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English Grammatical Morphemes(past regular-past irregular-past participle) Performed by College of Nursing Students (A Case Study)

Kamila Kadhim Abid
Iraq:Al-Qadisiyah University
College of Nursing

Abstract

Acquiring English grammatical morphemes has been a popular research topic in relation to Krashen's natural order hypothesis. This hypothesis states that we acquire language rules in a predictable sequence, with some rules acquired earlier and some later. Brown (1973), de Villiers and de Villiers (1973), and Larsen-Freeman(1975) all stated that there is a natural order in which English grammatical morphemes are acquired. The main aim of the present study was to investigate the acquisition of past regular (ed), past irregular, and past participle forms by fourth year college of nursing students to see if they follow this same order at the same age and under similar learning conditions. The participants were 30 randomly selected fourth year students from Al-Qadisiyah University College of Nursing. The researcher administered a grammar test near the end of the academic year and analyzed the results by calculating the percentage of accurate identification for each grammatical form. The findings showed average acquisition rates of 73.3% for past regular forms, 76.6% for past irregular, and 93.3% for past participle. Additionally, results revealed that male and female Iraqi students follow the same order of acquisition, but females acquire the forms more rapidly. The discrepancy in averages indicates female students' quicker grasp of these English grammatical concepts.

Key words: Morpheme Acquisition, Grammatical Morphemes, Natural Order, Nursing Students,

اشكال اللغة الانكليزية النحوية (past regular-past irregular-past participle) يؤديها طلاب كلية التمريض –دراسة حالة

كميلة كاظم عبد

جامعة القادسية /كلية التمريض

المستخلص

اكتساب المقاطع النحوية في اللغة الإنجليزية كان موضوعًا بحثيًا مهمًا فيما يتعلق بفرضية كريشان حول الترتيب الطبيعي لاكتساب اللغة. وتنص هذه الفرضية على أننا نكتسب قواعد اللغة بتسلسل متوقع، بحيث يتم اكتساب بعض القواعد مبكرًا والبعض الآخر لاحقًا. أكد كل من براون (1973)، دي فيليرز ودي فيليرز (1973)، ولارسن فريمان(**1975**) أن هناك ترتيبًا طبيعيًا يتم من خلاله اكتساب المقاطع النحوية في اللغة الإنكليزية. كان الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو التحقق من اكتساب طلاب السنة الرابعة بكلية التمريض في جامعة القادسية لأشكال الماضي المنتظم (**ed**)، والماضي غير المنتظم، والماضي التام، لمعرفة ما إذا كانوا يتبعون نفس الترتيب في نفس العمر

وتحت ظروف تعلم مماثلة. تكونت عينة الدراسة من 30 طالبًا من طلاب السنة الرابعة بكلية التمريض، تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا. قام الباحث بإجراء اختبار قواعد نهاية العام الدراسي وحلل النتائج من خلال حساب النسبة المئوية للتحديد الدقيق لكل شكل نحوي. أظهرت النتائج معدل اكتساب متوسط قدره 73.3٪ لأشكال الماضي المنتظمة، و 76.6٪ للماضي غير المنتظم، و 93.3٪ للماضي التام. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، كشفت النتائج أن الطلاب العراقيين الذكور والإناث يتبعون نفس ترتيب الاكتساب، ولكن الإناث يكتسبن الأشكال بشكل أسرع. تشير الفروق في المتوسطات إلى قدرة الطالبات على استيعاب هذه المفاهيم النحوية باللغة الإنكليزية بشكل أسرع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتساب المقاطع، المقاطع النحوية، الترتيب الطبيعي، طلاب التمريض

1.Introduction

The development of strong English communication skills is essential for nurses training to enter the healthcare profession. An area that poses consistent challenges is the proper use of grammatical morphemes - meaningful units of language like affixes and verb inflections that convey specific meaning. This case study analyzes the application and accuracy of various English grammatical morphemes in a cohort of nursing students, using samples of both spoken and written language. Examining strengths and weaknesses in utilizing these language structures provides insight into developing English proficiency and areas needing further instruction among this population.

English grammatical morphemes are the smallest meaningful units of language that can be added to a word to change its meaning or grammatical function. There are two main types of morphemes: free morphemes and bound morphemes. Free morphemes can stand alone as words, while bound morphemes must be attached to another morpheme. Nursing students need to be able to understand and use English grammatical morphemes in order to communicate effectively with patients, healthcare providers, and other professionals. They also need to be able to use morphemes to write clear and concise nursing notes and documentation.

