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Investigating the Difficulties of Learning English Grammar and Suggested Methods to Overcome Them

A B S T R A C T

English plays a significant role in developing educational systems worldwide. Grammar is an important aspect of learning English language. Without learning the grammar; the language cannot be practiced properly. English writing is considered as a vital part during the academic life of students. Several grammatical errors and difficulties appeared among students when leaning English because of the poor knowledge and experience of students with lexis and grammar in their daily life. This research aims to investigate the difficulties of learning English grammar and suggested methods to address them. A descriptive methodology was utilized in this research through reviewing the previous literature. The research results indicate that students still suffer from difficulties in learning the English language, especially its grammar, and they suffer from weakness in the grammatical, semantic and pragmatic levels that appear in their spoken or written language. The research finds out that students in various stages face many difficulties and problems in learning English grammar, which can be traced back to the old teaching style, inappropriate curriculum, and the non-enthusiastic psychological state of the student mainly.

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تقصي صعوبات تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية والطرق المقترحة لمعالجتها

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الخلاصة:

تؤدي اللغة الإنجليزية دوراً مهماً في تطوير الأنظمة التعليمية في جميع أنحاء العالم. تعد القواعد جانباً مهماً لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، وبدون تعلم القواعد لا يمكن ممارسة اللغة بشكل صحيح. تعتبر الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية جزءاً حيويًا خلال الحياة الأكاديمية للطلبة. ظهرت العديد من الأخطاء والصعوبات النحوية لدى

الطلبة عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وذلك لضعف معرفة وخبرة الطلبة في استعمال المفردات والقواعد في حياتهم اليومية. هدف هذا البحث إلى التعرف على صعوبات تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية والطرق المقترحة لمعالجتها. تم استعمال المنهج الوصفي في هذا البحث من خلال مراجعة العديد من الأدبيات السابقة. أشارت نتائج البحث إلى أن الطلاب ما زالوا يعانون من صعوبات في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وخاصة قواعدها، كما يعانون من ضعف في المستويات النحوية والدالية والبراغماتية التي تظهر في لغتهم المنطوقة أو المكتوبة. يبين البحث أن الطلبة في المراحل المختلفة يواجهون العديد من الصعوبات والمشكلات في تعلم قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، والتي يمكن إرجاعها إلى أسلوب التدريس القديم، والمناهج غير الملائمة، والحالة النفسية غير الحماسية للطلاب بشكل أساسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصعوبات ، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية ، القواعد ، المدارس الثانوية ، الدلالة ، البراغماتية.

Introduction:

English is a universal language that gains an increasingly importance in a daily basis, and it plays a significant role in developing educational systems worldwide. Basic grammatical English rules are considered the basis to each English learner, and the guarantor for practicing good language communication skills. Grammar learning is also the basic enablers for a good thoughts and ideas expression (Iqbal, et al., 2017:56)

English teachers are considered as the main factor that could help students to cover the grammar difficulties and their discomfort feelings. as many teachers paid efforts to make grammar teaching methods as useful and more interesting activity within the curriculum of the English language (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam,2011:69).

A huge number of English language teachers followed similar procedures in their classrooms. In traditional learning methods, a model passage is offered to the students by teachers that consist of pre-writing practices and involving students in text production, to evaluate the writing performance of each student later on. The main purpose of teachers at all learning methods is to develop the students awareness toward their mistakes and errors in English language learning and especially grammatical errors and this could not be achieved unless through utilizing more creative methods.

Previous studies indicated variety in students and teachers perceptions toward grammar instruction methods as students prefer to use explicit and formal instruction in learning grammar and getting feedback, while teachers prefer using communicative methods (Phipps & Borg, 2009:383).

Eun (2010:1) clarified that using more creative teaching methods such as employing audio visual aids and authentic materials could positively impact the grammar teaching performance of students and provide learners with a special learning experience that can develop their confidence toward the English language usage.

Therefore, English teacher should use new and creative methods to tackle English grammar difficulties. This research basically investigates the difficulties of learning English grammar and suggested methods to overcome them.

