

Research Article

The Relationship among Iranian Advanced EFL Learners' Speaking, Writing, and Grammatical Knowledge

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Abstract

This study examined the correlation between advanced EFL students' grammatical knowledge and their writing and speaking proficiency to determine whether students' grammatical knowledge can influence their productive skills. A total of 50 advanced students aged between 18 and 25 were chosen purposefully to take part in the study. Four tests were used, including one placement test and one grammar test from Oxford University Press for advanced—in the form of multiple-choice tests, one writing test, and one speaking test. Since the data for this study were quantitative, a correlational/descriptive design was chosen for the data to be analyzed. The researcher then decided to find a correlation between the students' writing and speaking scores and their grammar scores based on the obtained data. The Pearson correlation and t-test proved that there is no meaningful relationship between grammar and writing, and grammar and speaking. Moreover, the results of this study showed that the relationship between grammatical knowledge and writing proficiency is not different from the relationship between grammatical knowledge and speaking proficiency. The implication of this study is that grammatical knowledge is not a valid predictor for the proficiency of students in writing and speaking courses. If a student's grammatical knowledge is low, his/her proficiency in writing and speaking can still be average or even above average depending on the process of assessment. Additionally, the results revealed that learners must understand that possessing a strong grasp of grammatical knowledge does not inevitably ensure their ability to produce language effectively in spoken or written form.

Keywords: grammatical knowledge, productive skills, speaking proficiency, writing proficiency

Introduction

When a student plans to begin learning a new language, the four main skills, which are, speaking, writing, reading, and listening are all involved (Akram & Malik, 2010). As a result, teachers should get students ready to practice the four skills in various numbers and combinations (Dixon, 2005) as part of their foreign language instruction. According to Rao (2007), if one focuses solely on one skill, other skills will be neglected. To achieve the best results, one should therefore work on all four skills concurrently. Receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (writing and speaking) are the two main categories of language abilities. There are connections between the elements of these skills in each group. Their mutual impact and interrelationship can lead to the development of their actual application during the practical teaching process.

The quartet of abilities - with the productive abilities being the most widespread - are employed when one desires to converse or inscribe. Verbal communication is of such significance that people who possess a high level of proficiency in a language are often referred to as experts in that language (McCarthy & O'Keeffe, 2004). All methods of language instruction should have as their main objective preparing students with the abilities needed to communicate effectively and clearly in a foreign language (Davies & Pearse, 1998). Students attempt to learn a new language passively, however, as time passes, they begin to develop their own spoken works, including monologues, dialogues, and other pieces (Jeyagowri, 2018). Producing linguistic forms requires more effort than receptive abilities in order to be as efficient as possible. In other words, when someone begins learning a foreign language, they are subtly exposed to both productive and receptive skills. The interpersonal language function of speaking, according to Hughes (2013), is the creation and transmission of meaning. It is crucial to keep in mind that not all language learners are capable of speaking fluently and accurately after a considerable amount of time. They cannot speak or communicate effectively because they lack the knowledge they need. According to Nunan (1999), speaking any language other than one's native tongue requires a sufficient vocabulary and grammatical proficiency. When speaking in terms of productive skills, which is another aspect, students complete the speaking task in a variety of contexts. According to Nation and Newton (2009), the environment in which a speaker is performing can affect how well they perform. The four different types of performance conditions, as Nation and Newton (2009) state, are the level of support, the performance standard, the time constraint, and the planning. Grammar points, which provide language structure, serve as the foundation for the message to be communicated. Before

a speaker speaks, they must first create the syntactic structure in their head. Swan (2001) argues that, understanding how to create and employ specific structures ensures effective communication of common types of meaning. Making comprehensible sentences is challenging without these structures. When speaking, students should be able to identify the whys, whens, and hows of language production in addition to the specifics of how to construct grammar, vocabulary, and other specialized language structures. Thus, speaking differs from writing in terms of skills, structures, and conventions (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995).

Due to the widespread usage of the English language in all facets of daily life worldwide in the age of the global village, learning English is especially crucial. It is true that businesses can grow internationally and lay a strong foundation by having strong production skills. The demand for people with adequate English language abilities is also high. Due to this increased demand, learning English is a popular choice among most people. However, it is crucial that those learning a second or foreign language put their primary attention on mastering the language's foundational skills for production. These two abilities are included in the group of "productive skills".

