

**Using Discourse Based Grammar Teaching to
Reduce Grammatical Errors in English
Language Majors' writing**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing grammatical errors in English language majors' writings. The study employed the pretest-posttest control group design. Participants were 60 second year English department general education students at Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University who were divided into an experimental group (30 students) and a control group (30 students). Instruments of the study included a list of grammatical errors that occur frequently in second year English department students' writing, and a pre-post writing test that measures the frequency of those grammatical errors. The pre/post writing test was pre administered to both the control group and the experimental group. Then, the experimental group was instructed through the discourse-based grammar teaching program to reduce their grammatical errors in writing (i.e., tense errors, agreement errors, article errors, preposition errors, and sentence mechanic errors) whereas the control group was taught conventionally. The writing test was post administered to the control and experimental groups. Findings of the study revealed that

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the discourse-based grammar teaching program proved to be statistically effective in reducing the grammatical errors of the experimental group students' writing.

Key words: Discourse-based grammar teaching, grammatical errors, writing.

إعداد

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المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من فاعلية برنامج قائم على تدريس القواعد القائم على الخطاب لتقليل أخطاء القواعد النحوية في كتابات الطلاب المتخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية. استخدم الباحثان في هذه الدراسة المنهج شبه التجريبي للمجموعتين الضابطة والتجريبية بقياس قبلي وقياس بعدي. وتكونت مجموعة الدراسة من ٦٠ طالب وطالبة بالفرقة الثانية بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية تعليم عام بكلية التربية جامعة عين شمس. واشتملت أدوات الدراسة على قائمة بأخطاء القواعد النحوية الخاصة بطلاب الفرقة الثانية بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بالإضافة إلى اختبار الكتابة لقياس تكرار هذه الأخطاء. تم تطبيق اختبار الكتابة قبلياً على كل من المجموعة الضابطة والمجموعة التجريبية ثم تم تدريب المجموعة التجريبية من خلال البرنامج القائم على تدريس القواعد القائم على الخطاب لتقليل أخطاء القواعد في كتابات الطلاب بينما تم التدريس للمجموعة الضابطة بالشكل المعتاد. ثم طبقت أدوات الدراسة بعدياً على المجموعتين. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة فاعلية البرنامج وتحققت فروض الدراسة ما يعني ان تدريس القواعد القائم على الخطاب أدى الى تقليل أخطاء القواعد النحوية في كتابات المجموعة التجريبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس القواعد القائم على الخطاب- أخطاء القواعد النحوية- الكتابة

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1. Introduction

Writing is a productive language skill that should be mastered by ESL and EFL learners. Mastering writing can play an essential role in language learning in general and it can provide students with opportunities to better communicate with others. This is, in turn, requires big effort and much practice from both teachers' and learners' sides.

Writing is considered a complicated and a challenging skill for ESL and EFL learners. Writing requires students to learn vocabulary, grammar and other language aspects and then use them to produce linguistic representations in the form of writing pieces (Li & Roshan, 2019). There are several criteria that may affect students' writing performance including grammar and punctuation (Bakla, 2019; S.-M. Lee, 2020; Lin et al., 2020), coherence and cohesion, lexicon, grammatical range and accuracy (Chang et al., 2021; C. Lee, 2020). These criteria have been used in the literature as aspects through which students' writing may be evaluated.

According to Widodo (2006), grammar learning is essential in improving writing and other language skills including listening, speaking, and reading. For example, learning grammar helps language learners to speak English correctly and accurately which, in turn, facilitates oral communication. In reading, grammar helps language learners understand and comprehend the text through providing them with basic knowledge about the interrelationship between words, and sentences in a paragraph, a passage, or a text. As for writing, grammar provides language learners with the required knowledge to put their words in the correct structure, hence, communicate better in writing.

However, grammar is considered one of the learning challenges learners encounter in their learning journey towards learning English either as a second or foreign language. Many EFL learners have grammatical problems especially when it comes to applying the rules in written forms (Gass et al., 2008).

Teaching grammar is one of the most controversial issues when it comes to learning second and foreign languages. Several studies have presented different methods and approaches that are concerned with how to introduce grammar to EFL learners such as grammar translation method, form focused grammar, and teaching grammatical items through tasks (Farrokhi et al., 2018). According to Nunan and Carter (2001), these are all considered traditional methods and approaches of teaching grammar and they were mainly used to provide learners with rules and information about grammar. Such rules were often introduced out of any relevant context and in completely isolated sentences. In such contexts, EFL or ESL learners were required to merely memorize these grammatical rules through several drills and exercises that involved students in processes of mechanical repetition and transformation (Nunan, 1998).

In an attempt to overcome the disadvantages of the conventional grammar teaching methods and approaches, new grammar teaching pedagogy has been suggested by some scholars and educators. This new approach is known as discourse based

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grammar teaching (Farrokhi et al., 2018). Discourse based grammar teaching is an approach that is adopted by second and foreign language scholars and educators to better facilitate classroom engagement practices that focus on meaning and real communication. Discourse based grammar teaching provides EFL learners with several opportunities to be exposed to the target language in a natural way and use it for meaningful purposes (Elkouti, 2017).

According to Panahi (2020), discourse based grammar teaching focuses on three main aspects of any grammatical structures. These main aspects are form, meaning, and use in an authentic context. It provides EFL learners with authentic materials that are somehow challenging for the students' level, but at the same time they present grammar through texts, exercise and techniques that help students observe how grammatical structures are used.

