

Teaching Pedagogical Grammar in Context to Enrich English Language Learners' Academic Writing

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ABSTRACT

Studies and research reveal that most English language learners (ELLs) encounter challenges when they write an academic paper in English due to lack of grammar. As most international universities require passing international tests as TOEFL, IELTS, GMAT, GRE, and other tests with high level, most international students fail to achieve this requirement. The reason, as some studies and research reveal, is attributed to lack of pedagogical grammar, namely in writing. Hence, this paper focuses on how to teach pedagogical grammar to help ELLs write effectively in academic situations. The paper is based on literature review and interviewing nine ELLs, regarding the challenges they encounter while writing in academic situations. The researcher has used qualitative research method to fulfill this study, trying to investigate about the challenges that ELLs encounter while writing in academic situations. This study is directed to explore whether teaching pedagogical grammar is helpful to enhance and enrich ELLs academic writing or not. Findings of this study show that ELLs encounter challenges in writing in academic contexts due to lack of grammar. The findings also show that lack of pedagogical grammar results in low level of grades and achievement in the four language skills, namely writing. This study also provides recommendations that might be used to further investigate and provide some strategies, regarding teaching pedagogical grammar in writing contexts to enhance ELLs academic writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students, in general, write for the purpose of expressing facts, ideas, feelings, or thoughts to be shared with others, who might be potential readers or student writers themselves – as in the case of freewriting. Either writing publically (to others) or privately (to themselves), writing is still a social activity that requires intercommunication between two parties: sender (writer) and receiver (reader) through a medium (language). International students, who pursue their masters' or doctorates' studies in English-speaking countries, are required to write essays in international tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, GMAT, and they like to get academic admission in most international universities. When international students get admission and start school, they are, also; required to write papers, dissertations, theses, or academic assignments as part of their course work. Of course, writing in academic situations is not an easy task for most international students. In addition to using high level of language, academic writing requires knowledge about how

writers use pedagogical grammar in multiple different academic situations.

Generally speaking, writers use grammatical rules in order to change meanings of words and sentences. As a result, meanings of main ideas change. Therefore, grammatical knowledge provides international students with greater flexibility and ability as academic writers. Hence, it is significant that teachers focus on teaching pedagogical grammar in several academic writing contexts. Teaching pedagogical grammar in academic writing contexts enhances and enriches students' academic writing. So, the purpose of this paper is to shed some lights on the significance of teaching pedagogical grammar in writing context to enhance and enrich international students' academic writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A large number of research and studies emphasize the significant role of teaching pedagogical grammar in context to enhance and enrich ELLs' academic writing. Research and studies reveal that pedagogical

grammar assists ELLs to diversify their style and structure of writing. It, also; helps them show their own voice as competent writers. Chomsky (2006) shows the significance of grammar in learning foreign languages, namely writing, emphasizing that grammar “generates an infinite set of ‘structural descriptions,’ each structural description being an abstract object of some sort that determines a particular sound, a particular meaning, and whatever formal properties and configurations serve to mediate the relation between sound and meaning” (pp. 91-92). Hence, this part of study is devoted to highlight literature review regarding writing, grammar, and significance of using pedagogical grammar in context to enhance ELLs’ academic writing.

2.1. Writing

In its wider sense, writing is a social activity which people use to construct knowledge and share ideas and feelings. In its narrower sense, writing is defined as “a deliberate act; one has to make up one’s mind to do it” (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen, 1975, p. 22). Skolnick (2000), also, defines writing as “a way for students to discover deeper levels of their thinking” (p. 122). The above definitions refer to the fact that writing is a process that involves getting inner speech from one’s head into a piece of paper. Based on such an idea, the process of writing is difficult to recognize because no one knows what is going on inside the writer’s mind. Readers see only the product, not the process.

Garrison (1985) assures the idea of the inner speech presented by Britton et al, saying that writing “is not a series of formulas to follow. Writing is what you have in your mind to say and your search for the right combinations of words to say it” (p. 5). Back to Britton et al., it is clear that writing is not just a process of transforming oral speech into written, but it is also a process of transforming inner speech in mind into concrete words in a piece of paper. In other words, it is a process of making words in the writer’s head heard by readers through written words in a piece of paper.

