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TÍTULO DEL ARTÍCULO:

INFORME FINAL DEL CURSO DE PRE ESPECIALIZACIÓN

THE INFLUENCE OF PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR TEACHING IN THE WRITING  
PRODUCTION OF MODERN LANGUAGES SOPHOMORES

PARA OPTAR AL GRADO ACADÉMICO DE:  
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS MODERNAS: ESPECIALIDAD EN FRANCÉS E  
INGLÉS

PRESENTADO POR:  
GLORIA ISABEL GUEVARA ZELAYA - GZ17011  
MANUEL EDUARDO GUEVARA ZELAYA - GZ17006  
GÉNESIS YESSSEL RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ – RH17031

DOCENTE ASESOR:  
LICDA. MILENA BEATRIZ RAMOS TORRES

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**UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR**

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**VICERRECTOR ACADÉMICO**

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**SECRETARIO GENERAL**

**ING. FRANCISCO ALARCÓN**

**DEFENSOR DE LOS DERECHOS UNIVERSITARIO**

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# **The influence of prescriptive grammar teaching in the writing production of Modern Languages sophomores**

## Summary

Grammar plays a crucial role in the process of learning and acquiring any language, and writing skills are among the most vital aspects of language proficiency, encompassing not only grammar but also essential language structures. In certain educational curricula or institutions, grammar is often taught separately from writing despite the fact that these two subjects are closely interconnected. The aim in this article is to provide a precise and impartial examination of how prescriptive grammar instruction affects second-year students who are concurrently enrolled in a grammar course and have previously completed an intensive English course. To assess the impact of this approach, data was analyzed which was gathered from a students' survey as well as an interview with the teacher who is responsible for the grammar course.

## Key words

**Prescriptive grammar; writing production; grammar teaching; descriptive grammar; grammar approaches and methods.**

# **La influencia de la enseñanza de gramática prescriptiva en la producción escrita de estudiantes de segundo año de Lenguas Modernas**

## **Resumen**

La gramática desempeña un papel crucial en el proceso de aprender y adquirir cualquier idioma, y las habilidades de escritura están entre los aspectos más vitales de la competencia lingüística, abarcando no sólo la gramática, sino también las estructuras esenciales del lenguaje. En ciertos planes de estudio educativos o instituciones, la gramática a menudo se enseña por separado de la escritura, a pesar de que estos dos temas están estrechamente interconectados. Nuestro objetivo en este artículo es proporcionar un examen preciso e imparcial de cómo la instrucción gramatical prescriptiva afecta a los estudiantes de segundo año que están matriculados simultáneamente en un curso de gramática y que previamente han completado un curso intensivo de inglés. Para evaluar el impacto de este enfoque, analizamos los datos recopilados de una encuesta a los estudiantes y de una entrevista con el profesor responsable del curso de gramática.

## **Palabras clave**

**Gramática prescriptiva; producción escrita; enseñanza de gramática; gramática descriptiva; enfoques y métodos de gramática.**

## Introduction

The current article is focused on examining the adverse impact of teaching prescriptive grammar on the writing skills of second-year students. Prescriptive grammar is a conventional approach that instructs individuals on using language correctly through a set of rules. This approach has evolved over time, adapting to changing linguistic trends as well as communication needs. This research aimed to investigate whether this type of grammar instruction has a negative influence or not. Furthermore, it delved into the topic from a linguistic perspective and carried an academic interest. A quantitative methodology was employed suited to the research's nature and data requirements.

In this article the problem was introduced which revolves around two key questions related to prescriptive grammar, its teaching methods, and its effects on writing. Furthermore, it provided historical insights into grammar and explored two fundamental approaches: descriptive and prescriptive grammar. Key definitions are also provided to enhance comprehension of the subject. Moreover, the chosen research methodology was outlined, including the study type and details about the population and sample used to collect essential data through specific instruments for subsequent analysis. Then, the results obtained from these instruments were visually presented as well as the contributions of individuals within the sample, followed by a detailed analysis. Finally, the conclusion of the study was provided by interpreting the results and presenting the findings and the conclusions.