1.1. Context of the problem

Writing English properly is very important for EFL learners who should learn how to apply the grammatical rules correctly in their writings. To better investigate this issue, a pilot study was conducted on (30) second year English major students in the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. The pilot study was in the form of a writing test where students were asked to submit two of their essays of at least five paragraphs each on a topic they have written for their writing course. Students' sample writings revealed that they had clear grammatical errors in their writing. An error analysis was made for these sample writings. Error analysis is the process where the researchers can observe, analyze and classify errors made by students. The results of this error analysis are shown in the table below:

Table 1

Grammatical error analysis of second year English Majors students' writing

No	Grammatical errors	Frequency	Percentages
1	Verb Tense	90	13.65
2	Subject- verb agreement	110	16.69
3	Determiners	117	17.75
4	Prepositions	100	15.17
5	Sentence Mechanics (Run on, Fragments and comma splices)	90	13.65
6	Conjunctions	64	9.71
7	Conditionals	16	2.42
8	Genitive's	13	1.97
9	Word order	23	3.49
10	Capitalization	36	5.46
	Total	659	100 %

Based on the results of the frequencies of these grammatical writing errors among second year English majors' students, the researchers decided to work on the top five frequent grammatical errors reflected in students' writing that included their use of the verb tenses, subject – verb agreement, articles, prepositions, and sentence mechanics.

On the other hand, reviewing literature and previous related studies in the same area revealed that grammar still represents a challenge for most EFL students in Egypt. This might be due to several reasons as stated by (Abdel Latif, 2017):

- Most EFL teachers and instructors in Egypt adopt the deductive method when addressing grammar lessons in their classes. They first explain a grammatical rule and direct the class to examples and questions to answer about the grammatical rule.
- Grammar rules are presented apart from their context. Rules are just delivered for their own sake away from any meaningful context to show the actual use of such grammatical rules.

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- Most English language teachers and instructors in Egypt dedicate most of the class time to teach grammatical structures without using any textbook materials; rather, they depend basically on their deductive presentation of the rules.

In the same context, the researchers designed a questionnaire about teaching grammar in Egypt and administered this questionnaire to a number of 30 English language teachers and instructors who revealed that:

- Grammar instruction is mainly presented in a deductive method, which gives the students the impression that learning grammar is mainly a process of rule memorization.
- Grammar instruction is presented without the use of textbook materials except for answering the questions, so students feel bored and less motivated to learn grammatical structures which are isolated from context.
- Grammar instruction is not presented through authentic materials or texts, consequently students feel that grammar has no connection to real life situations of language use.
- Students' performance in grammar is not compatible with the time and effort exerted by the teachers in the classroom.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The problem of the current study is that “second-year English language major students in the faculty of Education have numerous grammatical errors in their writing.” This problem can be attributed to the conventional instructional methods and approaches used to teach grammar in their writing sessions. In order to solve this problem, the current study attempted to answer the following main question:

“What is the effect of discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing writing grammatical errors among second year English department students?”

The following sub-questions were also answered:

- 1- What are the most frequent grammatical errors in second year English department students' writing?
- 2- How can a discourse- based grammar teaching program be designed to reduce grammatical errors of second year English department students' writing?
- 3- What is the effect of the proposed program on reducing the grammatical errors of second year English department students' writing?

1.3 Hypotheses of the study

Based on the review of the literature and related studies, the following hypotheses have been stemmed:

- 1- There would be statistically significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors of the control group and that of the experimental group in the pre application of the writing test (that measures grammatical errors) as an overall score and in each separate aspect of the grammatical errors in favor of the experimental group.
- 2- There would be statistically significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors among the experimental group students in the pre and post applications of the writing test (that measures grammatical errors) as an overall score and in each separate aspect of the grammatical errors in favor of the post application.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the most frequent grammatical errors in second year English department students' writing and to examine the effect of using discourse-based grammar teaching to reduce grammatical errors among second year English department students' writing, which in turn helps them write English better.

1.5 Significance of the study

The current study may be of significance in that:

- 1- The study may be beneficial for the English department students as they can have the opportunity to improve their grammar knowledge.

- 2- The study may also be helpful for those students in that it may enable them to improve their writing by reducing grammatical errors.
- 3- The discourse-based grammar teaching approach may be important for EFL curriculum designers and developers who seek to integrate discourse-based grammar teaching approach into EFL textbooks.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

The study was delimited to:

- 1- A group of students in second year English department at the faculty of Education, Ain Shams University who study English as a foreign language. Two sections of 30 students were chosen randomly to be divided into an experimental group and a control group.
- 2- Some common grammatical errors that were highly frequent in second year English department students' writing.
- 3- A period of (10 weeks) to implement the program, during the 1st semester of the academic year 2021-2022.

1.7 Definitions of terms

1.7.1 Writing

Writing is a productive skill and an essential learning process for learning second or foreign languages. It is considered a demanding skill that requires managing both content and language (C. Lee, 2020). According to Nunan (2003), writing is the process of constructing ideas and thoughts, expressing ideas, and organizing thoughts in the form of sentences and paragraphs in a clear way. In this study, writing is the ability to construct well designed essays of at least five paragraphs that have no or minor grammatical errors.

1.7.2 Grammatical Errors

According to Miko (2018), grammatical error is a term used to describe an example of a faulty, unconventional or controversial use of a grammatical point. In this study, grammatical errors are those types of errors that are commonly represented in students'

writing and include errors of verb tense, agreement, articles, prepositions, and sentence mechanics.

1.7.2 Discourse based grammar teaching approach

QURROTI A'YUN (2019) defined discourse as the part of a language that is more than one sentence. It is the practice of spoken or written language in a social context. According to Panahi (2020) discourse based grammar teaching is defined as a grammar approach that brings attention to three main aspects of any grammatical structure: form, meaning and use within an authentic context. In the present study, discourse-based grammar teaching is an approach that makes use of authentic materials to deliver grammar in an implicit and communicative way following a number of steps that make learning grammar more engaging.

2. Review of Literature

This section reviews the main variables of the study represented in writing, grammatical errors, error analysis, and discourse-based grammar teaching.

