

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT TO
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Bachelor of Arts in English

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2002

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
May, 2012

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT TO
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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the contextualized or functional grammar instruction in improving the writing performance of adult English language learners (ELL). The participants in this study consisted of a total of five adult ELL students, all of whom were over the age of 18. The nationalities of these students were one Saudi female and four Saudi males. After determining the most problematic grammar skills that seemed to obstruct the participants' writing performance, five grammar skills were identified to be taught during this intervention. The five common errors identified were used to design instruction and to guide the evaluation. During the intervention, eight quickwrites were collected from each student and were evaluated through a rubric on the six traits of writing and a content analysis that included frequency counts of errors and correct usage of the five focus skills. The results of the quantitative analysis indicated considerable improvement in four out of five participants' skill usage and writing quality using the contextualized grammar method of instruction.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

In order to achieve academic, communicative and perhaps personal goals, the desire to learn functional English is a major ambition for many English Language Learners (ELLs) around the globe. Despite the overt value and presence of grammar instruction in most English Language programs, the practical use of grammar remains a problematic issue in the writing performance of most ELLs.

This study stemmed from my personal experiences and observations of the struggle of many ELLs when attempting to produce efficient English in real life situations. Several years ago, I had the advantage to teach both elementary and adult intermediate English Foreign Language Learners (EFL) who have received a considerable amount of grammar instruction over their schooling years. The eagerness of these students to practice English fluently was incredible. Interestingly, although the two groups varied in age, and their educational and language acquisition level differed, the two shared several features in common. Habitually, the two groups learned grammatical rules by heart and outshined in presenting terminologies and definitions of parts of speech. Frankly, I was not content with such *robotic* performance, but I figured that that was because many of them have only learned English in books. Along with their amazing ability to memorize and recite English grammar rules, these students had a great critical eye and were able to analyze and diagram sentence parts successfully. Many of them also achieved outstanding scores on controlled tasks in worksheets and tests. Despite these great advantages, which my students had acquired through traditional grammar instruction, their English writing and speaking performance was extremely poor.

I have always believed in the power of grammar in providing a vigorous foundation for language; however, I questioned the way it can become a practical tool for second language development and proficiency. I refused to become satisfied with my students' limited and stiff performance on worksheets and tests. Recognizing that the fundamental goal of learning English for these students was the ability to communicate practically, I realized that the students needed guidance in order to bring the rich grammar knowledge that they had collected over years of instruction to life.

Acknowledging the problem was a critical accomplishment for me; however, the great challenge was finding an efficient solution that would help serve the needs of my students. Shortly after realizing the problem, I left teaching to pursue my graduate studies, but I was determined to explore this topic.

Years later, I realized that this was only one story of hundreds that numerous ELL teachers have encountered around the world. I also came to understand that it is a major concern for many ELL students themselves, who fail to apply their English Language knowledge when confronted with real speaking and writing situations.

The overstressed traditional grammar methodology that most ELL instructors and programs have been following for years has resulted in disregarding other language skills that impact the growth of ELL students' language such as writing and practical speaking abilities (Huang,2010) Unfortunately, this method has crippled ELL students' flexible use of language. Drawing from my personal experiences and research-based evidence, the need to explore supplementary teaching approaches in order to upgrade the quality of grammar instruction for ELL students is critical.

Rationale of the study:

Notably, the rationale of this study was not to undervalue the powerful role of grammar in second language growth. I was not questioning whether “to teach or not to teach English grammar”(Shih-Fan Kao, 2007). This topic is an ongoing issue that dominates the field of education, past and present (Sjolie, 2006). Rather, the focal point of this study was to seek an appropriate instructional method in teaching English grammar to ELLs whose purpose is to use grammar in a functional manner. The highpoint of this project was to experiment with an approach that has the potential to foster the practical grammar use of ELLs and facilitate their language growth in writing. Based on the general agreement of the limited impact of traditional grammar on ELLs writing (Poth, 2006; Sjolie, 2006; Weaver, 1996), it is evident that this methodology needs to be improved. It is hypothesized that contextualized grammar instruction, as a means to improve communicative skills, significantly enhances ELLs ability to internalize the information that they are encountering in class (Elley, 1991; Manyak, 2008). ELL educators need to embrace the notion that “it is not wrong to approve of teaching grammar. And it is important to know approaches for wielding such a wild, often unwieldy tool to enhance its effectiveness” (Sjolie, 2006, p.35).

This quantitative research study aimed to encourage teaching grammar to ELLs through implementing a grammar-in-context approach, specifically teaching grammar through authentic writing opportunities. In addition, it also sought to highlight the crucial need for educators to distinguish the type of grammar instruction that helps ELL students reach their finest potential in writing.

As mentioned previously, this study aimed to investigate the outcomes of teaching grammar to adult ELLs in a non-traditional manner by providing meaningful input in the English

language. The reason that I chose to examine this particular group of students is that they had most likely experienced formal grammar instruction for a considerable amount of time. This factor helped me examine how these participants' writing performance did or did not change after experimenting with a different way of learning grammar. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own teaching strategies and consider better ways to teach this group in my future career. Interacting with this group in the past and my anticipation of working with similar groups in the future is a prior motivation in choosing the topic and participants of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

ELL Learning Theories

Theories of second language acquisition have varied in their vision of what types of English grammar instruction that leads to successful English language acquisition. It is no surprise that continued contradictions emerge time and again on whether grammar should be taught in an explicit manner, implicit manner, or even omitted when teaching ELLs.

In order to set the stage to understand the various instructional systems implemented in teaching ELLs, one must understand the learning philosophies that these instructional systems have sprung from. Understanding learning theories can play a significant role in teachers' professional improvement and performance (Wilson & Peterson, 2006). It can assist teachers in designing and choosing structures and strategies that have been demonstrated to be effective in the past. In addition, it can also assist teachers in finding answers to questions about their students, recognizing learners' styles, and reflecting on their own teaching performance (Darling- Hammond, Rosso, Austin, Orcutt, & Martin, 2001, p. 20; Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p.1). As James C. Maxwell states, "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" (as cited in Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p.14).

The following is a brief tour of a number of philosophies that have influenced the ELL instructional system for decades. It is worth mentioning that not all the following theories were originally aimed nor designed for pedagogical reasons. However, all theories are concerned with how humans learn. For instance, the Behaviorist and the Constructivist theories are basically psychological theories. On the other hand, both the Universal Grammar theory (UG) and the

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories come from a linguistic foundation. For the purpose of this study, I will discuss these four principle learning theories that have influenced the teaching approaches for ELLs.

Behaviorist Theory

The Behaviorist theory is a philosophical learning theory established between the late 19th century and the early 20th century (Moore, 2011) that is credited to the philosopher J.B Watson and was later espoused by the famous theorist B.F. Skinner (Forrester & Jantzie, n.d). The Behaviorist theory is based on behavioral habits and the assumption that repetition of behaviors and reinforcement will lead to mastery of the fixed knowledge that is received from the outside environment (Hanley, 1994; Moore, 2011; Semple, 2000). It assumes that learning is a straight-forward enterprise that can be achieved through imitation (Del Valle-Gaster, 2006), p.15). Advocates of this philosophy view the world as a body of facts that are transmitted, in this case, through the teacher to students. And students are expected to demonstrate absorbance of these facts through replicating it in their behavior. In this theory, learners are viewed as empty vessels that are filled with the knowledge that is received through the instructor (Lefrancois, 2011, Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996; Wilson & Peterson, 2006). Students demonstrate learning through imitation of the instructor's behavior (Wilson & Peterson, 2006). Through this school of thought, the students' absorbed knowledge is also measured through evaluation of exams (Forrester & Jantzie, n.d.). Obviously, this theory has been practiced and implemented in numerous teaching facilities in the past and is still being practiced in today's schools (Dean, 2008). Given the principles of the Behaviorist learning theory, the Classical-Traditional grammar method of rote rule memorization and the Grammar- Translation method of translating sentences or text both fall into a behavioral framework. The teaching methods that sprung from this

philosophy function through drills and memorization skills and are based on a teacher-centered environment (Hanley, 1994). Despite its widespread use, this theory has several criticisms especially after it has been proven that students “interpret- and do not automatically absorb- the information and ideas they encountered” (Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p. 3). Similarly, Long (1988) pointed out that traditional grammar instruction is ineffective (as cited in Fotos, 1998, p. 301). Consequently, regardless of the concrete evidence against the effectiveness of the Behaviorist theory, the roots of this ancient theory remain solid in the field of education (Taber, 2008).

Constructivist Theory

Jean Piaget and John Dewey are two of the pioneer sages whose names are associated with the Constructivist theory (Morphew, 2000). The Constructivist theory is initially based on inquiry teaching and learning. In this theory, learning is believed to occur through discovery and experimenting with facts (Leonard, 2002). Constructivists advocate the notion that learners build knowledge of new things by relating it to their own experiences. Thus, this theory accounts for the prior knowledge of the learner and it differentiates between students’ needs (Morphew, 2000; Semple, 2000). In this theory, teachers are coaches or facilitators who guide the students to acquire knowledge (Hanley, 1994). The Constructivist theory, as opposed to the Behaviorist theory, is based on a student- centered method and focuses on the process, not the product, of learning (Leonard, 2002). Further, the Constructivist theory stresses the role of the learner’s brain and how it affects the learning process (Leonard, 2002). Thus, it takes into consideration the mental role and learners’ activation of prior knowledge. Further, this theory can be linked to Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition theory in terms of providing comprehensible input that

students can relate to in order to learn a language. However these two theories may differ in the applied approaches to ELLs.

Universal Grammar Theory (UG)

The Universal Grammar (UG) school of thought was established in the 17th century (Cram, 1981). However, it was revitalized by and is normally associated with the linguistic philosopher Noam Chomsky in the 1980's (Cook,1989). Chomsky hypothesized that learning a foreign language is no different from learning our first language. According to Chomsky, the UG is a “mental organ” that all humans are born with (Del Valle-Gaster, 2006); it is the linguistic structures that are assumed to be common in all languages. Thus, according to UG supporters, there is no need for formal grammar instruction for ELLs because they already have these basics (Cook, 1989; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004) what is needed is exposure to meaningful input in the targeted language (Cook, 1989). Hence, the UG theory calls to exclude explicit grammar instruction in ELL teaching (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004).

Second Language Acquisition Theory (SLA)

Another major theory that was strongly influenced by Chomskian ideas is the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory (Del Valle- Gaster, 2006). Influenced by the naturalist movement and the Universal Grammar theory, Stephen Krashen established his Second Language Acquisition theory (SLA) in the 1980s (Del Valle-Gaster, 2006). Through his theory, Krashen explains that English as a second (ESL) or other language (ESOL) learners acquire language in the same way that children learn their first language, that is, through comprehensible input. Krashen emphasizes that there is no need for grammar instruction in language acquisition (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Instead ELLs need to be exposed to a rich language environment that offers meaningful input in the targeted language. This factor enables them to master the language

in a natural and fluent manner. The SLA theory is built on five hypotheses: 1) Learning hypothesis, 2) Acquisition hypothesis, 3) Natural Order hypothesis, 4) Input hypothesis. 5) Affective Filter hypothesis (Del Valle-Gaster, 2006; Altenaichinger, 2002). The SLA theory basically views language learning and language acquisition as two different modes. As Krashen explains, there is a difference between language *learning* and language *acquisition* that teachers must be aware of. According to Krashen, language learning is a conscious behavior that naturally results from teaching language in an explicit manner (Del Valle- Gaster, 2006). In contrast, language acquisition is an unconscious behavior which results from exposing learners to meaningful input in the targeted language that can be implemented in everyday life. According to the SLA theory, it is this type of knowledge that leaves the learner with an enduring effect and leads to practical, fluent use of the targeted language. Obviously, advocates of this theory strongly disagree with the Behaviorist theory. Krashen & Terrel (1983) elucidate that second language (L2) like first language (L1) “develops through interactions with peers, rather than through imitation of a teacher’s model or through formal study” (as cited in Del Valle-Gaster, 2006, p. 32). Despite the positive recognition that this theory achieved in the 1980’s (Del Valle-Gaster, 2006), it was eventually seen by several researchers as having insufficient influence on ELLs overall language achievement (Nassaji, 2000; Long, 1988 as cited in Fotos 1998, p.302). In fact, several researchers claimed that implementing comprehensible input alone to teach ELLs had limited outcomes (Long, 1988 as cited in Fotos, 1998; Nassaji, 2000). Nassaji (2000) found that “in terms of grammatical development, in particular, the contribution of communicative tasks has been shown to be limited” (Nassaji, 2000). The SLA theory may have been partly effective in supporting the learning of a foreign language; however, it may not be complete enough to achieve the desired results. Full and proficient language learning may require

educators to consider a combination of studies and theories, including ones that address the need for explicit instruction in grammar.