From another angle, Bartholomae (1987) believes that writing is “a solitary activity and writers are limited by the assumptions they carry with them to the act of writing. They are limited, that is, by the limits of their ability to imagine what writing is and how writers behave” (p. 88). This, of course, leads us

to Vygotsky’s differentiation between spoken language and written language. Dissimilar to spoken language, written language requires artificial training, which entails students to know the system of signs and sounds that represent the reality. Not away from Vygotsky, Lindeman (2001) conditions that readers should be aware of rhetoric and graphic system of that language in order to understand what is written. This means that ELLs need to improve cultural and linguistic awareness about English in order to convey clear and concise messages through writing in English.

Studies and research show that students’ attitudes and feelings toward writing are the most significant signs of verbal development. In other words, students develop their skills in reading, speaking, listening, and writing when they find it easy to improve their fluency and satisfaction in these language activities. When students find out the role of oracy and literacy in their lives, they appreciate how important language is in helping them socialize and communicate with others. Thus, writing, as Emig (1994) believes, “represents a unique mode of learning – not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique” (p. 89). Also, Calkins (1986) said, “For me, it is helpful to think of writing as a process of dialogue between the writer and the emerging text” (p. 19).

Though Zinsser (1988) sees that everyone can write, he defines writing as “a basic skill for getting through life” (pp. 10-11). The word “skill” in Zinsser’s definition indicates that there are some steps that writers should follow to get the product, namely in the case of academic writing. For seeing writing as stages and a process, Miller and Paola (2005) said, “You must have the patience to watch the piece evolve, and you need an awareness of your stages. You must know when you can go pell-mell with the heat of creation, and when you must settle down, take a wider view, and make some choices that will determine the essay’s final shape” (p. 153).

Writing, accordingly, includes several activities that work collaboratively. These activities may include: selecting appropriate words, using conventions, answering questions, reading, reviewing, assessing, editing, listening, and posing questions in mind. Elbow (1998) summarizes all these activities in one step as “your words must go through stages” (p. 44).

Like a potato plant, writing entails stems and leaves and requires digging deeper so that writers can express their ideas effectively (Lane, 1993). Accordingly, a writer's job is just as the cabinetmaker's. The first task a cabinetmaker thinks of before designing a table is to decide the purpose of making a table. After deciding the purpose of the table, the cabinetmaker designs the dimensions of the table, which helps in choosing the materials. The job of making the table does not end with selecting the materials and designing the table, but the work starts with assembling these materials to make the final product. The same task is for a writer: deciding what to write, designing and shaping the form, collecting the ideas and thoughts, and starting writing (Garrison, 1985).

2.2. Challenges of Writing at School

Studies and research reveal that writing is always problematic at school. For example, Allen (2000) said, "The 'writing problem' in our universities is really a humanism problem" (p. 287). Also, Britton et al. (1975) said, "Writing is often difficult, and not only for the learner: for some kinds of writing, in fact, the difficulties may actually increase as the writer becomes more proficient" (p. 19). Lamberg (1977) explains that "instruction in writing, at both the high school and college levels, has frequently been criticized for the inappropriate emphasis on the finished product and the corresponding neglect of the process of composing" (p. 26). Also, Bell (1991) believes that "although we teach writing organization in college, we usually instruct from written language rather than from oral language. For example, we have students note that their writing is too general and not specific. We instruct from the written language gestalt rather than from the oral language gestalt" (p. 177)

Ibrahim and Nambiar (2011) were more specific in the genre of writing difficulty, saying, "It cannot be denied that academic writing is an arduous task for international students" (p. 1716). Mukundan (2011), also, said, "In the writing classroom, the developing world learner (especially from North Asia, South Asia and Far East, who has been nurtured in a teacher-book support system) will be psychologically paralyzed" (p. 189). Similar to the situation of writing in Asia, Hisham (Cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2010) concludes in his study that Arab students, who study business at University Utara Malaysia, encounter problems regarding grammar in their

academic writing. Mohamed (2018) conducted a study on a number of Libyan students, who were studying at Tennessee State University in the United States, and concluded that "The difficulty of university study arises when it comes to academic writing, group discussion, and critical thinking. This causes some international students to lag behind their native-English speaking peers who are also pursuing graduate degree" (pp. 122-123).