On the other hand, writing is an essential complex skill if practiced well, it can help them speak more consciously and with greater awareness of sentence structure (Pham, & Bui, 2022). Syntactic knowledge is a crucial component in acquiring proficiency in both skills (Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh, 2020). Based on research, there could be a correlation between grammar and verbal and written communication. However, the connection between knowledge of grammar and skill in writing is considerably more robust (Saadian & Bagheri, 2014; Waer, 2023; Rassouli & Abbasvandi, 2013). As they learn useful skills, it becomes clear that some students who are thought to be good at speaking clearly are not sufficiently skilled at syntactic points. Despite the fact that their grammar is imperfect, they are still able to effectively convey their meaning to their audience. Contrarily, when writing, flouting grammar conventions is usually more illuminating. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between syntactic knowledge and the speaking and writing skills of language learners. Hence, the following queries will be looked at:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' grammatical knowledge and their speaking proficiency?

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' grammatical knowledge and their writing proficiency?

Accordingly, the first hypothesis of the current study was: *There is a significant relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' grammatical knowledge and their speaking proficiency.*

And the second hypothesis was: *There is a significant relationship between Iranian advanced EFL learners' grammatical knowledge and their writing proficiency.*

Review of the Literature

Theoretical Underpinning

It is crucial to acknowledge that the study of grammar is a fundamental component of language acquisition, as it equips us with regulations for blending words and structures to form coherent sentences (Al-Daoud, 2022). Consequently, possessing an understanding of grammar is indispensable for learners who aim to effectively communicate in both written and oral forms of the language (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014). Numerous studies have investigated the correlation between grammatical knowledge, verbal expression, and writing skills of students learning English as a foreign language. As per Ellis (1997), possessing grammatical proficiency is pivotal for succeeding in a second language as it allows learners to produce accurate and meaningful statements.

Research has consistently indicated a strong association between knowledge of grammar and proficiency in speaking. To illustrate, Ellis and Barkhuizen's (2005) study demonstrated that learners who received direct guidance on grammar rules were able to generate spoken language that was more precise and smoother compared to those who did not receive such guidance. With regard to speaking proficiency, studies suggest that understanding grammar has a significant impact on the development of oral fluency (Skehan, 1998). For example, Skehan (1998) discovered that EFL learners who possessed more extensive knowledge of grammar were able to produce more elaborate and intricate sentences, displaying elevated levels of oral fluency. Additionally, DeKeyser's (2007) research revealed that explicit instruction in grammar resulted in noticeable enhancements in accuracy and fluency of speech among adult learners of English as a foreign language.

Likewise, regarding writing aptitude, studies indicate that having a grasp of grammar is imperative for creating logical and connected written works (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Bitchener and Knoch (2010) contend that lacking a solid foundation in grammar can hinder learners' ability to construct well-organized sentences and paragraphs, which can impede their writing proficiency. Moreover, research also indicates that having a good understanding of grammar is vital for effective writing expertise. Learners

who possess better knowledge of grammar can produce well-structured sentences and paragraphs, resulting in coherent and cohesive written works. This is corroborated by Lee and Schallert's (1997) investigation, which revealed that learners who had a better grip on grammar produced written works that were evaluated to be more sensible and well-written.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that although having a good grasp of grammar is essential for language proficiency, it alone is insufficient (Han, & Ellis, 1998). Learners must also cultivate other abilities, including acquiring a rich vocabulary, mastering pragmatics, and developing competence in discourse, to attain proficiency in using a language (Alqahtani, 2015; Abdulkhay, 2022; Erath et al., 2018). It is worth noting, however, that the correlation between grammatical knowledge and language proficiency is bidirectional. In other words, while possessing a solid understanding of grammar can aid in speaking and writing proficiency, engaging in meaningful communication through speaking and writing activities can also enhance learners' grammatical knowledge (Priyanto, 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Suseno, 2020). Ellis (2008) highlights that learners who receive corrective feedback on their spoken and written language use are more likely to internalize new grammatical structures and rules.

In addition to the above, research has also highlighted the importance of context in the development of grammatical knowledge and language proficiency (Breen, 1985; Halliday, 1999; Honeyfield, 1977; Nagy, 1995). For instance, learners may have different needs and priorities depending on their language learning goals and the specific contexts in which they will be using the language. Thus, instructional approaches that are tailored to the individual needs and contexts of learners may be particularly effective in developing grammatical knowledge and language proficiency.

Overall, the relationship between grammatical knowledge, speaking, and writing proficiency of EFL learners is complex and multifaceted. While grammatical knowledge is undoubtedly an important component of language proficiency, it is not sufficient on its own and must be developed in tandem with other language skills such as vocabulary, pragmatics, and discourse competence. In general, it appears that there is a strong relationship between grammatical knowledge, speaking, and writing proficiency of EFL learners. Learners who possess greater knowledge of grammar are more likely to exhibit higher levels of proficiency in both spoken and written language production. In summary, the relationship between grammatical knowledge, speaking, and writing proficiency of EFL learners is significant. Learners who possess greater knowledge of grammar are more likely to exhibit higher levels of proficiency in both spoken and written language production (Gupta, 2008).