2.1. Writing

Writing is viewed as a vital language skill for both ESL and EFL learners to develop. Writing is a medium for sharing information and knowledge in different disciplines. Also, writing is required in all school and university levels. Moreover, through writing students can produce something with the language (Kusumawardhani, 2015). In the same line of thought, Leonard (2019) confirmed that writing is highly essential in achieving collaboration in today's personal life as well as business career.

Moreover, writing is not just limited to preparing EFL and ESL learners to be able to better face the challenges they might encounter in the future, but also it can have a positive impact on their reinforcement to one's language skills (Syahputra, 2019). In the same regard, Klimova (2012) supported this idea by adding that writing acquisition is not just connected to the other language skills (listening, speaking, and reading), but it also requires students to master metacognitive skills.

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In addition, Amin (2016), stated that both teachers and students consider writing to be one of the most complex skills. It is difficult for teachers to teach writing, and students have difficulty learning how to write well. In the same line of thought, Kusumawardhani (2015) added that writing is considered a skill that is challenging for both ESL and EFL learners as it involves complex processes that are required to create a writing product.

Writing in an EFL or ESL context is a real challenge for students in all educational levels particularly when it comes to paragraph and essay writing as to produce a piece of writing in the form of paragraphs or essays require students to use more writing skills which make writing a real challenge that requires much attention and practice by all the partners of the learning process (Hourani, 2008).

Writing includes several components such as content, structure, organization, punctuation, choices of appropriate vocabulary items and grammatical structures (Richards et al., 2002). Most school students find it challenging to write pieces of writing that do not have grammatical errors. As a result, teachers should address such grammatical errors in a non-traditional way (Hourani, 2008).

In the same context, Widiati and Cahyono (2016) added that many students lack sufficient understanding of grammar and others are not interested in learning writing skills since they make grammatical mistakes. At the same time, many teachers do not focus on correcting students' grammatical errors or when they focus on correcting such grammatical errors, they just focus on correcting grammar at the sentence level.

In addition, Klimova (2012) revealed that students' difficulties in writing in formal context include limited knowledge of grammar such as articles, word order, and tenses. In writing, many EFL learners have clear grammatical errors. In this context, Hyland and Hyland (2006) asserted that teachers should work hard

on highlighting students' grammatical errors in writing to focus on them and repair them as much as possible.

2.2 Grammatical Error & Error Analysis

Errors are the systematic deviations of grammatical structures that reflect students' lack of competence in specific language or grammar aspects. Errors in general and grammatical errors in particular occur when learners use language structures incorrectly (Setiyorini et al., 2020). In many cases, students are not aware of the errors they make or even consider them to be errors (Dinamika & Hanafiah, 2019). Such errors occur frequently in writing, as an example, and students do not know how to correct them as they appear to be caused by lack of language competence. Errors can show students' actual level of language learning and they can show real signs and indication about the effectiveness of language teaching methods and strategies teachers use (Hamilton, 2015). Thus, language teachers and instructors are required to do error analysis to understand the types of students' errors.

Error analysis is mainly conducted to investigate the different types of errors learners make when learning a language (Setiyorini et al., 2020). Error analysis enables language instructors to identify, classify, and tackle students' grammatical errors in EFL or ESL contexts (Batu et al., 2018). Error analysis provides teachers with a clear image about what their students know and how they apply the knowledge of the language they are learning (Setiyorini et al., 2020). On the other hand, error analysis can help teachers evaluate the teaching procedures, techniques, methods and strategies they use with their students in their learning and teaching endeavors; thus, they are provided with a clear vision about which language materials or teaching practices require modifications to better address the errors of their students (Khansir, 2012).

According to Keshavarz (2012), grammatical errors could be classified into four main categories. These four categories are omission, addition, substitution, and permutation. Omission is the lack of some words or items that are necessary in a sentence. An example of a grammatical error of this kind is when a student writes

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"He is study English now." instead of "He is studying English now." On the other hand, addition is the existence of a word or an item that is unnecessary in the sentence. An example of a grammatical error of this kind is "He is always plays football on Friday," instead of "He always plays football on Friday." As for substitution, it is the wrong use of a form of a word in a sentence. An example of a grammatical error of this kind is "Living in the city is different to living in the country", instead of "Living in the city is different from living in the country." On the other hand, permutation occurs when someone places a word or part of a word in a sentence that is not arranged correctly. An example of a grammatical error of this kind is "She walks always in the yard", instead of "She always walks in the yard."

On the other hand, Taher (2011) classified grammatical errors into eight categories that include verb related errors, subject-verb agreement errors, preposition errors, definite and indefinite errors, possessive case errors, word order errors, capitalization errors, and contracted form errors. In the same context, Ferris and Roberts (2001), classified grammatical errors into five categories. These five categories are verb, noun ending, wrong word, article, and sentence structure errors.

Heydari and Bagheri (2012) grouped the main reasons of errors into a number of categories. The first category is the interference errors. These errors are due to using some of the features or characteristics of one's first language when speaking or writing English or any other foreign or second languages. The second category of errors is intralingual errors which occur due to the generalization some students make especially in applying the rules they learn in EFL or ESL contexts. The third category of errors is the developmental errors which is the result of the attempt of an EFL or ESL learner to create hypothesis about the target language based on his or her own limited experience.