## Methodology

Research methodology encompasses a structured approach aimed at resolving research inquiries by employing diverse data collection techniques, offering an interpretation of the amassed data, and deriving conclusions from the research findings.

Essentially, it serves as the foundational plan guiding the execution of a research endeavor. (S. N. Murthy, 2009) Additionally, research methodology pertains to the way a researcher formulates a study to guarantee the production of dependable and valid outcomes aligned with the research objectives and goals. Mills and Birks (Mills, 2014) further elucidate that methodology comprises a collection of fundamental principles and concepts that shape the architecture of a research investigation.

## Research design

“Research design refers to your plan for answering your fundamental research questions. If you are writing a quantitative-based dissertation, your research design will center on numerical data collection and analysis.” (Journey., 2021). In simpler terms, it outlines how an investigation will be carried out and to understand the methods utilized to gather information in a clear and accessible manner, catering to the needs of both researchers and the individuals participating in the study.

A well-defined research design helps ensure the study's validity and reliability by determining the data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It also establishes the overall framework for the study, whether it be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. As noted by Creswell (Creswell, 2017), research design is essential for shaping the direction of a study, making it a fundamental aspect of the research process.

This research, it has adopted a non-experimental design, which implies that it is not intentionally manipulating the variables under study; rather, it is observing them in their natural state and subsequently conducting a detailed analysis.

Within non-experimental research, this study takes on a correlational approach, focusing on establishing and describing relationships between the variables of the phenomenon without direct intervention. This approach involves collecting data at a single point in time and is valuable for understanding prevalence, determinants of health, and population features.

This research also employs a cross-sectional study design, gathering data at a specific point in time for subsequent analysis. A cross-sectional study involves observing a group of individuals or collecting information at a specific moment or over a brief period. In this particular research, the data collection spanned approximately 4 to 5 months to efficiently gather the necessary information without prolonged duration.

## Research approach

As part of the Research approach, it has the quantitative approach, which is employed for data collection and analysis to address research inquiries, validate pre-existing hypotheses, and rely on numerical measurement, quantification, and frequently the application of statistical tools to detect behavioral patterns within a particular group or population.

## Sample and Sampling

The target population for this research comprises sophomore students majoring in Modern Languages at the Eastern Campus of the University of El Salvador who are currently enrolled in the English Grammar I Course, totaling around 90 students. The population in research is the group of people in general. Sampling is the method used to select the components or participants of the sample. The chosen sampling method for this investigation is probabilistic sampling, which involves analyzing specific groups within a statistical population through random selection.

The sample is the subset that is taken from the population which is going to be studied. There are two groups in the English Grammar I Course, and the sample was drawn from one of these groups, consisting of 15 females and 15 males, resulting in a total sample size of 30 students. Additionally, one English Grammar I Course professor was included in the sample.

## Instrumentation

Within the instrumentation part you can find technique, methods and tools. Techniques are what help make it possible to execute a project. The method is the strategies that are needed to carry out activities in order to achieve an objective. Finally, a tool is that element to carry out the activity.

The research is primarily concentrated on two specific data collection methods that it is believed are both reliable and precise for obtaining the information which is required. For this study, there were employed surveys for students and conducted interviews with professors, these methods are best suited to help to uncover the insights sought regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

One way to describe a survey is as a method in which a collection of questions is directed towards a statistical sample or even the entire population, often composed of individuals, businesses, or institutional entities. The primary purpose of a survey is to gain insights into opinions, characteristics of particular variables that require measurement, or specific factual information. Simon Bell (2013) explains that surveys offer inclusivity in terms of the range and quantity of variables that can be investigated, demand minimal resources for their creation and implementation, and provide a relatively straightforward means for drawing general conclusions.

