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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research was to describe the English grammar difficulties faced by third-year students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English II (group 2) of the Bachelor's degree in Modern Languages specializing in French and English, in their written production. In addition, the specific objectives focused on identifying and determining the most common problems and their frequency. To carry out this study, a quantitative approach with a descriptive design was employed. The population selected for this research consisted of students currently taking the Advanced Intensive English course II (Group 2) at Universidad de El Salvador, from which a sample of 25 participants was selected through simple random sampling. Subsequently, a test was administered to collect the necessary data and to assess the areas of English grammar in which students experience the greatest difficulties. This instrument consisted of five multiple-choice sections and an additional written production section, which helped identify the most common errors students make when using English grammar. The results showed that students have significant problems with English grammar, with subject-verb agreement being the most problematic area. Moreover, they faced difficulties applying appropriate English grammatical rules in their written production. The use of time prepositions and articles were other specific areas of weakness. This valuable information provides a detailed description of the different grammatical problems in English that students face and suggests teaching strategies to strengthen their grammatical skills.

KEY WORDS: English grammar, written production, common errors, areas of weakness, subject verb agreement, skills.

RESUMEN

El propósito principal de este estudio fue describir los problemas gramaticales en inglés que enfrentan los estudiantes de tercer año, que cursan Inglés intensivo avanzado II (grupo 2) de la carrera de Lenguas Modernas especialidad: Frances e Ingles, en su producción escrita. Además, los objetivos específicos se enfocaron en identificar y determinar los problemas más comunes y su frecuencia. Para realizar este estudio, se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo con un diseño descriptivo. La población seleccionada para esta investigación fueron los estudiantes que actualmente cursan la asignatura de inglés intensivo avanzado II (grupo 2) en la Universidad de El Salvador, de la cual se seleccionó una muestra de 25 participantes mediante un muestreo aleatorio simple. Posteriormente, se aplicó una prueba para recopilar los datos necesarios y evaluar las áreas de la gramática inglesa en las que los estudiantes presentan mayores dificultades. Este instrumento consistió en 5 secciones de opciones múltiples y una sección de producción escrita adicional, la cual ayudó a identificar los errores más comunes que los estudiantes cometen al usar la gramática inglesa. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes presentan problemas significativos con la gramática inglesa, siendo la concordancia sujeto-verbo el área más problemática. Además, enfrentaron dificultades para aplicar reglas gramaticales adecuadas del inglés en su producción escrita. El uso de preposiciones de tiempo y de artículos fueron otras áreas específicas de debilidad. Esta valiosa información proporcionó una descripción de los diferentes problemas gramaticales en inglés que enfrentan los estudiantes y sugiere estrategias de enseñanza para fortalecer sus habilidades gramaticales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gramática inglesa, producción escrita, errores comunes, áreas problemáticas, concordancia sujeto-verbo, habilidades.

INTRODUCTION

English grammar is the system that governs the English language, comprising rules and guidelines that determine how words are used, formed, and arranged to enable effective communication. Mastery of grammar is essential for developing core language skills writing, speaking, reading, and listening and allows learners to convey ideas clearly and accurately. However, grammar remains one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition, especially for non-native speakers. Effective grammar instruction is therefore crucial, and numerous studies have examined both learners' difficulties and the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies.

This study focuses on third-year Modern Languages students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English Course II, Group 2, at Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental (FMO), Universidad de El Salvador (UES), during the first semester of 2025. Its aim is to identify common grammatical errors in written production, assess their frequency, and provide strategies to improve grammatical accuracy and overall language proficiency.

Research conducted in Sweden by Tuomas, P (2015) provides insights into grammar instruction challenges, highlighting difficulties with the “third person -s,” verb tenses, and prepositions, often influenced by differences between learners' native language and English. Misuse of the progressive aspect and conditionals demonstrates structural and conceptual challenges that hinder accurate communication. Similarly, Córdoba Cubillo (2015) questions the effectiveness of traditional grammar instruction in improving writing, suggesting that an integrated approach—teaching grammar within the context of students' writing—yields better retention and application of grammatical rules.