In his study in 2014, Elraggas (Cited in Mohamed, 2018) found out that Libyan graduate students encounter writing difficulties when they apply to admit to American universities. They had difficulties to write in academic situations. Similarly, McPherron (2011) believes that English language learners fear of academic writing even for those who studied English for long time. For example, in his academic writing class in China, McPherron notices that the students have been studying English for more than ten years, and some of them have passed Chinese English Test (CET) and have passed advanced levels in English, yet they feel so nervous when they start writing in academic situations. This fear causes students to stop trying writing academic essays.

Hartwell (1985) Farrell (1987) attributes the reason that many college students fail to write in academic situations to the lack of using grammar in writing contexts. This is due to the traditional methods of teaching grammar apart from its writing context. Bean (2001) sees that teaching grammar in academic context is "a difficult goal to achieve" (p. 54). Garcia (2010) puts the blame of teaching grammar apart from its writing contexts on the shoulders of the traditional methods of teaching, which separate form and syntax from meaning and pragmatics. This separation makes ELLs confused about using some grammatical structures in some situations, and not in others. Garcia provides the solution for this problem as "learners will need to master both morphological and syntactic principles before they can begin to face some mood selection cases" (p. 75).

Achard (Cited in Garcia, 2010) attributes the problems that international students encounter while using grammar in writing to the way these students deal with grammatical rules as "a property of the system, and not a result of the speaker's choice" (p. 75). This, of course, leads to separation of meaning from structure; that is, separation of semantics from grammar. Not so far from Achard, Kambal (Cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2010) attributes the errors that

college Sudanese students commit in writing to lack of grammar. He notices that college Sudanese students commit errors in verb phrase, such as subject-verb agreement and verb formation besides other grammatical errors, such as tense, namely perfect tenses. Similarly, Al-Khasawneh (2010) concludes in his paper that the ten Arab students (five Jordanians, two Libyans, two Iraqis, and one Yamani), the participants of his study, encounter difficulties in writing due to lack of grammar.

Al-Khasawneh's conclusion and Kambal's indicate that difficulty in grammar leads to difficulty in writing. If we take it conversely, this means that grammar enhances writing, which is asserted by Ong (1982), who said, "It is impossible to use language without a grammar" (p. 106). In this vein, Weaver (2008) sees that teaching students a minimal quantity of grammar in writing context does not only enrich students' writing, but it also makes students powerful writers.

While discussing about grammar, we cannot neglect that fact that most students do not like learning grammar. Most students, as Weaver (1996a) indicates, see that grammar is boring and difficult to learn. Elbow (2000) justifies the reason that students do not like learning grammar because teachers teach grammar as a class subject *per se*. Teachers do not teach students how to use grammar in writing contexts. Even when teachers teach grammar in writing context, they teach a large quantity of traditional grammar. In fact, when teachers overuse traditional grammar in writing context, learning grammar in writing becomes a difficult and dull process. Moreover, most teachers teach grammar in isolation of its writing contexts. Neuleib (Cited in Hartwell, 1985) reviewed five experimental studies on writing, reaching the point that "formal grammar instruction has no effect on the quality of students' writing nor on their ability to avoid error" (p. 106). Kolln, also, reviewed six experimental studies and reached the same conclusion.

Furthermore, most high school students think of writing as a process of putting words on a piece of paper in a form of three-paragraph essay (Calkins, 1986). This might be true, but still how to write these three paragraphs is problematic for most students. Some students find difficulties in arranging ideas in a form of paragraph (cohesion) because these students

lack connective grammatical structures (cohesive). For that reason, Weaver (2008) believes that "teachers assume that students who speak and write using stigmatized forms don't know grammar and that they struggle with possession, verb agreement, plurality, and so on" (p. 239). Thus, lack of grammar is the most remarkable reason that makes writing problematic and difficult to learn and teach. The question that is posed here is: What is grammar? The answer of this question is the theme of the next part.

2.3. Grammar

To say that grammar is essential in writing enforces me, first, to define grammar. Later, I will try to find how to use pedagogical grammar to enhance and enrich international students' academic writing. According to Andrews (1993), grammar "usually refers to a description of how words and phrases normally relate to each other in oral or written sentences in a language" (p. 152). This definition shows that there is a relationship between words in sentences, paragraphs, texts, and contexts. This relationship shows not only how words are related to each other, but it also gives meaning to words according to their relationships with other words in a sentence. In this vein, Omar (2018) wonders that "two different syntactic structures may give nearly the same meaning, and two similar syntactic structures may give different meanings in different languages" (p. 383).