Error analysis as presented earlier is the process of observing, analyzing, and classifying errors made by learners in a

specific language aspect. In other words, error analysis is the process by which students' errors are analyzed with clear objectives and treated with effective teaching methods, strategies and approaches or remedial programs. In this study, the researchers conducted error analysis to second year English department students' writing to identify the most frequent grammatical errors that are present in their writing. In doing error analysis, the researchers followed these steps:

- Collecting data: students were asked to submit two essays of their writing; each one should be five paragraphs in length and should be written earlier as part of their writing course.
- Identifying errors: the researchers corrected students' writing samples and highlighted all the grammatical errors made by the students. In doing so, the researchers distinguished between mistakes and errors. Mistakes are caused by factors other than lack of knowledge such as fatigue or what is known as performance. On the other hand, errors are those types of language issues that result from lack of knowledge of the language or what is known as competence. The grammatical errors included in the error analysis were those related to competence.
- Classifying errors: the researchers classified students' grammatical errors into several categories. These grammatical errors categories included verb tense, subject verb agreement, determiners, prepositions, sentence mechanics, conjunctions, conditionals, genitive's, word order and capitalization.
- Counting the frequency of errors: the researchers calculated the total number of each grammatical error category along with the total number of grammatical errors that were present in students' writing. The researchers, then, calculated the weight of each grammatical error by calculating the percentage each grammatical error represents.

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- Identifying the targeted grammatical errors: the researchers selected the top five frequent grammatical errors that were present in students' writing. These top five frequent errors included determiners, subject verb agreement, prepositions, verb tense and sentence mechanics.
- Treating the errors: the researchers designed a program that implemented discourse-based grammar teaching to reduce these grammatical errors.

Therefore, reducing grammatical errors has been considered a language learning challenge that EFL learners encounter in their learning journey towards learning English either as a foreign or second language. Many EFL learners have grammatical problems especially when it comes to applying the rules in written forms (Gass et al., 2008). According to Abdel Latif (2017) the grammar issue now is not about whether grammar learning is important or not or whether or not to teach grammar, but the main issue is about how better teachers can provide language learners with effective grammar instruction.

Teaching grammar is still considered one of the most common fields of study. The majority of ESL and EFL learners think that grammar is an uninteresting and boring language aspect to study as it is dominated by isolated rule learning. One of the main factors that is responsible for making grammar learning less motivating and uninteresting is the method of teaching used by teachers in the classroom. Most ESL and EFL teachers teach English grammar traditionally as they just focus on the grammar rules in isolation from any real-life situations or real contexts which make students unable to practice using the grammar rules they learn in the classroom in real- life situations. So, there is a need to think of more engaging and effective grammar instruction methods that may relate grammar rules to real- life situations and communications(A'yun, 2019).

2.3 Discourse Based Grammar Teaching

According to Housen and Pierrard (2008) , during the previous decades, there has been a conflict regarding which grammar teaching method is the most effective. Explicit grammar instruction has been reported to cause several issues for language learners regarding their communicative competences in the English language. This deductive method has been criticized for mainly allowing more a teacher centered classroom and reducing learners' sense of ownership, responsibility, and interaction.

According to Ur (2009), grammar instruction should be more concerned with language structure, meaning and use rather than merely focusing on the grammatical rules. In the same line of thoughts QURROTI A'YUN (2019) suggested that when grammar is taught, teacher's focus should be placed on making the grammar lessons more engaging and stimulating. Teachers need to help their students use the language in authentic contexts where form and meaning are interrelated and highlighted. Discourse based grammar teaching encourages students to use the language more which resembles that of real-life situations.

For a long time, several educators and scholars have discussed the results of teaching grammar traditionally or through what is known as sentence- level grammar instruction. In this context, Elbaum (2010) listed the following issues for sentence - level grammar instruction:

- Sentence-level grammar instruction does not focus on the links between form, meaning and use.
- Sentence- level grammar instruction does not adopt the communicative approach to language.
- Sentence- level grammar instruction presents exercises in a way that does not promote deep understanding of grammar rules.
- Sentence-level grammar instruction exercises do not focus on real-life usage.

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According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), learners should be encouraged to construct meaning through grammar which help them build up their own communicative competence in several contexts away from the dominant grammar rule based approach which resulted in less communication opportunities for ESL and EFL learners.

Therefore, it can be said that grammar instruction should focus on form, meaning and context. One of the suggested approaches in this regard is discourse-based grammar teaching. Using discourse-based grammar teaching in ESL and EFL contexts has been recently paid more attention in the field by many scholars and educators including Assadi Aidinlou (2012) and Wu (2013) who have investigated the effect of using discourse based grammar teaching on different language aspects such as oral English skills, and writing. The results came up with very positive results regarding the use of discourse-based grammar teaching.

Discourse based approach was first initiated by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2005) when they stated that discourse-based approach to language teaching provides EFL and ESL language learners with opportunities to engage in the language learning process as it focuses on both meaning and real communication which may be delivered through both speaking and writing. They added that diverse language learners should be given more time to be naturally exposed to the target language so that they have more opportunities to use the language in an authentic and meaningful way (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2005).

According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2005), discourse is an example of spoken or written language where form and meaning are closely related to external communicative functions and purposes and a given audience. It is critically important when dealing with discourse to understand the spoken and written language produced by a given participant in each situation. On the other hand, according to A'yun (2019), a sentence or a random set of grammatically correct sentences that are put together does not

necessarily formulate a discourse. Instead of that, to be called a discourse whether spoken or written, these sets of sentences must be organized coherently within the context in which they are used.

According to Farrokhi et al. (2018), discourse based approach pays attention not only to the linguistic function of the language but also to both the sociocultural and pragmatic ones as well. Moreover, it can be said that discourse-based approach is based on two perspectives: first, grammar is not learned away from meaning, and context. Second, grammar should be learned through communication and for communicative purposes like other language aspects.

According to Alexeeva (2015), discourse based grammar teaching can be an effective alternative for the issues of sentence-level grammar instruction. According to HUGHES and MCCARTHY (1998), there are several advantages of using discourse-based grammar teaching. First, it stresses the link between structure and function in context. Second, discourse grammar-based teaching focuses on the inter-personal facet of language use. Third, discourse grammar-based teaching may give perceptions for grammar areas that lack satisfactory clarification when presented through sentence level grammar instruction. Last, discourse-based grammar teaching presents an authentic way of dealing with the language as it presents grammar through the same way students will encounter it in real-life situations.