At FMO, third-year Modern Languages students face persistent difficulties in applying grammar rules, resulting in errors in key areas such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, and sentence structure. These errors compromise the clarity and coherence of their written work and affect spoken communication, reducing students' confidence. The prevalence of these errors

suggests that traditional teaching methods relying on rote memorization are insufficient for developing practical language competence.

Structural problems, including sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and incorrect word order, further impede students' writing, disrupting the logical flow of ideas and diminishing overall effectiveness. Word order, prepositions, articles, and subject-verb agreement are essential for precise communication; failure to master these elements constitutes a significant barrier to academic and professional success.

This study identifies the most frequent grammatical errors in students' written production, providing a foundation for targeted teaching interventions. By focusing on specific weaknesses, such as verb tense errors, educators can design exercises and writing tasks that promote accurate usage. Additionally, this research contributes to the broader discussion on grammar pedagogy, supporting the integration of grammar instruction into meaningful writing activities rather than relying solely on prescriptive methods.

Ultimately, the study seeks to enhance grammatical accuracy and overall language competence among third-year Modern Languages students at FMO UES. By addressing common grammatical problems, the research aims to improve students' writing proficiency, boost their confidence, and positively impact spoken English. Enhanced grammar skills will facilitate academic success and prepare students for professional environments requiring clear and effective communication, representing a step forward in improving the quality of English language education in the university context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative approach was implemented considering that it enables statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends. As stated by Rana, Oldroyd and Gutierrez (2021). This research was carried out using a descriptive research design which aligned with the objectives of the research and the research purpose. As Manjunatha (2019). explains, descriptive research is defined as a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied. The researcher does not manipulate any of the variables but rather only describes the sample and/or the variables (Houser, 2023, p.41). In addition, this research has only one variable “grammatical English problems” which coincide with Siedlecki (2020) who states that the ability to have just 1 variable of interest is a unique quality of descriptive designs. Moreover a cross-sectional study is an observational study that analyzes data from a population at a single point in time (Wang & Cheng, 2020). This type of study was used because it measured the variable only once. The research employed a prospective design because the data were collected in real time and the events were observed as they occurred (Frost, n.d). Advanced Intensive English course II (group 2) had an active population of 49 students and a sample composed of 25 participants who were tested based on their current knowledge with the intention of identifying their weaknesses and strengths in specific grammar areas such as verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions and word order. The data collection technique was a written test. While the instrument used consists of six parts, multiple choice from part I to part V and the last part deals with writing production, this part was evaluated through a rubric that takes into account the following criterias: The correct use of verb Tenses, subject-Verb Agreement, articles (a/an/the), prepositions of Time (in/on/at), word Order and grammatical accuracy.

RESULTS

Table 1.

Problem Areas of English Grammar

	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Tenses	70	21.60%
Subject verb agreement	104	32.10%
Articles	55	16.98%
Prepositions	50	15.43%
Word order	45	13.89%
Total	324	100%

Source: Data findings chart

Description: Most of the population studied had problems with subject-verb agreement being the most problematic area, with a mode of 104, followed by the other grammatical areas evaluated according to their frequency of errors shown in the table, such as verb tenses, articles, prepositions and word order.

Table 2.

Results of the written production section.

	Absolute F (Excellent/3)	Absolut e F (Good/2)	Absolu te F (Poor/1)	Total
Criteria	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Poor (1)	
Tenses	12	10	3	25
Subject verb agreement	14	9	2	25
Articles	16	8	1	25
Prepositio ns	13	9	3	25
Word order	13	12	0	25
Grammati cal Accuracy	7	16	2	25

Source: Data findings chart

Description: Most of the population studied had problems with grammatical accuracy in

written production, The mode is 16, appearing as the most frequent score in two categories. In Articles, this value corresponds to students who reached an excellent level, showing strong use of articles. In Grammatical Accuracy, it reflects a good level, indicating acceptable control, though not at an excellent standard.