However, it is important to note that grammatical knowledge alone is not enough to achieve language proficiency as learners need also to develop other language skills.

Grammar and Speaking

The significance of grammar in developing communicative skills, particularly in spoken language competence, has always been a subject of interest among academics. Recently, Reynolds and Teng (2022) conducted a piece of research to investigate the feasibility of native English speakers providing corrective feedback on grammar during conversations. The study involved two advanced male English learners from South Korea, with one receiving explicit feedback on plural noun errors while the other did not. The outcomes of the four conversation sessions revealed that overall corrective feedback had a positive effect on the learners' grammatical accuracy, and explicit corrective feedback had a higher score by the end of the experiment.

Furthermore, an intriguing study conducted by Penning de Vries et al. (2020) utilizing Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) systems and automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology discovered that learners who received grammatical corrections from artificial intelligence had a more favorable attitude towards the experience. The authors introduced a CALL system that facilitated spoken exercises on word order, a crucial aspect of Dutch grammar. ASR technology was employed to process the learner's responses and identify errors, enabling immediate corrective feedback (CF) to be given on learner mistakes. The authors evaluated the system's effectiveness as a learning environment by analyzing proficiency gains in pre- and post-tests, practice session logs, and learner satisfaction with the system. Two learning conditions were presented: (1) learners received oral practice and immediate CF on spoken performance, and (2) learners received oral practice and NO CF on spoken performance. The authors found that their system was efficacious in providing L2 speaking practice. The final results indicated that both groups enhanced their proficiency in the target feature following treatment that provided grammatical corrective feedback. Although there was no significant difference in learning between the groups, they progressed differently through the sessions, and learners in the group that received automatic CF evaluated the system more positively than the NO CF group.

Examining the elements that influence learners' ability to speak effectively is a valuable pursuit. Pangket's (2019) research aimed to explore the factors that impact the oral English proficiency of grade 5 students at Bontoc Central School. The study employed a sequential mixed method approach, utilizing a questionnaire for teachers and a Focus Group Discussion

to identify the factors influencing the students' oral proficiency. Twelve teachers participated in the study, and two speaking activities were conducted to validate their observations of the factors that affect the students' proficiency. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the teachers. The findings revealed that grammar was one of the primary factors that influenced the students' oral proficiency.

In addition, Issa and colleagues (2020) studied the linguistic advancement of college-level second language (L2) learners, who were at both intermediate and advanced levels, during summer programs in Spain that were focused on short-term study abroad. The participants were evaluated at the beginning and end of their programs using a measure of overall proficiency, as well as assessments of their ability to comprehend grammar (morphosyntactic) and vocabulary (semantic). The outcomes revealed that both groups of learners made significant progress in their language skills, particularly in the morphosyntactic and lexical domains for intermediate-level learners, and in the lexical domain for advanced learners. These findings suggest that short-term study abroad programs can help learners at both intermediate and advanced levels improve their language abilities, and that their initial proficiency level has a limited impact on the amount of progress they make.

Moreover, Prasatyo et al. (2021) recently conducted a study to gather empirical evidence and examine whether proficiency in grammar and critical thinking has an impact on the speaking abilities of students. The research was carried out at a government-run senior high school in Serang, employing a survey method with a multiple-correlation technique. A sample of 80 students from the senior high school was selected for the study, and data collection involved a questionnaire and two multiple-choice tests. The questionnaire was based on the Likert Scale. The research outcomes reveal three significant findings. Firstly, both grammar proficiency and critical thinking have a considerable influence on the speaking skills of students. Secondly, even though the impact is somewhat weak, there is a significant association between grammar mastery and students' speaking abilities. Finally, there is a notable correlation between critical thinking and students' speaking skills.

In a recent investigation conducted by Quines (2023), the aim was to determine the influence of grammar aptitude on students' listening and speaking proficiency. To establish the correlation between students' grammatical aptitude and their listening and speaking abilities, this research employed the descriptive correlation research design. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was utilized to gauge the strength of the connection between the two variables- grammatical competence and listening and speaking abilities. The findings of the study revealed that there is no significant

correlation between grammatical competence and students' speaking and listening performance. The study's outcome indicates that students who have poor grammatical competence can still attain average or even high performance in listening and speaking courses. Therefore, grammatical competence cannot be considered a reliable indicator of listening and speaking proficiency.

