

محاور الصعوبات النحوية: دراسة حالة لدي طلبة المستوى الرابع في مركز اللغات بجامعة السيد محمد بن علي السنوسي الإسلامية أ. نورالعيون عبدالله علي القبائلي*

قسم الاتجاه العام ، كلية الاقتصاد الاسلامي والعلوم السياسية ، جامعة السيد محمد بن
علي السنوسي الإسلامية، البيضاء ، ليبيا .

drnooelovoon92@gmail.com

0009-0007-2575-5396

تاريخ الارسال 2026/6/2م تاريخ القبول 2026/8/2م

الملخص العربي

يظل النحو موضوع جذلي وجوهري والأكثر تعقيدا لدي متعلمي اللغة كلغة أجنبية , يواجه هؤلاء أخطاء نحويه متعددة ، لذلك تتحري الدراسة الصعوبات النحوية الأكثر شيوعا لدي طلبة مستوى ما قبل المتوسط. استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الكمي عبر تصميم الاختبار القبلي والبعدي لمجموعة واحدة موزعة علي 28 طالبا من طلاب مستوى ما قبل المتوسط بمركز اللغات بجامعة السيد محمد بن علي السنوسي الإسلامية لقياس النتائج قبل وبعد المعالجة التعليمية ، قد احتوي الاختبار علي 20 قاعدة نحوية مختلفة ، بناءً علي التحليل الإحصائي للاختبارين . فإن أكثر الصعوبات كانت ولا زالت كالآتي:

I wish + past perfect (92.9%) / articles (89.3) /since
/for (85.7%)

وأیضا بعض الصعوبات الأخرى في أسماء الإشارة والأسماء الموصولة ومطابقة
الفعل بالفاعل ، أما لمتغيرات الامتحان البعدي بسيطة :

much / many ➡ (39.9%) /since / for ➡ (71.4%)/ ed/ing
adjectives ➡ (67.9%)

الكلمات المفتاحية: العوائق النحوية، متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، العثرات ،
الجودة التعليمية .

Areas of difficulties in English Grammar : A Case Study of Pre- Intermediate Students at Language center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University.

Nooreloyoon Abdulla Ali *

drnoocloyoon92@gmail.com

0009-0007-2575-5396

BSTRACT

Grammar remains a contentious yet crucial topic faced by ESL learners. ESL students often experience types of grammar errors. This study explores the most common grammar challenges encountered by pre-intermediate EFL learners. Quantitative research was conducted using a one –group pre and post-test design and employed 28 pre-intermediate level students at the Languages Center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University. Data were collected using 20- item grammar test administrated before and after the instructional intervention. Quantitative analysis of the pre and post-test items revealed significant grammatical shortcomings concerning the use of both I wish + past perfect (92.9% error rate), articles(89.3% error rate), since / for (85.7% error rate). Additionally, other components were showed in the use of demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, and subject-verb agreement. The post-test only modest changes were noticed in selected areas including many(39.9%) , since / for(71.4%) and ed/ing adjectives(67.9%).

Keywords: Grammar Challenges, EFL Students, Obstacles, Quality of Education.

1.1Introduction

Grammar is a vital component of language facilitates effective communication(Ajaj,2022, p.46). According to Daskon(2023,p.2) grammar, as a vital aspect of the language, offers a set of rules and structure that facilitates communication among learners. Essential for the production of language , in the field of the language teaching, four key language elements: structure, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling (Alahmadi,2016 ,p.50). Despite its importance, disregard changes in linguistics patterns, semantic meanings, and improper language use (Ekalia,2021, p.5). Grammatical problems made by learner are considered incorrect because they go against the standards of the language (Yusuf, 2023, p.110). This poses a problem for individuals learning English as their second language. Numerous researchers have examined these errors to understand their underlying causes. They are curious about how these errors affect language learning. English teaching methods can address them (Damaiyanti, 2021, p.68). Alghazo (2020, p.7) stated that a major problem with grammar includes structural errors resulting from violation of language rules .

Indeed, ESL students' grammatical errors that arise from their limited understanding of the target language structure; moreover, limited grammatical knowledge contributes to a variety of errors. English grammar is regarded as difficult due to linguistic challenges, irregular grammatical systems, conventional teaching approaches and additional obstacles(Qizi,2025, p.77).

