

## Difficulties in Written Communication Faced by the Students of Commerce: A Study Conducted at Graduate Level (B.Com)

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**Abstract** *The purpose of this paper is to highlight difficulties the students of Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) face in written communication. During the final year of B.Com they study the subject of business communication focused on business correspondence. The major barrier for the students is their inability to use syntax correctly. For this purpose data were collected from 125 randomly selected students from institutes of commerce education in Bahawalpur using an untimed grammaticality judgment test. This test was proposed by Rod Ellis (2005) and Erlam (2006) consisting of seventeen challenging grammatical structures. The result showed that the majority of students were unable to use correctly the basic structure of English language syntax in their writing. In the post-test interviews they shared that they did not learn these basic structures of English ever in their academic career as they were forced to cram materials.*

### Key Words:

Written Communication, Business Communication, ESL, Grammar, Morphological structure, Syntactical Structure

### Objectives of study

The purpose of present research is

- To highlight the deficient performance of the student of Bachelor of Commerce in written communication.
- To pinpoint the reasons of their dissatisfactory performance in written communication.

### Research Questions

The present paper will examine the following research questions:

- Is the knowledge of the grammatical discipline of English indispensable for competency in written communication?
- Why do the students of Bachelor of commerce consider learning grammar boring and uninteresting?
- What are the reasons for deficient performance of written communication of the students of Bachelor of commerce?

### **Limitation of Study**

The present study is limited to the male students studying in commerce colleges located in Bahawalpur.

### **Introduction**

*“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man”* (Francis Bacon). The importance of written communication can be understood from the above mentioned remarks of Francis Bacon. Written communication holds very important place in the professional career of commerce students as they are to draft letters of different nature in their professional career. Competency in written communication develops the critical analysis skills of the students (Emig, 1977). One common phenomenon observed during my professional career as a teacher is that even the students of bachelor level are very weak in written communication. They are unaware of common grammatical structures of English which are being taught to them at different levels of education. The syllabus of functional English of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur is somewhat different from Bahaudin Zakria university of Multan. The course contents of functional English of Bahaudin Zakria University of Multan are purely based on grammar emphasizing the grammatical discipline. While the syllabus of functional English of The Islamia university of Bahawalpur is not purely based on grammar. Summaries of short stories, topics of modern prose and translation of English passage into Urdu are also included in the syllabus which helps the student to pass the subject by cramming a few summaries and short notes. This is perhaps because they turned a deaf ear to the questions of grammatical discipline which consists of the use of correct form of the verb in the sentence, change of voice, and use of correct punctuation and narration. This phenomenon I observed when I performed the duties of sub examiner in the subject of functional English. More than 80% of the students left the question of grammar unattempted. More than 70% of the students attempted it wrongly. This is perhaps one of the basic reasons of their lagging in the field of written communication. This is also because the students themselves do not want to learn the basic structure of grammatical discipline considering it tough and boring. They just want to pass the paper. During the process of data collection when this question is asked to them, they shared that they can get good marks in the subject of functional English without learning basic structure of grammar. This mind set may become the cause of their incompetency in written communication further in the final year of Bachelor of Commerce. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to pinpoint the basic reason which has become the cause of their deficient performance in written communication

## **The Literature Review**

The pages of history reveal that human language is extended and developed through writing. It started due to expansion of political activities and cultures of ancient time which needed a trustable source of sending information and maintained records of history. Writing is the remarkable invention of the human being (Carroll, 1990). It is a source of sharing our ideas, information and view point not only to the present generation but also to the future generation. It allowed the intelligentsia and learned people of the past to speak to the present world. Its need was felt to save the cultural and human values of the societies. Writing is the best helping tool to write official text and also for the purpose of business correspondence. It is a necessary source which enables us to interact with others in a variety of ways (Mandal, 2009)

Good writing must be logical, cohesive, coherent, readable and pleasurable for the reader (Isaacson, 1984). Most of the researchers are of the view that the majority of the students are unable to write because they get little opportunity to write. The learners are motivated to write what they have read from the book. That's why students become habituated to write the same way as projected in the book thus hampering the self-writing ability of the students. The teacher instructs the students to memorize the rules of writing. In case of mistakes, the students is discouraged by the teacher by highlighting mistakes in red ballpoint. The learners are unable to perform well in written expression because they are forced to learn a knowledge of mechanics usage and grammar. Contrary to that, if the students are given a chance to express their own thoughts freely it will be more functional, encouraging and appealing (Anson & Beach, 1995).