Grammar and Writing

In terms of progression in writing ability, grammatical expertise plays a pivotal role (Trapman et al., 2018). Examining the significance of grammar in writing development, Aksoy's (2021) research aimed to predict the effect of grammar on the writing proficiency of Turkish foreign language learners and to identify the influential variables affecting writing ability. The research was conducted using the relational scanning model, one of the quantitative research models. The study data were collected from a total of 100 students with B1 and B2 language levels in Turkish Teaching Centers in the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. To analyse the data, descriptive statistics such as mean, t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and regression and correlation analysis from hypothesis tests were employed. The data were analysed with the SPSS 21.0 data analysis program. The study found that students scored an average result on the grammar test, and there was no difference in grammar and writing skills based on gender. B2 level students scored higher than B1 level students, and the level of language proficiency, vocabulary, and writing skills of older age groups with a preference for change and increased life expectancy in Turkey has been shown to increase in grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills. The research revealed that language had a positive and significant impact on writing skills, and there was a strong positive correlation between grammar and writing.

A recent investigation conducted by Qosayere (2015) aimed to assess the efficacy of grammar correction in enhancing students' writing abilities. The study sought to determine whether grammar correction had a favourable or unfavourable impact on writing skill development. A qualitative research design was employed, with a focus group comprising first-cycle students and an interview conducted with teachers. The findings indicate that both students and teachers recognized the significance of grammar correction in improving students' writing skills. The teacher's feedback and strategies were positively received, indicating that grammar correction was an effective tool for enhancing students' writing abilities.

Survey research conducted by Puspitaloka (2019) investigated the impact of proficiency in grammar and critical thinking on the descriptive writing

abilities of students. The study involved a sample of ninety students, chosen through random sampling from a private senior high school in Karawang. The research tools included questionnaires and tests. The findings revealed that the writing skills of students were influenced by both their mastery of grammar and their capacity for critical thinking.

Jones et al. (2013) aimed to utilize a conceptualized comprehension of grammar as a tool for creating meaning in writing growth and examined the consequences of contextualized education on students' writing aptitude. The research employed a mixed-methods strategy, involving a randomized controlled experiment and an accompanying qualitative study. The statistical evaluations demonstrated a favourable outcome on writing performance for the intervention group ($e = 0.21$; $p < 0.001$); nevertheless, the research also revealed that the intervention had distinct impacts on various sub-groups, favouring skilled writers over weaker writers. The research was noteworthy as it was the first to provide thorough, conceptualized proof of the probable advantages of teaching grammar to assist in writing growth.

Several investigations have demonstrated that correcting grammar, regardless of whether it is done by teachers or peers, can have a significant impact on improving writing skills. Ramírez Balderas and Guillén Cuamatzi (2018) discovered that both self and peer-correction strategies were advantageous for students, enhancing their writing abilities and self-awareness. This, in turn, led to the development of critical self-assessment skills and accountability for their own learning. The study emphasizes the importance of allocating class time for continuous training to enable students to systematize their writing practices. A comparable study by Kuyyogsuy (2019) examined the effects of peer feedback on students' English writing proficiency in L2 writing classes. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, using a writing pre-test and post-test, and self-written reflection in the experiment. The data were quantitatively analyzed through a dependent simple t-test, and content was thematically analyzed for qualitative data. The participants were 21 undergraduate students majoring in English in the three southernmost border provinces of Thailand. The results indicated that the students had made significant progress in their writing ability, as shown by the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. Additionally, the effect size was calculated at 1.97, indicating a "large" magnitude. Furthermore, students reported that peer feedback was a valuable experience for social interaction, and it helped them perceive the writing process, develop affective strategies, support critical thinking skills, and develop socially and intellectually by working collaboratively. Additionally, it aided them in

practicing to become more independent learners. As a result, implementing peer feedback in L2 writing classes is recommended.

Moreover, a study conducted by Robinson and Feng (2016) demonstrated the crucial role that grammar instruction can play in enhancing students' speaking and writing skills. The aim of this research was to explore the impact of direct grammar instruction on the quality of students' writing abilities. The study included 18 fifth-grade students and two fifth-grade teachers. Based on the outcomes of the students' pre-assessment writing scores using Write Score, direct grammar instruction was introduced to address the common mistakes found in their writing. The students were provided with direct grammar instruction every week for approximately four months. Following the four-month period, the students underwent a writing post-assessment. The findings indicated that after receiving direct grammar instruction for four months, half of the participating students demonstrated significant improvements in their overall writing scores. These results highlighted that students can achieve adequate progress in enhancing their writing skills by implementing research-based strategies such as grammar instruction during writing instruction.