In addition, Panahi (2020), illustrated that discourse-based grammar teaching stresses three main aspects of any grammatical structure. These three aspects are form, meaning, and use within an authentic context. According to him, the reason behind this is that when a new grammatical structure is presented in an authentic context through some of the noticing techniques, it helps students to learn form, meaning and use at the same time.

Many scholars and educators have reported that using discourse-based grammar teaching can enhance students' cognitive skills as well as their engagement in the learning process. Moreover, it provides students with opportunities to be engaged interactively in

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some communicative activities and scenarios designed for raising students' own awareness of the grammar rules intended without making them feel that the main focus of their lessons is on these grammar rules (QURROTI A'YUN, 2019).

According to Elkouti (2017), discourse based grammar teaching provides learners with more focus on being engaged and involved in the target language and pays more attention to both meaning and real communication. In other words, learners who seek to learn English through the use of discourse-based grammar teaching should be naturally exposed to the language they seek to learn and should be provided with several opportunities for using the language for meaningful purposes.

According to Anderson (2005) using discourse-based grammar teaching can be very beneficial. It can provide a meaningful framework that helps to connect grammar to authentic situations in real-life. Discourse based grammar teaching allows students to learn grammar in an implicit way which in turn makes the learning process an unconscious process of learning. In other words, it helps students learn grammar in an indirect way.

According to Elkouti (2017), discourse based grammar teaching has some principles and requirements. The first principle is that meaning precedes form. This approach focuses on grammar within relevant contexts. Grammar rules are discussed within their pragmatics and contexts. In this regard, learners should be aware of the relationship between pragmatics and grammar. For example, learners can be taught English tenses through authentic pieces of discourse such as a story instead of explaining the tenses through isolated sentences.

The second principle is that using discourse-based grammar teaching requires using authentic materials. Authentic materials are not primarily written for instructional purposes, but for the purposes of communications. Authentic materials can be found in several sources such as books, newspapers, magazines, etc. The only challenge of authentic materials is that they may be complex as they

are written by native speakers, so they should be adapted by teachers and educators if they are to be used for instructional purposes.

The third principle of discourse-based grammar teaching is the idea of top-down vs bottom-up processing. Discourse based grammar teaching calls for an integration between the two processes. These methods are mainly used in reading, but they can be also used in other language aspects such as grammar. At the time bottom-up processing requires a focus on sentences and words to understand the discourse from one side, the top-down processing depends on contextual and socio-cultural knowledge for interpreting or producing discourse.

According to Farrokhi et al. (2018), discourse-based grammar teaching pursues specific procedures to be implemented in the classrooms as follows:

- The first step is that language learners should be exposed to authentic materials that reflect the grammatical rule of the lesson or the one the teachers or instructors intend to focus on as part of the class learning outcomes.
- In the second step, the teacher uses different strategies to grasp students' attention to the grammatical rule. This can be attempted via highlighting techniques such as color coding, bold fonts, or underlying words and phrases.
- The third step is teaching grammar in clusters instead of focusing only on one structure at a time. In other words, when the teacher presents a grammatical rule, s/he goes around the minor language functions associated with the main grammatical rule intended to be presented.
- In the fourth step, the teachers ask the learners questions to elicit the grammatical rule.
- In the fifth step, the teacher implements some techniques such using pictures, demonstration, etc. to present the meaning of the grammatical structure.

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- In the sixth step, teachers provide students with chances to express themselves and communicate in writing through some activities to enable them to use the grammatical rule.
- In the seventh step, the teacher engages students into self or peer assessment to evaluate their own writing followed by the teacher's feedback and correction.
- Finally, the teacher asks students to write a paragraph or an essay about an authentic situation that requires using the grammatical rule as a homework assignment.

Despite the fact that developing grammar has been reported to have a positive influence on students' language learning in general and language skills in particular, there is no agreement over the impact of discourse grammar based teaching on the development of EFL learners' writing (Panahi, 2020). In the same context, Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2005), argued that grammar knowledge might be effective for students' language learning to some extent. On the other hand, Collins and Norris (2017) have stated that grammar teaching through context can positively influence and improve both grammar learning as well as students' writing. In addition, Elkouti (2017) stated in a study that using discourse based approaches can be effective for developing EFL learners' language in both general and specific settings. On the other hand, Richard Andrews' (2004) study which investigated the effect of discourse based grammar teaching on improving accuracy and quality in writing has no influence.

What have been presented earlier supports the idea that there is a lack of EFL studies that investigate the roles of discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing grammatical errors in students' writing and hence comes the importance of the present research that attempts to investigate the effect of discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing grammatical errors in students' writing.

3. Method

This section discusses the method followed by the study to examine the impact of using discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing grammatical errors in students' writing.

3.1. Study design

The two-group pretest/posttest design was utilized. This design is consistent with the study instruments which aimed at comparing the changes that occur within the control and experimental groups related to the reduction of their grammatical errors after introducing discourse-based grammar teaching to the experimental group whereas the control group was exposed to the regular grammar teaching.

3.2. Participants of the study

Sixty (60) second year English department students (general education) at the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University participated in the study. The 60 students were randomly assigned into two groups: experimental group (30 students) and control group (30 students). The students' ages ranged from 19-20 years old.

3.3 Instruments of the study

The following instruments were used:

3.3.1 A list of the common grammatical errors in English majors' writing

Based on the error analysis procedure conducted in the pilot study phase to identify the 2nd year English department students' grammatical errors in their writing, a list of the 5 most frequently occurring errors in students' writings was created.

The purpose of the list was twofold. First, it served as a guide to the researchers to design the rubric by which the participants' grammatical errors in writings in the pre/posttest were scored. Second, it helped the researchers determine the aims and content of the proposed program, with a focus on the participants' needs as elicited from the highest errors frequencies included in the list.