These errors could be divided in two types :

1. Interlingual Errors: These errors arise when learners transfer the structure of their native language to the target language, for example , in English a learner may say: "I am hearing you" instead of" I hear you" resulting in incorrect language use. .

2. Intralingual Errors: These errors occur when the rules of the target language are misapplied due to incomplete understanding of those rules . For example in English learners may say :

"You speak English ?" ; Instead of , "Do you speak English?" .
(Setiati,2025, p.2841)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Grammar is a complex subject that presents considerable challenges, which are difficult. ESL learner often have a limited understanding of grammatical rules, which can make learning and using English grammar challenging. They may encounter difficulties in applying grammatical rules. Students at the Languages Center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University encounter significant challenges in applying grammatical rules even after instructional intervention.

1.3 Research Questions of the Study

The researcher aims to conduct an experimental study to answer the following research questions :

1. What grammatical difficulties encountered by pre –intermediate learners at this Language Center ?
2. What are the possible explanations for these grammatical difficulties?

1.4.Aims of the Research

This study aims to

- Explore types of grammatical difficulties encountered by pre-intermediate students at Language center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi.
- Explain these grammatical errors .

1.5 Significance of the research

Grammar is a major source of difficulty in the field of English language learning . This research aims to identify the grammatical errors made by ESL learners. The results of this research can be helpful to classify the most complex difficulties in grammar .

1.6 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to grammatical problems encountered by pre-intermediate students at Language Center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University. The sample was selected according to the requirement of the research. The focus of the study is on explaining difficulties learners encounter when applying grammatical rules .

2.Literature Review

Several studies have discussed the difficulties that learners encounter when learning grammar. Nugroho(2021, p.51) highlighted several issues with grammatical rules faced by ESL learners in applying grammatical

rules, including the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement or subject- verb mismatch modals, and conjunctions.

These findings are consistent with Ilham (2025 ,p.18), who identified certain grammatical rules as challenging, including if conditions, subject-verb agreement, relative clauses, and tenses. Ultimately, the results of this study align closely with the grammatical challenges identified by

Alghazo (2020, p.7) , who conducted a systematic analysis involving 87 participants and identified clear learner difficulties in the use of tenses, articles, subject-verb agreement, possessives and modals. Joven (2025, p.12)suggested that student mistakes stem from interference between the first language and the second language; however, the study also indicated that effective teaching methods are fundamental may contribute to these errors.

2.1Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Importance of Grammar

Grammar receives considerable attention from people because it is a complex component of language . This is because grammar controls how words and sentences are structured to convey meaning and facilitate . Another important aspect is that grammar can be viewed from two perspectives : grammar as a process of language learning and grammar as a product consisting of the rules and structures that govern a language. Grammar is not about the order of words but also about how language is used in speaking or writing. It even includes descriptions of other than one's first language. Grammar is really essential , for understanding how to use language effectively (Hoa,2020).

2.1.2 Grammar Difficulties

Numerous researchers studying languages have discussed issues related to grammar. They are particularly concerned with the difficulty learners experience in grammar rules. This can be attributed to three factors:

The grammatical structures of English and Arabic are different, for example :

-English follows Subject-Verb-Object word order(SVO), for example: "The boy ate an apple" .

-Arabic can use Verb-Subject-Object(VSO)in verbal sentences, or Subject-Verb(nominal sentences)(Situmorang,2024, p.110).

2. The grammar rules can be complicated particularly those related to subject –verb agreement. In the present simple if the subject is he, she or it, "es , s or ies " must be added to the verb and students may fail to recognize that the subject is singular subject. Students must add "es " at the end of the verb "pass", because " student " is singular the verb must agree with subject, not a word that comes next to it for instance: "The box of chocolates" is on the table (Kamiliya ,2024,p.3)

3. People learn at different and some students do not practice sufficiently. For example :limited opportunity for practice.(Hoa ,2020, p.81)

Although grammar is important, many English as a Second Language learners find it difficult. This is because they do not understand the rules of grammar well and that makes grammar a significant challenge and a boring task for them (Hoa, 2020).(Elturki, 2024,p.4) argued that learning grammar is easy and requires grammatical proficiency.