Table 3.

Results of the written production part in percentages.

	Relative F	Relative e F	Relative e F	Total
Criteria	Excellent (3)	Good (2)	Poor (1)	
Tenses	48.00%	40.00%	12%	100%
Subject verb agreement	56%	36%	8%	100%
Articles	64%	32%	4%	100%
Prepositio ns	52.00%	36.00%	12.00%	100%
Word order	52%	48%	0%	100%

Grammatical Accuracy	28%	64%	8%	100%
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Source: Data findings chart

Description: The table presents the percentages of performance across different grammatical areas evaluated in students' written production in English. The results reveal that the greatest difficulties are found in overall **grammatical accuracy**, where only 28% of the students achieved an excellent level, while the majority (64%) performed at a good level and 8% at a poor level. This indicates that, although there is partial mastery, persistent problems still affect the overall correctness of written texts.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that third-year Modern Languages students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English II face noticeable difficulties in several areas of English grammar. In the multiple-choice section, subject-verb agreement was the most challenging, with 32.10% of answers marked incorrect. The difficulty with this section appears to stem from students' frequent misinterpretation of collective nouns that seem plural in form, such as "Bacon and Eggs," which, despite their plural appearance, require singular verbs. Tenses came next, with 21.60% of mistakes. One of the main difficulties was the correct use of the present perfect tense. Only 6 out of 25 students selected the correct answer, "have taken place, have been set up". Many used incorrect forms such as "were taken place," showing limited understanding of complex verb phrase formation. Errors in article usage accounted for 16.98%. Most students selected "the" instead of "a" in "Can I have ___ pencil, please?", demonstrating their confusion between definite and indefinite articles. This suggests that they associate "the" with any singular noun, indicating a limited understanding of when to refer to something general rather than specific; also caused by the influence of Spanish as a first language. Prepositions of time caused fewer problems (15.43% of errors), however students still tended to use them incorrectly in some cases, particularly when referring to days, months, or specific times. For example they selected "on" instead of "at" in "We have lunch ___ midday". Finally, word order mistakes made up 13.89% of errors. Nearly half of the students incorrectly chose the sentence "You really have done a good job" as correct in terms of word order. This indicates confusion about the typical placement of adverbs in English

These findings are consistent with previous research. National studies, such as Espinoza et al. (2010) at the University of El Salvador, also found subject-verb agreement to be the most common problem among advanced students. Similarly, Maldonado & Navas (2018) reported that higher-level learners continue to struggle with concord, showing that this challenge persists over time. Research with other L2 learners supports this pattern: Alghazo & Alshraideh (2020) identified tenses and articles as common difficulties among Arabic-speaking students, suggesting these

issues are widespread across languages. The continued struggles with articles and prepositions align with the findings of Tuomas, P (2015) and Córdoba & Solís (2015), highlighting a gap between knowing grammar rules and applying them correctly in writing.

This gap is especially clear in the written production tasks. While students performed relatively well in multiple-choice exercises, their free writing revealed deeper weaknesses. Common problems included missing subjects, incorrect verb forms, omitted articles, and spelling mistakes. Cohesion was also affected by missing transitions, repeated ideas, and poor organization. Overall, grammatical accuracy was rated as “Poor” in 8% of cases. These results suggest that while students may recognize correct structures in controlled settings, applying that knowledge in authentic writing remains challenging.

From a theoretical perspective, these difficulties can be explained through Selinker’s Interlanguage Theory (1972), which proposes that learners develop an evolving linguistic system blending features of their first language with the target language. For instance, errors in subject-verb agreement with collective nouns may stem from Spanish influence, where rules differ. Tense errors, particularly with the present perfect, also reflect L1 interference. Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) may further explain the patterns seen in writing: students with high anxiety or low confidence tend to simplify sentences, avoid complex structures, and repeat ideas, all of which appeared in their paragraphs.