The list comprised the following 5 highly frequently occurring errors which were then targeted by the program:

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- Determiners,
- Subject verb agreement,
- Prepositions,
- Verb tense, and
- Sentence mechanics (See appendix A)

3.3.2. A pre / post writing test

The purpose of the pre- post writing test was to examine the second-year English department students' grammatical errors. A writing test in the form of essay writing questions was designed by the researchers to measure a list of grammatical errors, mainly, verb tense errors, agreement errors, article errors, preposition error, and sentence mechanic errors. The pre-posttest consisted of four topics and students had to choose two topics to write two essays of at least five paragraphs for each.

To measure the content validity of the pre- post writing test, the initial version of the test was given to a number of 5 EFL curriculum and applied linguistics experts to evaluate it in terms of the content appropriateness, number of items and suitability of the test to second year English department students. The test questions were accepted as they were except for some minor phrasing of the topics (See Appendix B).

Piloting the test

To pilot the test, it has been administered to a group of 30 second year students enrolled in the English department, rather than those who participated in the study. That was done to:

- Determine the appropriate duration of answering the test.
- The timing of the test was calculated through calculating the time spent by each student in the test followed by calculating the mean timings for the entire sample. At the end, the timing of the test was 90 minutes.
- Determine the internal consistency of the test
In order to verify the internal consistency of the test, the correlation coefficients were calculated between the score of each of the test individual items and the overall test score.

Table (2)

Correlation coefficients between the score of each individual item and the overall test score

Individual items of the test	Correlation coefficient
Agreement	0.51**
Verb tense	0.55**
Prepositions	0.60**
Articles	0.59**
Sentence mechanics	0.58**

significant at 0.01 level, where $n = 30$, and it is significant at 0.01 when the correlation coefficient ≥ 0.45 .

It is clear from the previous table that all items are statistically significantly related to the total score, which indicates the internal consistency of the test items.

- Reliability of the overall test
In order to establish the test reliability, the following measures were used:
 - Cronbach's Alpha: Alpha coefficient was calculated, and its value was (0.89) and it is a high value which generally indicates that the test was consistent and reliable.
 - Test-retest reliability: The test has been repeated after 15 days of its first administration on the same sample. The correlation coefficient between the two test applications was calculated and was found to be 0.96 and it is a high value which indicates that it has a strong correlation which assures the reliability of the test as a measurement tool.

3.3.3 The writing grammatical errors rubric

In order to objectively correct the test, an analytical rubric was designed by the researchers to assess students' writing grammatical errors in the pre and post writing test. A list of students' writing grammatical errors was already designed and included five main grammatical errors: agreement errors, verb tense errors, article errors, preposition errors and sentence mechanic errors. These main grammatical errors were then used to identify the assessment criteria corresponding to the expected standards of

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students' performance. To determine how far a student's writing grammatical errors met these criteria, four levels of descriptors which differentiated several levels of performance poor (1), fair (2), good (3), exceptional (4) were specified and described in a qualitative and quantitative manners. Poor level is the level where the grammatical error is highly frequented and exceptional level is the level of performance where the grammatical error is almost not present in students' writing. The highest score of the test was 20 and the lowest score was 5 (See Appendix C).

3.3.4 The program

The researchers developed a program based on discourse- based grammar teaching to reduce the second-year English department students' writing grammatical errors.

Aim of the program

The program of the current study aimed at reducing the grammatical errors of second year English department students' writing at the faculty of Education, Ain Shams University.

Objectives of the program

By the end of this program, second year English department students would be able to:

- Use verb tenses correctly in writing.
- Distinguish between the different verb tenses in English.
- Identify common verb tense errors in writing.
- Apply subject- verb agreement rules correctly in writing.
- Apply noun-pronoun agreement rules correctly in writing.
- Demonstrate correct usage of prepositions.
- Use determiners correctly in writing.
- Write correct punctuated sentences.

Content of the program

The program included 10 face to face lessons adapted from several authentic materials and websites including newspaper articles, magazine articles, movies, advertisements and other

authentic materials from online sources. Such lessons were adapted to be delivered using discourse-based grammar teaching approach to target reducing the grammatical errors of the participants' writings. (See Appendix D).

Implementation of the program

Before introducing the discourse-based grammar teaching program to the experimental group, the researchers applied the instruments of the study in the second week of the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022, the pre-writing test was administered to both the experimental group and the control group. Data was collected (calculating the number of grammatical errors for each student) and statistically treated using Z Test for independent proportions in order to check the equality of the variances for the control and experimental groups before implementing the program. The following tables point out the results of the pre application of the test.

Table 3

The differences of proportions between the control and experimental groups in the pre application of the writing test that measures grammatical errors

Grammatical errors	Experimental group		Control group		Z	significance
	frequencies	P1	frequencies	P2		
Agreement	103	0.504	101	0.495	0.198	Not significant
Verb tense	75	0.506	73	0.493	0.232	Not significant
Prepositions	92	0.505	90	0.494	0.209	Not significant
Articles	102	0.492	105	0.507	0.294	Not significant
Sentence mechanics	86	0.504	84	0.494	0.216	Not significant
Overall grammatical errors	458	0.502	453	0.497	0.234	Not significant

The previous table shows that all the values of calculated Z for the grammatical errors as an entire score and in each grammatical error aspect separately is less than the value of table Z (1.96) which is not statistically significant. This indicates that there

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are no statistically significant differences between the proportions of the frequencies of the grammatical errors for the experimental and control groups which means that the control and experimental groups are equivalent prior to the implementation of the program.

Program orientation procedures

- The researchers made sure that the experimental group students understood the general and specific objectives of the discourse-based grammar teaching program.
- The researchers discussed the importance of reducing one's grammatical errors in writing.