Elturki (2026,p.5) stated that rules of grammar are not learnt , thus there is possibility of competence in English language grammar without adequate knowledge of its grammar rules, Chomsky(as cited in Said ,2021, p.32) argued that syntactic rules are innate and thus not learnt , structure rules according to" x bar theory "are development of rules of structure that attempt to identify these syntactic rules shared by all languages and the relationship between syntax and lexicon; however , Ilham(2025) emphasized that to learn grammar rules must connect three essential factors : form , meaning and usage propose not only to learn but also identify grammatical form . As argued by Prichati(2024, p.202) to understand the meaning of that form to use it appropriately students still struggle applying complex grammatical structures to the present day, for example: Articles which are words used before nouns(Yusuf, 2023 , P.90) and preposition are used to describe another word in the sentence (Jrosby,2024, p.410) .

3.Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current research is an experimental research using one –group pre pre- and post-tests design. According to Creswell(2014,p.11), experimental research is a type of research that aims to examine whether the outcomes are influenced by specific treatment . It may investigate the impact of some variable on other variable. Two tests, "pre- test and posttest , were administered within a case study framework, to measure the participants' performance before and after the treatment. The study employed quantitative research approach.

3.2 Participants

Participants of this experimental research were selected non- randomly purposively from the compulsory course conducted during 2025/2026 because the students were expected to have high performance. The course was attended by 28 students pre- intermediate students level at the Languages Center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University. However, students have lower performance in applying grammar rules despite their involvement in instructional intervention.

3.3Instrument

In order to collect data for the study, a pre-test was administered to the participants to determine their level of grammar proficiency before the intervention and post-test .The pretest consisted of 20 multiple –choices items , and students were given half an hour to complete all the items . The post-test contained 20 multiple choices items identical to those found in the pre-test. Responses were coded as correct or incorrect. Exact McNemar tests were used for each paired binary item. A total score , defined as the number of correct responses out of 20, was calculated for each learner at both time points. Overall scores were compared using a paired-samples t-test, with a Wilcoxon signed-rank test used as a sensitivity analysis.

3.4 Procedures

Firstly, the researcher administered pre-test during the first and last week of a 24 hour of lecture course , with four hours of instruction per week, during the Fall semester 2025/2026 . Initially , 28 participants were selected to identify their grammatical errors. Secondly, the researcher was

also the instructor of the course during the intervention . The instructor used face to face books, whiteboards as well as data shows as teaching material and taught the participants to practice intensively throughout the course .The instructional materials, contained examples of much/many, articles, any/some, since/ for and ed/ing adjectives.

Finally, in the last week , the instructor administrated the post- test to the same students to recognize whether students ' proficiency improved . The post-test was identical to the 20- items pre-test. However, the results showed slight improvement, possibly because of time sensitivity. The results for much /many improved from 67.9% to 39.3% , while those for articles improved from 89.3% to 75%, those for any / some 82.1% to 71.4, since/for 85.7% to 71.4, and those for ed/ing adjectives from 78.6% to 67.9 %.

3.5 Test –Retest validity and reliability

Test validity was assessed through expert to evaluate the clarity , difficulty, timing and suitability of the sentences. Test-retest reliability was assessed to determine the consistency of test results and was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which was 0.71, indicating acceptable reliability.

4. Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Mc Nemar's tests, which were applied to each paired binary item to address quantitative aspects of the data . Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, The analysis indicated an average gain of 0.64 points between pre -and post-tests scores . Statistical significance set at as $p < 0.05$ (paired t-test $p = 0.071$; Wilcoxon $p = 0.076$). The effect size was small to moderate (Cohen's $d_z = 0.36$).

5. Discussion

5.1 The performance of pre-test and post-test

Taken as a whole, the post-test was better than the pre-test, but only modestly. The mean score increased from 5.29 to 5.93 correct answers out of 20, corresponding to an average gain of 0.64 points. This difference approached slightly, but didn't reach, the conventional threshold for statistical significance (paired t-test $p = 0.071$; Wilcoxon $p = 0.076$). The effect size was small to moderate (Cohen's $d_z = 0.36$). Across the 20 individual items, eight showed lower post-training error rates, six showed no net

change, and six showed higher error rates. Therefore, the most defensible conclusion is that immediate post-training performance was descriptively better overall, but the improvement was not sufficiently for all items as in I wish + past perfect, present perfect simple and prepositions .