Good writing skills require effort by the student to write well because they cannot be acquired naturally. The cultural setting, a good learning environment, and formal and informal teaching practices all play a role in the development of this skill. (Hadley, 1993). In writing, the learner composes some pieces of information in the form of text. The writer projects some required information in the form of description and narrative by using his ability and expertise. In this activity the writer first learns the mechanical aspect of writing which consists of knowledge of words, letters, spelling and punctuation. After learning the mechanical aspect of writing the writer moves towards the creative aspects of writing which include the learning of grammar, vocabulary and the correct placement of words into sentence.

One of the reasons for students' deficient performance in written communication is that the learner is restricted to developing this skill within the boundary of a particular study program. One of the possible remedies of this deficiency is to give the students the facility of developing writing skills across the boundary of the curriculum program. Graham & Harris (2005) supported the idea that those students who are not good in written skills should be given the liberty of free writing. This idea for developing writing skills was initiated by British Educators in the 1970s. Before that teachers, were only restricted to a particular study program by including those contents which were the part of curriculum. The results of this development of writing skills were fruitful. In the 1980s the same idea was adopted by the United States in response to the media report that the writing ability of the students of school and college students went below the required standard. No doubt development of writing skills across the curriculum proved fruitful but they should be adopted regularly and consistently in all classes (Harris & Schaible 1997).

Graham and Larsen (2001) suggested six effective principles to improve writing skills. The first one is the provision of result oriented instruction. The second is that the instruction of the teacher should be changed according to the needs of the students. Thirdly the teacher should intervene whenever the students commit a mistake: even in the initial stages of writing this may prevent him to repeat the mistakes again. Fourthly, the teacher should hold a positive view and expect that every student can learn to write without any difference. Fifthly, the errors and mistakes of the students should be identified, and special concentration should be given on the rectification of these errors. Sixthly, the teacher should use new technological devices, fun games and various other activities to create interest in classroom teaching.

Writing is not an easy task because it is related to the knowledge and experience of our own cognitive process. This activity helps the learner to display his knowledge, ability strategy and the ability to deal with multiple processes. Writing consists of a triangle which includes the reader, writer and the text (Grape & Kaplan, 1996) . The reader is the receiver of the product created by the writer. Therefore, he is the first important character in the writing process. The writer is the initiator and creator of the message who transforms his ideas into words to communicate his point of view to the reader. The last element which completes the triangle is the contents of the message or text. This maintains the relationship between reader and writer to make the communication complete. All these elements are indispensable to complete the writing process because each plays its role in the interpretation of the meaning of the text.

## **Research Methodology**

Difficulties in written communication faced by the students of Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) at graduate level is the focus of this research. Various factors which played a role in this study were analyzed. Descriptive research is found suitable in order to get the responses of the respondents (students of B.Com studying in various colleges of Bahawalpur) of the study.

### **Design of the study**

For this present research quantitative research will be used. In this research information was collected through a test consisting of 17 (seventeen) incorrect sentences and respondents of the study were asked to correct these sentences. This test is based on the untimed grammaticality judgment test designed by Ellis (2005, 2006) and Erlam (2006). The students were reluctant to attempt the test due to lack of interest in grammar. Then the researcher gave them the option not to write their names on the test in order to retain the secrecy of the responses.

### **Population of the study**

This research is being conducted to observe the difficulties in written communication which the students of Bachelor of Commerce face during written communication at graduate level. The researcher has selected the population according to the nature and objectives of the study. The targeted population is as below.

Students of final year of Bachelor of Commerce of the following institutes of district Bahawalpur.

- Government Sadiq postgraduate college of commerce Bahawalpur.
- Allam Iqbal college of commerce satellite town campus Bahawalpur.
- Allam iqbal college Goheer campus Bahawalpur.
- Millat college of commerce Bahawalpur.
- Jinnah college of commerce Bahawalpur.