Thus, according to the previous information, researchers in language development theories can be classified into the following categories:

- Firstly, those who advocate the critical need of grammar instruction when learning a second language. This can be divided into two branches:
 - a) Those who believe that grammar should be taught in a formal manner, for example the Behavior theorists.
 - b) Those who believe that grammar instruction and communicative learning are parallel and inseparable (e.g. Azar, 2006).
- Secondly, researchers who believe that successful language growth does not require grammar instruction but, rather, develops in the context of natural language environments (e.g. Chomsky and Krashen).

Despite the different views of how to approach grammar instruction, both the Behaviorists and the Constructivists claim that there must be a type of formal instruction or guidance provided by the facilitator for the language learning process to happen. While on the other hand, both the UG and the SLA theories state that language acquisition occurs without providing explicit grammar instruction. Instead, the two advocate a naturalist stance that advocates the abundant presence of comprehensible input in any ELL instruction.

Grammar Instructional Methods for ELLs

In the light of the previous research and propositions, it is evident that the contradictions between pros and cons of grammar instruction and how a language is acquired led to the

emergence of several approaches in teaching English to ELLs. The following section will highlight the most common approaches in this field.

Grammar-Translation Method

This method is also known as the classical, formal or traditional method. It is an instructional method descended from Greek and Roman principles which consider memorizing and reciting rules an ideal mode when learning a language (Haussamen, 1997; Weaver, 1996). Basically, it is also characterized as an Aristotelian methodology (Haussamen, 1997; Hillocks & Smith, 1991). Such instruction is demonstrated today in worksheets, diagramming parts of language, and drills. It also emphasizes constant correction of spelling, punctuation, diction and the lack of manipulation with parts of speech. Such method belongs to the traditional grammar instruction family mentioned previously. In the context of this paper, traditional grammar is “teaching grammar as a system, and teaching it directly and systematically, usually in isolation from writing” (Weaver, 1996, p. 7). Unfortunately, despite its marked shortcomings, it “is still alive throughout Europe, Asia and even in the Americas” (Taber, 2008).

Focus-on-Form Method

This approach is also known as the Grammar-in-Context approach and it is based on the notion that “students need to construct knowledge of grammar by practicing it as part of what it means to write” (Ehrenworth & Vinton, 2005, p.10). Advocates of this method assume that students tend to learn and apply language structure through practice and that manipulating sentences through writing helps students practically use the language and therefore increase the language proficiency level. The term *context* is defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as “the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning.” Under this definition, this approach can be linked to Krashen’s language acquisition

theory. Krashen (2004) proposes that language acquisition goes beyond reciting, memorizing, and completing closed exercises. He explains that in order to be functional, language needs to be taught and experienced through authentic context. Anderson (2005) clarifies that context does not necessarily mean a lengthy text; it can be a paragraph or even a sentence (p.11). Thus, the contextual grammar approach can be applied through using mentor sentences and paragraphs to explain grammar concepts and mechanics in a relatively meaningful situation that ELL students can relate to. This approach is clearly influenced by the constructivist theory. Through this study, I explored the efficacy of such a method that presents both explicit grammar instruction and meaningful input that allows students to elaborate on, experiment with, and relate to the received knowledge.

As accomplished practitioners, acknowledging and being aware of the theories and methodologies that have influenced ELL teaching and learning is a crucial step. Yet, it is critical for teachers to consider that “all the theories are based on limited information” and that this information is consistently being examined and perhaps even amended (Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, teachers must know what works for their students and use a “balanced view of learning and teaching.” (Kilpatrick, Swafford & Findell, 2002 as cited in Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p. 4). This may mean it is necessary to employ more than one approach when teaching rather than focusing on just one approach. For instance, following the Behaviorist theory alone can lead to learning grammar rules in isolation and students inability to transfer this knowledge to other language skills. Similarly, following the UG or the SLA theory, which both stress language learning without grammar instruction, may not be ideal for many students either. Many experienced teachers and those who have interacted with ELLs realize that some students will need a type of grammar coaching as well as meaningful input depending on the students’

level and style of learning. Thus, having a solid understanding of how we teach, possessing the ability to articulate our instructional approach, and being aware of various learning theories may hold a lot of promise in boosting our teaching performance and may provide satisfying results. However, it is important that we choose the appropriate approach that suits our learners' needs.

Review of Research

Traditional grammar instruction has dominated the field of teaching English as a second language for decades (Eaton, 2010). For many ELL educators, traditional grammar is considered the substructure of language learning and knowledge (Sjolie, 2006). Problematically, the underlying philosophy of this approach builds on the notion that students automatically apply concepts and rules that have been presented in isolation to their writing (Anderson, 2005; Weaver, 1996). However, many researchers have found that the majority of students *do not* transfer knowledge without guidance (Weaver, McNally, & Moerman, 2001). Research has shown that students need to be guided through such processes in order to reap the benefits of grammar and to produce effective writing (Weaver, 1996). Such guidance can be provided through constant writing and teaching grammar concepts in meaningful context (Calkins, 1994; Krashen, 2003). Poth (2006) explains that grammar exercises that are introduced through worksheets and workbooks provide students with limited knowledge that does not necessarily relate to the authentic use of grammar. Likewise, Thomas and Kington (1974) found that “the school- grammars totally ignore many of the important facts that we have learned about in the last 150 years” (Thomas & Kington, 1974; as cited in Weaver, 1996, p.6). Unfortunately, the Aristotle version still remains a typical approach that is implemented in today’s schooling systems (Hillocks & Smith, 1991). In terms of writing, it can be confidently said that teaching

grammar rules in isolation would not likely improve students' writing skills (Weaver, McNally, & Moerman, 2001).

The excessive implementation of and the value placed on teaching traditional grammar can be traced to the late 1800's. Some researchers have even concluded that the teaching of traditional grammar may result in negative outcomes. Braddock, Lloyd, and Schoer (1963) found that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or ... even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing" (as cited in Dean, 2008, p. 9). Similarly, Hillocks (1986) points out that "if schools insist upon teaching the identification of parts of speech, the parsing or diagramming of sentences, or other concepts of traditional grammar..., they cannot defend it as a means of improving the quality of writing" (p.138). Despite the early prediction of the negative aspects of following the traditional grammar approach solely, it was not until 1936 that the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) asserted that traditional grammar instruction had little impact on the students' quality of writing (Anderson, 2005; Dean, 2008).

Since the mid-1900s, educators have noted the limited effect of traditional grammar on ELL's language learning. Weaver (1996) states that, in the past, traditional grammar instruction "... allowed for limited production of language in addition to requiring analysis" but this method is still being followed in today's schooling systems (p.5). A synthesis of studies in the 1960s revealed that "knowledge of grammar does not materially affect a student's ability to learn a foreign language" (1960, p.9 as cited in Weaver, 1996). In fact, research has noted that "... in spite of the fact that the contribution of the knowledge of English grammar to achievement in foreign language has been its chief justification in the past, the experimental evidence does not support this conclusion" (1950 as cited in Weaver, 1996, p.9). Despite the early dates of these articles, they discuss issues that are relevant to what teachers and students are experiencing

today. According to Frodesen (2001), basically, ELLs are “often able to access and explain grammar rules” (p.235); however, they fail to utilize this knowledge when writing. Hence, it is evident that ELL educators need to employ a more transformational method that allows students to apply grammar rules in writing.

Opponents of the traditional approach argue that knowing the foundation and structure of language is a principle factor in learning a second language (Dean, 2008); however, following such a method solely has been proven to significantly deprive ELL students from the natural outcomes of practically applying grammatical conventions to serve communicative needs, specifically when writing (Hillocks, 1986; Huang, 2010; Wang, 1999 as cited in Lin, 2008, p.5). The use of traditional grammar instruction alone has been found to be ineffective in improving students’ writing performance (Weaver, McNally & Moerman, 2001). Traditional grammar helps students label parts of sentences and become familiar with the system of a particular language. Accordingly, Hillock (1987) assures that traditional grammar instruction familiarizes students with the structure of language. However, the only advantage that students may reap from such methodology is the ability to recite rules and analyze the various parts of sentences and paragraphs. The predicted limited influence of the traditional method led many educators to conclude that the need of both explicit and implicit grammar is crucial for ELL’s language growth and that teaching grammar separately from other skills may be inapt (Ellis, 2005 as cited in Huang,2010; Sjolie,2006). “Teaching grammar divorced from reading and writing creates a fractured, disjointed approach that does not improve reading and writing” (Controversy of Teaching Grammar, n.d.). Burgess (n.d.) acknowledges the importance of teaching grammar to students yet emphasizes the role of choosing the appropriate approach when teaching it. He states, "There is a satisfactory boniness about grammar which the flesh of sheer vocabulary

requires before it can become vertebrate and walk the earth. But to study it for its own sake, without relating it to function, is utter madness” (Burgess, n.d.). Similarly, Sjolie (2006) shows the importance of teaching grammar in ELL classes in familiarizing students with the structure and patterns of English; however, he found that “study of grammar itself... offers little in the way of sentence structure improvement” (p.36). Such findings are echoed in Hillocks’ (1986) meta-analysis of writing research studies. After reviewing a significant number of reports, Hillocks (1986) found that all reports emphasized the fact that grammar instruction had no impact on the students’ writing skills. Weaver, et al (2001) concluded that “Teaching traditional grammar in isolation is not a very practical act” (p.18). Justifiably, “in some form, the role of grammar will remain as an essential component of effective written communication” (Frodesen, 2001, p. 247). However, the effectiveness of building grammar awareness in ways that enable ELLs to functionally use in their writings mostly depends on the method that is followed. Hence, although the traditional method has been widely used and is acknowledged for familiarizing ELL students with the mechanisms of the English Language (Hillocks, 1987; Weaver, 1996), it has remarkably failed ELL students when attempting to transfer this knowledge to writing.

Several educators such as Azar (2006) advocate the presence of both grammar teaching as well as communicative teaching in the ELL classroom. Azar (2006) explains that “communicative teaching and grammar teaching are not mutually exclusive. They fit hand in glove” (p.3). For instance, in favoring the notion to weave grammar instruction with communicative teaching, Nassaji (2000) explains that several educators have found that comprehensible input alone, such as the naturalist movement advocates, is partially beneficial yet it is not enough to achieve accuracy and fluency in the target language (Nassaji, 2000, p. 242). In fact, despite the bountiful exposure to meaningful context in the targeted language, Harley and

Swan (1984), who launched an empirical research study found that the ELL subjects in their study revealed problematic grammar structuring and forming after being exposed to “meaningful input” alone for a considerable amount of time (as cited in Nassaji, 2000, p.242).