Statement of the Problem:

In view of the critical importance of learning English grammar among language skills, and their essential role in the entire educational process; any difficulties that students face when learning English grammar at this time is a problem of concern because of its great impact on students' learning now and in the future.

According to previous literature, there are several grammar instruction alternatives employed by teachers in the classrooms and this causes several types of challenges that are basically related to learning English grammar (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam,2011:70).

English writing is considered as a vital part during the academic life of students. Several grammatical difficulties appeared among students when leaning English according to the poor knowledge and experience of students with lexis and grammar. Furthermore, according to the recent educational environment; teaching English is often confined to the traditional learning methods which are away from creative thinking and original writing processes. At advanced educational stages, sentences in English learning become more complicated which could develop the probability of facing more grammatical errors when compromising letters, paragraphs, and essays (Eun, 2010).

Grammatical errors are considered as a huge problem as great ideas could be missed and not appreciated due to the misunderstanding that lexis and grammar errors could cause, and as most teachers pay a huge attention to the grammatical accuracy rather than ideas development (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam,2011) .

Thus, it is considered essential to realize the grammatical errors that students make; as this educational stage is considered crucial due to the fact that many years of English learning have passed, and it is a portal for a later stage of education in which English language realized as the basis. Moreover, it is important to investigate the consequences of these mistakes and examine the role of teachers in covering the difficulties of learning English grammar.

Finally, it should be mentioned that difficulties of learning English grammar could be disappointing and frustrating students when learning English. Thus, this could negatively impact their academic achievements in this subject. According to that, the questions that this research seeks to answer are:

- What are the difficulties of learning English grammar among students?
- What are the methods that could be followed to overcome the difficulties of learning English grammar among students?

Research objectives:

The main objective that this research seeks to cover can be summarized as follow;

- to describe the English grammar learning methods used in teaching students.
- to investigate the difficulties of Learning English grammar that students face.
- to suggest methods that can overcome the difficulties of learning English grammar among students.

Value of the Research

Learning a new language is very important in human life; learning a language in addition to the mother tongue contributes to acquire new language skills, and helps to achieve many positives for the human being. Gavran (2013) clarifies that learning another language in the early years of life is very beneficial and helps to learn to read and write better. Bohdanská (2012) stress that the importance of the English language and its wide spread imposed on societies to learn it.

This language is considered a simple and an uncomplicated language that can be mastered easily in a short time through the various widespread and available educational means, whether by individual efforts by learning its rules from lessons, and Books, websites or in private schools and institutes under the supervision of specialized professors. Learning foreign languages and mastering their grammar

helps in communicating between people and increasing their understanding of each other and thus creating a better world. Learning English also contributes to the diversity of cultures and the promotion of openness between countries.

In more detail, the importance of the research can be clarified by clarifying its importance for the following categories:

- Teachers: through the findings of the research regarding the difficulties that English language students face in learning English grammar and the reliable ways to address these difficulties.
- Supervisors: by identifying the reasons of students' weakness in English grammar to guide teachers and try to avoid them.
- Curriculum specialists: as revealing difficulties in learning English grammar may help specialists when considering the modification and development of curricula.
- Researchers: in their subsequent studies of similar or related topics.
- It is hoped that the results of the current research will be beneficial to those officials in the ministries of education in identifying the most prominent difficulties in learning English grammar, whether for students or for teachers, and thus determining the appropriate methods to deal with them and overcome them.

Research Procedures

This section of the research clarifies the current methodology to achieve the research objectives. Research design is considered as a guide that enables researchers to arrange their thoughts and knowledge, and to conduct research with a valid result and within the expected duration (McBurney and White, 2010). A Descriptive method is employed in this research.

The descriptive method is represented by reviewing several related literature to this research topic at books, theses, journals and other reliable sources. This theoretical data source basically depends on reviewing concepts and arguments related to English learning approaches and their relation to difficulties of learning English grammar, which could help the researcher to formulate conceptual ideas about the research subject and design the data collection instrument (Yin, 2009:24).

