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## Grammatical Challenges in Academic Writing: A Study of Common Errors among ESL Students

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores common grammatical challenges faced by ESL (English as a Second Language) students in academic writing, focusing on prevalent errors such as subject-verb agreement, verb tense, article use, and sentence structure. By analyzing writing samples from university-level ESL learners, the research identifies patterns of grammatical mistakes and investigates the underlying causes, such as L1 (first language) interference and inadequate exposure to English syntax. The findings reveal that errors in verb tense and articles are particularly frequent, often due to differences between the grammatical structures of the students' native languages and English. The study also examines the pedagogical implications of these errors and suggests effective strategies for addressing them, including targeted grammar instruction and the use of writing workshops. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on improving academic writing proficiency among ESL learners and highlights the importance of

tailored teaching methodologies. The paper emphasizes the need for educators to focus on error analysis and the adaptation of teaching approaches to meet the specific needs of ESL students. This view, bolstered by contemporary second language acquisition research, is important for promoting the grammatical accuracy of ESL students in their written assignments (Ellis, 2008; Ferris, 2011).

## Introduction

Academic writing is a core competency for students, especially at every step of education. However, mastering academic writing skills add significant challenges, particularly to non-native speakers, often referred as English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Writing academically is quite advanced as it entails writing in a clear, exact, and stiff manner. ESL learners, however, struggle more so because of problems related to grammar. This challenge is usually attributed to different levels of English mastery amongst the learners, influence of one's mother tongue, and the differences in English language structure and the first language of the learners.

In the past few years and due to globalization, the role of English as the medium of communication has been extended to academic writing. In the last decade the trend and importance of academic writing seen in a lot of the world has increased due to scientific pinch globalization. In spite of this, there exists a persistent problem when it comes to writing in English as Second Language students, which is the use of grammar. When it comes to writing for instance there is a problem with regards to the use of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, and sentence structure among other issues. In the past few years and due to globalization, the role of English as the medium of communication has been extended to academic writing. In the last decade, the trend and importance of academic writing seen in a lot of the world have increased due to scientific pinch globalization. Despite this, there exists a persistent problem when it comes to writing in English as a second language student, which is the use of grammar. When it comes to writing, for instance, there is a problem with the use of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, and sentence structure, among other issues. For instance, these wrong usages impair the clarity and logical flow of their works and weaken their capacity to conform to academic writing requirements. An individual who proposes to understand ESL learners' challenges cannot overlook the study of grammar.

For example, some types of errors are common across several language groups, while some vary depending on the second language acquisition and an individual's native language. A good case in point is that people from article-less languages such as Chinese and Japanese have problems with the proper use of articles in English (Bitchener et al.,2005). On the other hand, students coming from language backgrounds, that do not have the same tense structure as that of English, have difficulties in the use of past, present, and future tenses (Ferris, 2011).

This study aims to explore the grammatical problems that ESL students encounter most frequently when writing in an academic setting. Such types of errors help us to understand what aspects of language teaching may be modified or changed to better meet the needs of ESL students. It will also address the issues faced by the students and the writing assistance services to be provided for the students in order to enhance good academic writing.

### **Importance of Grammar in Academic Writing**

In academic writing, grammar is fundamental in relaying ideas in a clear and professional manner. Concerns with grammar can complicate clarity of ideas, diminish the strength of arguments, and lower the respect to the writer's ideas. Grammaticality is, however, as said by Hinkel (2004), not only a matter of linguistic competence, but it is also an important element on the way academic

writing is viewed by instructors, comrades or even editors. Grammar helps structure the communication of ideas; something that is very important in scholarly interaction. It is therefore important for students and instructors to know the usual grammatical problems of ESL learners.

Grammar is crucial for Academic writing for students as it directly impact clarity, credibility, and professionalism of their work. In academic writing proper grammar is essential for effective and accurate communication. ESL students often face significant challenges in mastering the intricacies of English grammar, which can hinder academic success. Addressing grammatical challenges help improve the quality of academic writings.