Since the mid-20th century, the positive impact of teaching grammar-in-context on students’ writing has been recognized (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Dean, 2008; Sjolie, 2006; Weaver, 1996). A host of current studies have emphasized the fact that humans tend to learn “in a web-like fashion the web of content.” (Anderson, 2005, p. 10). Teaching grammar in context provides a meaningful framework that connects to reality in the targeted language (Anderson, 2005). We must have a practical approach that allows ELLs to generate thoughts and to make use of the received knowledge. Del VanPatten (2003) stresses the importance of providing writing input to the teaching of grammar. “Language learners must have opportunities to produce output in order to gain fluency and accuracy” (Guilloteau, n.d.). Teaching writing as a process to ELLs was first introduced by Vivian Zamel in 1976 (as cited in Kroll, Long, & Richards 2003). Many researchers stress the fact that ELLs need to experience grammatical conventions in various contexts in order to control and use them correctly (Anderson, 2005). For instance, Calkins (1994), Fu (2003), and Anderson (2005) demonstrated the effective impact of teaching language, specifically grammar conventions and mechanics, through writing. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) found that students’ writing performance over a substantial period had dramatically improved when following the grammar-in-context approach (p.21). Weaver, et al. (2001) affirms that effective writing is a result of teaching grammar in context because it allows students to apply mechanics and conventions and produce effective writing. Experts conclude that grammar is best understood conceptually, rather than mechanically, and is best learned in an inductive, discovery- based process (Dean, 2008; Ehrenworth & Vinton, 2005; Raub, 1880 as cited in Dean,

2008). Such standards can obviously be provided and illustrated in writing. ELL educators need to contextualize grammar instruction through writing in order to “build students understanding of grammar through writing” (Dean, 2008, p.75).

ELL instructors and educators need to distinguish the purposes of traditional grammar in language and the role that such approach can play. They also need to realize the shortages that can result from focusing on this approach solely. Weaver (1996) provides a clear summary of the reasons of teaching traditional grammar for decades (p.7-9). She states that traditional grammar can help a student understand the structure of a language, in other words to understand how a specific language works. However, this prescriptive purpose needs to be appealing to the student and accompanied with a transformational approach to achieve the intended goals of a descriptive method. Kolln (1991) anticipated that grammar instruction accompanied with “explicit application” may potentially be more powerful than teaching grammar in isolation. Students need guidance to translate and transfer traditional grammar knowledge to functional use (Hillocks, 1986). Hence, we should not expect students to automatically apply concepts and rules that have been presented in isolation (Anderson, 2005).

If the shortcomings of traditional grammar are so evident, then why do ELL educators continue to follow and implement it in their curriculum?

Unfortunately, despite the fact that grammar-in-context has been “greeted with fanfare” since the mid 1900s, it has hardly been put into action (Weaver, 1996). Many educators remain loyal to the traditional grammar fad (Dean, 2008). Such commitment can be the result of many reasons. The urge to teach traditional grammar may be due to public expectations such as parents and politicians who hold prior assumptions of the benefits of the teaching of grammar (Weaver, 1996; Weaver, McNally & Moerman, 2001). The dysfunctional application of grammar rules in

ELL's writing, when taught through the traditional approach, is because our minds have been settled on the allusion that "practice makes perfect and that skills practiced in isolation will be learned that way and then applied as relevant" (Weaver, 1996, p.17). What many may not realize is that, with the absence of a transformational stage, we are training ELL students to become grammarians who may excel in diagramming and analyzing language but fail to apply this knowledge to communicative use (Frodesen, 2001; Leki, 1992). Their brains become fixed on the sentence analysis phase and hardly ever develop the concept of transferring this knowledge to produce effective writing. Another reason why this method is still being used in many ELL classes is that "it is easy to teach" (Taber, 2008, p.1). Teachers following this method do not need to be fluent in speaking and pronunciation (Taber, 2008, p.2).

In order to raise the quality of ELL's writing performance, educators need to embrace and prize that "improving their writing, not just learning grammar for the sake of knowing the proper terminology or in order to pass a grammar test" (Weaver, et. al. 2001, p.25). ELLs need plenty of guidance and experience with authentic material in order to write in the approved manner (Weaver, 1996). Weaver (1996) asserts that we teach grammar to "train the brain, to aid in learning a second language, to help students score well on-scale tests, ... and to help them improve as writers and readers" (Dean, 2008, p. 13). However, the method of teaching grammar according to the purpose varies. If the goal of teaching grammar in ELL classes is to generate grammarians, then we have succeeded in doing so. However, the majority of ELL students aspire to use English in a practical manner. "Grammar and mechanics are not rules to be mastered as much as tools to serve a writer in creating a text..." (Anderson, 2005, p.5). "Grammar maps out the possible; rhetoric narrows the possible down to the desirable or effective" (Francis Christensen, 1967, p.39; as cited in Weaver, et. al. 2001,p.19). This necessitates the presence of a

transformational stage from familiarizing ELLs with the structure of language to applying grammar to writing.

Applying grammar instruction approaches for EFLs

Due to the fact that this study is intended to improve my teaching skills in both English as a Second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) environment, the following section will underscore the differences that need to be considered when dealing with the EFL population as opposed to ESL students. Along with the need to differentiate among learner styles, which has been strongly recommended and become a successful recipe for many teachers, there are other reasons that call for adjusting or revising our teaching methods when teaching EFLs. It is critical to realize that teachers need to consider applying suitable modifications when implementing any teaching method discussed previously due to the following differences:

- 1- In most EFL classes, the curriculum, which is more often than not designed for test preparation, is determined and fixed through the teaching ministry (Long, 1988 as cited in Fotos, 1998) and employing other material can be a hurdle for many teachers who mandatorily teach from the school text book alone. This constraint may pose a challenge in exposing ELLs to authentic and meaningful input of the targeted language. Therefore, EFL teachers must conceive and explore various ways to implement authentic English material with a tight curriculum and little resources.
- 2- Another obstacle is the class size (Long, 1988 as cited in Fotos, 1998). Having a large number of students can impact a teacher's feedback especially in providing one- on-one guidance. Giving EFL students one-on-one feedback may possibly result in generous learning, however, such practice can be difficult for teachers who teach large numbers of students. Therefore, the burden is placed on teachers in adapting strategies to allow

students to receive feedback in a constructive and efficient manner. For instance, teachers can utilize peer feedback amongst their students’.

- 3- Another factor that EFL students lack when compared with their ESL peers is less input of the targeted language in terms of interacting and using the language in a realistic environment. Many EFLs experience English input for one hour at most through a classroom environment as opposed to their ESL peers who have the advantage of interacting with real life language situations in and outside of school (Fotos, 1998). This factor remains a true obstacle that interferes with the fluent usage of language for many EFLs.

However, despite these negative factors, Long (1988) explains that a solution to such obstacles can be developed through several steps (as cited in Fotos, 1998). First he explains that EFL schools have begun to incorporate communicative skills into curricula such as listening and speaking activities that provide more input in the targeted language. He also suggests that teachers promote and encourage cooperative activities within the limited time of class to provide more input opportunities in the targeted language. Therefore, it is assumed that the Focus on Form approach is the most convenient approach that fits the EFL group (Fotos, 1998). Long (1988) adds that the Focus on Form approach is adaptable in both ESL and EFL settings, of course, through considering the various adjustments needed in each environment (as cited in Fotos, 1998).

According to the reviewed studies, the effect of grammar instruction on language acquisition is debated among researchers. Grounded on various language learning theories, several methods of teaching English to ELLs have emerged. These approaches vary in the amount and type of grammar instruction included in ELL instruction. However, the approaches

that call to exclude grammar instruction from ELL programs, such as the communicative approach, have been accused of having limited impact on the language growth of ELLs (Nassaji, 2000). Researchers have also argued that many students who received such instruction struggle with producing sufficient writing with appropriate English structure (Harley and Swan, 1984 as cited in Nassaji, 2000). Further, several researchers have indicated that teaching grammar alone, such as in the case of the traditional grammar approach, also showed inadequate results. Despite the strong advocacy of formal grammar instruction and the wide spread of this method in several ELL programs, several studies have proven this method to be ineffective in developing functional English skills for ELLs (Sjolie, 2006; Weaver, McNally & Moerman, 2001). Such results were linked to the lack of guidance in this method (Weaver, 1996).

Due to the shortcomings in the previous discussed methods, several educators have recognized a balanced grammar instruction approach that allows the instructor to provide both explicit grammar and meaningful context; this method is known as the grammar-in-context approach. This approach invites instructors to include both explicit grammar teaching as well as meaningful input when teaching ELLs. Many researchers, such as Azar (2006) and Weaver (1996), considered the fact that neither the separation nor the neglect of grammar instruction seemed to have a strong impact on ELLs language learning development. Advocates of weaving both grammar instruction and meaningful input explain that contextual grammar familiarizes students with the language structure and enables them to write and speak practically. It also helps them relate the received knowledge to realistic situations. Noticeably, contextual grammar has resulted in appreciative results in many cases (Anderson, 2005; Calkins, 1994; Fu, 2003; Graham & Perin, 2007).

In the present study, I explored the impact of the grammar-in-context method on adult ELL's writing performance. This application included explicit grammar instruction as well as contextual input. Therefore, this study extends the results that were found in Graham and Perin's study (2007). A review of the professional literature supports the notion that contextualized grammar is effective and has a considerable impact on the writing performance of adult ELLs. This study will add to the presented literature and will help recognize the effectiveness of contextualized grammar instruction.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The research investigation in this study largely sprung from the notion that “the goal of grammar teaching is to help students create an interlanguage that is increasingly fluent and accurate in the use of English structures in meaningful communication” specifically in writing (Azar, 2006). Therefore, the research question, methodology, and the collected data included in this chapter were carefully crafted to achieve this goal. This investigation was led by one main research question which is included in the first section of this chapter. The second section in this chapter describes the methodology that was followed in this study. This section includes a definition and an explanation of the action research approach and its relevance to this project. The third section details the number of participants that took part in this study along with information about their past experience in learning English. For confidentiality reasons, all names included in this thesis are pseudonyms. The fourth section of this chapter includes a detailed explanation of the instructional design, which includes a survey of participants’ English learning experiences, use of common writing errors lists and the instructional procedures that were followed during the eight sessions. Finally, description of the types of data that were collected, the time phases of the data collection, and the data analysis methods are also presented at the end of this chapter.

Research Question

When taught with a contextualized/ functional grammar approach, in what ways do adult ELLs apply their grammar knowledge in writing?

In the context of this investigation, grammar knowledge refers to sentence structure and punctuation. The sentence structure includes article use, subject-verb agreement, verb-tense shift, and sentence fragments.

Methodology

“Action research is continual professional development and provides a direct route to improving teaching and learning” (Calhoun, 2002, p.7). Due to the fact that this is a self-reflective and inquiry-based project in which a problem has been identified and attempts to solve it are presented through conducting the following steps, I have elected to use the action research approach. Gilmore-See (2010) asserts that “action research is *not* about learning why we do certain things, but rather how we can do things better. It is about how we can change our instruction to impact students” (p.73).

Action research methodology incorporates the following principle elements:

- a) Identifying a problem: Recognizing a problem and questioning the reasons that allowed such a situation to occur.
- b) Connecting theory and action: Conducting a thorough literature review and considering the interventions and findings of others.
- c) Taking action by designing and implementing a plan: Implementing and experimenting with several adjustments that have the possibility to improve students’ performance as well as making effort to produce effective results.