Overall, the study confirms that third-year students still face significant grammatical challenges, especially in subject-verb agreement and tense usage. It also emphasizes the contrast between controlled exercises and free writing, suggesting that grammar instruction should go beyond recognition tasks and focus more on practical application.

Despite its contributions, this research has limitations. The small sample (25 students) limits generalizability of the findings, and the cross-sectional design captures

performance at only one point in time, limiting insights into students' long-term grammatical development.

CONCLUSION

This scientific article has described the English grammar difficulties present in the written production of 3rd-year Modern Languages students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English course II (group 2) in 1° semester 2025 UES-FMO. It also answered the research question: "What are the grammatical English problems in the written production faced by third-year students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English course II from group 2 in Modern Languages 1° semester 2025 UES-FMO?" The discussion clearly highlights that students struggled the most with subject verb agreement with 32.10% of incorrect answers. While the grammatical accuracy was 64% of students who performed at an acceptable level, but with some inaccuracies. After having identified, calculated the frequency and classified the types of grammatical errors, the specific objectives of this paper were achieved successfully thanks to the results obtained.

The problem with subject verb agreement is related to the frequent misinterpretation of collective nouns that seem plural in form, such as "The United Nations," which, despite their plural appearance, require singular verbs. Furthermore, students struggle to correctly identify the main subject in sentences especially, when it is separated from the verb by a prepositional phrase or other modifiers. This results in errors such as using a plural verb when a singular one is required, because they focus on nouns within prepositional phrases rather than the true subject of the sentence.

Additionally, this article revealed a crucial disconnection between students' performance in isolated, controlled exercises and their ability to transfer these skills to actual written production. Although students often selected the correct answer in multiple-choice formats, as in the test, their failure to apply these rules in writing suggests a superficial grasp of the concepts rather than true mastery. While analyzing the short text written by the students, it was noticed that students have problems with basic grammar, such as omission of the subject, misspelling words, incorrect conjugation of the verbs in present tense, and using present to talk about past actions.

This gap exhibits the need for further practice, focusing on contextualized, and practical application of English grammar.

Based on the results obtained from the test it is concluded that the hypothesis was confirmed, since third year Modern Languages students presented significant problems in the domain of English grammar which were previously described.

Moreover, it was also calculated the frequency of each grammatical error they made in the test. The absolute and relative frequency of correct and incorrect answers per item, as well as by indicator, was calculated, as shown in Table 1. Additionally, the grammatical problems found in the students' written texts were classified, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Finally, it is concluded that this article provides valuable details and descriptions of the different English grammar difficulties that third year students enrolled in Advanced Intensive English course II from group 2 in Modern Languages faced in semester I-2025 at the UES-FMO.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For teachers:

1. Offer Supplementary or reinforcement sessions. To create courses that can provide extra support to the students in the main problematic areas, especially for those students who need additional practice.
2. Increase writing-based evaluations: written production should have a more important role in evaluation. Short and frequent writing tasks are more effective for developing grammatical accuracy than multiple-choice tests.
3. Emphasize subject–verb agreement through targeted exercises. One of the main difficulties identified was subject–verb agreement. For this reason, teachers should dedicate more time to exercises that help students identify the real subject in complex sentences
4. Integrate grammar into real writing tasks. Teachers can include writing practice as journals, letters, summaries, or short essays, since this will help the students to apply grammatical rules to real communicative context.

For students:

1. Practice grammar through writing. Regularly write short texts such as journals, reflections, or summaries. This helps apply grammar rules in real situations rather than only memorizing them.
2. Review and self-correct. Students should always review their work before submitting it. They are encouraged to read their texts aloud, use a checklist to check key grammar points, and correct mistakes related to verb forms, tenses, and subject–verb agreement.

For future research:

1. Conduct longitudinal studies to monitor students' progress over time and evaluate the sustained impact of grammar-focused interventions on their written accuracy.

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