Figure 1. Comparison of pretest and posttest correct answers before and immediately after training

Figure 1 and 2 answer the first question: "What grammatical difficulties encountered by pre –intermediate learners at this Language Center ?" presents pre-test and post-test results obtained before and immediately after instructional intervention pre-test mean score 5.29, while the post-test mean score was 5.92 out of 20 .

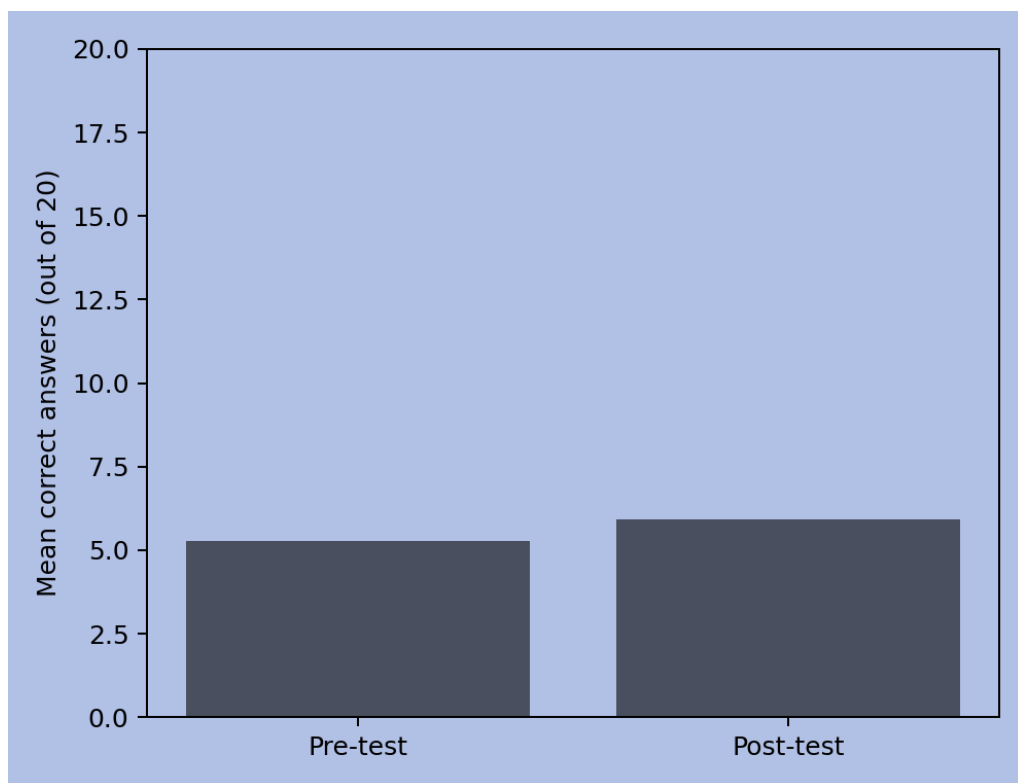


Figure 2. Comparison of pretest and posttest correct answers before and immediately after training

*

Areas of difficulties in English Grammar : A Case Study of Pre- Intermediate Students at Language center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University.

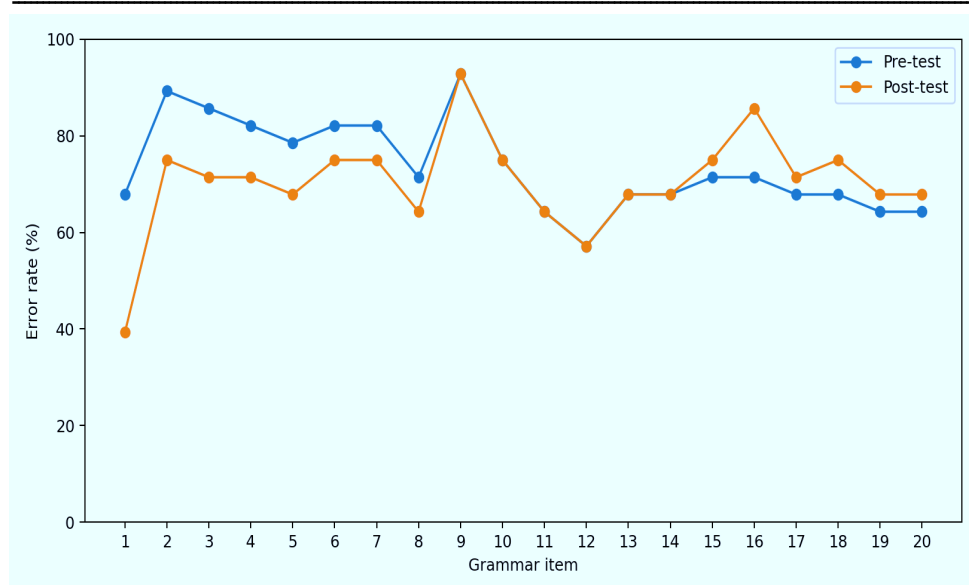


Figure 3. Error rates for each grammar item before and immediately after training.