- d) Gathering and analyzing the data: Collecting information from one's classroom and choosing the appropriate analysis method that achieves the goal of the study that is being conducted.
- e) Reflecting: A principle component in action research is reflective thinking. In light of Dewey's definition of reflection, Norlander-Case and colleagues (1999) explain that "true reflection could only occur when an individual is confronted with a problem, recognizes it, and then attempts to resolve the problem rationally" (as cited in Hendricks, 2009, p.25).

Through this paper, I reach out to address ways that may positively influence ELL's writing performance. This topic was aligned with the action research methodology in that it involved teaching, learning, and implementing an intervention that may potentially lead to change and probable improvement (Mills, 2000). Action research is "a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion as components of the research" (Ferrance, 2000). Such inquiry occurred in this study through noticing a problem with the grammar instruction and the students' grammar usage, investigating and applying an instructional method that might be effective, and analyzing students' work in order to assess the effectiveness of the instructional strategy that was followed. These steps were taken in light of Dewey's recommendation which indicates that teachers need to be involved in experimenting with the hypotheses that are provided through theory (Burns, 1999). In the past, it has been suggested that disregarding practitioners' judgment can affect the worthiness of any theory (Fishman & McCarthy, 2000). Thus, action research allows for teachers professional growth through reflecting on acts and suggesting possible adjustments and improvements for instruction (Ferrance, 2000).

Finally, since action research takes into account both the research evidence that has been previously provided by others as well as initiates action (Dick, 2000), I have provided a history of the studies and opinions of both advantages and disadvantages of teaching grammar to ELLs in the previous chapter.

Participants

This study took place on a university campus that was located in a small city in the Midwestern part of the United States. During the first session of this study ten students attended. However, since this study was voluntary, in the following weeks only five students were committed and attended all eight sessions. Therefore, the participants in this study consisted of a total of five adult ELL students, all of whom were over the age of 18. The nationalities of these students were one Saudi female and four Saudi males. The participants had all received a considerable amount of traditional grammar instruction in the past and were considered at the intermediate level of English Language acquisition in both speaking and writing. I chose to work with adult students in particular because I predicted that they had experienced the traditional English grammar instruction for a considerable amount of time; this prediction was confirmed by the participants' Language Learning Experiences Survey responses. At the beginning of the intervention, the participants were asked to complete the ELL's Language Learning Experiences Survey (Vasiljeva, 2007; see appendix 1). The purpose of distributing this survey was to provide contextual data and to generate an understanding of the subjects' past experiences of learning English grammar and its role in improving their overall English performance. This survey was not used as a primary data source for this study. The ELL's Language Learning Experiences Survey was adapted from a 2007 Latvian and Swedish study by Vasiljeva. The adapted survey included a total of 15 multiple choice questions. These questions highlighted the subjects'

attitudes, beliefs, and preferences towards fruitful ways to potentially improve their English and were directly related to serve the rationale of this study. The answers in these surveys served as valuable contextual support for this study. During the first session, all questions on the survey were discussed and explained in order to avoid any misunderstandings that may lead to random responses or even avoidance of answering some questions. In addition, it is noteworthy to mention that the participants were allowed some time to complete the survey and return it within the first week of the study. Such step was taken to assure the accuracy of the students' responses and to alleviate potential anxiety related to completion of the survey.

Through these surveys, students expressed interesting opinions that basically conflicted with the type of grammar instruction they received before the intervention and which may be relevant in examining changes in the subjects' writing performance. For instance, all students' responses indicated that writing in English was a rare activity and that they relied on reading or listening to English more often as a source to learning the language instead of learning through manipulating sentences and writing. Further, in question numbers thirteen of the survey, the participants were asked how they have learned English grammar in the past. All five students indicated that they learned grammar through rule memorization, indicating a traditional grammar approach. However, the survey responses indicated that these participants would prefer to learn English grammar in a practical manner by choosing "prefer to learn English grammar through watching T.V.". Interestingly, none of the participants indicated their preference in learning English grammar by memory. This desire was also expressed through our classroom discussions. The majority of the participants stated that, despite their many years of learning grammar, they failed to apply this knowledge when speaking or writing. One even stated that he rarely thinks of grammar when interacting in English. Despite the fact that two of the participants claimed that

the grammar rules that they received in a traditional approach seemed partly beneficial for them and somewhat helped in improving their English speaking and writing abilities, they clearly explained in discussions that this knowledge was not enough to neither speak nor write effectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that all five participants stated that memorizing grammar rules and practicing these rules through closed exercises was neither preferred nor effective. Through our class discussions and the survey responses, the majority of students also indicated that they would like to study more English grammar; however, they desired a non-traditional approach. In question fourteen the students' were asked, "How would you like to learn English grammar?" All five students answered by choosing "learning the rules with sample sentences" or "building a sentence after a given pattern." All the participants have received grammar lessons for a considerable amount of time. However, when asked to estimate their written English performance in question ten, none of the participants chose "very good" or even "good"! In fact two of the five students chose poor while the remaining others chose "average." Despite the participants' high expectations of grammar and their realization of the importance of learning the structure of English on their language growth, uncertainty of how grammar will help improve their practical use of language especially in writing loomed in throughout our discussions. Therefore, having the intention to work with this particular group in the future, I believed that such experiment would provide me with valuable input and will help me reflect and deepen my understanding of my teaching acts in the future.

Data Collection

The instruction and data collection took place in the spring of 2012. The instructional portion of this study lasted four weeks. Within these four weeks, the participants and I met two days a week for a total of eight sessions. Each session lasted approximately one hour.

Throughout the sessions, the subjects were instructed to write on various open-ended topics and to manipulate various sentence structures to apply definitions and rules of grammar concepts. After receiving contextualized grammar instruction, the subjects applied the concepts in practice activities that directly related to the addressed grammar concepts. Students' grammar learning was assessed through conducting a simple frequency count of the number of errors and instances of correct use with each addressed grammar skill in each writing sample. Notably, I chose to analyze both the error and correct use of each grammar skill for two reasons. First, to recognize the development that may occur on the participants' sentence structures and writing. Second, it was hypothesized that this data would provide insights into students' experimenting processes, a potential sign of growth when learning a new skill. The error count might indicate attempts of taking risks in their writing and experimenting with the taught skills. On the other hand, the correct usage count would indicate that the student had recognized the grammar mistakes and has begun to take action by fixing the addressed grammatical errors.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Grammar-in-Context approach on the participants' writing, both contextual support data and primary data sources were collected in this study. The contextual support data were the ELL's Language Learning Experiences Survey responses and the researcher's observations. The primary quantitative data source was the eight quick writes. The purpose of these quick writes was to allow the participants to apply grammatical knowledge in an authentic manner. The decision to collect two or three quickwrites at each phase was based on the fact that a single piece of writing does not demonstrate a writer's ability. Kincaid (1953) found that "a single paper written by a student on a given topic at a particular time cannot be considered as a valid basis for evaluating [a student's] achievement in a

writing course at any time, unless that student's writing ability was rather low" (p.93). Therefore, a total of eight pieces of writing were collected from each student.

In order to distinguish the impact of the implemented intervention on the subjects' performance, this project included three phases. A pre-assessment phase, a middle- assessment phase, and a post- assessment phase. The material that was gathered in these three stages was divided as followed:

- a) Pre-assessment data: Survey responses, three pieces of ten minute writings.
- b) Middle- assessment data: two pieces of ten minute writings.
- c) Post- assessment data: three pieces of ten minute writings, and the researcher's observations.

Instructional Design

Two lists of common grammatical errors designed by Anderson (2005) and Susan Fawcett (2004) were used to design the grammar instruction in this study (see appendix 2 and 3). The first list addresses common errors of native language speakers while the second includes common errors that are usually found in ELL's writings.

Realizing that every student's needs are different, I used the two previously mentioned lists only as a guide to help ascertain errors that may occur. However, after examining and analyzing the participants' work, I designed a list that addressed the errors of this particular group (see appendix 4). This formative list led me to teach certain strategies and provide mentor sentences that addressed the participants' needs in order to equip them with tools to help improve their writing. Along with serving as a selection tool in choosing the grammar skills that were addressed in the eight sessions, the Participants Common Writing Errors list was also employed

as a data analysis framework for comparing the students' use of the addressed grammar skills in the individual pre, middle and post assessments of each participant.

Lesson Framework

The following paragraphs detail the procedures that were followed in each session. After a brief introduction to the study and explanation of the participants' rights during the first ten minutes of Session One, the participants were instructed to write two ten- minute quickwrites that would serve as pre-assessments (see appendix 6 for suggested topics). Following, the students were invited to share their writings with the class. Next, the components of the ELL's Language Learning Experiences Survey were discussed and clarified. Finally, each student received the survey and was asked to return it completed at the following session.

At the end of the first session, I analyzed the students' work in order to determine the most common errors and generate a list of grammar concepts to be taught (See appendix 4 for Participants' Common Errors list). After generating the Participants' Common Writing Errors list, the essential targeted grammar concepts were put into the following lessons.

Table 0.1

Sequence of lessons

Lesson number	Skill taught
Lesson One	Sentence fragments
Lesson Two	Punctuation
Lesson Three	Verb- tense shift
Lesson Four	Article use
Lesson Five	Subject-verb agreement

During the first ten minutes of the second session, students completed a third pre-assessment quick write task (see appendix 6 for suggested topics).

For the rest of the sessions, the teaching procedures were basically the same. First, at the beginning of each session, I allocated about fifteen minutes to teach one of the grammar skills from the Participants Common Errors list and model its use through mentor sentences as well as encourage inquiry. Next, the participants were encouraged to apply the grammar concept that was presented at the beginning of each lesson through related activities such as inventing short sentences cooperatively or editing short paragraphs. Following, I allowed fifteen minutes for students to experiment and practice the addressed grammar concept through writing, discussions, and peer or group exercises.

After the fourth session, which marked the halfway point of this intervention, I asked participants to complete two more ten-minute quickwrites and analyzed the students' work in order to assess their improvement. Students completed three final quickwrites during the last session. All the work that was presented was compared to the pre- assessment quickwrites.

Data Analysis

In order to provide valuable insights on the participants' performance during these sessions, I chose to employ a quantitative content analysis on the data. The quantitative analysis, demonstrated in the frequency count of the use of the five addressed grammar skills (article use, sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb-tense shift and punctuation) in the participants' writing pieces and the measurement of the participants' writing quality growth through the Six Traits Paragraph Writing Rubric, was used to show the impact of this type of instruction on the participants' performance in a numeric form. The purpose of employing such rubric was to

provide a more vivid picture of whether this intervention had an impact on the overall quality of the participants' performance or not.

The Six Paragraph Traits of Writing Rubric was an analysis tool that assisted in evaluating the overall quality of writing while the Participants' Common Writing Errors list functioned as the primary quantitative data source in this project.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is “a systematic research method for analyzing textual information in a standardized way that allows evaluators to make inferences about that information” (Krippendorff, 1980, pp. 21-27). Within quantitative content analysis, there are two common approaches: conceptual content analysis and relational content analysis (Wilson, 2011). For the purpose of this study a conceptual content analysis was conducted. In a conceptual content analysis, “the content is coded for certain words, concepts, or themes, and the analyst makes inferences based on the patterns that emerge” (Wilson, 2011). In this paper, the conceptual content analysis method was implemented through calculating the frequency of the errors and correct usage of the five grammar skills. This method was also employed to draw inferences and to develop interpretations of the results in the discussion section. No relational content analysis was used in this study.