Thus, grammar links style with content, which is fulfilled through the use of grammatical rules or punctuation. Accordingly, grammar is the backbone of language; that is, without grammar, speakers or writers would find difficulties in expressing themselves clearly. Though there is a finite number of grammatical rules, these finite rules produce infinite number of structures and utterances. These finite rules, of course, help users of language use several styles and structures for one form and help them reveal their own voice through diversity of syntactic structures and grammatical rules.

Role of grammar to language, thus, is like the role of skeleton to human body. Without the bone structure (skeleton), the human body would have no shape. It becomes just a mess of flesh and tissues. Similarly, without grammar, language would have no oral or written shape. Garcia (2010) sees grammar as

“communication itself, containing tangible and helpful resources for the construction of output and the understanding of input in the L2” (p. 90). Al-Khasawneh (2010) believes that grammar “is extremely important in conveying accurate messages” (p. 15). Also, Weaver (2008) said, “Conventions are the keys to communication” (p. 67).

Hartwell (1985) defines grammar as “the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings” (p. 352). Also, Lanham (2000) believes that grammar “refers to all the rules that govern how meaningful statements can be made in any language” (p. 117). Lanham definition to grammar is based on Chomsky’s universal grammar theory, which sees that grammar is what makes people create infinite number of structures and meanings. For the role of universal grammar in using language unconsciously, such universal rules enable people to communicate, using different structures and word order to determine the meaning of sentences. For example, to say, “Sam hates Anna” does not entail that “Anna hates Sam”.

Thus, it can be discussed that grammar draws a general framework that enables people to understand meanings of words in a sentence. In other words, grammar helps people reveal what words mean in different structural and semantic contexts. According to Dixon (1995), “grammar exists to code meaning” (p. 175). Due to the large number of definitions to grammar, Weaver (1996a) believes that there are several meanings for grammar according to how people see it in language, so grammar means “a description of the syntactic structures and ‘rules’ of a language, as well as the actual structures and patterns themselves ... It also means a functional command of these structures and patterns, that is, the ability to understand and use a language and its structures” (p. 251).

For that reason, Kollen (Cited in Hartwell, 1985) believes that the word “grammar” requires a clear definition in order to be used effectively. Hartwell (1985) presents five meanings for “grammar,” ranking from number 1 to number 5. Grammar 1 means “the set of formal patterns in which the words of a language are arranged in order to convey larger meanings.” Grammar 2 “is the branch of linguistic science which is concerned with the description, analysis, and formulization of formal language

patterns.” Grammar 3 is “linguistic etiquette ... The word in this sense is often coupled with a derogatory adjective: we say that the expression ‘he ain’t here’ is ‘bad grammar.’” Grammar 4 means “the grammars used in the schools.” Grammar 5 is the “grammatical terms used in the interest of teaching prose style” (pp. 109-110).

Accordingly, it is essential that teachers be aware how to manipulate these five meanings of grammar in writing. Knowing these five meanings help teachers select the required grammar to be taught in classroom in order to help students write. For example, Bean (2001) notices that most of students’ errors are from the types of Grammar 1 and Grammar 3, which means that it is not so easy that students avoid such errors. Teachers might make use of knowing these types of errors, which require practice to avoid them. Identifying students’ errors and ways of correcting them is important in writing as Moore-Hart (2010) explains because “students learn how to write well by finding their own editing and grammar errors. The red ink marks from our corrections only remind students about what they can’t do. They begin to think that they are not good writers; many even give up trying to write” (p. 304).

From another perspective, Chomsky (2006) looks at grammar from two levels: surface structure and deep structure (transformational grammar). Students can benefit from deep structures to vary their surface structures because there are several mental operations between deep and surface structures. The use of deep structures in writing might help students explain ambiguous surface structures. For example, the surface structure “Playing football with them is risky” might be written in several ways, using deep structures, such as “It is risky to play football with them,” “Playing football is risky when it is played with them,” and others. According to Chomsky (2006), “the grammar of English will generate, for each sentence, a deep structure, and will contain rules showing how this deep structure is related to a surface structure” (p. 93).