Importance of Learning English in General& Grammar in Specific

Languages are the primary means of acquiring knowledge and developing it, and language for a high school student is the tool on which he relies on communicating with the environment and gaining direct experiences. Therefore, his control over these years is considered very important from an educational point of view since the English language is a prescribed subject for the student, it is important for the English language teacher to be able to learn all the skills and grammar of the English language, and be able to communicate the information to the students with ease without any trouble (Shiu, 2011: 10).

The English language is considered among the most important foundations of learning in the stages of education. Its importance at this stage follows precisely from being the first language used in America, Britain and Australia, and the foreign language in which science is taught in most other countries of the world (Mahdi, 2018: 24).

English language is the universal language that facilitates communication, cooperation and understanding between individuals of different religions, races and languages. As a result of the information and communication revolution; this language has witnessed a wide spread because it is considered the language of knowledge, science and culture. Putra (2020) and Nishanthi (2018) emphasized that most jobs in various international institutions and organizations require speaking English, as learning and proficiency in this language has become a basic requirement for all students of sciences. It is the language of the age and the ideal means for obtaining information that is the main basis for development and progress. Maros (2007: 3) stressed on that and clarified that the importance of the English language is evident in its benefits in education and work, and the ability to use it to communicate with indigenous people as it is considered an additional source for all science and technology. Widianingsih and Gulö (2016: 141) indicate that the English language represents the language of the modern era, and it is the first most used and widespread language in the world. It is the language of science, technology and scientific research, as it is the language of economics and electronic commerce, and it is the language in which studies are made in universities and higher institutes.

English Grammar

The grammar is defined as a group of systems that control sentences where it is not possible to form a sentence, no matter how simple, without relying on it and adhering to it. Larsen-Freeman (2001: 70) emphasizes that learning the grammar of

the English language helps understand the sentence and understand its composition, and this includes the ability to define the verbs, adjectives and adverbs which are used to form a useful sentence.

Azar (2001: 4) clarifies that the grammar enhances the student's skills in reading and writing, as it is not possible to achieve the results of learning the English language without learning its grammar. Grammar is considered as an important aspect of learning the English language, and without learning the grammar the language cannot be practiced properly.

In general, the most important obstacles to learning the English language are the psychological obstacles that are related to the nature of the human psyche, and this includes an advanced look towards the English language and misconceptions about learning the foreign language. Also, the administrative problems that are represented in the lack of money, the inefficiency and qualification of trained teachers, and the insufficiency of the educational means necessary for the success of the learning and teaching process are among the most important problems face in the education process (Shiu, 2011: 16).

In addition to psychological obstacles, there are groups of administrative, systemic, and educational obstacles that include an imbalance in the programs of preparing the English language teacher, the methods used in teaching the English language, lack of cooperation and partnership with expertise and scientific centers specialized in teaching the English language at the local, regional and global levels (Maros, 2007: 3). Educational institutions in the Arab countries focus their efforts on giving the student a large amount of linguistic, morphological and audio materials, but they neglect to employ modern teaching methods and employ theories of foreign language learning, as they neglect the development of students' language skills.

Not taking into account the use of the appropriate curriculum when learning leads to the learning the language incorrectly, as teachers must choose the right approach to learning, where there are many approaches to learning the English language. Ahmad et al. (2011) emphasize that the most important component of language learning is practice. Without practice, the students cannot practice what they have learned from the English language. Speaking and practicing break the barrier of fear of using language. Many teaching methods teach the language without motivating or helping students to use and practice it (Gass and Selinker, 2001). Therefore, despite the student learning the language, he/she quickly encounters a barrier when speaking with any foreign person, thus loses his/her confidence in himself/herself and then no longer uses it.

Mahdi (2018: 25) also affirms that the time specified for teaching English in schools in the Arab countries is not sufficient, besides, to the lack of educational means necessary for education. The intensity in the educational classes is one of the most prominent problems that contribute to reduce the ability of students to learn English.

Burner (2005: 32) points out that another obstacle is the failure of schools in the Arab countries to use quality standards, such as the teaching standard and learning standard on which educational policies, systems, programs and applications should be built. In addition, they do not rely on international standardized methods to determine the level of adequacy of the English language teacher.