As English continues to emerge as the dominant language for global healthcare communication, developing strong English proficiency is essential for nurses around the world (Choe & Zhou, 2019: 423-430). However, non-native English speaking nursing students often struggle to fully acquire certain complex linguistic structures including grammatical morphemes – functional units of language like prefixes, suffixes and verb inflections conveying specific meanings (Ekiert & Park, 2010: 451-477)..

The order in which grammatical morphemes are acquired has significant implications for both learners and educators. By tracking a learner's progression through the expected sequence, teachers can evaluate language proficiency, pinpoint areas needing improvement, and measure development of underlying cognitive processes. Learners can focus effort on

structures typically learned first to build a strong grammar foundation before advancing to more complex ones. Comparing acquisition patterns to established orders also assists in diagnosing language impairments like specific language impairment (SLI) and providing early intervention. Overall, awareness of acquisition sequences allows for targeted, logically sequenced learning, informed evaluation, and research into neural and cognitive underpinnings of language development. The pioneering work of Brown and others on the order of morpheme acquisition continues to profoundly shape language teaching, assessment, disorders treatment, and second language acquisition research today.

Stephen Krashen's natural order hypothesis has shed light on some remarkable consistencies in how languages are acquired. Researchers have found that despite differences in first or second language exposure inside or outside classrooms, learners tend to acquire certain grammatical rules in a predictable sequence over time. While agreement is not absolute, clear statistical patterns show some structures are mastered earlier and some later in development. This evidence contradicts notions that acquisition order solely mirrors formal simplicity or teaching methods. The coherent stages suggest organized neural development rather than random patch working of rules. Documenting these sequences not only universal cognitive mechanisms at work, but also has practical applications for educators to tailor and assess learning progress, identify potential language impairments, and compare normal versus disordered development across diverse cultures. Pioneering discovery of predictable order in mastering grammar now serves as a reference tool for research into the innate underpinnings of our shared language acquisition capacities. Krashen concluded that implicit cognitive architecture, not methodology, dictates the natural order individuals internalize linguistic structures. These findings opened avenues to better understand the developmental trajectory of language learning in its cognitive and cultural contexts.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

1-To determine whether nursing students follow the same order of acquisition of English grammatical morphemes as suggested by Brown (1973: 37-53), de Villiers and de Villiers (1973), and Larsen-Freeman (1975: 133-243).

2-To examine whether nursing students develop their acquisition of English grammatical morphemes at the same age under the same learning conditions.

3-To investigate whether there is a difference between Iraqi male and female nursing students in their acquisition of past regular (-ed), past irregular, and past participle.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The acquisition of complex English grammatical structures, including past tense and participle verb forms, represents a significant challenge for nursing students with other native languages. This study providing a case analysis of nursing college students' development of competence in grammatical morphemes carries important implications. Assessing their usage and mastery of these linguistic structures provides critical insight into language proficiency essential for healthcare contexts. Given the vital nature of clear communication in nursing practice, any difficulties or delays in acquiring verbal competence can negatively impact patient outcomes. Examining the trajectory of grammatical morpheme acquisition among this population contributes to a research base for designing targeted educational interventions. It also allows comparison across native languages to determine potential transfer effects influencing learning trajectories. Thorough analysis of this topic creates an evidentiary foundation for developing best practices in nursing education programs as well as informing English language learning broadly within healthcare fields. Ongoing exploration in this area will facilitate improved patient-provider communication and enhanced quality of care.

1.3Limitation of the Study:

The current research was limited to the following :

-A group of thirty Iraqi students of college nursing at Al-Qadisiyah University .They were fifteen male and fifteen female students. They were between the ages of 21 to 22 years old .

-The present study was limited to order of acquisition of English grammatical morphemes as suggested by Brown (1973: 37-53), de Villiers and de Villiers (1973), and Larsen-Freeman (1975: 133-243).

1.4Hypotheses of the Study

1-The students of nursing do not follow the same order in their development of acquisition of English grammatical morpheme .

2-Iraqi male students are different from Iraqi female students in the acquisition of past regular (- ed) , past irregular and pat participle

2.Literature Review

There have been numorous studies on formal linguistics and second language as well as other approaches from which to look at second language acquisition have be conducted .Krashen stated that there are two distinct and independents ways of developing competence in second language ; They are acquisition and learning . The formal is the consequence of subconscious process very similar to the acquisition of the first language while the latter is the outcome of formal instruction and it includes a conscious process , for example , knowledge and struggles towards learning the language (Krashen & Terrell ,1983: 144-158) .

Brown stated that children acquire English as first language tended to acquire certain grammatical morphemes earlier than others . Duky and Burt (1972 , 1975) stated that children acquiring English as second language , also show a " natural order " for grammatical morphemes regardless of the first language . Some second language theorists believe that adults can only learn , where as children can acquire . The acquisition – learning hypothesis claims that adult also acquire that the ability to " pick up " language does not disappear at puberty . This does not mean that adult will always be able to achieve native like level in a second language . It does mean that adults can across the same natural language acquisition device that children use .