Lessons Delivery

Each lesson followed these steps that represented the core of the discourse-based grammar teaching approach adapted from a number of studies:

- The first step is that language learners should be exposed to authentic materials that reflect the grammatical rule of the lesson or the one the instructor intends to focus on as part of the class learning outcomes.
- In the second step, the teacher uses different strategies to grasp students' attention to the grammatical rule. This can be done through highlighting techniques such as color coding, bold fonts, or underlying words and phrases.
- The third step is teaching grammar in clusters instead of focusing only on one structure at a time. In other words, when the instructor presents a grammatical rule, he or she explains the minor language functions associated with the main grammatical rule intended to be presented.
- In the fourth step, the instructor asks the learners questions to elicit the grammatical rule.
- In the fifth step, the instructor uses some techniques to present the meaning of the grammatical structure.
- In the sixth step, the instructor provides students with opportunities to express themselves and communicate in

writing through some activities to enable them to use the grammatical rule.

- In the seventh step, the instructor involves students into self or peer assessment to evaluate their own writing followed by the instructor's feedback and correction.
- Finally, the instructor asks students to write an essay about an authentic situation that requires using the grammatical rule as a homework assignment.

Duration of the program

The program lasted for ten weeks in the first semester of the academic year 2021-2022. The total number of the instructional sessions was 10 sessions. Each session lasted for 120 minutes.

Assessment

In order to measure the effectiveness of discourse-based grammar teaching program on reducing second year English department students' grammatical errors in writing, the pre and post writing tests were administered to the participants of the study.

4. Findings of the study

The results of the study are presented in light of the hypotheses of the study.

Verifying the first hypothesis

The first hypothesis is "There would be statistically significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors of the control group and that of the experimental group in the pre application of the writing test as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the experimental group." In order to verify this hypothesis, the Z test for the differences between independent proportions was used to find out the significant differences between the proportions of the grammatical errors among the control and experimental group as shown in the previous table:

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Table 4

The differences of the grammatical error proportions in the writing of the control and experimental groups in the post application of the test

Grammatical errors	Experimental group		Control group		Z	Significance
	Frequencies	P1	Frequencies	P2		
Agreement	53	0.37	91	0.63	4.478	Significant at 0.01
Verb tense	32	0.31	70	0.69	5.321	Significant at 0.01
Prepositions	46	0.37	80	0.64	4.283	Significant at 0.01
Articles	65	0.40	98	0.60	3.655	Significant at 0.01
Sentence mechanics	60	0.43	80	0.57	2.390	Significant at 0.05
total post	256	0.38	419	0.62	8.690	Significant at 0.01

The previous table points out that the grammatical error proportion of the experimental group in the writing test as an entire score and in each grammatical error separately is less than that of the control group which indicates that the grammatical error proportion in the writings of the experimental group students was reduced after implementing the discourse-based grammar teaching program. Also, the table points out that all the calculated Z values for all the grammatical error categories are higher than the Table Z which equal 2.58 at 0.01 level of significance which means that the calculated Z value is statistically significant at 0.01 level which verifies the first hypothesis that there are statistically significant differences between the proportion of the grammatical errors of the control group and that of the experimental group in the pre application of the writing test as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the experimental group that has the less writing grammatical errors.

Verifying the second hypothesis

The second hypothesis is “There are statistically significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors among the experimental group students in the pre and post

applications of the writing test as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the post administration.” To verify this hypothesis, the Z test for the differences between two independent proportions was used to find out the significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors among the experimental group students’ writing in the pre and post applications as shown in the following table:

Table 5

The differences of the grammatical error proportions in the writing of the experimental group students in the pre and post application of the writing test

Grammatical errors	Proportion of the pre application		Proportion of the post application		Z	significance
	Frequencies	P1	Frequencies	P2		
Agreement	103	0.66	53	0.34	5.661	Significant at 0.01
Verb tense	75	0.70	32	0.30	5.878	Significant at 0.01
Prepositions	92	0.67	46	0.33	5.537	Significant at 0.01
Articles	102	0.61	65	0.39	4.049	Significant at 0.01
Sentence mechanics	86	0.59	60	0.41	3.043	Significant at 0.01
Overall grammatical errors	458	0.64	256	0.36	10.691	Significant at 0.01

The previous table points out that the grammatical error proportion of the experimental group in the post application of the writing test as an entire score and in each grammatical error separately is less than that of pre application which indicates that the grammatical error proportion in the writings of the experimental group students was reduced after using the discourse-based grammar teaching program. Also, the table points out that all the calculated Z values for all the grammatical error categories are higher than the Table Z which equal 2.58 at 0.01 level of significance which means that the calculated Z value is statistically significant at 0.01 level which verifies the second hypothesis that there are statistically significant differences between the percentages of the grammatical errors among the experimental group students on the pre and post

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application of the writing test as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the post application that has the less writing grammatical errors.

On the other hand, in order to calculate the effect size, Eta-squared was used. In this context, Abdelhamid (2016. Pp : 273-284) stated that to calculate the effect size using T test whether for two dependent or independent samples, the following formula should be used:

$$\text{Effect size } (\eta^2) = t^2 / (t^2 + df)$$

(η^2) is interpreted as shown below:

Table (6)

Eta- squared and effect size values

If	$0,010 > (\eta^2)$	Effect size is weak
If	$0,059 > (\eta^2) \geq 0,010$	Effect size is small
If	$0,138 > (\eta^2) \geq 0,059$	Effect size is medium
If	$0,232 > (\eta^2) \geq 0,138$	Effect size is large
If	$(\eta^2) \geq 0,232$	Effect size is very large

In order to determine the effect size, T test for the significant differences between the mean scores of the grammatical error frequencies among the experimental group students in the pre and post applications of the test was used as shown in the following table:

Table 7

T. Test for significant differences between the mean scores of the grammatical error frequencies of the experimental group in the pre and post application of the test and the effect size of the program

Grammatical errors	mean		t- test value	Effect size (η^2)
	Pre	post		
Agreement	3.43	1.77	12.835	0.85
Verb tense	2.5	1.07	3.195	0.26
Prepositions	3.07	1.53	5.630	0.72
Articles	3.4	2.17	5.406	0.50
Sentence mechanics	2.87	2	3.612	0.31
Overall test score	15.27	8.53	14.302	0.88

The previous table shows that the effect size value calculated by Eta squared for the writing test as an overall score and in each grammatical error category separately is bigger than (0.232) which means that the effect size is very large; therefore, it can be concluded that the discourse-based grammar teaching had a very large effect on reducing the grammatical errors among the experimental group students' writings which in turn answers the study main question.