On the other hand, within the spectrum of data collection techniques, an interview stands as a tool employed by individuals to gather information directly from the population under investigation. According to the findings of Fox et al. (2000), the interview is considered a crucial data collection method, characterized by verbal interactions between the researcher and the participant.

### Data collection instrument

The instrument that was used in this work is the questionnaire for both parties. The questionnaire helps us to simultaneously organize the information through questions, whether open or closed. A questionnaire can have closed-ended or open-ended questions; however, it was used closed-ended for students and open-ended for teachers. Indeed, within the category of closed-ended questions, there exist subtypes. However, in the survey instrument that was applied, it is intended to employ multiple-choice questions for the students and open-ended questions for the teachers. The plan is to administer these questionnaires online using Google Forms.

### Data processing technique

In quantitative research, data processing is a crucial step as it involves the transformation of all the collected information into a more comprehensible, visible, and

practical format. This process is what allows data to be presented in the form of graphs or charts. As an example, in this research, it processed student results by converting numerical data into pie charts for representation. Conversely, when processing teacher results, that was used a double-entry chart that clearly and succinctly outlines the categories to which the questions pertain, along with the corresponding responses provided by the teachers. This method facilitates the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data.

According to Bernal (2010), this phase of the research process involves handling the data gathered from the population under study during fieldwork, which may initially be scattered, disorganized, or in individual form. The goal of this phase is to transform the data into results that are organized and structured, forming the basis for subsequent analysis aligned with the research objectives, hypotheses, or questions.

The data processing phase typically comprises three key stages: data collection and input, processing, and presentation. Within this context, there are three primary methods for handling the collected information. In this research, electronic data processing was opted, which is named so because it leverages software and technologies to expedite the data analysis process.

For this study, technology was the primary tool employed for both data collection and processing. Computers and software applications such as Google Sheets, Google Forms, Google Docs, and similar tools to streamline were used to do these tasks efficiently.

## Data processing tool

A data processing tool is software, or a system designed to efficiently collect, manipulate, analyze, and manage data.

These tools have a diverse set of uses, spanning from data cleaning, transformation, and visualization to statistical analysis. In the context of modern data-driven decision-making, data processing tools hold significant importance, enabling the human being to leverage data's potential for gaining a competitive advantage and fostering innovation.

The primary data processing tool for the student instrument in the research is Google Sheets. The advantage of using Google's suite of tools for data processing is that Google Sheets seamlessly connects with the questionnaire created in Google Forms to collect responses from

the sampled population. It then stores this data in a virtual database, automatically generating graphs and spreadsheets with tabulated data. This streamlined process simplifies data processing and allows for more time to be dedicated to the subsequent analysis. These spreadsheets are used to process student data and use graphs to visually represent the tabulated information. For teacher data, Google Docs will be employed to create a double-entry chart.

All the instrumentation used was very helpful since they were very easy to manipulate and understand. Likewise, they provided the graphs and numbers that we needed to tabulate. The people to whom the surveys were applied were very willing to collaborate and in this way the work could be expedited.

## Results and data analysis

Data analysis is a crucial component of research since an inadequate analysis can result in an inaccurate report, leading to flawed findings and ultimately poor decision-making. Consequently, it is imperative to select an appropriate data analysis approach to ensure the acquisition of dependable and actionable insights from your data (Eteng, 2022). In simple terms, data analysis involves scrutinizing a dataset to draw conclusions, enabling precise decision-making to reach the goals. The specific procedures for such analysis cannot be predetermined due to potential data collection challenges.

Another way to have a clearer idea of what the data analysis consists of is that data analysis involves as well examining, refining, modifying, and shaping data to address challenges. It aids in discerning the effectiveness of current approaches, enabling adjustments required to reach the objectives. Moreover, some considerations when data analyzing are that researchers should possess the essential research skills to analyze and manipulate data, undergoing training to exhibit a strong standard of research conduct. Ideally, researchers should possess more than a fundamental grasp of the rationale behind selecting one statistical method over another to enhance data insights, and research and data analytics projects vary across scientific disciplines. Consequently, seeking statistical guidance early in the analysis process aids in designing survey questionnaires, selecting data collection methods, and determining sample choices.