Key Points on the Importance of Grammar in Academic Writing for ESL Students:

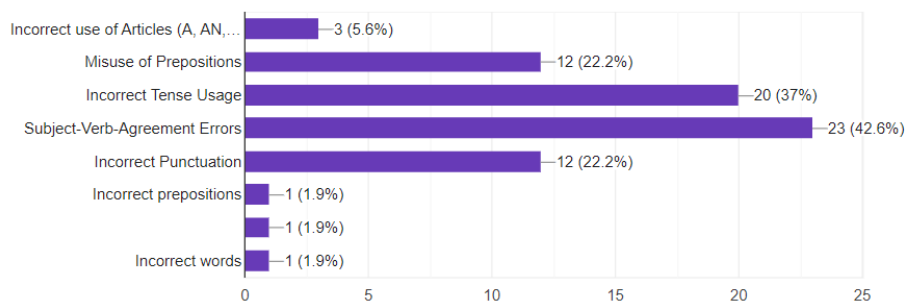
- **Clarity and Understanding:** Grammatical lapses may alter the intended meaning of utterances and create ambiguity. Proper grammar is imperative to the clear transmission of ideas. In particular ESL students face challenges with matters of the agreement of a subject to a verb, tenses, sentence composition and such where their written work becomes incomprehensible. For instance, Hyland (2019) asserts that every form of academic writing must have a clear grammatical structure to help the reader in knowing how to follow the writer's argument without any doubts.
- **Credibility and Professionalism:** Most people have the view that academic writing reveals the writer's educational qualifications as well as ability. While grammatical errors may encourage the writing, she may reduce the confidence of such a writer thus making them look less skillful. ESL learners sometimes incur article troubles because their native tongues do not require such grammatical logic which rather brings out a formal outlook in their writing (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). The absence of such writing techniques may lead to poorer grades or rejection of the writing due to lack of submission.
- **Grammar and Academic success:** Research indicates that students who have good command of grammar skills are likely to complete academic writing tasks with ease. ESL learners who are taught grammar and writing skills practice regularly get better in writing skills over some time. In line with this, Ferris (2011) indicates that explicit instruction in grammar, particularly in areas like syntax and morphology, vastly improves the academic writing of ESL students.
- **Accuracy in Arguments:** In academic correspondence, accurate grammar is important as it assists in building coherent arguments as well as conveying intricate concepts. On the

other hand, students learning English as a second language are constrained in sentence complexity and punctuation thereby affecting its strength. In a similar perspective, a point raised by Ferris (2009) indicates that failure to use appropriate grammar can alter the message the writer intended to pass to the reader and change the applicability of the claims made.

- **Error Patterns in ESL Writing:** Among ESL learners, some of the widespread grammatical mistakes include incorrect use of prepositions, articles, misuse of verb forms and incorrect placements (Dulay & Burt, 1974). Such repeating tendencies are as a result of the first language of the learners and the acquired mother tongue proficiency of English grammar. It is important to appreciate these errors as this will make it easy to give relevant comments to students and help improve their academic writing.

### Common Grammatical Errors in ESL Students/ Learners

Comprehending the particular linguistic contexts of the learners helps to focus on instruction and correction effectively. Many of the common grammar mistakes made by ESL students arise due to the contrasting characteristics of English and other native tongues sundries. Therefore, by addressing these areas, ESL instructors and academic writers can help them better prepare students for grammatical issues present in academic writing.