Al-Mansour (2013: 22) emphasizes that traditional teaching methods are incompatible with the nature of contemporary learning, and they reduce students' motivation towards learning and make them feel bored. Shiu (2011: 23) also points to the lack of educational resources and aids in teaching such as laboratories, and in the case of their presence, teachers are unable to use them and benefit from them because they have not received appropriate training in their use.

Also, the most prominent problems of learning the English language in the Arab countries are the misconceptions about learning it. The students in the educational stages proceed to learn the English language without any enthusiasm because of their feeling that it is not a priority in their life, and their focus is in the success of the subject in order to move to the next academic level. Students focus on memorizing English grammar and words in order to pass the final exam (Nasser, 2018).

Iraqi students' struggles with English grammar were the topic of Aws's (2018) research. As a result, he spent time interpreting and looking for solutions. Additionally, he made an effort to discover the types of faults that University of Technology Department of Materials Engineering students commonly made in their papers. A total of fifty students took part in the test, which was based on Ja Park et al. category's scheme from 2003. They can be broken down into four categories: Word Order; Ellipsis (Ellipsis, pronouns, omission and addition; and misapplying pronouns); Articles; Prepositions (addition, omission, misapplication); Tense (Present form for the past; past tense with present and infinitive); Verbs; and Numbers - Pluralities and Comparative constructions. According to the research papers, the findings were divided into categories, such as "verbs." Whether it is "omission of be" or "omission and misuse of ing," we find that pupils have misused verbs in many instances. After the verb mistakes, the remainder of the errors follows in a logical order. We have discovered that standard methods of

instruction are not sufficient for students to grasp the language's foundations. It is more than just studying for an exam the next day.

In addition, Afraa (2021) states that Game strategy can improve students' grammar while also identifying specific grammar features that will be improved as a result. Using games strategy as a teaching-learning tool is amusing and having created a non-threatening learning environment that stimulates communication and teamwork amongst students. It also demonstrates that learners' motivation was improved by game strategy, and the process of learning grammar can attract them more.

In teaching EFL, especially grammar, games strategy outperforms the traditional method, according to research. In order to learn, acquire, and employ English Grammar in a variety of situations, they allow learners to take on various roles within grammar lessons while using the target language accurately and fluently. As well as people who can think critically, solve problems, and make decisions. These positions are beneficial to them.

The Difficulties of Learning English Grammar

The problems of learning the English language are not limited to specific country; rather, they exist in many countries of the world that teach English as a foreign language. Therefore, many studies were conducted to identify the difficulties which the students' face in learning English language grammar (Burgess and Etherington, 2002: 437). One of the most important difficulties is the inability of the curriculum to provide educational situations similar to reality (Saeed and Jafar, 2016: 55). The study of Widianingsih and Gulö (2016: 142) also confirmed that teachers lack the ability to diversify the methods of teaching English language skills and grammar, and the study also emphasized the lack of students' motivation towards learning grammar because of the difficulty of its presentation in activities. Schultz (2001: 250) indicated that students face problems in writing the expression due to their weak ability in grammar and because of the differences in the grammar of the mother tongue in the foreign language.

Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011: 77) emphasized that both students and teachers face problems in learning and teaching English grammar, and the level of problems students face is somewhat greater than the problems of teachers. Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011: 80) also stressed that the problems facing students are the difficulty of communicative activities (written or spoken) and the lack of focus of teachers on important communication activities and tasks to develop grammatical knowledge for students.

The convictions of some teachers about the English language are in most cases of obstacles and not only difficulties in the educational process. Some teachers believe that giving an enormous amount of grammar is in the interest of language service, thus they seek to flood the classroom with empty grammatical terms at the expense of building vocabulary and using it in the appropriate context (Widianingsih and Gulö, 2016). There is a misconception that giving students grammar subject that establishes them for what is to come in the future (Muayad, 2018). Therefore, in many cases, the eighth-grade students, for example, are required to memorize the specifications of the three types of conditional sentences without accustoming the students to formulating the same sentences, completing them, or connecting them together.