Result tabulation is the process of condensing the activities carried out, collecting partial, overall, or cumulative figures by understanding the positions and their corresponding



quantities during the measurement process. This process acts as a central hub for aggregating critical research data using a particular tool and its associated methodology.

To better understand and evaluate the variables that can influence or improve the research, pie charts were employed to visually depict and present the data as percentages for each question. This method assists in achieving a more transparent comprehension of the data.

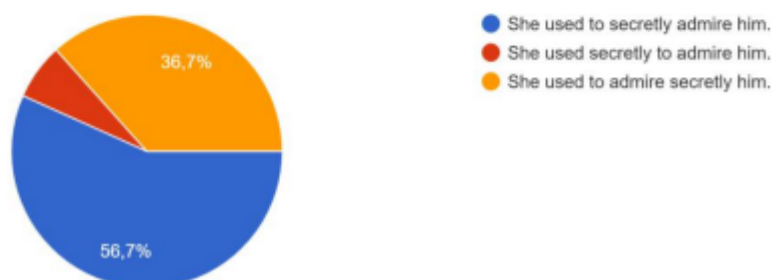
## Results and data analysis of the student survey

### 1- Which of the following sentences is correct?

Infinitives		
Option	Answer	Percentage
She used to secretly admire him.	17	56,7%
She used secretly to admire him.	2	6,7%
She used to admire secretly him.	11	36,7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.1%</b>

1- Which of the following sentences is correct?

30 respuestas



Most of the students surveyed chose the first option, obtaining a total of 56.7%, which indicates that the students answered the question based on descriptive grammar, as they were not making use of the prescriptive rule that says infinitives should not be split. Moreover, the second option received 6.7%, and the third option received 36.7%, from which it can be deduced that although many students follow descriptive grammar, there is always a significant percentage of students who are influenced by prescriptive grammar.

## 2- Which of the following questions is correct?

Prepositions		
Option	Answer	Percentage
From where are you?	0	0%
Where are you from?	30	100%
Are you from where?	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

2- Which of the following questions is correct?

30 respuestas



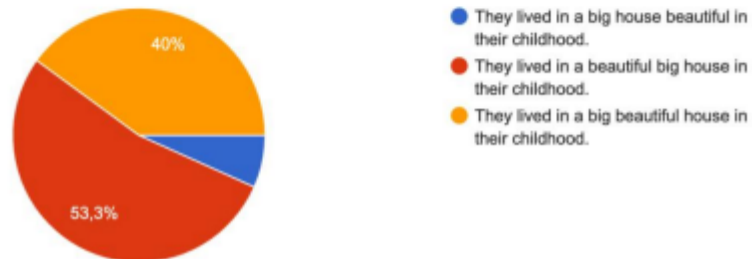
Regarding question number two, it's evident that all students, a full 100%, selected the second option. This indicates that the students' responses were influenced by descriptive grammar principles. This choice aligns with the prescriptive grammar rule against ending sentences with prepositions, in contrast to what the students expressed. In options one and three, it was observed a total of 0% for both choices.

### 3. What is the correct adjective order in the following sentences?

Order of adjectives		
Option	Answer	Percentage
They lived in a big house beautiful in their childhood.	2	6.7%
They lived in a beautiful big house in their childhood.	16	53.3%
They lived in a big beautiful house in their childhood.	12	40%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

3- What is the correct adjective order in the following sentences?