*Fig.1 Grammatical Errors in ESL Learners*

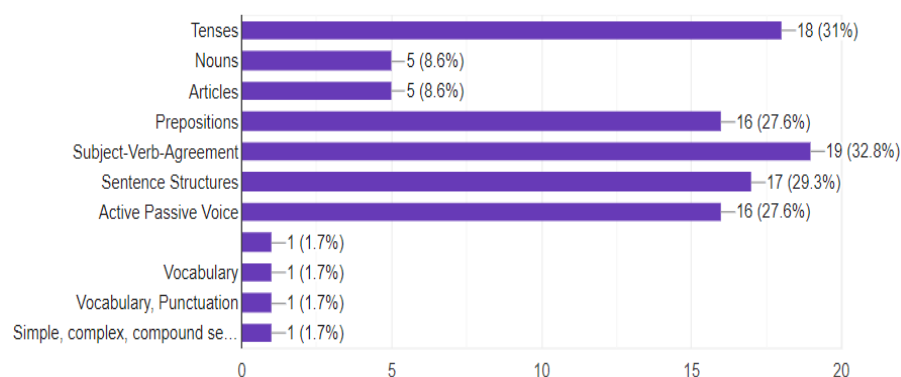
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- **Subject-Verb-Agreement:** It is one of the most frequent error that most of academic writers where learners fail to match Singular and Plural subject with the correct for of verb. For instance: “*She go to Hospital.*” Instead of saying “*She goes to Hospital.*” ESL learners mostly forget to match the verb with the subject, especially with *third-person singulars* in present tense.
- **Tense Usage:** This is one of the most common errors seen in ESL learners where they get confused which differentiating between Past, Present, and Future Tense. Such as “*I go to office yesterday*” instead of saying “*I went to office Yesterday.*” ESL learners might use wrong tense because they get confused with the rules which might not be clear to them as when taught or the way might they have been taught.
- **Articles (A, AN, THE):** Another common error which can be seen is use of Articles (A, AN, THE) ESL learners omit articles (Definite and Indefinite) and even may use incorrect articles. For Example: “*I have car.*” Instead of saying “*I have a car.*” Many language have different uses and may have different articles or may not, they leads to confusion for students.
- **Prepositions:** Errors in Prepositions is also one the major widespread error among learners and majorly misused prepositions are *In, On, At, To, For*. For Example: “*I am walking since two hours.*” Instead of saying “*I’m walking for two hours.*” The use of prepositions mostly varies between the languages, which makes it one of the hardest aspects for ESL learners.
- **Word order and Sentence Structure:** This error is generally one of the most common errors ESL learners faces on their daily life is because in their Native Language the sentence structure is used **Subject-Object-Verb** but in English grammar we use it as **Subject-Verb-Object**. Most of the time this error is seen in Negative Sentences such as “*Why you are late?*” instead of using the structure as “*Why are you late?*”

### Challenges in Academic Context

From a pedagogical perspective, grammar has often been a major hindrance to the learning of ESL (English as a Second Language) students who, as a result, find it difficult to write in an organized and effective manner. Perfecting such details of English as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, Prepositions and articles can prove frustrating to even the most talented second language speaker. According to research, a lot of time and attention is wasted by ESL learners on

these causes which diminish the quality and the professionalism of their written works (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). Such factors have been established in a study conducted by Hyland (2019) where the aspects of grammar were noted to have a great impact in enhancing communication but making academic writing so boring that there are lots of grammatical errors especially for elaborative sentences. These issues can emerge from the influence of the learner's native language or the lack of adequate practice with formal English writing patterns (Swales & Feak, 2012). It is important to tackle these issues to facilitate the integration of the students in the academic community and guarantee their success in academic activities.



***Fig.2 Challenges faced by ESL Learners***

- Sentence structure is a common area of difficulty for ESL students. The subject-verb-object (SVO) structure of English may differ from their home tongue's grammatical structures because ESL students can find it difficult to discern between dependent and independent clauses or may punctuate incorrectly, they frequently utilize run-on phrases and sentence fragments. Together, these grammatical difficulties make it difficult for them to communicate concepts in English precisely and clearly.
- Because verb forms are complicated and have varying usage in different contexts, tenses pose a substantial problem for ESL students. English has several tenses, including present, past, and future, with continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous varieties, unlike many other languages. ESL students frequently make mistakes because they are unable to discern the tiny differences between these tenses, especially when it comes to accurately using future forms or differentiating between the simple past and present perfect. The irregularity of many verbs adds to this problem, making it more difficult for pupils to understand and consistently use the correct tense when writing and speaking.