According to Panahi's (2020) investigation, the utilization of discourse-based grammar instruction has the potential to enhance both reading and writing skills. The study aimed to examine the views of EFL learners concerning the incorporation of discourse-based activities in advancing their reading comprehension and syntactic accuracy in writing. A total of 12 EFL learners, comprising 4 female and 8 male participants aged between 15 and 17, were randomly selected from classes for interviews. The data were collected through three focus-group interviews, which included open-ended questions starting with "what," "how," or "have you ever" to elicit insightful responses. The interviewees were asked to express their opinions on the effectiveness of the method and strategies used in the course. The findings indicated that the use of discourse-based activities was perceived to be highly beneficial for fostering the overall development of EFL learners' reading comprehension ability and syntactic accuracy in writing.

It is compulsory for second or foreign language learners to concentrate firstly on the fundamental skills of the language. Productive skills, including speaking and writing, are a category of these four skills. The importance of learning to speak is to the extent that those who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language (McCarthy & O'Keeffe, 2004). On the other hand, writing is a crucial complex skill, and if students practice it, they can maximize consciousness and awareness of the structure of sentences while they are speaking. There are some factors important in learning to speak and write, and one of them is syntactic knowledge, which plays a crucial role in both (Berwick,

1985). The probable relationship between grammar and speaking is not necessarily as much as the relationship between grammar and writing (Tree & Meijer, 1999). In the process of learning productive skills, it can be seen that some students who are considered good at speaking fluently are not proficient enough in syntactic points. They can easily convey their meaning to their audience while they do not use grammar flawlessly. On the other hand, when it comes to writing, disobeying the syntactic rules is usually more revealing (Muhsin, 2015). Therefore, the relationship between syntactic knowledge and speaking and writing proficiency of language learners is potentially a field of research in ELT which is going to be investigated in this research.

Method

Participants

Since the data was quantitative, a correlational/descriptive design was used to determine whether there was any correlation between grammatical knowledge and writing and speaking ability. The researchers were interested in learning whether there is a connection between student scores for grammar, writing and speaking based on the obtained data.

Fifty EFL students, male and female, from two institutions at various levels, were chosen through a purposive sampling method to be the participants in this study. Based on the outcomes of a placement test, both males and females were chosen. These 50 advanced-level EFL students, who came from two institutions (Safir language institute and Gooyesh language institute) in Gonbad City, Golestan Province, Iran, were assigned to two classes. The researcher was forced to give the tests to advanced students in two different institutes because there were not enough students in one institute to conduct the study. The age range of the students was 20 to 27. It should be noted that students at different language proficiency levels had enrolled in both institutes and the placement test was used to choose advanced students for the study. The period that they were studying English was between winter 2022 to spring 2023.

Instruments

Four tests, including a placement test, a grammar test, a writing test, and a speaking test, were the instruments used in this study. Initially, a placement test was administered to recruit the advanced participants of the study. The placement test was a sample of the Oxford Placements Test (OPT), consisting of two parts that entail 50 multiple-choice questions focused on grammar and vocabulary, a reading section including a passage, and 10 multiple-choice questions that had to be answered within 45 minutes.

The second test was a grammar test designed to gauge the students' knowledge of syntactic constructions. It has also been prepared by Oxford University Press. According to the test guidelines provided by Oxford, there were 40 multiple-choice questions that had to be answered in 40 minutes. The reliability index of the tests was reported to be 0.92 which was quite high.

The third test involved writing; each student received a piece of paper, and they were instructed to write three paragraphs (each at least 250 words), outlining "*Three crucial ways to learn English*". Each paragraph had a 15-minute allotment during the 45-minute writing portion of the test.

The fourth test required students to respond to a question orally within three minutes. They were instructed to respond to this question by discussing it, and the researcher simultaneously recorded their voices. The speaking prompt read, "*In three minutes, discuss three significant ways to improve listening skills*". It should be noted that two tenacious raters completed the process of scoring speaking and writing. There were two sets of scores for both speaking and writing in the current study because there were two raters. Thus, it should be measured if there was any consistency between these sets of scores. In order to do this, the reliability of these scores, as well as Cronbach's alpha measure, was calculated. The administration of the four tests will be covered in more detail in the following section.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Initially, the placement test was administered to the students of these two institutes. This process was done on two separate days one day: in one institute, and the other day in the other institute. After the sheets of all students in two institutes were gathered, they were scored by the researcher based on the answer keys of Oxford. Based on Oxford, those students who answered more than 50 questions correctly were placed at an advanced level and were allowed to take the subsequent test, that is, the grammar test. In the final results, 50 students were selected randomly and were considered as advanced based on the placement test.