The quantitative data analysis in this study was conducted in the following manner. First, I examined individual participants' use of the five addressed grammar skills over the three phases (pre-assessment, middle- assessment and post assessment) of data. These examinations included a frequency count of both the incorrect and correct usage of the five grammar skills. The calculating was done manually by thoroughly reading each text and locating and counting

the grammar use of the five targeted grammar skills that were mentioned previously in a conceptual content analysis method.

After conducting an individual frequency count of both the error and correct use of each skill, by each student, over the three assessment collections, a comparison table of all students' error and correct usage of the grammar skills was created (see tables 6 and 7). These tables helped distinguish the general effectiveness of the contextualized grammar instruction that was followed. Remarkably, the correct usage of the addressed grammatical areas outnumbered the errors usage. These data lead to several interferences that are discussed in detail in the following sections of this paper. Next, in order to evaluate the potential growth in this area, each student's writing performance over the three assessments was measured by using the Six Traits Paragraph Writing Rubric (Teacher Planet, 2011). The purpose of employing the rubric was to highlight the connection between the participants' grammar usage and the general coherence and quality of their written material at the end of the intervention. The Six Traits Paragraph Writing Rubric evaluates six traits, or components, of quality writing: idea, voice, word choice, sentence fluency organization, and conventions rated on a Likert scale that ranges from 1-6 (see appendix 7). Finally, the conceptual content analysis method was reemployed to draw interferences and conclusions from the results that emerged earlier.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The overall results of this study demonstrated the positive influence of contextual/functional grammar instruction on students' usage of grammar skills in their writing. According to the error usage evaluation, all five students' increased in one grammar area, while four out of five showed improvement in another. Further, the correct usage of the targeted grammar skills outnumbered the error usage results. Interestingly, according to the Six Traits Paragraph Writing figures, the participants showed limited growth in the global aspects of writing (e.g. ideas and organization) and the local traits (i.e. sentence fluency) assessed by the Six Traits rubric. A detailed presentation of these results is provided in the following sections.

Individual Student's Error and Correct Usage Data

The following charts show the individual results of each student's free writing performance:

Student 1- Sarah

Based on the error frequency count, Sarah's grammatical errors decreased in four areas: article use, sentence fragments, verb-tense shift and punctuation. However, despite the decline of errors in the fifth skill (subject-verb agreement) that appeared in her middle-assessment work her error usage of this skill remained stable by the end of the intervention (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Sarah's Error Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	10	3	5	2	6
Middle- assessment	7	0	1	0	2
Post- assessment	7	1	3	2	1

In chart (1.2) Sarah's correct use of the skills taught increased in three areas: sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement and punctuation. Her performance remained stable in the two other skills (article use and verb-tense shift).

Table 1.2

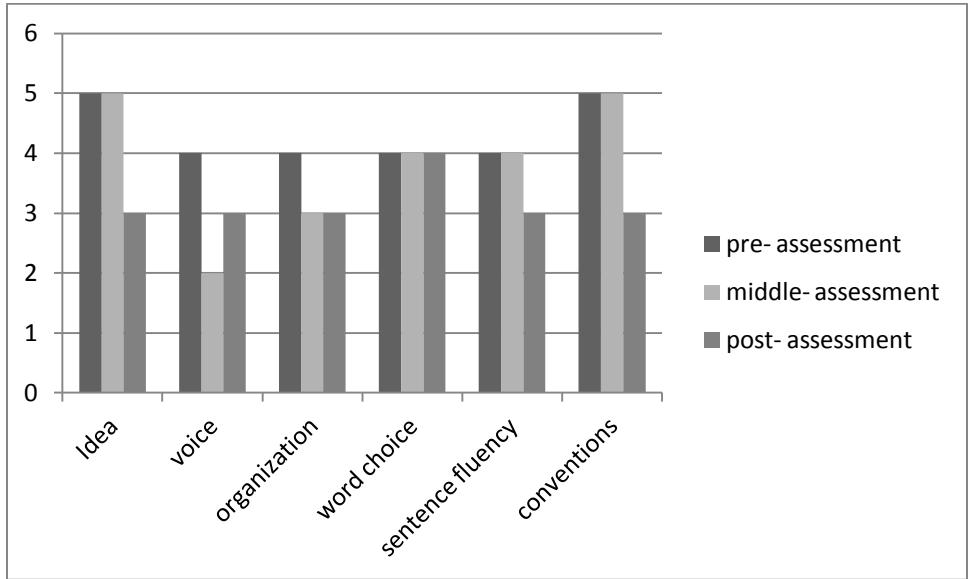
Sarah's Correct Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	7	11	16	26	14
Middle- assessment	1	4	4	6	4
Post- assessment	7	15	16	27	19

When comparing Sarah's writing quality in the three phases (pre-assessment, middle-assessment and post- assessment), it appeared that her performance improved in two traits word choice and ideas. However, despite her improvement in both conventions and sentence fluency

during the middle-assessment, these two traits along with voice and organization remained stable when comparing pre-and post- assessments (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Six Traits Writing Rubric Scores for Student 1-Sarah



Student 2- Omar

Overall Omar's error use of the five grammar skills decreased in four areas: sentence fragments, verb-tense shift, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation. However, one out of the five skills (article use) remained stable (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Omar's Error Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	6	4	9	9	5
Middle- assessment	4	1	11	1	2
Post- assessment	6	1	2	2	4

Remarkably, the results in table (2.2) show a dramatic increase in Omar's correct use of all five grammar skills.

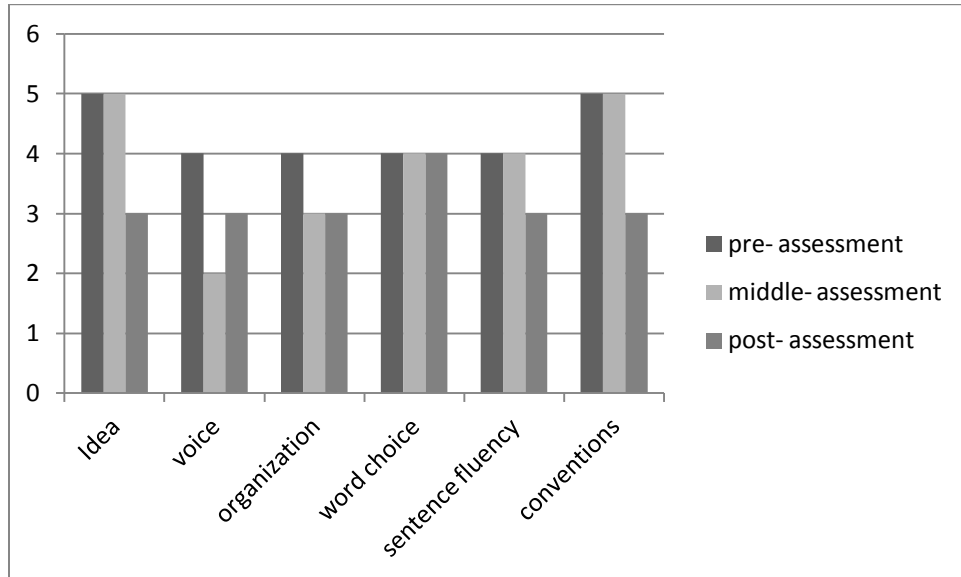
Table 2.2

Omar's Correct Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	6	11	9	17	14
Middle- assessment	4	5	4	8	8
Post- assessment	10	20	20	27	31

Further, when examining Omar's writing quality over the three assessments, one can clearly notice the progress in three writing traits of conventions, sentence fluency, and voice while the three other traits , idea, organization and word choice, remained stable (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Six Traits Writing Rubric Scores for Student 2- Omar



Student 3- Mohammed

Mohammed's incorrect use of the five skills through all three assessments slightly decreased. Although, Mohammed's incorrect usage of articles increased on the middle-assessment, he managed to lessen these errors at the end of the study (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Mohammed's Error Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	12	9	11	4	11
Middle- assessment	14	6	6	3	4
Post- assessment	11	8	7	3	8

Next, when comparing Mohammed's correct skill application between both the pre-assessment and post-assessment, he was able to increase the correct use of all five skills. However, these results contradicted with the numbers that showed in the middle-assessment work, in which one can see a dramatic drop in the correct use of the mentioned skills (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2

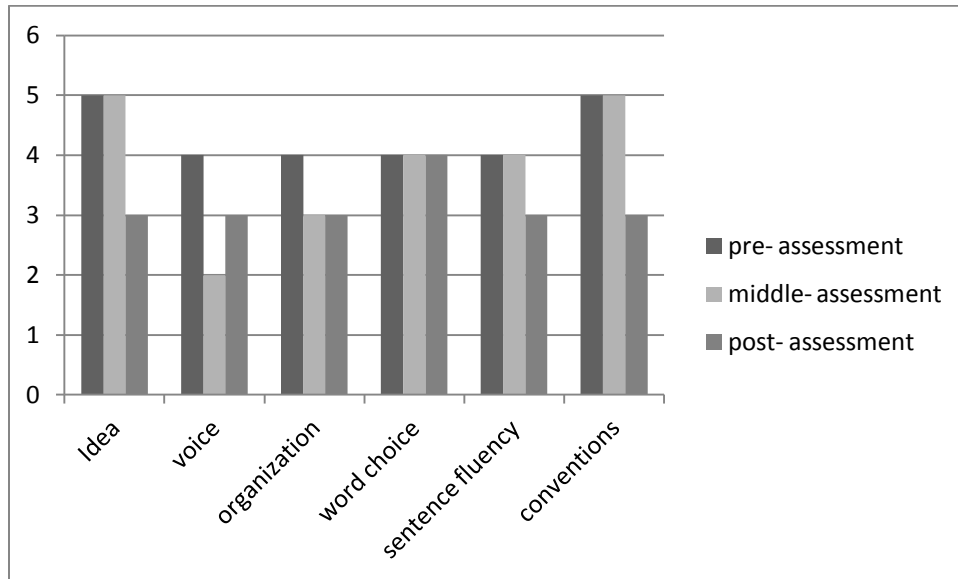
Mohammed's Correct Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	9	6	5	19	15
Middle- assessment	2	1	3	5	4
Post- assessment	11	8	9	27	19

When looking at Mohammed's writing, (Figure 3), one can see that his performance improved over the intervention in three areas: conventions, word choice and ideas. However, it

remained stable in one writing trait (voice). By the end of the sessions, Mohammed's performance declined in the two traits of sentence fluency and organization.

Figure 3 Six Traits Writing Rubric Scores for Student 3- Mohammed



Student 4- Sammy

Sammy’s usage of the five skills varied over the three phases that took place during this study. According to the following results he managed to decrease his errors in one skill- subject-verb agreement. However, his errors increased in three skills (punctuation, verb-tense agreement, and sentence fragments) and remained stable in one (article use), despite the decline of the errors in this skill during the middle-assessment (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Sammy’s Error Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	8	2	4	8	7
Middle- assessment	3	1	6	3	5
Post- assessment	8	5	5	1	10

Interestingly, despite the low progress of Sammy’s error use, Table 4.2 showed that his correct use of four skills increased during the implementation of this study. These four skills are article use, verb- tense shift, subject-verb agreement and punctuation; one skill remained stable (sentence fragments) despite its decrease in the middle- assessment.