Maros (2007: 6) concluded that the students make many grammatical errors when writing, as this result was linked to the weak ability of teachers to teach English grammar and the weak educational methods used.

Learning English grammar was and remained a huge and complex problem for all students. In view of the importance of this aspect in learning the English language, several studies that examined the problems facing students in learning the grammar of the English language (Saeed and Jafar, 2016; Mahdi, 2018; Nasser, 2018). Students' problems in learning English grammar in public schools are related to the inappropriate educational environment and the sources used in education (Saeed and Jafar, 2016: 53). The instability in some countries also affects the level of student learning and the level of the educational process as a whole.

Mahdi (2018: 178) conducts a study on students of the University of Technology in Iraq to find out the difficulties which the students' face in learning grammar. Results confirmed that students make many errors when using verbs, as this was related to many of reasons, including; the weak abilities of the teachers and the use of traditional methods, as these methods do not help students learn the rules as it is required. Mahdi (Ibid: 29) stresses the need to use modern educational methods that enhance students' desire to learn the grammar of the English language.

Nasser (2018: 178) emphasizes that Iraqi students face problems in writing due to the large number of grammatical errors, and this is linked to the weak level of teachers and the weak educational methods used, in addition to the limited time allocated to teaching grammar.

Suggested Methods to Overcome the Difficulties of Learning English Grammar

Being able to overcome the problems of learning the English language, especially the grammar of the English language for students, requires preparing and training English language teachers in methods of teaching English grammar. Teachers need to reduce the focus on theoretical science to the development of the student's linguistic level and expansion in the field of applied linguistics (Widianingsih and Gulö, 2016: 144).

There are many methods that can be used to reduce the level of difficulties and problems facing students in learning English grammar. Al-Mansour (2013: 14) points out that the use of modern learning technology helps the learner to operate all his senses and increases his level of attention to the educational material, and thus improves his level of assimilation and helps to apply the English language in reality. The teacher's use of the suitable method also improves the performance of students. The teacher must be patient with his students, and must try to identify the grammatical problems faced by students, and use various methods to overcome them (Burgess and Etherington, 2002: 440).

Also, the atmosphere of the educational session is considered an important factor in attracting the attention of students, and this means providing an atmosphere of interaction, participation and cooperation, ensure confidence in the students and notify them of the importance of their participation in educational sessions (Ammar, 2018: 27). Ammar (Ibid) states that it is also important to intensify the level of activities that include an application to the grammar that are taken in educational sessions, as these activities help to consolidate the subjects in the student's mind and help him understand and remember it.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the importance of the English language all over the world, as it represents the language of the age, development and economy; students still suffer from difficulties in learning the English language, especially its grammar, and they suffer from weakness in the grammatical, semantic and pragmatic levels that appear in their spoken or written language. Accordingly, this research aims to investigate the difficulties of learning English grammar and to propose some methods to overcome these difficulties. It is found out that students in various stages face many difficulties and problems in learning English grammar, which can be traced back to the old teaching style, inappropriate curriculum, and the

non-enthusiastic psychological state of the student. It is evident that teachers lack the ability to diversify the methods of teaching English grammar, and their lack of focus on modern communicative teaching activities as well as the weak motivation of students in learning grammar due to the inappropriate environment and material sources.

In addition, the research showed the need to adopt a set of proposed methods to overcome the difficulties of learning English grammar for secondary students, such as preparing and training English language teachers on using modern learning methods and techniques to teach English grammar, directing students' focus towards applied grammar exercises instead of theoretical ones, and enhancing students' self-confidence and ability to learn grammar and inspire their learning enthusiasm.

The researcher recommends the need for English teachers to adopt modern teaching methods in teaching English grammar, and to focus on the application aspects of these grammatical rules by students such as speaking and writing, as well as improving learners' confidence in the use of the English language through teaching and providing positive feedbacks.

Furthermore, it recommends expanding the research scope to include student's perspectives besides teachers, and use qualitative methods by conducting interviews with students and teachers in a way that adds comprehensiveness and generality to the results of this research.

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