

Writing Difficulties: An Investigation Based On Simple Present, Present Continuous and Present Perfect Tenses Among The ESL Undergraduates

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Abstract

Writing is a vital skill in language production and communication. The ability to write meaningful sentences, lines and paragraphs which a reader can easily understand can be termed as excellent writing skills. It is also one of the most challenging areas in learning a second language. Most of the students are good at language, but many of them face the main issue of expressing their ideas effectively and efficiently in their writing. The common problems are the inadequate knowledge of grammar, inadequate stock of English vocabulary and creativity. Hence, knowledge of grammar plays a very important role in writing. It is the structural foundation of one's ability to express himself or herself. Furthermore, it is the set of structural rules that govern the composition of sentences, phrases and words. On top, tense is an essential aspect in grammar which plays a major role in writing. ESL learners face a number of difficulties in their attempt to master English tenses appropriately. Therefore, this research was conducted with an aim to find the writing difficulties of ESL undergraduates of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (SEUSL) based on simple present, present continuous and present perfect tenses. This study also aimed to discover the reasons and remedies for these difficulties. Sixty undergraduates from the third year of the Faculty of Arts and Culture (FAC) of the SEUSL were randomly selected. They were given an individual questionnaire and a task sheet. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions. Also, the task sheet was composed of 25 items related to writing difficulties regarding selected tenses. Further, it comprised multiple-choice questions, fill in the blank items, and a free writing activity. The findings of this study illustrate that the undergraduates have more difficulties in writing while using the present perfect tense rather than the simple present and present continuous tenses. Some of the reasons for these difficulties were the first language (mother tongue) interference, lack of practice in English grammar and lack of interest in learning the English tenses. Error correction activities, using grammar builders, remedial teaching, regular grammar practices, and the like are among the remedies found out to overcome these difficulties.

Keywords: writing difficulties, grammar, tenses, proficiency level, English as a Second Language