30 respuestas



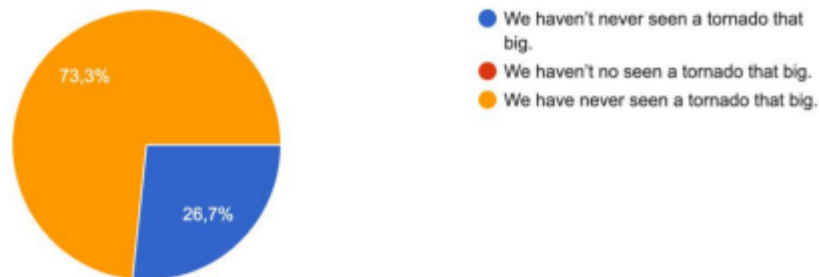
In this particular question, it's evident that 53.3% of students adhere to prescriptive grammar rules concerning the placement of adjectives in a sentence, whereas 46.7% of their peers struggle with getting the correct adjective order. Nevertheless, the influence of prescriptive grammar remains dominant.

#### 4. Which of the following sentences is correct?

Negatives		
Option	Answer	Percentage
We haven't never seen a tornado that big.	8	26.7%
We haven't no seen a tornado that big.	0	0%
We have never seen a tornado that big.	22	73.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

4- Which of the following sentences is correct?

30 respuestas



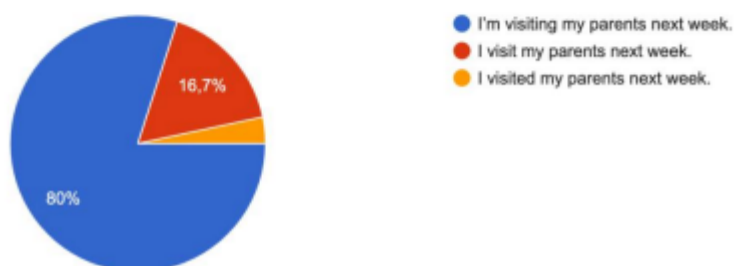
In question four, 73.3% of students demonstrated proficiency in applying the rule against using double negatives in sentences, effectively employing a prescriptive approach. In contrast, 26.6% of sophomores are unfamiliar with the double negative rule. However, the majority of students still adhere to the correct sentence structure, avoiding the use of double negatives.

**5. Which of the following sentences is correct?**

Verb tenses		
Option	Answer	Percentage
I'm visiting my parents next week.	24	80%
I visit my parents next week.	5	16.7%
I visited my parents next week.	1	3.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

5- Which of the following sentences is correct?

30 respuestas



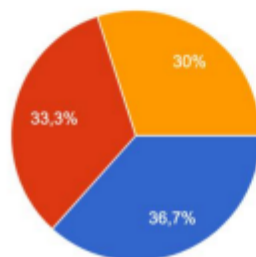
In question five, 80% of the surveyed sophomore students chose the correct form of the verb tense by applying present progressive as future. This reflects their knowledge about the different rules to use present progressive tense and a great influence of prescriptive grammar that teaches those rules. 16.7% of students selected the second option, and only 3.3% chose the third one, which shows that 20% of the respondents are not being directly influenced by prescriptive grammar, and they do not know the rules of usage of this tense.

**6. Which of the following sentences is incorrect?**

Conjunctions		
Option	Answer	Percentage
Steve submitted the homework on time. But, he forgot to do the last exercise.	11	36.7%
Steve submitted the homework on time, but he forgot to do the last exercise.	10	33.3%
Steve submitted the homework on time. But he forgot to do the last exercise.	9	30%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

6- Which of the following sentences is incorrect?

30 respuestas



- Steve submitted the homework on time. But, he forgot to do the last exercise.
- Steve submitted the homework on time, but he forgot to do the last exercise.
- Steve submitted the homework on time. But he forgot to do the last exercise.