### **Sample of the study**

The sample of study consisted of male students studying in the final year of Bachelor of Commerce in the above-mentioned institutes. For this purpose, the researcher has randomly selected 125 male students, 25 students from each of the above mentioned college. The sample of the study is limited due to the decreasing trend of commerce education from the last a few years. A suitable sampling technique is used to collect the data.

### **Research Instrument**

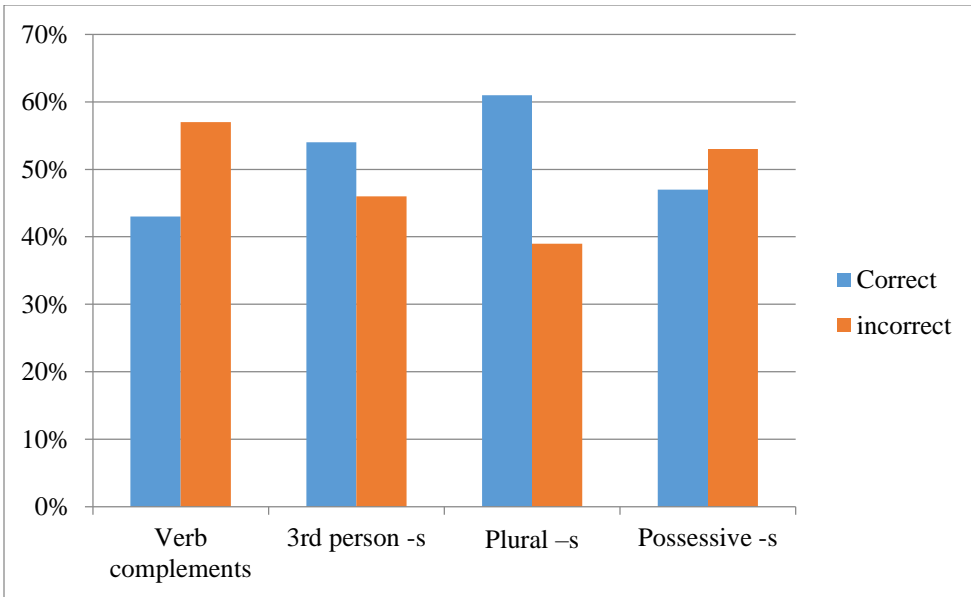
In the present research a test consists of (17) seventeen incorrect sentences based on the untimed grammaticality Judgment test (Ellis 2005, 2006), used as a research instrument.

### **Data Analysis**

To investigate the deficiency of the students of Bachelor of Commerce in written communication a test consists of 17 grammatical structures was distributed among the participants of the study. The test is based on the untimed grammaticality judgment test used by Ellis (2005, 2006). The purpose of selecting these grammatical items is that these grammatical structures have been found universally problematic for the students of second language learning especially in writing skills. Among these grammatical structures some are related to phonological structure and some are related to morphological structures of the sentence. The results of the test collected from the students is presented in the form of the following tables.

**Table 1. Sentences of Morphological structure N-125**

S/No	Sentence	Nature of Sentence Structure	Correct	Incorrect
1	Hassan wants finding a new job next month	Verb complements	43%	57%
2	Waseem live with his brother Kashif.	3rd person -s	54%	46%
3	Nida bought two present for her children.	Plural -s	61%	39%
4	Shahid is still living in his rich uncle house.	Possessive -s	47%	53%

