complex process and is strongly influenced by the type or text genre that will be written, so that the sentence structure needs to be adjusted to the communicative purpose of the text. Meanwhile, Brown (2001) states that writing is a high-level thinking process, which includes planning, drafting, and revision, so writing is not just about pouring words, but rather practicing logic and structural accuracy. Nunan (2003) states that writing involves mental activities like finding and drafting ideas, as well as conveying messages in a runut and clear to readers.

In Richards and Renandya's perspective, writing is even considered the most challenging skills for second-language learners because it involves simultaneous mastering of grammar, paragraph organizations and mechanics. Keraf (2001) views writing as a way to convey the mind, feelings and ideas to the other party in writing, so as demanding clarity of the message. Likewise, Tarigan (2008) emphasized that writing is a form of indirect communication, where the author must be able to convey meaning effectively without oral communication assistance. From these various opinions, it can be concluded that writing skills are not only about grammar, but also regarding the thinking process, context adjustment, and the effectiveness of message delivery. In this research, it becomes relevant because students are expected to be able to form the right and meaningful sentences both in writing sentences and pronunciation.

Writing in English learning has a very important role because it not only emphasizes the ability to construct sentences, but also helps students develop their overall language competence. Through writing, students can improve their grammar mastery, vocabulary use, and sentence structure, while also enhancing their ability to think critically and express ideas logically. According to Hyland (2013), writing supports language learning by integrating grammar, vocabulary, and discourse, while also promoting critical thinking and learner autonomy. This shows that writing is not only a communication tool, but also a means of fostering independent learning and intellectual growth. Therefore, the benefits of writing can be seen both in academic aspects, such as improving students' ability to express ideas in a structured way, and in personal aspects, such as building confidence and creativity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive quantitative design, aiming to investigate students' ability in constructing English sentences based on their understanding of sentence elements (subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverb) and sentence structures (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex). According to Creswell (2012), quantitative research is a method used to test objective theories by examining the relationships among variables, which are measured using instruments and analyzed with statistical procedures. In this study, the variables are students' understanding of sentence elements and sentence structures, which are measured through written grammar tests. The data is collected through a written grammar test composed of 25 multiple-choice items and 5 sentence construction tasks. The results are quantitatively analyzed to determine students' proficiency levels. This method aligns with Creswell's (2012) concept of quantitative research, which is designed to measure variables numerically and interpret findings through statistical procedures. The research was conducted in SMP RK SANTA MARIA PAKKAT, which is located in Jl. Perguruan Katolik, Pakkat Hauagong, Kec. Pakkat, Kabupaten Humbang Hasundutan, Sumatera Utara 22455. The research activity took place in the even semester of the academic year 2025.

This research was conducted at SMP RK SANTA MARIA PAKKAT in the even semester of the 2025/2026 school year. The preparation stage was carried out in August and September 2025, which includes the management of research permits to schools and preparing and submitting the research proposal. The data collection phase is conducted from August to September 2025. At this stage, the researcher provides a written test consisting of double options to identify the elements of sentences (subject, predicate, object, complement, adverb) and construction regarding the construction to measure the ability of students in making sentences based on the structure (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex). The final stage is the assessment (assessmentsment), which was conducted in October 2025. The test results were checked and analyzed based on the assessment rubric, then categorized into the high levels of capability, medium, and low. This school is chosen because it has a curriculum that includes learning structure sentences in writing, and students in the target class have obtained the material.

The population in this study are all VIII C class students in SMP RK SANTA MARIA PAKKAT, with as much total number 27. This population was chosen because their curriculum has received material about element of sentences and type of sentences based on structure in English. The research sample was taken using a purposive sampling method, which is a sampling technique based on specific considerations. In this study, class VIII students were chosen as the sample because they had already studied verbs, sentence writing, and sentence structures in their curriculum, and their ability levels were relatively evenly distributed. According to Sugiyono (2017), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the researcher determines the sample based on particular characteristics that are considered to have relevance to the research objectives. This means that the selection of the sample is not random, but deliberately chosen to ensure that the data collected truly represents the problem being studied. The number of samples in this study was as many as 16. This sample is considered quite representative to describe the level of students' ability within populations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data were obtained through a written test in the form of 25 questions about double options and 5 descriptions. The results of this study were analyzed quantitatively by using value distribution, error analysis, and test to assess the fit with the standards of the Merdeka Curriculum (70 – 80). The total number of students who participated in this research was 27, consisting of 15 males and 12 females, aged between 13 and 14 years old. Based on the test results, the lowest score obtained by students was 39, the highest score was 94, and the average score was 68.1. These results indicate a noticeable variation in the students' ability to construct English sentences. Some students demonstrated strong understanding and accuracy in sentence construction, while others showed limited ability and made several grammatical or structural mistakes.