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- Another troublesome area is articles (a, an, and the). Many languages still require an article system akin to that of English. This results in the misuse, abuse, or overuse of articles.
- Considering how different prepositions are used in different languages, prepositions can present many challenges. Prepositions like "in," "on," and "at," for example, might be confused by students, resulting in strange constructions.

### Pedagogical Solutions and Implications

The Pedagogical Solutions focus on both implicit and explicit learning strategies, balancing grammar practice with authentic grammar feedback and learning exposure. By focusing on practical strategies that ESL learners may use to overcome common grammatical errors. Here is structure that includes various pedagogical solutions and implications:

- **Reading Newspapers, Novels, Books, etc.** is one the major solution students feel which can help in overcoming their grammatical errors. This may help with the exposure of authentic language through extensive reading which helps ESL learners internalize grammar patterns. By encouraging students to read widely especially in academic and journalistic contexts which provides real life examples of grammar in action. While the student engages in the tasks, he is able to actively use the grammar rules which make most of the academic writing correct. Ellis's studies (2006) emphasize that the understanding and retention of grammatical structures is enhanced by completing written work containing them.
- Whereas, some of the students think that providing **clear and accessible grammar rules** for revision through study guides, handbooks and more. Explanations should be clear and concise for understanding and should focus on common mistakes which are faced by ESL learners such as misuse of Prepositions, Articles, Tenses, etc. Clear understanding of rules behind grammar will help learners to develop a conscious awareness on their errors.
- **Personalized feedback from Teacher or Tutor** is the third selected solution by the learners which they feel is an effective solution to improve their grammatical errors. This is actually helpful in addressing and improving grammatical errors. One-on-one classes or small group consultation provides opportunities to address needs of individual learners, clear difficult concepts, and provide targeted practice exercises. Research by Lee (2017)

indicates that the correct feedback during consultation which have significant impact on improving ESL learners grammatical accuracy.

- **Attractive Modern Technological tools** also provide assisted grammar software's for checking grammar mistakes and language- learning applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, etc. which offer additional resources for ESL learners by practicing vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciations in an attractive manner. AI (Artificial Intelligence) helps learners to get lots of material easily available whatever they require like how to ask questions, conversations, receive grammar corrections, etc. Studies done by Chapelle (2003) showcased that technology can enhance grammar instruction by providing them personalized feedback with clear definition of mistake and giving access to learners to practice at their own time and pace.

### **Suggestions for Improving Academic Writings:**

- **Error Correction Strategies:** Cite procedures for correcting errors that involve self-reflection. For instance, teachers are able to use supported peer review, self-editing checklists, and unique feedback to initiate students to point out and correct their grammatical errors.
- **Focused Grammar Instructions:** Support the proposal that extensive grammatical instruction should be incorporated in an ESL learner's academic writing classes. Lessons should be focused on areas in problems such as tenses or articles or sentence structures. Such grammar problems can be solved by targeted grammar exercises.
- **Practice through Writing Essays:** Suggest that students should be encouraged to practice writing regularly to promote the proper use of grammar. For instance, rather short reflective essays or a writing journal may provide ESL students the opportunities to utilize grammar skills within a real setting while active feedback is given.
- **Peer review Sessions:** Encouraging ESL learners to engage in peer review exercises where they discuss and comment on each other's work facilitates the provision of additional comments and assessments to the learners. It also helps them appreciate in what areas their mates are strong and in what ones they are weak.
- **Group Writing Projects:** Team-based writing activities can also lead to improve learning since the students help one another overcome challenges associated with grammar. Such



an approach fosters collaboration that invites the practice of peer teaching grammar rules to cement their understanding.