Aitchison (2003) classifies the transformational grammar principles into three components that work together to enhance writing. These three components are syntactic, which deals with structure; phonological, which deals with sounds; and semantics, which deals with meaning. Aitchison’s perspective about grammar shifts from the narrow definition of grammar as morphology, which “relates

to the way in which words are formed from their meaningful parts, or morphemes” (Wolfram and Estes, 2006, p. 85) and syntax, which “refers to the arrangement of words into larger units as phrases or sentences” (Wolfram and Estes, 2006, p. 87) to a wider one to include phonology and semantics.

Furthermore, Aitchison (2003) goes further to add pragmatics to grammar, saying, “Around the central grammatical hub comes pragmatics, which deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone” (p. 9). Kozulin (1986) agrees with Aitchison in seeing the part of semantics as part of grammar because “behind words, there is the independent grammar of thought, the syntax of word meanings” (p. 222). Some linguists include punctuation to grammar. Readers need to distinguish, for example, between “The great man-made river” and “The great man made river”. The first is a phrase, indicating to the name of the project as one constituent; whereas, the second is a sentence, indicating that there is a great man, and that man made a river.

As we know, there are various types of grammar, amongst of which are

1. Cognitive Grammar, which is “largely mechanical, with the focus exclusively on using a grammatical feature to produce some sort of utterance” (Lee and VanPatten, 2003, p. 123).
2. Mental Grammar, which indicates the “incredible sense of correctness and the ability to hear something that ‘sounds odd’ in a language” (Nordquist, 2014b, para. 1).
3. Universal Grammar, which is defined as “the study of the conditions that must be the grammar of all human languages” (Chomsky, 2006, p. 112).
4. Transformational Grammar, which is defined as a “a grammar which sets up two levels of structures, and relates these levels by means of operations known as transformations” (Aitchison, 2003, p. 200).
5. Comparative Grammar, which is “concerned with a theory of grammar that is postulated to be an innate component of the human mind/brain, a faculty of language that provides an explanatory basis for how a human being can acquire a first language” (Nordquist, 2014a, para. 3).
6. Descriptive Grammar, which refers to “the structure of a language as it is actually used by speakers and writers” (Nordquist, 2004, para. 4).
7. Prescriptive Grammar, which refers to “the structure of a language as certain people think it should be used” (Nordquist, 2004, para. 4).
8. Traditional Grammar, which “focuses on the distinction between what some people do with language and what they ought to do with it, according to a pre-established standard” (Nordquist, 2014c, para. 2).
9. Generative Grammar, which is defined by Oxford Dictionary as “a type of grammar which describes a language in terms of a set of logical rules formulated so as to be capable of generating the infinite number of possible sentences of that language and providing them with the correct structural description.”
10. Operational Grammar, which is based on the idea of teaching both meaning and form as one unit for the purpose of getting what is called “operational values,” which are the outcome of form-meaning associations. These operational values are determined by the speaker’s intention. The operational grammar provides the opportunity to learners to select the linguistic forms that convey the message, then grammar “will be the ultimate means of communication, and not the tool with which to try and communicate” (Garcia, 2010, p. 76).
11. Performance Grammar, which is “a psycholinguistically motivated grammar formalism” (Kempen and Harbusch, 2006, para. 1) that describes and explains the reason of forming the well forms of grammatical sentences according to synthesizing processes for getting well-formed rules and structures.
12. Pedagogical Grammar, which is used for the purpose of enhancing and promoting foreign language learners to acquire language prescriptively and to solve the problems that foreign language learners encounter while learning the foreign language. According to Little (1994), pedagogical grammar refers to (1) pedagogical process – the explicit treatment of elements of the target language system as (part of) language teaching methodology; (2) pedagogical content – reference sources of one kind or another that present information about the

target language system; and (3) combinations of process and content. In this sense, pedagogical grammar increases the learner's comprehension of the target language structures.

2.4. Teaching Pedagogical Grammar in Context

Several teachers, however, think that teaching grammar in writing means teaching rigid rules, restrictions, limits, and the like, which all make grammar something boring, as most students express. Also, several teachers believe that teaching grammar in writing limits students' imagination to use words freely as long as the meaning is conveyed without being interrupted by their teachers' orders "use this not that" or "use that not this" though "this" and "that" or "that" and "this" convey nearly the same meaning.