The grammar test like the placement test was administered on two separate days in those two institutes. Then, the sheets were gathered, and the score of each student was calculated by the researcher based on the answer key. Both speaking and writing tests were administered on two separate days. One day for half of the participants (25 participants) in one institute, another day for the other half of the participants (25 participants) in another institute. The scoring of writing sheets was based on TOEFL iBT (Independent Writing Rubrics). The scoring of sheets was done by the two raters mentioned before.

The scoring of speaking sheets by these two raters was based on TOEFL iBT (Independent Speaking Rubrics).

Conducting written and oral assessments were carried out sequentially. Initially, a written test was administered among the contenders. The papers were distributed among them, and they were instructed to write three paragraphs on the given topic within a time limit of 15 minutes. Those who completed the writing test were then eligible to participate in an oral test. In this test, the students were assigned to speak on a question for a duration of 3 minutes. The researcher recorded the voices of the participants. Eventually, these recordings were evaluated by two assessors who also scored the written tests.

Results

Placement Test

Since only advanced students were supposed to take part in this study, based on the placement test, the number of students reduced from 62 to 50 as the participants of the study (Table 1).

Table 1
Statistics of Placement Test

Students' number	62
Max score	58
Highest score attainable	60
Min score	32
Lowest score allowed	50
Sex	Males and Females
Advanced participants collected	50
Questions	50 Vocabulary and grammar questions 10 reading questions

As Table 1 shows, the placement test contained 50 vocabulary and grammar questions whose total score was 50 and 10 reading questions whose scores were from 10 based on Oxford criteria. The participants of the placement test were both males and females. After advanced students were recruited, they attended the next three tests including the grammar test, speaking test, and writing test.

Grammar Test

The information listed in Table 2 was gathered following the administration of the grammar test to 50 advanced participants.

Table 2
Statistics of Grammar Test

Valid Number	50
Mean	40.32
Std. Error of Mean	.746
Median	40.00
Mode	43
Std. Deviation	5.274
Variance	27.814
Skewness	-.494
Std. Error of Skewness	.337
Kurtosis	-.502
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.662
Range	18
Min	30
Max	48

Based on the statistics provided, we can see that the grammar test was taken by 50 people and the mean score was 40.32 with a standard deviation of 5.274. The median score was 40 and the mode was 43. The range of scores was 18, with the lowest score being 30 and the highest score being 48. The skewness of the distribution was negative (-0.494), indicating that the distribution was slightly skewed to the left, although not significantly so. The kurtosis was also negative (-0.502), which suggests that the distribution was slightly flatter than a normal distribution. Overall, the statistics suggest that the grammar test was moderately difficult, with most people scoring around the middle of the range, and relatively few people scoring at the extreme ends of the range. The negative skewness and kurtosis suggest that the distribution may be slightly skewed and flatter than a normal distribution, but this effect is not very strong.

Speaking Test

The participants' speaking ability was the second variable, and Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the scores.

Table 3.
Statistics of Speaking Test

Valid Number	50
Mean	15.30
Std. Error of Mean	.155
Median	16.00
Mode	16
Std. Deviation	1.093
Variance	1.194
Skewness	-1.907
Std. Error of Skewness	.337
Kurtosis	4.048
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.662
Range	5
Min	11
Max	16

As indicated in Table 3, there were 50 valid scores. The mean (average) score was 15.30, with a standard error of .155. The median score was 16.00, while the mode (most frequent score) was 16. The standard deviation was 1.093, indicating that scores were relatively spread out around the mean. The variance was 1.194, which is the square of the standard deviation. Skewness was -1.907, indicating that the distribution of scores was negatively skewed, meaning that there were more high scores than low scores. The standard error of skewness was .337. Kurtosis was 4.048, indicating that the distribution of scores was leptokurtic, or more peaked than a normal distribution. The standard error of kurtosis was .662. The range of the scores was 5, with the lowest score being 11 and the highest being 16.

Inter-rater Reliability of Speaking and Writing Tests

Table 4 shows the inter-rater reliability indices for the speaking and writing tests. The results showed that there were significant agreements between the two raters on speaking test, $r(48) = .883$, representing a large effect size, $p = .000$, and writing test, $r(48) = .870$, representing a large effect size, $p = .000$ test.

Table 4.
Inter-Rater Reliability

	SPR2	WRR2
	Pearson Correlation	
	.883**	
SPR1	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	.000	
	N	
	50	
	Pearson Correlation	
	.870**	
WRR1	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	.000	
	N	
	50	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Writing test

The participants in the writing test had 30 minutes to write three paragraphs—almost 10 minutes for each paragraph—about the given topics. The following statistics were obtained after the data had been gathered (Table 7).