Item	Grammar area	Errors pre n (%)	Errors post n (%)	Incorrect→Correct	Correct→Incorrect	Exact McNemar p
Q1	Much/Many	19 (67.9%)	11 (39.3%)	12	4	0.077
Q2	Articles	25 (89.3%)	21 (75.0%)	5	1	0.219
Q3	Since/For	24 (85.7%)	20 (71.4%)	6	2	0.289
Q4	Any/Some	23 (82.1%)	20 (71.4%)	6	3	0.508
Q5	-ed/-ing adjectives	22 (78.6%)	19 (67.9%)	8	5	0.581
Q6	Present Perfect Continuous	23 (82.1%)	21 (75.0%)	5	3	0.727
Q7	Present Perfect	23 (82.1%)	21 (75.0%)	5	3	0.727

Areas of difficulties in English Grammar : A Case Study of Pre- Intermediate Students at Language center of Islamic Mohammed Ben Ali Al Sanusi University.

Item	Grammar area	Errors pre n (%)	Errors post n (%)	Incorrect→Correct	Correct→Incorrect	Exact McNemar p
		)	)			
Q8	Prepositions	20 (71.4%))	18 (64.3%))	6	4	0.754
Q9	I wish + past participle	26 (92.9%))	26 (92.9%))	0	0	1.000
Q10	Question Tag	21 (75.0%))	21 (75.0%))	0	0	1.000
Q11	Future Tense	18 (64.3%))	18 (64.3%))	0	0	1.000
Q12	Modals	16 (57.1%))	16 (57.1%))	0	0	1.000
Q13	Past form of be	19 (67.9%))	19 (67.9%))	0	0	1.000
Q14	First Conditional	19 (67.9%))	19 (67.9%))	0	0	1.000
Q15	Present Simple (3rd person singular)	20 (71.4%))	21 (75.0%))	3	4	1.000
Q16	Demonstratives (this/these)	20 (71.4%))	24 (85.7%))	2	6	0.289
Q17	Relative Pronouns	19 (67.9%))	20 (71.4%))	2	3	1.000
Q18	Modal + base form	19 (67.9%))	21 (75.0%))	4	6	0.754
Q19	Possessive s	18 (64.3%))	19 (67.9%))	5	6	1.000
Q20	But + negation	18 (64.3%))	19 (67.9%))	7	8	1.000

The baseline results indicate substantial difficulty in several grammatical areas, especially I wish + past participle(92.9%), articles(89.3%), since/for(85.7%) , as well as other topics with high pre-test error rates. After training, the clearest improvement was observed for Much/Many (39.3%) , while several other topics also show descriptive improvement , particularly articles (75.0%) , since/for(71.4%) , any/some(71.4%), and -ed/-ing adjectives (67.9%) . However, none of the individual McNemar comparisons reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), and some later items showed no improvement or slightly worse performance.

The second research question: " what are the possible explanations for these grammatical difficulties ?" , asks about possible explanations for the difficulties. The pre-test/post-test dataset can identify where difficulties occurred, but it cannot establish why they occurred. Possible explanations such as first-language interference, incomplete rule automatization, limited exposure, insufficient practice, or difficulty transferring grammatical knowledge that students use should therefore be discussed as literature-based interpretations rather than as explanations directly demonstrated by these data . Additionally, poor performance in post-test may be resulting from :

1. Cognitive overload : Too many rules taught in a short period that overwhelm learners resulting these basic errors .
2. Carelessness and anxiety : Stress or rushing causes ignoring rules that they actually recognize.
3. Vocabulary limitation : Limited vocabulary knowledge may lead students to produce incorrect sentences structures .
4. Attitudes toward English Language: Libyan Students may not find the English language instruction acceptable.
5. Random responses : Some students may have provided random answers because they took half an hour to complete test .