Table 4.2

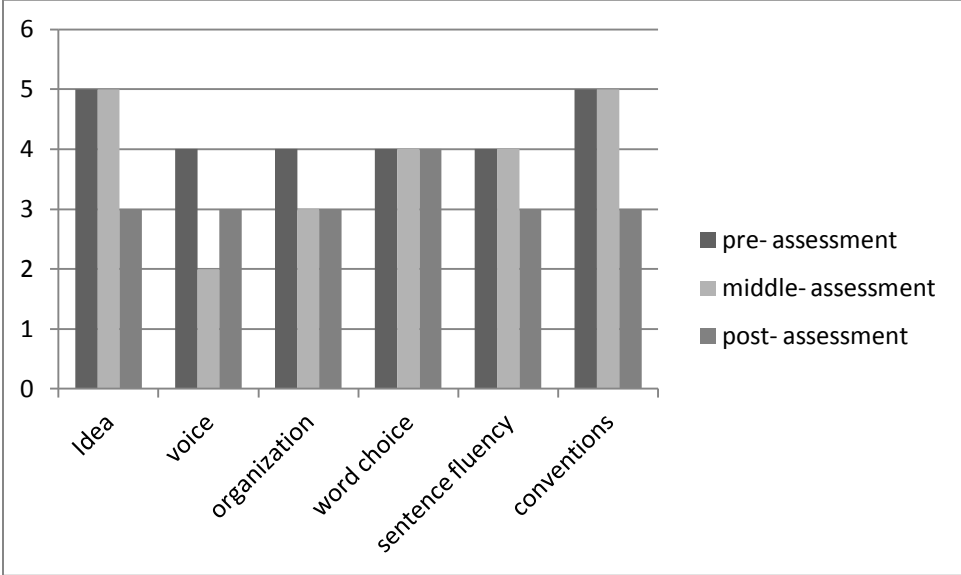
Sammy’s Correct Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	1	8	12	13	15
Middle- assessment	2	4	8	13	5
Post- assessment	4	8	15	17	21

Moreover, during the three assessments, Sammy’s writing quality improved in two areas: word choice and organization. However, his performance decreased in one area (sentence

fluency) and the three other traits remained stable (conventions, voice and idea) throughout the study (see figure 4).

Figure 4 Six Traits Writing Rubric Scores for Student 4- Sammy



Student 5- Ali

During the intervention, Ali’s incorrect usage of the five grammar skills decreased in three areas: punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and verb tense shift. However, his errors clearly increased in one skill (article use) and the (sentence fragments) usage remained stable (see table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Ali’s Error Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	2	1	5	6	6
Middle- assessment	1	0	1	2	1
Post- assessment	5	1	1	4	4

Subsequently, Ali’s correct usage of the five grammar skills increased in two areas: verb-tense shift, and subject-verb agreement and decreased in three areas: punctuation, article use and sentence fragments. However, an obvious decline during the middle-assessment of all five skills was marked (see Table 5.2).

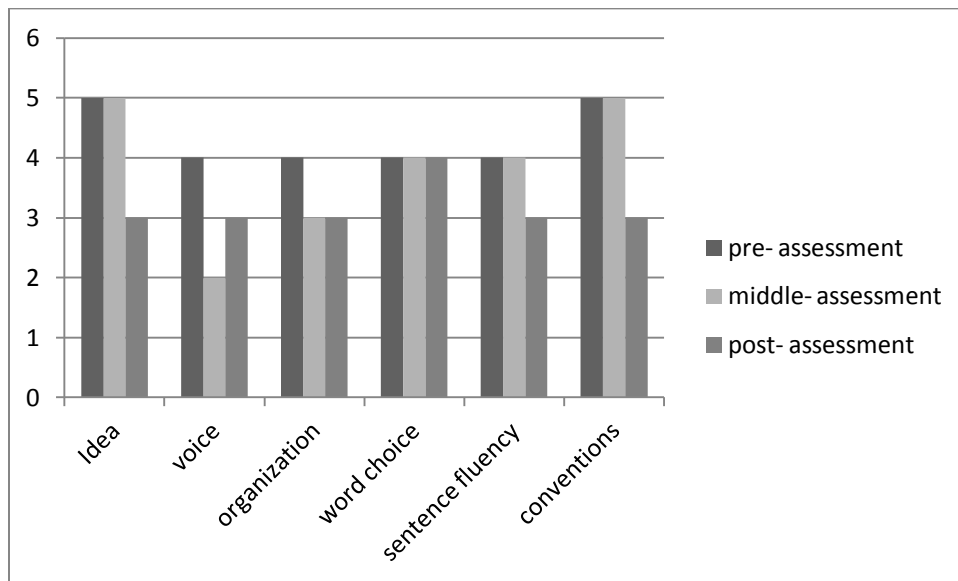
Table 5.2

Ali’s Correct Usage Frequency Count

Grammar skill	Article Use	Sentence Fragments	Verb Tense Shift	Subject- Verb agreement	Punctuation (comma/period)
Pre- assessment	21	13	11	24	14
Middle- assessment	2	5	6	10	7
Post- assessment	19	12	24	37	12

As shown in figure 5, no improvement was detected in Ali's writing quality throughout the study. In fact, it declined in four out of the six traits (conventions, sentence fluency, organization, and voice) and remained stable in one trait (idea).

Figure 5 Six Traits Writing Rubric Scores for Student 5- Ali



In an attempt to answer the proposed research questions in this study, a comparison was made of the overall development of all five participants on the use of the five grammar skills that were addressed during the eight sessions. The following two charts demonstrate both the errors use and the correct use of these skills for all five students. A color code was used to distinguish between the developments in the listed categories.

Table 6

Overall Error Usages of all Five Participants

	Punctuation (comma/period)	Subject-verb agreement	Verb- tense shift	Article use	Sentence fragments
Sarah	-	-	-	+	≠
Omar	-	-	-	≠	-
Mohammed	-	-	-	-	-
Sammy	+	-	+	≠	+
Ali	-	-	-	+	≠

Note. + = increase in correct use; - = decrease in correct use; ≠ = stable in correct use. The darker shades indicate the grammar area that scored the highest improvement among the participants' work. The lighter shades indicate the subsequent improved grammar areas.

As indicated above, the participants' performance has remarkably improved in many areas. However, these results varied from one individual to the other. The incorrect use of the subject-verb agreement skill decreased among all five participants. Further, the incorrect usage of both the punctuation skill and the verb- tense shift skill decreased among four participants and increased among one student only. Interestingly, according to these results, the article use skill appeared to be the most problematic and was the least improved in this study. In fact, only one student showed improvement in the use of articles, while two other student's errors increased in this area and two remained stable. Finally, the sentence fragment skill also remained stable among two students and increased with one student in terms of incorrect usage. However, two students showed improvement in this area at the end of the intervention.

Table 7

Overall Correct Usages of all Five Participant

	Punctuation	Subject-verb agreement	Verb- tense shift	Article use	Sentence fragments
Sarah	+	+	≠	≠	+
Omar	+	+	+	+	+
Mohammed	+	+	+	+	+
Sammy	+	+	+	+	≠
Ali	-	+	+	-	-

Note. + = increase in correct use; - = decrease in correct use; ≠ = stable in correct use. The darker shades indicate the grammar area that scored the highest improvement among the participants' work. The lighter shades indicate the subsequent improved grammar areas.

After examining the previous charts it was found that the majority of the participants' correct use of the five skills has considerably increased.

Table (7) clearly shows that the correct use of the five skills outnumbered the occurrence of both the stable and incorrect use across all the skills. Interestingly, the subject-verb agreement skill was the most improved skill among all five students. However, each student's growth varied in the other areas. For instance, both Omar and Mohammed ranked in top performance when compared with their peers. These two participants managed to increase their correct use of all five grammar skills. In addition, despite the increase in Sammy's error uses and the fact that he had the least growth in the previous chart, the correct usage chart shows improvement in his correct use of four skills. Ali was the only student whose performance declined by decreasing his correct use in three areas, indicating the least growth among all five students in terms of correct usage of the five grammar skills.

In conclusion, the results presented in this chapter showed considerable growth in the participants' writing performance. In the error grammar skill usage, it was found that the students' incorrect use of three targeted grammar skills decreased among most of the participants

over the intervention. In addition, the correct use of the five grammar skills outnumbered the error usage among four out of five students. This outcome carried a positive indication that led to favoring the grammar-in-context approach. In comparison, I did not notice the same growth in the overall quality of the writing as in the errors and correct usage. One possibility that may have led to this result is that the quality of writing takes longer to influence and is more complex than just grammar. The interpretations that were derived from this analysis produce an interesting discussion that is presented in detail in the following chapter. This discussion included pedagogical implications and recommendations for further investigations.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter includes explanations, interpretations, and indications derived from the data presented in the previous chapter. The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the contextualized or functional grammar instruction in improving the writing performance of adult English language learners. After determining the most problematic grammar skills that seemed to obstruct the participants' writing performance, I identified five grammar skills to be taught during this intervention: article use, sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb-tense shift and punctuation. These five common errors were used to design instruction and to guide the evaluation of the writing samples. In addition, the rubric served as another way to look at the data assessing the overall quality based on the six traits of writing: idea, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, organization, and conventions. In order to investigate the potential development in the participants' writings, eight quickwrites were collected and were evaluated for number of errors, correct usage of the skills taught, and overall quality of the writing.

The first section of this chapter contains a summary of the participants' grammar skill use changes, if any, throughout the implementation of the grammar-in-context approach. This was followed with an analysis of the impact of these results on the writing quality of these participants. In the next section, I present the possible interpretations that can be drawn from the results. Finally, the last section includes implications, limitations, and a conclusion of this study.

Mainly, when examining the participants' overall improvement in the use of the five grammar skills, it was obvious that the majority of the participants showed considerable growth

in four out of five skills (see tables 6 and 7). Participants' errors decreased the most in the subject-verb agreement, and correct usage of punctuation and verb-tense shift improved among four out of five students. Therefore, the subject-verb agreement skill ranked the highest in terms of error decrease among all five participants. Further, although two out of five students showed decline in the correct or error use of the sentence fragment skill, it remained stable among two other students and increased among one. According to these findings, it seemed that the article use was the most problematic grammar skill among the five that were taught and was the skill with the least participant gains.

It was not a surprise that each student's performance and growth varied from one another. However, this did not hinder the considerable positive impact of this method when comparing the results of all five participants as shown in Tables 6 and 7. One positive result is that the number of correct use occurrences outnumbered the error use among four of the participants. However, not all participants showed growth in the mentioned areas. For instance, the correct use of one out of the five students dramatically decreased in three skills during this study (see table 7). This may be a result of many factors such as attempts to experiment with his previous grammar knowledge. It can also possibly be due to the simple notion that the pace of learning varies from one individual to another. In addition, some learners may go through different stages such as exploring, manipulating, and making errors before mastering a certain skill or concept. However, when comparing the participants' grammar skill growth with the six traits usage, I did not notice the same growth in the overall quality of the writing as in the errors and correct usage. Such results may indicate that the grammar-in-context approach may have had a positive influence on applying mature grammar skills and therefore led to improvement in the participants' writing performance; however, their performance on the six traits did not change

much. This is more likely due to the complex nature of writing, in general, and the fact that writing encompasses much more than just grammar knowledge. The six traits rubric assesses the organization, voice, content and ideas, etc. These components of writing are complex and require explicit instruction on each trait, which was not part of this study. Thus, the limited growth and change in these more global aspects of writing makes sense. It was expected that these skills would take explicit instruction, modeling, and practice over several pieces of writing in order to develop. However, as mentioned previously, these hypotheses would require further investigation to confirm.

Interpretation of Results

Firstly, Sarah, who was a studious student, showed considerable growth in the use of several grammar skills. In her error use this student improved in four areas and showed no decline in errors in the subject-verb agreement skill. On the other hand, Sarah's article error use increased, while it remained stable when measuring her correct use of the same skill. This indicates that no obvious growth was found in her article uses during this study.

Secondly, Omar achieved obvious growth in the usage of the five grammar skills. He managed to decrease his error uses in four skills while the fifth which is article use remained stable throughout the three assessments. Additionally, growth was detected in Omar's performance after examining his correct use frequency count chart. Remarkably, Omar improved in all five skills by the end of this research.