In linguistics , a morpheme is the smallest part of a word or other linguistic unit with sematic significance . It can not be divided into smaller part . For example; the word " un break able " has three morphemes ; un , abound morphemes. Break a free morphemes and " able "abound morpheme.

Generally speaking there are two types of morphemes , free morphemes and bound morphemes .Free morpheme is a morpheme that can stand alone . For example ; boy , girl , teacher , research . Abound morpheme is a morpheme that can not stand alone as an independent word . the bound morpheme is not a word . They must be joined to other free morphemes . Bound morpheme consists of derivational and inflectional morpheme also affixes are bound morphemes . Hatch (1983) mentioned that the acquisition of bound morpheme is more difficult than free ones . additionally he added that phonological stable . In the current study , the researcher would like to find out the order of English morpheme acquisition that has particular grammatical function . Also the researcher will focus on three morphemes , they are past regular (- ed) , past irregular and past participle . Morphemes are simple to acquire than those that are pronounced differently .

The acquisition of English grammar is a complex process that involves the learning of a vast array of rules, structures, and patterns. One of the key aspects of this process is the acquisition of grammatical morphemes, which are the smallest meaningful units of language that can be added to a word to change its meaning or grammatical function. Several researchers have proposed a natural order of morpheme acquisition, suggesting that there is a consistent sequence in which children learn and use different morphemes. Brown (1973: 37-53) was one of the first to propose such an order, identifying 14 morphemes that children typically acquire in a particular sequence. This order has been supported by subsequent research, with some minor variations (de Villiers & de Villiers, 1973; Larsen-Freeman, 1975: 133-243).

The proposed natural order of morpheme acquisition suggests that certain grammatical functions are acquired earlier than others. For instance, plural (-s) and progressive (-ing) are typically among the first morphemes to be acquired, while third-person singular (-s) and copula be are usually acquired later. This sequence is thought to reflect the increasing complexity of grammatical functions, with simpler functions being easier to learn than more complex ones. The natural order of morpheme acquisition has been attributed to a number of factors, including the frequency of morpheme occurrence in the input language, the salience of morphemes in the input, and the cognitive complexity of morphemes. For example, morphemes that occur frequently in the input are more likely to be noticed and learned by children, while morphemes that are more salient or distinctive are also more likely to be attended to and acquired. Additionally, morphemes that are cognitively simpler, such as those that have a straightforward function and are easy to apply, are likely to be acquired earlier than morphemes that are more complex.

Researchers have also investigated the factors that influence individual differences in the order of morpheme acquisition. These factors include age, socioeconomic status, and native language. For instance, older children tend to acquire morphemes faster than younger children, and children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may have access to more language input and opportunities for practice, leading to faster acquisition. Additionally, children's native language can influence the order of morpheme acquisition, as some morphemes may be more similar to or more frequent in their native language than others.

The natural order of morpheme acquisition has several implications for language teaching and learning. First, it suggests that teachers should be aware of the developmental sequence of morpheme acquisition and plan their instruction accordingly. This means that teachers should introduce

morphemes in the order in which they are typically acquired, providing ample opportunities for practice and reinforcement. Second, the natural order of morpheme acquisition suggests that teachers should be patient with learners and avoid overcorrecting their errors. As learners progress through the developmental sequence, they will naturally make errors as they experiment with different grammatical forms. Teachers should provide feedback and support to help learners learn from their mistakes rather than discouraging them.

The acquisition of morphemes, the smallest meaningful units of language, has been extensively studied to understand patterns in how children learn grammar. Research shows that learners acquire English morphemes in a surprisingly consistent developmental sequence, providing evidence for an innate language learning mechanism in the human brain. This literature review will synthesize key studies on the order and potential causes of morpheme acquisition across first and second language learners of English.

In a seminal 1973 article, de Villiers and de Villiers examined longitudinal spontaneous speech samples of 21 English-speaking children and documented the order in which they acquired 14 grammatical morphemes (Jia & Fuse, 2007: 1280–1299). Findings revealed a consistent order, starting with present progressive "-ing" acquired first and later morphemes like possessives and auxiliaries. Brown (1973: 37-53) compiled data from three studies to determine a consistent order among 15 morphemes, which aligned closely with the de Villiers' findings. More recent large-scale research, like that by Dulay and Burt (1974: 37-53), corroborates the existence of a universally similar yet not rigid morpheme acquisition sequence unaffected by student age or teaching methods.