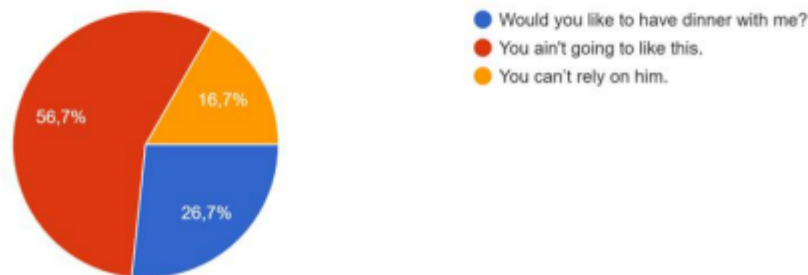
In question six, the results revealed strikingly similar percentages among the options chosen by surveyed students. Combining the first option at 36.7% and the third option at 30%, it was observed that 66.7% of the surveyed population is evidently influenced by prescriptive grammar, deeming the use of conjunctions at the start of a sentence as incorrect.

### 7. Which of the following expressions is incorrect?

Level of formality		
Option	Answer	Percentage
Would you like to have dinner with me?	8	26.7%
You ain't going to like this.	17	56.7%
You can't rely on him.	5	16.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.1%</b>

7- Which of the following expressions is incorrect?

30 respuestas



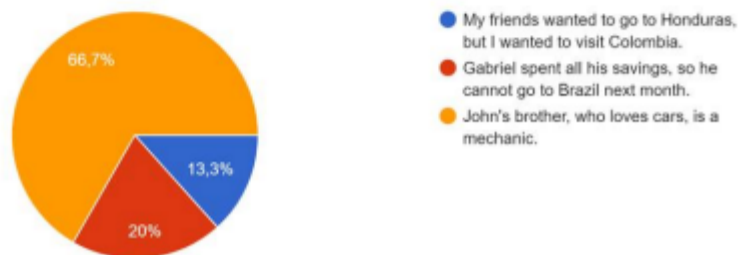
The majority of surveyed students, 56.7%, could identify informality in a sentence, as reflected in their preference for the second option. This highlights the influence of prescriptive grammar, wherein a grammatical rule order and formality are adhered to. The first answer garnered 26.7%, and the third option received 16.7%.

**8. Which of the following statements is not a compound sentence?**

Sentences		
Option	Answers	Percentage
My friends wanted to go to Honduras, but I wanted to visit Colombia	4	13.3%
Gabriel spent all his savings, so he cannot go to Brazil next month.	6	20%
John's brother, who loves cars, is a mechanic.	20	66.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

8- Which of the following statements is not a compound sentence?

30 respuestas



The survey highlighted a strong preference for response number three, receiving 66.7% of the votes, showcasing the influence of prescriptive grammar in these students' written work. In second place, we have the second answer with 20%, and the first answer received 13.3%.

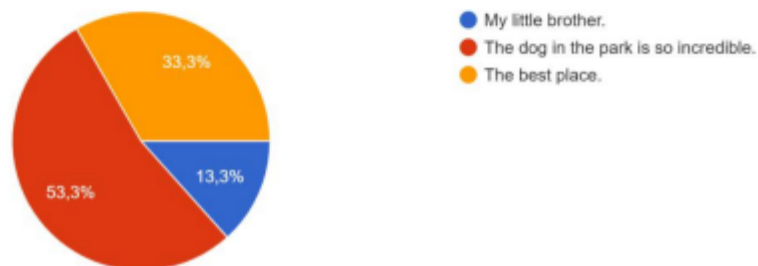


**9. Which of the following statements is not a noun phrase itself?**

Phrases		
Option	Answer	Percentage
My little brother.	4	13.3%
The dog in the park is so incredible.	16	53.3%
The best place.	10	33.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

9- Which of the following statements is not a noun phrase itself?

30 respuestas



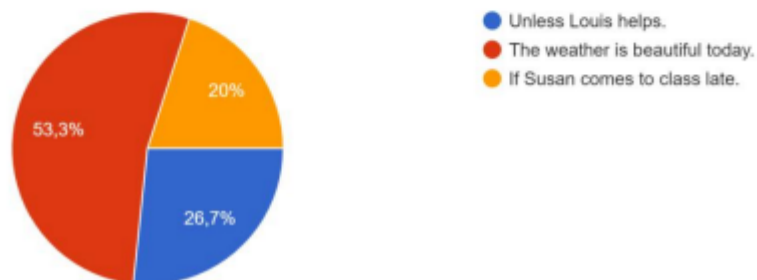
The survey revealed that over half of the students, 53.3%, chose the second answer, while the first one garnered 13.3%, and the third one received 33.3%. A majority of students leaned towards the answer aligned with prescriptive grammar due to its nature and structure, whereas the remaining students favored answers more characteristic of descriptive grammar.