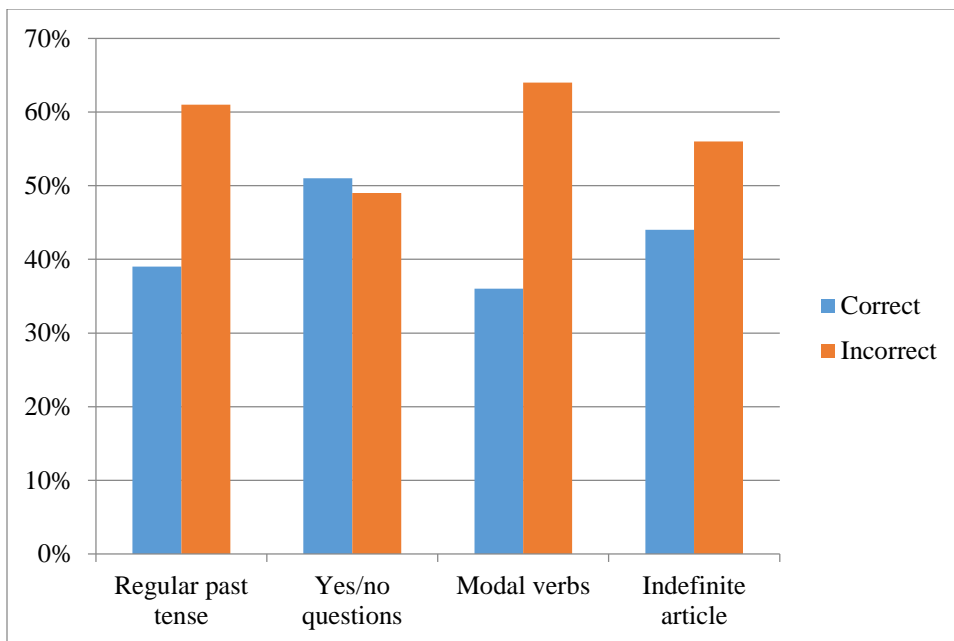


**Graph 1: Sentences of Morphological structure N-125**

Table and Graph 1 reveal that 43% of the respondents of the study gave a correct answer about the use of verb complements in the sentence while 57% gave an incorrect answer. As regard to the use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s, 54% of the respondents gave a correct answer while 46% gave an incorrect answer. About the use of Plural-s 61% of the respondents gave a correct answer while 39% gave an incorrect answer. 47% of the respondents gave a correct answer about the use of Possessive-s and 53% gave an incorrect answer.

**Table 2. Sentences of Morphological structure N-125**

S	Sentence	Nature of sentence structure	Correct	Incorrect
5	Zia completed his research article and print it out.	Regular past tense	39%	61%
6	Did Khalid completed his homework?	Yes/no questions	51%	49%
7	I can to speak English very well.	Modal verbs	36%	64%
8	I saw very funny movie last night.	Indefinite article	44%	56%

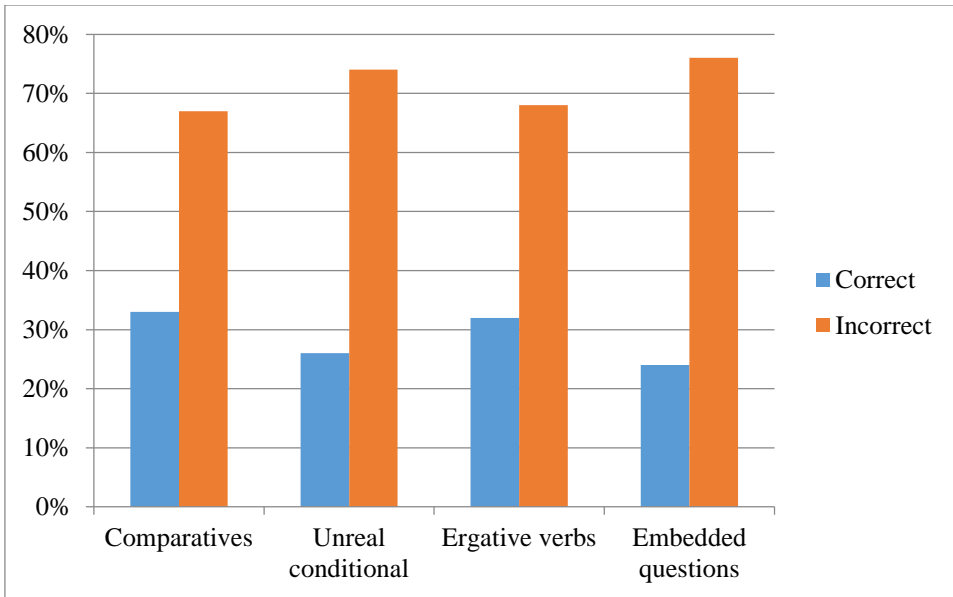


**Graph 2: Sentences of Morphological structure N-125**

The data of table and graph 2 indicate that 39% of the respondents gave a correct answer and 61% gave an incorrect answer about the use of regular past tense. In response of the sentence of Yes/No question the 51% respondents gave a correct answer while 49% answered incorrectly. About the use of Modal verb, 36% of the respondents gave a correct answer while 64% gave an incorrect answer. As regard to the use of indefinite article 44% of the participants of the study gave a correct answer while 56% answered incorrectly.