Thirdly, Ali varied in his writing performance throughout all three assessments. This student's error use showed more gains when compared with his correct use of the skills. That is, his error use declined in three skills. However, he showed no progress in sentence fragment uses.

On the other hand, according to this students' correct usage frequency count, his performance among the skills considerably dropped in three areas.

Finally, according to the previous data, it is obvious that Mohammed achieved the highest among his peers by attaining the most improvement in all five skills. While the least improvement throughout this intervention was marked in Sammy's error use chart. Sammy's error use chart signifies a decline in his overall usage of the addressed skills. However, this contradicted his correct use results in which the numbers indicated partial growth in his usage of four skills. This may be attributed to increased risk taking. Familiarity and relevance with the writing topics may be another factor that seemed to influence Sammy's performance. For instance, the first topics were mostly general and seemed to be well-known to the participant such as writing about "My favorite season", "Something I love/Hate", and "My City". In these topics, I detected a considerable gain in his writing performance. However, when writing about more specific topics that he may have not been familiar with such as "Winning the Lottery" and "Something You Would Like to Achieve" he seemed to struggle with applying ideas that expressed his opinions. Further, the lack of vocabulary and correct word choice was obvious in these topics.

Next, after examining the Six Traits Paragraph Writing charts of all five students, it seemed that there may be a relationship between the use of grammar skills and the writing quality of these students. For instance, Omar, who showed improvement in all five skills at the end of the intervention, did not decline in any writing trait. Instead, his scores improved in three traits and remained stable in three. This indicates that the Grammar-in- Context approach did not have a negative effect on the students' performance. It was also noticed that four out of the five students improved in the conventions trait while no decline in the word choice trait was found in

all five participants' work. On the other hand, no one improved in organization and a decline in the sentence fluency trait performance of three out of five students was found. Overlooking these two traits may be a result of the students' cautiousness of producing correct sentence structures. Further, only one student's writings demonstrated a decline in the idea trait and only one student improved in the voice trait. Another example of the positive impact of the Grammar-in-Context approach is Mohammed, whose grammar skill usage in all five areas improved. When examining his writing quality, it was obvious that he improved in the use of three traits. In addition, Sammy, whose correct use of the five grammar skills increased in four areas, also showed improvement in three out of six writing traits. Finally, only one student showed a decline in five out of the six writing traits. However, it is noteworthy to mention that this student also showed a decline in his correct use of three out of five skills as well. Overall, these findings led me to believe that there may be a positive correlation between grammar skill usage and writing quality.

My examination of the results in the quantitative charts mentioned above resulted in several interpretations that need to be considered. Interestingly, one of the eye catching results is that the numbers presented in the frequency count charts did not necessarily reflect the potential growth of the students writing performance. For instance, when looking at table (4.1), there is no doubt that Sammy's error use of the five skills did increase throughout the study; however, when examining this students' writing quality over the three assessments, he managed to improve in two traits and no decline was noticed in this student's writing quality except in one trait. Further, along with this student's gains in his writing quality performance, he also managed to boost his correct use of four out of five skills. This led me to hypothesize that the increase of this student's error uses may possibly be viewed as a positive factor. That is, it is probable that the increase of error use was due to the fact that this student was experimenting with the new skills.

The phenomenon of increased errors possibly indicating increased skill was also present when examining Ali's writings. I noticed that at the beginning of the intervention, Ali was barely using articles; in fact most of the articles were dropped in his pre-assessment writings. However, despite his considerable mismanagement of the use of this skill when measured in numbers, both the definite and indefinite articles began to appear more often in his writings. This is a sign that he began to consider the use of this skill in his writings and could be interpreted as a sign of growth. Such an act is a gain in itself and calls for celebrating the fact that the student is conscious of and experimenting with this new skill.

Another interesting point was that after introducing the grammar skills to the participants, I noticed that some students developed the tendency to write cautiously which may have impacted the frequency data. This was clear in Sarah's writings with an obvious increase of her correct uses of these skills. After analyzing Sarah's assessments, I found that shortly after introducing the grammar skills, she began to use simple sentences and the length of her writing pieces became shorter, especially in the middle-assessment phase. It is hypothesized that Sarah began to pay more attention on the structure of her writings and less attention to the quality of her writings. This can also be viewed as a part of growth in her writing performance as it indicates that she was experimenting with the new patterns. It is hypothesized that once she is comfortable using these patterns, she may begin to take risks and manipulate the structures. On the other hand, this tendency may be viewed as a negative factor. That is, due to the over focus of this student on conventions, the quality of her writings may decline. In Sarah's case, a hyper-focus on grammar may have lessened the quality of writing in other areas (see table 7).

It was also expected that due to the order that the taught grammar skills were presented the students' may have had more time to practice some grammar skills than the others, and

therefore the results would be impacted with such factor. However, this factor did not seem to interfere with the participants' performance on the later skills. For instance, according to tables 6 and 7, the highest improvement was scored in the subject-verb use which was taught at the end of the implementation. On the other hand, the lesson sequence that was followed in this study may have influenced the considerable poor performance in the article use area. One possibility may be due to the fact that it was introduced in the fourth session toward the end of the instructional sequence and the students' had less time to work with it. However, along with the short time to practice this skill, other factors may have resulted in the difficulty of correctly applying articles to writing. For instance, Abushihab, El-Omari, and Tobat (2011) explain that article use is considered a particularly difficult skill for Arab learners. There are two types of articles in the English language (definite and indefinite articles), the Arabic language contains only one- the definite article. These articles are used differently in the two languages. In addition, the article skill in English is more ambiguous and less rule governed or consistent when compared with other English grammar skills (Crompton, 2011). Predicting the exact reasons of difficulty particularly in this area is unattainable through this study however, considering the notion that these factors may have a negative influence on the article use of Arab learners (Abushihab, El-Omari, & Tobat, 2011; Crompton, 2011) can play a principle role in designing instructions in article usage for Arab learners.

Finally, the decline in the sentence fluency trait performance among three out of five students was an unforeseen finding. Generally, I expected to find a positive correlation between instruction in grammar conventions and sentence fluency. However, in this study the students' sentence fluency performance seemed to contradict their grammar development. In fact, while the conventions trait improved among four out of five participants, the sentence fluency

performance declined among three students. This phenomenon may be attributed to cautious writing as well. It is hypothesized that the cause of this decline is due to the lack of transitions, rhythm, and variety in these participants' sentence writing. In addition, they may be trying out the new skills, and negotiating several writing skills at once, which may cause the writing to be more disjointed and dysfluent for a while. Although the writing pieces of the majority of the students may have been grammatically correct, the lack of rhythm and sentence variety was obvious.

Pedagogical Implications

It is critical to consider our students' miscues and to view them as a sign of progress. Such errors may indicate that they are manipulating the language structure and experimenting with different sentence patterns. It may also indicate that they are considering the usage of such skills in their writings, where there may have been fully absent before. Therefore, instructors need to celebrate these attempts that indicate potential growth, give credit to their students for such acts, and use these attempts as openings for further instruction. In addition, it was also observed in this study that numbers may decline; however, this may imply that the student is taking risks in his/her writings and making cognitive leaps. Another factor that seemed to influence the students' learning was familiarity with the topics that were presented during the lessons. Therefore, it is crucial to find connections between the topics that are suggested in our classrooms and not to assume that all learners possess the same literacy knowledge. Finally, acknowledging student diversity in terms of differentiating among learners' styles, background knowledge, and pace needs to highly be considered when teaching. Such implications should not be disregarded. We need to embrace the notion that, when approached constructively, such

miscues can possibly lead to remarkable progress in our students' learning and may become the major steps of a successful and fruitful literacy journey.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. First, the time span for this study was considerably short. That is, the intervention was implemented for only four weeks which may be recognized as a weakness to this study. Like all types of learning, distinguishing, applying and mastering grammar skills requires an extended amount of time in order to reach likely results. Such process entails repetition of the taught skills as well as constant practice. Therefore, it is recommended when duplicating this study to consider a longer amount of time to reach more accurate results. Another weakness of this study was the small number of participants. Since participation in this study was voluntary, it was difficult to assure that all students would attend all eight sessions. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights on the potential impact of the contextual grammar approach on ELL's writing growth. It also enabled me to consider future pedagogical implications.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of the Grammar-in-Context method on the grammar skill use and the writing performance of adult ELL students. It was found that the results of this study are consistent with Graham and Perin's (2007) study which favored the Grammar-in-Context approach and concluded that the writing performance of the participants improved after following this approach for a period of time. In the present study, the quantitative analysis verified considerable improvement in four out of five participants' skill usage and writing quality over the intervention.

In conclusion, although the data supported the impact of this intervention on the students' use of the targeted grammar skills in the context of their own writing, it is critical for all instructors to recognize that growth is not only determined by the numbers; our observations play an important role in identifying the various types of growth that may not appear in these numbers. In addition, we need to appreciate the fact that inquiry-based teaching holds many promises towards our students' literacy growth. However, this process requires patience and may include many miscues before students reach the desired results.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Name

Nationality

ELL’s Language Learning Experiences Survey

The intended audience of this survey is English Language Learners (ELL). The survey is adapted from (Vasiljeva,2007) and contains (15) questions. The responses will be used as a data source for a research study that will examine the language learning experiences of these students and its impact on grammar instruction. Completing this survey is voluntary. There are no risks anticipated for participating in this study.

ELL's Language Learning Experiences Survey

1. How often do you hear authentic spoken English
(Apart from lessons in English at school)

- Several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year
-

2. How often do you read authentic English material

- Several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year
-

3. How often do you use spoken English outside English lessons at school

- Several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year
-

4. How often do you use written English outside English lessons at school

- Several times a day every day every week a few times a month a few times a year
-

5. How often do you have lessons in English at school

- Several times a day once a day once a week two/ three days a week
-

6. How often do you study English grammar at school

- Several times a day once a day once a week a few times a month a few times a year
-

7. Would you like to study English grammar more often

- Yes, a lot more I like it the way it is no
-

8. How important do you find it is to study English grammar

- Very important important not that very important not important
-

9. How good is your spoken English

- Very good good average poor
-

10. How good is your written English

- Very good good average poor
-

11. How often do you use English grammar rules when you speak outside school

- Always often sometimes never
-

12. Do you think learning English grammar is useful in learning how to speak and write in English

- strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree
-

13. How did you learn English grammar in the past? You may choose more than one of the following choices:

- memorizing grammar rules
- speaking with English native speakers
- Teacher in the class
- Media
- Reading books
- answering worksheets
- other answers:
-

14. How would you like to learn English grammar? You may choose more than one of the following choices:

- Learning the rules by memory
 - Learning the rules with sample sentences and examples
 - Learning common phrases
 - Building new sentences after a given pattern
 - Translating to and from English
 - other answers:
-

15. Why are you learning English grammar? You may choose more than one of the following choices:

- Grammar improves my knowledge of English
- It helps me express myself correctly
- It helps me understand spoken and written English
- I like English grammar
- For academic reasons
- To get good grades and pass a test
- Other answers:

20 Most Common Errors in Order of Frequency

(Anderson, 2005)

1. No comma after introductory element.
2. Vague pronoun reference.
3. No comma in compound sentence.
4. Wrong word.
5. No comma in nonrestrictive element.
6. Wrong/missing inflected endings.
7. Wrong or missing prepositions.
8. Comma splice.
9. Possessive apostrophe error.
10. Tense shift.
11. Unnecessary shift in person.
12. Sentence fragments.
13. Wrong tense or verb form.
14. Subject-verb agreement.
15. Lack of comma in a series.
16. Pronoun agreement error.
17. Unnecessary comma with restrictive element.
18. Run-on fused sentence.
19. Dangling or misplaced modifier.
20. *It's* versus *its* error.