6.Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine and explain grammar difficulties, the study proved that 24-hour grammar program may have produced a small immediate improvement ; however , the response was uneven across grammatical areas. The absence of statistical significance

does not prove that the intervention had no value; rather, it means that the observed change was not strong enough , possibly because of the limited numbers of instructional hours and the small sample of 28 learners.

The largest item-level change occurred in Much/Many(39.3%) followed by , since/for(71.4%) , articles(75%) , some /any(71.4%), and (67,9%) ed/ing adjectives which experienced intensive training during the course. While several persistent topics remained difficult despite of intensive training, the findings indicate that some areas showed improvement .

The design has limitations that should be acknowledged explicitly. The same test was repeated before and after training. Consequently, the study mainly measures short-term change improvement was retained over time. Repeating the same items may also introduce familiarity effects.

7.Recommendations

1.A larger controlled study with a delayed follow-up assessment and multiple items per grammatical domain would provide stronger evidence.

2.As potential reason was short intervention that the teaching method was too brief to create impact, taking time in account to be increased.

References

- Ajaj, I.(2022).Investigating the Difficulties of Learning English Grammar and Suggested Methods to Overcome Them. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 29(6),45-58.
- Alahmadi , N .(2019). A Study of Grammatical Errors of Subject Verb Agreement Made by Saudi Learners. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 7(6), 48-59.
- Alghazo , K.(2020) .Grammatical Errors Found in English Writing : A study from Alhussein Bin Talal University .*International Education Studies* ,13(9),1-9.
- Creswell ,w.(2014). *Research Design :Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th edition).California :SAGE Publication .

- Damaiyanti, S.(2021). Grammatical Errors Made by Students in Speaking English .*Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning* , 2(2),57-69.
- Daskon ,A.(2023). The challenges of Grammar Learning and Teaching .*International journal of Social Science*, 10(3),1-14.
- Ekalia , Y(2021). Grammatical Errors Made by Eleventh Grade Students in English .*ICHELA*,30(31),1-6.
- Elturki, E.(2024). An investigation of Grammar Problem Facing English Language Learners , *Humanising Language Teaching* , 16(2),1-5.
- Hoa , L .(2020) Students Difficulties in Learning English for Specific Purpose Grammar at the People's Police University. *The Dua Mot University Journal of Science* , 2(1),78-97.
- Ilham, M (2025) .Analysis of English Language Students' Difficulties in learning Grammar at Muhammadiyah University of Mataram.*Wej* , 9(2),16-19.
- Joven ,A.(2025). Grammar Gaps :An Error Analysis of Grammar Difficulties among Senior High School Students . *International Journal of Social Science and English Literature* , 9(8),9-18.
- Jroshy , N.(2024).An Error Analysis of Using Prepositions of Time among Third Semester Students at Faculty of Languages and Translation .*Scientific Journal of Faculty of Education* , 25(27), 408-420.
- Kamiliya, Z(2024).Grammatical Problems Faced by Students in Using Simple Present Tense. *Journal of English Education*, 7(1),1-8.
- Nugroho ,D. (2021).Recto verso Education and Technology Digital Track of Education Learning. *International Journal of Research*, 7(1),43-52.
- Prichati, L.(2024). Challenges countered by Ninth Grade Student in Learning the Present Perfect Tense .*Journal of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics* ,6(2),195-203.
- Qizi, E.(2025).Li Challenges Faced By Students In Learning English Grammar. *International Scientific Journal* ,2(5),77-79.
- Said,S(2021).Universal grammar: Arguments for its Existence .*Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 12(2),31-36.

- Satuluri ,S.(2025) Is it Difficult to Understand Relative Clauses in English ? A Study of Indian ESL Learners .*Jabalpur Journal of Languages and Linguistics* ,7(1),197-215.
- Setiati,A .(2025). Investigating Grammatical Error in EFL university Students. *International Journal of Social Science*, 8(5),2839-2845.
- Situmorang, k.(2024) . Analysis in Using Simple Past Tense in Nursing Students' Writing Assignments. *Eternal: English Teaching Journal*, 15(1),144-155.
- Yusuf ,A.(2023).Grammatical Errors on Article Usage . *Makna Jurnal Kajian* , 12(1),82-116.