**Table 3. Sentences of Syntactical structure N-125**

S/No	sentence	Nature of sentence structure	Correct	Incorrect
9	This plan is better than your plan.	Comparatives	33%	67%
10	If he had been richer, she will marry him.	Unreal conditional	26%	74%
11	Between 1990 and 2000 the population of Pakistan was increased.	Ergative verbs	32%	68%
12	Asad wanted to know what was I eating.	Embedded questions	24%	76%



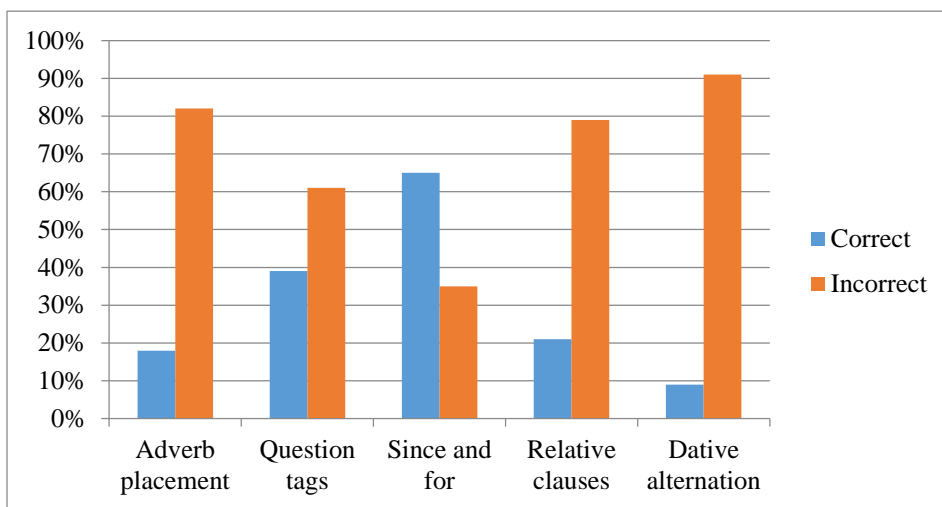
**Graph 3: Sentences of Syntactical Structure N-125**

Table & Graph 3 shows that about the use of comparatives 33% of the participants of the study gave a correct answer while 67% gave an incorrect answer. About the use of Unreal condition 26% of the respondents gave a correct answer but 74% gave an incorrect answer. As regard to the use of Ergative verb 32% of the respondents gave a correct answer while 68% gave an incorrect answer. The response of the respondents about the use of embedded questions is that 24% gave a correct answer while 76% gave an incorrect answer

**Table 4. Sentences of Syntactical Structure N-125**

S/No	Sentence	Nature of sentence structure	Correct	Incorrect
13	She likes always watching horror movie.	Adverb placement	18%	82%
14	We will leave tomorrow, isn't it?	Question tags	39%	61%
15	Students have been using laptops since many years	<i>Since and for</i>	65%	35%
16	The bird that my brother caught it has died.	Relative clauses	21%	79%
17	The teacher explained Kamran the answer.	Dative alternation	09%	91%





**Graph 4: Sentences of Syntactical Structure N-125**

In table & graph 4 the respondents shared their knowledge about the use of Adverb placement. 18% gave a correct answer while 82 answered incorrectly. As regard to the use of Question tags 39% gave a correct answer while 61% gave an incorrect answer. About the use of since/ for, 65% of the respondents gave a correct answer while 35 answered incorrectly. When talk about the use of Relative clauses, 21% of the respondents gave a correct answer and 79% answered incorrectly. 09% of the respondents gave a correct answer about the use of Dative Alternation while 91% gave answered incorrectly.

## **Findings of the Study**

After the analysis of the data received by the respondents the findings of the study “Difficulties in written communication faced by the students of Bachelor of Commerce “ are as below.