Table 5
Statistics of Writing Test

Valid Number	50
Mean	4.74
Std. Error of Mean	.075
Median	5.00
Mode	5
Std. Deviation	.527
Variance	.278
Skewness	-1.958
Std. Error of Skewness	.337
Kurtosis	3.140
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.662
Range	2
Min	3
Max	5

As shown in Table 5, there were 50 valid numbers in the sample. The mean score was 4.74, indicating that the average score was slightly below 5. The standard error of the mean was .075, suggesting that the sample mean is likely to be a good estimate of the population mean. The median score was 5, which means that half of the scores were above 5 and half were below 5. The mode

score was also 5, which is the most frequently occurring score in the sample. The standard deviation was .527, which indicates that there was some variability in the scores. The variance was .278, which is another measure of the spread of the scores. The skewness was -1.958, which suggests that the distribution of scores was skewed to the left. The standard error of skewness was .337, which indicates that this estimate may not be very precise. The kurtosis was 3.140, which indicates that the distribution was more peaked than a normal distribution. The standard error of kurtosis was .662, which suggests that this estimate may also not be very precise. The range of the scores was 2, with the minimum score being 3 and the maximum score being 5.

Research Question 1

The first null hypothesis of the current study was that speaking ability and grammatical knowledge in advanced EFL students are unrelated. Table 8 shows how the advanced students' writing skills and grammatical knowledge correlate.

Table 6
Correlation between Grammar and Speaking

	Grammar	Speaking
Grammar Pearson Correlation	1	.138
Sig		.334
Number	50	50
	Grammar	Speaking
Speaking Pearson Correlation	.138	1
Sig	.334	
Number	50	50

The p-value indicates whether there is a positive or negative relationship between the two variables. The p-value in Table 8 is .334, and the Pearson correlation is .138. The correlation becomes meaningful when the p-value is greater than 0 and lower than 0.05. Regarding the first research question, the correlation is present but not strong enough since the p-value in Table 6 ($p=0.334$) is greater than 0.05. As a result, it is debatable.

Research Question 2

The second null hypothesis was that Iranian advanced EFL learners' grammatical knowledge and writing ability had no relationship. Table 7 provides statistics on the potential correlation between advanced students' grammatical knowledge and their writing ability.

Table 7
Correlation between Grammar and Writing

	Grammar	Writing
Grammar Pearson Correlation	1	.190
Sig		.186
Number	50	50
	Grammar	Writing
Writing Pearson Correlation	.190	1
Sig	.186	
Number	50	50

In Table 7, the Pearson correlation is .190 and the p-value is .186. Thus, there is a correlation between syntactic knowledge and writing ability although it is not particularly strong.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore whether there is any possible correlation between the syntactic knowledge of Iranian advanced EFL learners and their speaking and writing proficiency and whether there is any difference between the correlation between knowledge of grammar and writing skills and the correlation between knowledge of grammar and speaking skills.

Based on the findings related to the first research question, it was discovered that there is no significant relationship between syntactic knowledge and speaking proficiency of the advanced Iranian EFL learners which could be supported by a very recent study by Quines (2023). This researcher used the descriptive correlation research design to establish the relationship of the students' grammatical competence to their listening and speaking skills. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables- grammatical competence, and listening and speaking skills. Based on the results of the study, grammatical competence had no significant relationship to the speaking and listening performance of students.

However, contrary to the findings of the current study, Reynolds and Teng (2022) found that grammatical corrective feedback can improve students speaking accuracy (but not necessarily proficiency) a great deal. Furthermore, a study by Priyanto (2013) was conducted with the aim of obtaining the correlation between English grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh-grade students. It was found that the value of the r coefficient that was acquired as the result of correlation analysis between grammar competence and speaking fluency of eleventh students can be categorized as

moderate and the correlation was significant which was in contrast with the findings of the current study. Nevertheless, it could be argued that most of the studies related to the relationship between grammatical knowledge and speaking proficiency are to some degree discussing the importance of grammar for speaking accuracy (Penning de Vries et al., 2020; Pangket, 2019; Prasatyo et al., 2021), but not necessarily for the fluency of the students and it is obvious that acquiring grammatical knowledge can do more good than harm to one's overall speaking ability. However, there are still some who believe that there is no significant correlation between syntactic knowledge and the oral proficiency of EFL learners (Yazdi & Mohammadian, 2022).