Teaching grammar requires teachers to think deeply of Garcia's (2010) question: "What kind of grammar instruction is needed?" (p. 73). Teaching grammar, as Hartwell (1985) believes, "is a complicated one. And, perhaps surprisingly, it remains controversial, with the regular appearance of papers defending the teaching of formal grammar or attacking it" (p. 105). As teaching grammar is complicated, Weaver (1996b) sees that "learning of grammatical concepts is so complex" (p. 17).

For international students, teachers think of how to convince them to follow a large number of sets of rules that they are not used to even with native English speakers in everyday language. The problem is that international students get confused between the use of descriptive grammar, prescriptive grammar, traditional grammar, pedagogical grammar, and any other type of grammar. Also, grammar rules differ from one language into another. In this vein, Omar (2018) wonders that "two different syntactic structures may give nearly the same meaning, and two similar syntactic structures may give different meanings in different languages" (p. 383). Dixon (1995) justifies that grammar "exists to code meaning ... a similar type of meaning may be expressed by different grammatical means in different languages" (p. 175).

Scovel (2007) poses this question: "How can anyone learn to communicate effectively in another language if they are not aware of the more fundamental grammatical and lexical patterns of that target language?" (p. 152). Though students use grammar unconsciously in daily-speaking life, most students find difficulties in using grammar effectively in

academic writing. Therefore, teachers need to pay more attention to the need of teaching grammar in writing because grammar is the heart of the processes of teaching and learning. To know how important grammar is to writing, Yoder (1996) presents some examples about her students' writing in the school she teaches in Mississippi. For example, some students wrote: "She absent," "Mines don't make no sense," and "He go with Keisha." This makes Yoder ask two questions: Do I need to teach grammar in writing? Do I teach students traditional grammar? For the first question, the answer is "yes." For the second question, the answer is "no" because traditional grammar does not help students use grammar in writing.

Teaching traditional grammar, according to Andrews (1993), "does not help writing or speaking, nothing seems to diminish the impulses and compulsions to continue to teach it in schools" (pp. 4-5). Therefore, it is much more useful that teachers teach pedagogical grammar. It is, also, important that teaching grammar in writing be enhanced from first day of class. Students might commit convention mistakes, yet teachers accept their writing. It is important that students be aware of sentence structures, which come through practice writing every day.

Traditional grammar, according to Weaver (2008), encourages "writers to follow perspective rules that are sometimes not only archaic and arbitrary but in contrast to what many professional writers actually do" (p. 20). Weaver (1996a), also, clarifies that teaching parts of speech and their functions in sentences is not enough to teach writing. Weaver, Carol, and Sharon (2001) believe that pedagogical grammar provides students with different structures, such as appositions, participles, absolutes, varieties of sentences, modifier placements, and several sentence structures that help them write effectively. When students learn how to work with sentence expansions and revision, they become effective writers.

Students can make use of pedagogical grammar to create and write grammatical images, for example, using the five brush strokes: participle, absolute, appositive, adjectives shifted out of order, and action verbs. For example, the sentence "The diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey" might be written, using participles, as "Hissing, slithering, and coiling, the diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey" or "Hissing their forked red tongues and coiling their

cold bodies, the diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey.” Similar, an absolute can be used as in the sentence “The cat climbed the tree” to be “Claws digging, feet kicking, the cat climbed the tree.” Also, an opposition can be added to the sentence “The raccoon enjoys eating turtle eggs” to be “The raccoon, a midnight scavenger who roams like shoreline in search of food, enjoys eating turtle eggs.” “Adjective out of order” is often used by writers. For example, the sentence “The large, red-eyed, angry bull moose charged the intruder” is changed to be “The large bull moose, red-eyed and angry, charged the intruder.” An example of action verb might be “The woman, old and wrinkled, smiled ...” (Noden, 1999, pp. 4-9).

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher conducted a qualitative research method, basing on primary and secondary recourses to reach findings and recommendations. The primary resource includes interviewing nine ELLs, taking a course of IELTS preparation in Benghazi, Libya. The preparation course was run by the researcher at English Language Center at University of Benghazi. The researcher prepared questions related to the problem of the study. He based on his own interpretation to obtain findings of the study through analyzing the participants' answers and comments on the questions asked.