- Through the responses of the respondents in table one, we find that more than 50% students are unable to correct the sentence with verb complements and possessive-s. This means they are not well versed in these grammatical structures, while concerning the use of plural -s and 3<sup>rd</sup> person-s the students’ level of understanding is better than that of verb complements and possessive-s.
- The results in table two indicated that the respondents showed poor performance in the use of regular past tense and modal verbs, while its use is very common in everyday English and the same is taught right from the primary classes. Even the students are unable to know the use of indefinite article which is very astonishing one. While yes/no question sentence is answered by the half of the respondents.
- The findings of table three are really discouraging and it is astonishing that the students of bachelor level are unable to use comparatives, unreal conditions, ergative verbs and embedded questions. Approximately 70% of the respondents of the study are unable to correct the sentences of the above-mentioned grammatical structures.

- The results in table four are also not different from table three. The response of the respondents about the use of the adverb is very poor which is an essential component of the parts of speech of English. As far as I know as a teacher, these parts of speech are taught right from the beginning of the academic career to the students. These are continually revised and repeated till graduation level in any case. The same poor performance is also exhibited about the use of questions tags, dative alternation and relative clause. But most of the students know the use of since and for in sentences.

## **Conclusions**

After collection, interpretation and analysis of the data in the present study “Difficulties in written communication by the students of Bachelor of Commerce” it is concluded that the major difficulties which the students of Bachelor of Commerce face in written communication are related to the basic grammatical structures of English. These grammatical constructions are found universally problematic in written communication for the students of a second language. Though these basic grammatical structures are taught to the students they find them difficult and boring, and most of the students do not pay attention in the learning of these structures. This is due to the traditional methods of teaching grammar to the students. After the results of the test the researcher decided to see the respondents of the study personally to know the real causes of this deficient performance, when the question was asked why they are not very proficient in these basic construction of English as these are indispensable for their future career. They say that although they are studying grammar in almost all the classes they did not fully understand grammar. Although they tried, they could not understand it in spite of their sincere efforts. They consider it very difficult to understand. This is because of the following reasons.

Our English teachers always teach grammar in a traditional way as they were taught in their academic life without making it easy and interesting. The students’ lack of vocabulary also creates a problem in their written communication. They have the right ideas in their native language, but they are unable to assign suitable words in the target language. This is because they are not good readers. They do not spend ample time in reading apart from their curriculum books. Reading may help them to develop their vocabulary.

The teachers do not assign students written assignments as homework to rewrite passages from books, which causes lack of written practice.

Teachers do not focus on the marking and checking of written assignment due to lack of time. If a teacher spends ample time to point out the mistakes in the written work of the students it will help the students to overcome their mistakes. Some of the students come from the countryside or village areas. They do not know the importance of written communication.

## **Recommendations**

In the present research “Difficulties in written communication faced by the students of Bachelor of Commerce at graduate level”, data has been collected to pinpoint the difficulties and its reasons. After presenting the results and conclusions, the following suggestions have been recommended to overcome these difficulties.

- The course contents of Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) part 1 should be revised eliminating the portion of summaries, short notes and modern prose. The course contents should consist of purely functional English covering all the aspects of traditional grammar. This decision will motivate and convince the student to study the basic structure of grammar at any cost.
- The traditional way of teaching grammar should be replaced by the new method of teaching grammar. The teacher should include these activities; fill in the blanks, story writing quiz program and fun games emphasizing the particular aspect of grammar.
- The students should be assigned to rewrite the passages of curriculum books in their own wording without being conscious about the mistakes in the beginning. These mistakes afterwards should be eradicated gradually.
- Written assignment should be properly marked and checked, pointing out the mistakes.
- Realization about the importance of written communication should be imparted to the students.
- Writing competitions with rewards should be arranged in the class on a weekly basis.
- The practice and concept of cramming should be discouraged.
- Students are advised to read any English newspaper and listen news on the BBC and CNN. The BBC and CNN channels are available for almost all the students due to the cable network.
- Spoken classes should be made part of the timetable which may enrich the vocabulary and fluency of speech which afterwards develops written communication.
- Teachers should motivate and encourage the students towards brainstorming, mapping, list making and free writing.
- Group activities should be arranged to point out errors and practice grammar.

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