**10. Which of the following statements is not a dependent clause?**

Clauses		
Option	Answer	Percentage
Unless Louis helps.	8	26.7%
The weather is beautiful today.	16	53.3%
If Susan comes to class late.	6	20%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

10- Which of the following statements is not a dependent clause?

30 respuestas



The second option received the highest number of selections at 53.3%, while the remaining 46.7% was divided between the first option at 26.7% and the third option at 20%. This demonstrates a stronger preference for sentences adhering to the rules of prescriptive grammar, with others choosing options diverging from the question's requirements.

## Results and data analysis of the teacher survey

Category	Answer
Teaching time	- 2 years or more
Difficulties	- Previous knowledge - Low L2 proficiency - Poor background knowledge about Spanish grammar
Grammar approach	- Prescriptive grammar approach
Importance of grammar	- It is the core of writing - It is a must for non-native English speakers
Written production affection	- Lack of reading produces poor writing, poor vocabulary, and interlinguistic errors

	techniques and strategies applied during the class session
Written expression	- Grammar and written expression have to be hand-by-hand

Grammatical errors	- Errors in syntax, morphology, semantics, and usage
Appropriate approach to use	- Prescriptive grammar approach for written production - Descriptive grammar approach for oral communication
Activities in the classroom	- Completing exercises- fill-in-the blank exercises - Sentence completion - Cloze exercises - Q&A activities - Live quizzes & feedback - Paragraph writing - Error analysis
Grammar teaching influence	- It is not about the method, but the teaching

Being a teacher with just over 2 years of teaching grammar experience, this teacher highlights common student challenges, such as a lack of prior grammar knowledge and familiarity with Spanish grammar rules. Recognizing the centrality of grammar in writing, especially for non-native speakers, the teacher advocates for effective teaching methods. This entails implementing activities like sentence completion, live quizzes with feedback, and error analysis. Importantly, it is not the method, but rather the teaching techniques and strategies within a class session that influence students, emphasizing the need for a seamless connection between grammar and written expression in instruction.

## Discussion, Conclusions, and Suggestions

After analyzing and interpreting the data, the following conclusions were drawn:

I. In relation to the independent variable "prescriptive grammar teaching," this investigation confirms the hypothesis that professors at the Eastern Campus of the University of El Salvador employ this approach when teaching grammar to their students. This conclusion is based on the outcome of teacher interviews, where one teacher explicitly stated that the prescriptive grammar approach is the method employed in their classroom.

II. It is apparent that students are significantly influenced by the prescriptive grammar approach, as indicated by the survey results, which demonstrate that most students selected options aligned with this grammatical style.

III. Despite the prevalence of students favoring the prescriptive grammar approach, there exists a percentage who either lean toward a descriptive grammar approach or potentially lack a comprehensive understanding of grammatical rules in general.

IV. In reference to the dependent variable "writing production," the findings contradict the hypothesis that prescriptive grammar has a detrimental effect on the writing abilities of sophomore students. On the contrary, according to the obtained results, surveyed students consistently selected the correct options in line with acceptable standards of grammar in the target language, indicating a positive impact on their writing production.

Based on the information above, the following suggestions can be shared:

I. Educators should persist in instructing their students in prescriptive grammar because extensive research has unequivocally demonstrated its favorable impact on their written production and composition skills.

II. From insights from teacher interviews, it is evident that a prescriptive grammar approach can be used effectively to improve students' writing skills, while a descriptive grammar approach is valuable in honing their command of spoken language.

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