3.1. Methodology of the Study

In addition to interviews, the researcher, who was teaching the course of IELTS preparation, asked the participants to write about a topic selected based on IELTS actual test. The test was conducted on the first week of the course before teaching pedagogical grammar. The researcher intended to assess the students' level of academic writing. The question was:

After hard work, Alis spent good time with her family out of town in Spring Break. Some people prefer spending Spring Break out of town, and other people prefer spending Spring Break in town. Which one do you prefer? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

The researcher asked the participants individually to write for 40 minutes about the mentioned topic. Then, the researchers analyzed all the participants' pieces. The researcher did not review the papers with the participants. After teaching pedagogical grammar

for almost 60 hours for seven weeks, the researcher conducted the same test to the same participants to see the effect of pedagogical grammar in enhancing the participants' academic writing. The researcher analyzed the participants' pieces. In addition, the study includes secondary resources: books, journals, studies, research, periodicals, and Webs related to the topic of the study.

3.2. Problem of the Study

Most international students, seeking for admissions at international universities, see that writing is the most difficult part in IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, and GAMAT tests. The problem in the writing section is not related to language proficiency; rather, it is related to the use of English grammar in constructing an academic piece. Many studies and research reveal that though most international students have studied English in their home countries and in English-speaking countries, they still find difficulties in using English in academic writing contexts. Hence, the researcher sees that there is a problem that ELLs encounter regarding using grammar in academic-writing contexts.

3.3. Questions of the Study

Based on studies and research, most international students perceive writing as the most difficult part in IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, GAMAT, and academic essays. Though most international students study grammar at school, they still find difficulties in using English in academic writing contexts. Thus, the researcher posed the main question of the study as:

- What makes academic writing difficult?

To shed more lights on the roots of the problem of the study, the following sub-questions were posed to be answered:

- What is the most difficult part in writing?
- How can students enrich their academic writing?
- How can teachers of writing use grammar in enhancing students' writing?
- What grammar should teachers use to enhance students' writing?

3.4. Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were nine international students, taking IELTS preparation course at English Language Center at University of Benghazi in Benghazi, Libya. All the participants are holders of

master's degrees in various majors: medicine (4), sciences (3), and engineering (2). Almost all the participants had already done at least one international test, namely IELTS. All the participants achieved low grades in Writing Section. All the participants studied English as a medium of instruction at their school. Four participants spent at least a year in an English-speaking country. All the participants are teaching members at the University of Benghazi.

3.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to identifying the importance of teaching pedagogical grammar in writing contexts to enhance and enrich students' academic writing. The sample of the study comprises nine pieces of writing written by nine international students and interviewing these students to ask them questions related to use grammar in academic writing. The study started in July 2018 in Benghazi, Libya and lasted for almost three months.

3.6. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore how teaching pedagogical grammar can enhance and enrich ELLs' academic writing. Findings of this study are going to propose some strategies, regarding teaching pedagogical grammar in writing contexts to enhance ELLs' academic writing. This study, also, might be used for future investigations in the same or relevant topics.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

At the beginning of the course, the participants performed an official IELTS Test. The highest mark was 5.5. By the end of the course, the participants performed another official IELTS Test. The lowest grade was 7.0 and some got 8.5. This indicates that pedagogical grammar enhanced the participants' level of language, namely writing. After analyzing the participants' pre-course paper and post-course papers and the participants' answers to the questions posed by the researcher, the researcher obtained the following findings:

First, based on the participants' academic writing pieces:

- In the first paper, the participants had several punctuation and grammar mistakes. They improved a lot in the second paper and hardly have punctuation or grammar mistakes.

- In the first paper, the participants did not use transitional phrases to link sentences and paragraphs, but they used them perfectly in the second paper.
- In the first paper, the participants have difficulty in using high-level grammar and structure, but they used them a lot in the second paper.
- The participants shift from descriptive grammar they used in the first paper into prescriptive grammar in the second paper, so their second paper seems academically professional.
- The participants shift from indicative grammar to subjunctive grammar, which add more power to their second paper.
- The participants' voice has become clear in the second paper.