Conclusion on Empirical Validity & Reliability Fill-in-Blank Question Of the 5 questions, 4 questions (1–4) are valid and 1 question (no. 5) is invalid. This essay test instrument has high reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$), which increases to 0.85 when question no. 5 is removed. Therefore, question no. 5 needs to be revised to better align with the indicators for measuring students' ability to construct sentence elements. Based on the results of the data analysis that has been carried out, the ability of eighth-grade students at RK Santa Maria Pakkat Private Junior High School to write English sentences shows varying results depending on the type of sentence written. The test results show that 81.5% of students are able to write simple sentences, 51.9% are able to write compound sentences, 48.1% are able to write complex sentences, and 40.7% are able to write compound-complex sentences.

These results indicate that most students already understand the basic structure of English sentences, but their ability declines when faced with sentences that have more complex syntactic structures. Thus, students demonstrate a moderate level of ability in writing sentences overall. These findings answer the first research question, namely the extent of students' ability to write English sentences. The majority of students are already able to construct sentences with a simple structure consisting of a subject and predicate, but still have difficulty forming relationships between clauses in compound and complex sentences. This is in line with Harmer's (2010) opinion that writing skills are one of the most difficult aspects of foreign language learning because they involve the integration of grammar, vocabulary, and logical thinking skills.

According to Brown (2015), students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL learners) tend to have difficulty writing complex sentences because they have not mastered clause combination patterns and the correct use of conjunctions. This difficulty is also evident in the results of this study, in which many students still misuse conjunctions such as because, although, and while in complex sentences. Furthermore, these findings also support Hyland's (2015) research, which explains that writing ability not only reflects grammar mastery but also the ability to organize ideas and form cohesion between clauses. In the context of junior high school students, this ability is still developing, so it is natural that the results are better for simple sentences and decline for more complex sentences.

In response to the second research question, namely the factors that enable or disable students' ability to write English sentences, the results of this study indicate that there are several important aspects that influence their ability:

1. Limited Grammar Mastery

Some students still have difficulty understanding basic sentence patterns and parts of speech. They often misplace verbs or omit important elements in sentences. According to Azar & Hagen (2017), good writing skills depend heavily on a strong understanding of grammatical structure, especially in distinguishing the functions of subjects, predicates, and objects.

2. Limited Vocabulary

Many students are unable to express their ideas accurately due to their limited vocabulary. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary is the main foundation of writing skills; the richer a student's vocabulary, the greater their ability to form meaningful and varied sentences.

3. Lack of Writing Practice

Based on observations, writing activities in the classroom are still rarely carried out on a regular basis. Students more often practice answering grammar questions than writing complete sentences. This is in line with the opinion of Richards & Renandya (2011), who emphasize that writing skills can only be developed through continuous practice and feedback from teachers.

4. Weak Understanding of Sentence Elements

Some students cannot clearly identify the elements that make up a sentence, such as the subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverbial. In fact, understanding these elements is very important as the basis for constructing complete sentences. Halliday (2014) in his Systemic Function theory.

From all of the above findings, it can be concluded that the more complex the sentence structure, the higher the level of difficulty for students in writing it. This is because compound and complex sentences require a broader mastery of grammar, cohesion, and logical relationships between ideas. Therefore, writing instruction in junior high school should be done gradually—starting with strengthening the understanding of simple sentence elements, then progressing to the composition of compound and complex sentences. This finding is in line with the results of Refnita (2014) and Arista research, Yana, & Sugiharti (2016) which also finds that junior high school level students tend to have difficulty in forming compound and complex sentences. Therefore, the learning strategy that emphasizes gradual and intensive training in drafting complex sentences is necessary so that students can improve their writing skills as a whole.

In addition, the results of this study are also in line with Al-Badi's (2015) study, which found that EFL students at the junior high school level tend to have difficulty developing coherent sentences due to limitations in structure and ideas. Therefore, teachers are expected to use writing learning strategies based on sentence building activities, such as practicing combining two simple clauses into compound or complex sentences with the appropriate conjunctions. Thus, this discussion reinforces the conclusion that the English writing skills of eighth-grade students at RK Santa Maria Pakkat Private Junior High School are generally still at an intermediate level, with a dominant ability to write simple sentences. More intensive, targeted, and sentence-based writing instruction is needed so that students can construct correct and meaningful sentences in accordance with the context of the English language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the summary of findings above, several conclusions can be drawn as follows: In general, the ability of eighth-grade students at RK Santa Maria Pakkat Private Junior High School to construct English sentences can be categorized as “moderate”; the majority of students are able to meet the minimum proficiency criteria (average score ≈ 70.2) although they are not yet evenly distributed at higher levels. Students' understanding of basic sentence elements (subject and predicate) is relatively better than that of complements and adverbs; this indicates a need to place special emphasis on introducing the functions of complements and adverbs in the context of sentences. Students' writing ability according to structure type shows a downward trend as the complexity of the structure increases: students find it easiest to write simple sentences and most difficult to write compound-complex sentences. The test instruments used are sufficiently valid and reliable to measure student ability in the context of this study (22 valid items; KR-20 = 0.82), but there are several items that need to be revised or removed because they are not valid. The assessment conducted by the researcher and validated by teachers/experts (observers) showed an adequate level of consistency so that the study results can be trusted inferentially and descriptively.

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