### **The Significance of Addressing Grammar Challenges**

- **Enhance Academic Performance:** Effective academic communication hinges on grammatical accuracy. Students of English as a second language (ESL) tend to experience difficulties with grammar that invariably affect the clarity, coherence and even quality of their written work. In turn, overcoming such problems assists in elevating their academic achievements by allowing them to submit more presentable and professional pieces of work.
- **Improving Communication Skills:** Effective communication hinges upon proper grammar usage. Your research seeks to identify ways which can help ESL students avoid structural mistakes, which in turn, assists in clearly and persuasively articulating their thoughts. This ensures that even complicated academic ideas can be communicated with clarity.
- **Global Competence:** As the prevalent language within the educational system, it is important to incorporate addressing the grammar issues that ESL students face since this will enhance their participation in global academic interaction. This enables them to engage in learning environments that are not restricted by geographical boundaries and contribute positively to the global academia.
- **Bridging the Achievement Gap:** As mentioned earlier, many ESL students have additional barriers to their studies when compared to students who speak English as a first language due to language difficulties. Coping with such grammatical problems evens the playing field and enables these students to strive to realise their academic potential and honing their skills without being held back by linguistic challenges.
- **Supports Language Acquisition:** Tackling problems related to grammar is of utmost importance when it comes to learning languages. This is because, by pinpointing certain mistakes and proposing certain counter actions, an academic work can help develop some teaching methods which will help teach English grammar to ESL learners quickly and effectively. This promotes their general language skills and ensures their better achievement in education and career later in life.

### **Methodology:**

The investigation titled, 'Grammatical Challenges in Academic Writing: A Study of Common Errors among ESL Students,' involved the use of a well-structured questionnaire. The sample of this research included 60 ESL students from a range of academic institutions and disciplines. The questionnaire sought to find out the particular grammatical problems, which the students were facing in their categorical schooling. The questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended questions, which sought to provide an in-depth perspective. Most of the closed-ended questions dealt with frequent grammatical problems, regarding aspects such as, the consistency of verb tenses, agreement of subjects and verbs, and construction of ideas in sentences, where quantification of occurrence of these faults was possible. Open-ended questions enabled students to articulate their views and experiences on the challenges encountered during writing assignments. Hence qualitative information enhancing the quantitative results was obtained.

In order to calibrate and evaluate the questionnaire, an initial small scale study was undertaken with a different group of ESL students and adjustments made accordingly. The final version of the questionnaires was sent out to the participants through email where they were assured that their identities would be kept private to promote candid responses. Data collected in respect of respondents arrived were inspected through the use of software and trend analysis carried out to patterns of issues with grammatical construction focused on common errors that would suggest reasons for the broad based research gap. Results of this analysis provides specific aspects that are problematic to ESL learners as well as understanding of the challenges posed by pedagogical tactics in the teaching of grammar in relation to writing skills. In doing so, the study aims to direct these focus areas towards teachers and curriculum developers.

### **Results:**

A study carried out using a questionnaire with 60 ESL students (School going and Undergraduate Students) showed a number of significant grammatical problems in academic writing. The findings showed that students had issues with subject-verb agreement, incorrect verb tenses, and punctuation; all of which inhibited their ability to express their ideas clearly. A large number of the respondents indicated that they had an issue with the use of combining sentences, hence defaulting to the use of single sentences that were, in most cases, shallow. There were also problems with the use of articles and prepositions, which indicates that these areas may need

focus on instruction. Overall, this research outlines the need for effective grammar teaching and strategies to develop the academic writing skills of ESL students.

### Gender Number/ Percentage of Participants

Male: 60%

Female: 40%

### Conclusion

In closing, this research emphasizes the considerable difficulties in grammar that ESL learners encounter in every academic writing activity, illustrating typical mistakes that can impact communication in academic terms. The examination of these difficulties stresses the need for focused teaching and facilitative approaches to develop grammar skills in ESL learners. Addressing some concerns with such writing helps students enhance their skills resulting in better performance and morale. The next studies should still investigate new techniques and tools which can better help ESL learners in tackling those grammatical barriers in order to promote their efficiency in academic settings.

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