Second, based on the researcher's own interpretation for analyzing the participants' interviews,

- All the participants of the study encounter difficulties in their academic writing. For example, Saleha said, "I feel I can't write good essay or academic paper." Amina said, "I always write simple sentences because I learn this in school." Saida said, "I hate writing in IELTS, so I had low grade in my last exam."
- The participants attribute these difficulties to lack of grammar. Ali said, "I am weak in grammar, so I can't write good." Asma said, "I don't write well because of my bad grammar." Noura said, "Teachers in school teach us only negative and question. I know grammar to pass exam only." Hana said, "I am sure my writing is bad because I didn't study big grammar." Nouha said, "I am not good in grammar, so I can't write well."
- The participants blamed their teachers' methods of teaching grammar in school. Asma said, "Teachers teach us negative and questions." Nouha said, "We use grammar to pass the test, not for writing." Ali said, "We learn grammar just only for passing English tests." Hana said, "Teachers teach us how to change to negative and questions only."
- As for the most difficult part in academic writing, the participants express their frustration in writing academically because

they lack the use of convention (punctuation, connectors, transitions, and parts of speech). Saida said, "I can't write in academic because I don't know to use commas and other articles to make sentences long." Ali said, "We don't study link sentences." Nouha said, "I don't know how I use transitions. I learned about that when I took this course here." Asma said, "I lack cohesion in my academic writing." Saleha said, "Punctuation is the most difficult part in writing." Amina said, "Sometimes I am confused about thesis statement and how to link it to the writing paragraph." Noura said, "I find writing difficult in general, but punctuation is the most difficult part." Hana said, "I write in English and think in Arabic. It is very difficult."

- The interviews with the participants of the study reveal that they have improved a lot after being taught pedagogical grammar. The participants express their gratitude to grammar in improving their academic writing. Asma, Noura, Nouha, Sami, and Ali express their gratitude to learning pedagogical grammar, expressing that they did not know English before.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the findings obtained from both primary and secondary resources, the researchers have provided some recommendations that might be used by decision makers, administrators, and teachers of writing to improve the methods of teaching writing at school. These recommendations are as follow:

- Teachers of writing should motivate students to manipulate grammar in writing contexts. Grammar helps students enrich and enhance their writing because, as Weaver (2008) sees, "by focusing on certain grammatical constructions as they draft or revise, students – indeed, all of us – can write more interesting, more detailed sentences" (p. 3).
- They should find effective and easy methods for teaching grammar as an interesting subject in writing contexts. Teaching grammar in context helps students construct mental images in mind, get high scores in standardized test, learn English faster, and

become good users of oral and written language.

- They should encourage students to write for real purposes inside and outside school and to practice academic writing and share ideas with potential readers.
- They should start teaching grammar in academic writing contexts in early stages and in every class lesson. In this regard, Lindemann (2001) believes that "if we teach grammar as a subject matter, we isolate language study from language use. If, on the other hand, we apply what we know about grammar to helping writers use language, our students will become more proficient in negotiating increasingly complex encounters with language" (p. 85).
- They should teach strategies of writing, which include using grammar in writing contexts because, as Weaver, Carol, and Sharon (2001) say, "grammar can help us generate ideas" (p. 21), and, as Weaver (2008) says, "grammar can be a way to enrich student writing – a way to make writing better, more complex, more exciting, and overall, more rich and interesting" (pp. xi-xii).
- They may start with descriptive grammar, but they should shift to pedagogical grammar later.
- They should teach grammar integrated with other lessons that is because, as Gordon (2007) explains, "lessons that integrate the structural and semantic properties of language and are placed in real life-like communicative contexts exemplify the task-based approach to teaching grammar recommended by leading experts in pedagogical grammar" (p. 119).
- They should encourage students to think critically and use language grammatically. In this vein, Tchudi and Thomas (1996) see that it is not a matter of "teaching grammar or not;" rather, it is a matter of framing students' minds toward language. They called this "thinking grammatically," which they see that it "gives one fresh perspective on language, and grammars themselves offer a variety of tools to use as we examine communication" (p. 50).

- They should teach the grammar that helps students increase improvement in writing their sentences and lessen their grammatical errors. Weaver, Carol, and Sharon (2001) believe that it is not “to grammar or not to grammar,” rather, it is what grammar to teach, when to teach grammar, and how to teach grammar that enriches and enhances students’ writing.

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