5. Discussion

This section is a discussion of the results presented above. These results are interpreted and discussed in relation to the study hypotheses.

Concerning the first hypothesis, the results showed that there are statistically significant differences between the proportions of the grammatical errors of the control group and that of the experimental group in the pre application of the writing test (that measures grammatical errors) as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the experimental group. These findings indicate that the discourse-based grammar teaching program was effective in reducing the grammatical errors in writings among second year English department students. Such development may be attributed to the following reasons:

- Using the discourse-based grammar teaching approach requires the instructor to adapt authentic materials to present grammar which, in turn, motivated students to be more engaged and involved in the learning process as the materials are up- to- date and interesting.
- Discourse- based grammar teaching presented grammar in context where students could learn the rules implicitly or naturally.
- Discourse based grammar teaching provided students with opportunities to figure out the rules embedded in the authentic texts which made them remember and understand the rules better.

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- The discourse-based grammar teaching program engaged students in self and peer assessment processes which helped them work on their grammatical errors in writing in a scaffolding way.
- The discourse-based grammar teaching program allowed the instructor to provide students with constructive feedback on the common grammatical errors they used to make in their writings which enabled them to identify and work on such errors to better write.

As for the second hypothesis, the findings revealed that there are statistically significant differences between the proportions of the grammatical errors among the experimental group students in the pre and post applications of the writing test (that measures grammatical errors) as an overall score and in each aspect of the grammatical errors separately in favor of the post application. The results of this research are consistent with the results reached by several similar researches including that of Collins & Norris (2017) on the effectiveness of teaching grammar within the context of reading and writing in reducing students' errors in writing. Moreover, it is in line with the findings of Farrokhi's & et al (2018) study which revealed the positive impact of discourse – based grammar teaching on writing skills of Iranian EFL learners.

On the other hand, a closer look at the statistical results presented in Table (5), which shows the differences of the grammatical error proportions in the writing of the experimental group students in the pre and post application of the writing test, reveals some interesting observations. All the participants' grammatical errors decreased regardless of their types or focus. That is, while their use of tenses which mostly depends on contextual meaning improved, other grammatical points which are more related to particular words, rather than general context, such as prepositions and articles were also enhanced. This may be attributed to a main feature of discourse-based grammar teaching, i.e., the integration between top-down and bottom-up processing. This feature enables

learners not only to understand the overall contextual meaning of what they want to express, but also to consider word- specific rules which promote accuracy and refine the final version of their writings.

It can also be noticed that *using appropriate tenses* came at the top of the developed grammatical skills. This may be attributed to another principle of discourse-based grammar teaching which confirms that meaning precedes form. This principle is particularly related to use of tenses, since the primary rationale to choose a certain tense rather than another is the intended meaning. Even when students are taught some key words for tenses, the meaning prescribed by the relevant context remains the only determiner of which tense to choose (e.g., *I always played tennis in my childhood*, although *always* is taught as a key word for present simple). Teaching pragmatics of discourse and providing students with authentic materials during the program contributed to the development of students' sense of meaning in their use of tenses instead of mechanical responses based on key words which they may memorize in isolation from context.

Sentence mechanics, on the other hand, developed least, as it came at the last order of the developed grammatical skills. Egyptian students' use of run on sentences or comma splices may be due to first language interference. In Arabic, commas are more commonly used to separate sentences than periods which are mostly used at the end of a paragraph. Taken into consideration that some students think in their mother language while preparing for what to write in foreign language, this finding related to the development of *sentence mechanics* can be justified.

This finding can also be ascribed to the teaching techniques that most Egyptian teachers follow when introducing conjunctions and linking words. Meaning of conjunctions and linking words is taught with less focus on their punctuation marks. Punctuation is mainly centered around capitalization, periods and question marks, as it is taught at early stages at schools. When students are taught conjunctions or linking words later on, they are more concerned

about their meanings and they may pay less attention to the use of punctuation marks which may negatively affect the smoothness and clarity of sentences.

6. Conclusion, implications, and suggestions for further research

6.1 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the discourse-based grammar teaching program is effective in reducing the grammatical errors in writings among second year students enrolled at the English department, in the Faculty of Education, Ain Shams University. The use of discourse-based grammar teaching helped students to be independent learners and motivated them to be engaged in their grammar lessons through the use of authentic materials. The results are also consistent with results that proved the positive effect of discourse based grammar teaching on several aspects of language learning (e.g., Collins & Norris, 2017; Farrokhi et al., 2018).

6.2 Recommendations of the study

The following implications for researchers, scholars, and curriculum designers are recommended:

- Teachers who teach English as a foreign or second language should be trained to use discourse-based grammar teaching to be able to enhance students' grammatical performance.
- EFL curriculum and course designers should take discourse-based grammar teaching into account when addressing grammar and writing.
- It is highly recommended to engage students in learning the language through authentic materials.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

- At the time, the focus of the present research was to measure the impact of discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing grammatical errors in writing among English Majors, further research is required to investigate other language aspects that can be enhanced by discourse-based grammar teaching.

- Investigating the impact of a discourse-based grammar teaching on reducing the grammatical mistakes in writing among students in other educational stages is suggested.
- Evaluating English textbook in light of the directionality of discourse-based grammar teaching in presenting grammar may be done.

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