8 Common ESL Errors

(Fawcett, 2004)

Error #1: Count or Noncount noun error.

Error #2: Incorrect or Missing Article.

Error #3: Preposition Error.

Error #4: Repeated Subject.

Error #5: Wrong Verb Tense.

Error #6: Irregular Verb Errors.

Error #7: Wrong Form after a Verb.

Error #8: Wrong Order of Adjectives.

Participants Common Writing Errors list

1. Sentence fragments.
2. Verb tense shift.
3. Article Use.
4. Subject- Verb agreement.
5. Punctuation.

Lesson Framework

Lesson One

Grammar Skill: Sentence Fragments

Description: A sentence fragment is a sentence that lacks one of the following:

- a) Begins with a capital letter.
- b) Ends with a period.
- c) Contains a subject and a verb.
- d) Has a complete thought.

Mentor Sentences:

- **Robert watched** a scary movie last night. (complete sentence).
- The red rose. (sentence fragment).
- The red **rose grows** in the park. (complete sentence).
- When she rode her bike to class. (sentence fragment).
- **She rode** her bike to class. (complete sentence).

Application:

The following paragraph included sentence fragments. After examining and discussing the mentor sentences, the students worked on pairs on identifying the sentence fragments in the following exercise:

Marina, the beautiful mermaid, wanted some tuna salad. But had a small problem since she was allergic to celery. At Sammy's Sub Shop, Marina hoped to find tuna salad free of this dangerous vegetable. Flopping across the tiled floor to the counter. Marina placed her order and then checked her sandwich for celery. Not noticing, however, the spoiled

mayonnaise. At five o'clock that evening, Marina became violently ill with food poisoning. When a lifeguard at the beach discovered the problem, he called 911. Even though the mermaid had fishy breathe. A handsome paramedic gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Wailing like a sick dog, the ambulance sped off to the hospital. Where the doctor on call refused to treat a sea creature with a scaly tail. A kind nurse, however, had more sympathy. After she found some Pepto-Bismol, Marina drank the entire bottle of pink liquid, feeling an immediate improvement. The mermaid told the rude doctor never to swim in the ocean. For she would order hungry sharks to bite off the doctor's legs. While sharp-clawed crabs plucked out his eyes. Tossing her long hair, Marina thanked the nurse for the Pepto-Bismol. And took a mint from David, the handsome paramedic.

Lesson Two

Grammar Skill: Punctuation.

Description: First, using the comma:

- a- Before conjunctions “FANBOYS” (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so).
- b- To separate a series.
- c- To list more than two items.
- d- After introductory elements.

Second, using the period after complete thoughts and making sure that the elements of a complete sentence are present.

Mentor sentences:

Houston, G. (1992). *My great- aunt Arizona*. Harper Collins Publishers.

Application:

After discussing the occurrences of both commas and periods in the story the students did a quickwrite about something they would like to achieve.

Lesson Three

Grammar Skill: Verb- Tense Shift

Description: to have consistency in the verb tenses when writing and to avoid unnecessary switching from one tense to the other.

Mentor Sentences:

- Yesterday, I baked the cake and then I mixed the icing.
- Sarah wondered where she parked her car.
- I go to the park every day and walk.

Application:

First, each student was asked to compose a sentence describing something s/he experienced or did in the past. Next, the students exchanged the sentences and each student was asked to change the sentence that s/he received from her/his partner to the future tense. We then discussed the changes that occurred and why we made these changes. Following, I read the following paragraph from *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* to exemplify the correct use of verb tenses when writing.

“Claudette Colvin: I was about four years old the first time I ever saw what happened when you acted up to whites. I was standing in line at the general store when this little white boy cut in front of me. Then some older white kids came in through the door and started laughing. I turned around to see what they were laughing at. They were pointing at me. The little white boy said, “Let me see, let me see, too.” For some reason they all wanted to see

my hands. I held my hands up, palms out, and he put his hands up against my hands.

Touched them. The older kids doubled up laughing. My mother saw us, and she saw that the boy's mother was watching. Then my mom came straight right across the room, raised her hand, and gave me a backhand slap across my face. I burst into tears. She said, "Don't you know you're not supposed to touch them?" the white boy's mother nodded at my mom and said "That's right, Mary."

That's how I learned I should never touch another white person again." (p.3).

Lesson Four

Grammar Skill: Article Use

Description: The appropriate use of the definite and indefinite articles (a, an and the) with countable and uncountable nouns.

Mentor Sentences:

Say, A. (1993). *Grandfather's Journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Application:

After discussing the articles use in the first part of *Grandfather's Journey*, we played “Pass the Can”. In this game the students were asked to pick one from the can. The folded pieces of paper had short paragraphs from *Grandfather's Journey* story as well as some short paragraphs that I have invented earlier. These sentences all included articles. After picking out one folded paper from the can the students were asked to write the piece on the board and to discuss why s/he thinks that the author used a specific article in that part of the story.

Lesson Five

Grammar Skill: Subject- Verb Agreement

Description: Consistency between the subject and verb use in terms of agreeing in number.

Mentor Sentences:

- All of the students who took Sammy's class have passed.
- Everyone needs to be loved.
- Either my mother or my father has watered the plant.

Application:

The following exercise was retrieved from (Anderson, 2005,p.119).

After reading and discussing the following paragraph each student was asked to change it from present tense (first- person) to present tense (third- person singular). Next, we collaboratively discussed the changes that occurred.

“With my bicycle secure in the roof rack high atop my Volvo, I drive home after my first 40- mile bike ride, and I feel so happy. So happy, in fact, without even thinking or slowing down, I drive into my driveway and into the carport.

That is, until I hear a loud, horrible scraping sound. I slam on my brakes and watch in my rearview mirror as my \$2300 Lance Armstrong Trek crashes down on my trunk, dragging its metal toe clips across the gold paint, finally dropping off the edge of the trunk, and dropping one final time onto the driveway. My high is officially over.”

Quickwrites Suggested Topics

- Something You Love (e.g. a person, an event, and item...etc.).
- Something You Hate (e.g. a chore, a tradition, a place...etc.).
- Travelling to a New Country.
- Current Events in the World (politics, natural disasters...etc.)
- Something You Would Like to Achieve.
- Your Hobby.
- Your Favorite Season.
- Winning a Lottery (e.g. If I win one million dollars...).
- Your Ideal / A person who in had an influence on your life. (A parent, teacher, a celebrity).

Six Traits Paragraph Writing Rubric

(Teacher Planet, 2011)

	1 Beginning	2 Emerging	3 Developing	4 Proficient	5 Strong	6 Exemplary
Idea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main theme • Supporting details 	Lacks central idea. Development is minimal or non-existent.	Purpose and main idea may be unclear and cluttered by irrelevant detail. May be unclear because paragraph has competing ideas for thesis.	Main idea may be cloudy because supporting details too general or even off-topic.	Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited.	A main idea or topic is clear. Clear focused, interesting idea with appropriate detail.	Paragraph centered around a significant idea or topic. Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong, supporting detail.
Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure • Introduction • Conclusion 	Lack of coherence: confusing. No identifiable beginning or ending.	Lack of structure; disorganized and hard to follow. Appears to start or stop in the middle of something.	Attempts at organization; may be a list of items. Beginning and ending not clear.	Organization is appropriate, but conventional. Attempt at introduction and conclusion.	Strong order and structure. Inviting intro and satisfying closure.	Effectively organized in logical and creative manner. Creative and engaging intro and conclusion.
Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality • Sense of audience 	Writing is lifeless. No hint of the writer.	Writing tends to be flat or stiff. Stereotypic, copied tone and voice.	Voice may be inappropriate or non-existent. Writing may seem mechanical.	Evident commitment to topic. Inconsistent or formulaic personality.	Appropriate to audience and purpose. Writer behind the words comes through.	Expressive, engaging, sincere. Strong sense of audience. Shows emotion: humour, honesty, suspense or life.
Word Choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precision • Effectiveness • Imagery 	Limited range of words. Some vocabulary misused.	Monotonous often repetitious, sometimes inappropriate.	Words may be correct but mundane. Common words chosen.	Language is functional and appropriate. Descriptions may be overdone at times.	Descriptive, broad range of words. Word choice energizes writing.	Precise, carefully chosen. Strong fresh, vivid images.
Sentence Fluency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythm, flow 	Difficult to follow or read	Often choppy.	Some awkward	Generally in control.	Easy flow and	High degree of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety 	<p>aloud. Disjointed, confusing, rambling.</p>	<p>Monotonous sentence patterns. Frequent run on sentences. Some sentence fragments.</p>	<p>construction. Common simple pattern used. Several sentences begin the same way.</p>	<p>Lacks variety in length and structure.</p>	<p>rhythm. Good variety in length and structure.</p>	<p>craftsmanship Effective variation in sentence patterns.</p>
<p>Conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age appropriate for spelling, caps, punctuation, grammar 	<p>Numerous errors distract the reader and make the text difficult to read. Errors may be made more than one way for the same pattern or structure.</p>	<p>Frequent significant errors may impede readability. Errors frequent in common patterns and structures.</p>	<p>Limited control of conventions. Some errors in common patterns or structures do not unduly interfere with understanding.</p>	<p>Control of most writing conventions. Errors reflect risks with unusual or sophisticated structures.</p>	<p>Strong control of convention. Errors are few and minor.</p>	<p>Exceptionally strong control of standard conventions of writing. Complex conventions attempted.</p>

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, October 28, 2011
IRB Application No ED11181
Proposal Title: A Practical Approach in Teaching Grammar to Second Language Learners

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 10/27/2012

Principal
Investigator(s):

Arege F. Eldoumi	Jennifer Sanders
26 N. Univ. Place, Apt. 7	252 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74075	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

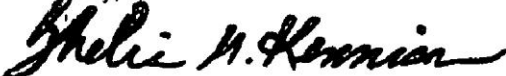
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Areege Fawzi Eldoumi

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Major Field: Teaching, Learning and Leadership, with option in Elem., Mid., Sec., K-12 Education

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Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Teaching, Learning and Leadership, with option in Elem., Mid., Sec., K-12 Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Omar Al-Mukhtar University, Elbeida /Libya in 2002.

Experience:

- Reading Tutor, (Spring, 2011).
- Teacher Consultant, OSU Writing Project/ (July, 2009).
- Teaching Assistant, English Department, Omar Al- Mukhtar University, Al-Beida/ Libya, (January 2005- 2008).
- Resource English Teacher, Al- Manahal Elementary School, Al- Beida/ Libya (2004-2005).

Professional Memberships:

- Golden Key International Honour Society member, (December, 01, 2011).

Name: Areege Fawzi Eldoumi

Date of Degree: May, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Pages in Study: 87

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Teaching, Learning and Leadership, with option in Elem., Mid., Sec., K-12 Education

Scope and Method of Study:

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the contextualized grammar instruction in improving the writing performance of adult ELLS. The participants in this study were 5 adult ELL students, all over the age of 18. The nationalities of these students were 1 Saudi female and 4 Saudi males. After determining the most problematic grammar skills that seemed to obstruct the participants' writing, 5 grammar skills were identified to be taught during this intervention. The grammar skills were used to design instruction and to guide the evaluation. Evaluation was conducted through a frequency count and a rubric.

Findings and Conclusions:

The results of this study expressed the positive effectiveness of the contextualized grammar method. Considerable improvement in four out of five participants' skill usage and writing quality over the intervention was found.

ADVISORS APPROVAL: DR. JENNIFER SANDERS