Considering the second research question, the same findings as the first research question were unveiled. It was discovered that the relationship between syntactic knowledge and the ability to write fluently was not a significant one which was not seen in some previous studies in which grammatical knowledge was emphasized for the development of writing ability (Trapman et al., 2018).

Also, contrary to the results of the current study, Aksoy (2021) found that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary can to a great deal improve the writing ability of Turkish EFL students. There were also other studies whose overall findings were in contrast with the results of this study. For example, Cuamatzi (2018) discovered that grammatical corrections received even from classmates can have a positive effect on students' writing ability similar to /Cuamatzi's study, Kuyyogsuy (2019) found that the scores of the post-test writing test of Thai students improved after they received grammatical feedbacks from their peers in a short period of time.

Additionally, Mushin (2015) carried out a study in Indonesia that is analogous to the one at hand in which the correlation between students' writing proficiency and their knowledge of grammar was determined. The researcher used a test as a tool for data collection in order to determine the level of writing and grammar proficiency among the students. In this study, the researcher used a written test as the writing test's instrument and multiple-choice questions with 25 items and 10 fill-in-the-blanks as the grammar test. Following the collection of data from 23 students, the researcher was able to calculate the correlation between the students' writing and grammar skills, which came out to be 0.43. The correlation between students' grammar skills and writing proficiency was moderately significant, according to this value. Because the correlation coefficient in the current study was 0.190, it was not as significant as Mushin's study in demonstrating a connection between advanced students' syntactic knowledge and their writing ability. Mushin's

study demonstrates a moderate correlation, but the current study reveals a very weak correlation that cannot be regarded as significant.

However, in accordance with the findings of the present investigation, a recent exploration conducted by Sattar et al. (2023) aimed to explore the plausible association between grammatical expertise and argumentative essay writing proficiency among IELTS examinees in Pakistan. Specifically, the study endeavoured to discern whether grammatical knowledge contributed to enhancing students' writing proficiency. To gather information, the researcher employed three tools: a prompt for penning argumentative essays, a scoring rubric based on IELTS band descriptors, and a collection of grammatical knowledge items developed by the researcher. A total of 131 students from diverse IELTS institutes in Pakistan, comprising 86 males and 45 females, were selected for the study. The data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23, utilizing Pearson Product-Moment analysis to gauge the correlation between grammatical knowledge and argumentative essay writing proficiency. The study's outcomes proposed that there was no notable relationship between grammatical knowledge scores and argumentative essay writing proficiency.

To conclude, this study aimed to evaluate the significance of the relationship between advanced EFL students' syntactic knowledge and competency in productive skills. In the current study, three null hypotheses were to be assessed in order to determine whether they should be accepted or rejected.

It was mentioned in the first hypothesis that there is no correlation between advanced EFL students' grammatical knowledge and their speaking ability. The correlation between the grammar and speaking scores on the Pearson test was calculated to determine whether this hypothesis should be accepted or rejected. The correlation value for these two variables indicated a weak but not statistically significant correlation between grammar and speaking scores. In fact, it was discovered that emphasizing syntactic knowledge more is not advised for advanced EFL students who want to develop their speaking proficiency. Despite the fact that they should take grammar into consideration, according to the findings of the current study, it has little bearing on their speaking ability.

The second conclusion was that writing ability and advanced EFL students' syntactic knowledge are unrelated. The Pearson correlation between the speaking and grammar scores indicated a relationship between the two but was not significant as a criterion for accepting or rejecting this hypothesis. In fact, it has been demonstrated that putting more of a focus on syntactic knowledge is not advised for advanced EFL students who want to advance their writing skills.

Although they should take grammar into account, according to the findings of the current study, it cannot have a significant impact on their writing ability.

The relationship between syntactic knowledge and writing proficiency is similar to that between syntactic knowledge and speaking proficiency, according to the study's final hypothesis. The third hypothesis was accepted based on the correlation between writing and speaking ability and syntactic knowledge. In fact, it was discovered that there was no difference between the relationship between syntactic knowledge and speaking proficiency and the relationship between syntactic knowledge and writing proficiency. It means that EFL students' syntactic knowledge did not significantly affect their writing and speaking abilities.

The implication of this study was that teachers should not overemphasize the significance of grammatical proficiency and should give equal attention to each individual skill. Grammatical competence is not a valid predictor for the proficiency of students in writing and speaking courses. If a student's grammatical competence is low, his proficiency in writing and speaking can still be average or even above average depending on the process of assessing these skills. Additionally, learners must understand that possessing a strong grasp of grammatical knowledge does not inevitably ensure their ability to produce language effectively in spoken or written form.

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