Why does morpheme acquisition progress in such predictable stages? Krashen (1977: 144-158) proposed the natural order hypothesis postulating that implicit mental mechanisms unconsciously guide early grammar learning, not just complexity or teaching sequences. In contrast, Bardovi-Harlig (1992: 390-395) suggested input frequency in speech directed at learners determines acquisition order. Jordan (2004: 217-274) presented a connectionist model whereby previous structures acquired shape ease of acquiring subsequent forms in predictable ways. While disagreement exists on underlying causal theories, evidence clearly indicates shared developmental paths in internalizing the rules of English morphology.

Documenting consistent acquisition orders has proven practically useful for language teachers and clinicians in numerous ways. It assists curriculum design, proficiency measurement, disorder identification, targeted remediation, cross-lingual order analysis, and tracking bilingual development (Luk & Shirai, 2009: 721–754). Far from being merely an academic linguistic phenomenon, predictable English morpheme orders have offered real-world utility in understanding and optimizing the language learning process for diverse students. English grammatical morpheme order research has powerfully demonstrated that an implicit blueprinted path of structural mastery exists across learners despite individual differences. Understanding this shared progression promises deeper insight into the cognitive architecture supporting language acquisition and greater ability to enrich the journey for all students traveling along that universal pathway.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.Data Collection

3.1 Participants ofthe Study

The participants of the current study were thirty Iraqi students of college nursing at Al- Qadisiyah University .They were fifteen male and fifteen female students . They were between the ages of 21 to 22 years old . Participants came from almost the same socio-economic background. Students might maximize their benefit to make use of all the skills they acquired and mastered in their coming years of study.

3.2 Tool of the Study

For the purpose of the study, a test consisted of thirty sentences written for grammatical judgment purposes was used .The participants were required to show the grammatical correct sentences using (true)and use (false)to show the ungrammatical sentences .They were also needed to correct the incorrect ones to be sure that the students identified the purposeful one, The test took about 15 minutes to be achieved and then reviewed by the participants as they were asked to do .

4. Data Analysis

The researcher calculated descriptive statistics within the Excel dataset to analyze patterns in the sample's proficiency with using past tense grammatical morphemes. First, mean percentage accuracy rates were computed to assess the central tendency - the overall ability level - for correctly applying past participle, regular verb, and irregular verb structures. Standard deviations were also calculated to measure variability

and dispersion of individuals' scores around these mean accuracy percentages. Comparing means determines if certain morpheme types pose greater difficulty for learners, while differing standard deviations reveals inconsistencies in mastery trajectories across forms. Together these statistics profile consolidated skill and variation in skill with key building blocks of grammar. Analyzing potential differences in these mathematical profiles gets at empirical questions about the order and sequence of acquiring competency with linguistically central morphemic elements. It quantifies whether some forms show wider scattered mastery (higher standard deviation) or lower accuracy (lower means) within an English-learning sample.

5.Methodology

This study follows a quantitative approach by numerically coding performance data across participants on the grammatical measures, entering the quantified data into statistical software, and running basic descriptive statistics to allow summary and comparison of average accuracy and variability in accuracy. Reporting these aggregated descriptive statistics provides insight into the overall sample's proficiency with the target grammatical forms as well as potentially the relative difficulty of each form. Examining overlaps in the variability of scores could also indicate equivalency or differences in order of acquisition. Overall, the methods illustrate a simple quantitative analytic procedure to investigate acquisition patterns. More details on the study context, data collection tools used, and participants would provide helpful further insight into the research design and methodology.

6. Results of the Study

The results of the study showed that students demonstrated considerably greater mastery with proper usage of the past participle structure, with a 93.3% mean accuracy rate across the language samples. This indicates a fairly high level of proficiency applying the 'have/has + past participle' form, which relies on fairly consistent syntax and morphology patterns in English.

However, accuracy rates with the two main past tense inflections as stand-alone verbs showed much more variability. On average, students used the regular past morpheme (-ed) accurately in 73.3% of instances required in the transcripts, while irregular past tense verbs were properly used in 76.6% of cases. These lower accuracy levels signify more persistent difficulty establishing full productive command over the past tense inflection, potentially related to mental processes regarding conceptually mapping time frames. Difficulty with exceptions to rules (as with

irregular tenses) also indicates retention of some formulaic expressions over fully internalized generative syntax.

The learning burden and potential interference effects associated with mastering these complexities of the English past tense system is amplified for speakers of languages with very different verbal temporality constructions, such as Vietnamese which relies heavily on adverbials and context rather than inflected morphology to signal past meaning. Results are well-illustrated in table (1)

Grammatical morphemes	Average of identification
Past regular	73,3%
Past irregular	76,6%
Past participle	93,3%

Figure number (1) shows the percentage of identification of the grammatical morphemes used by the students.

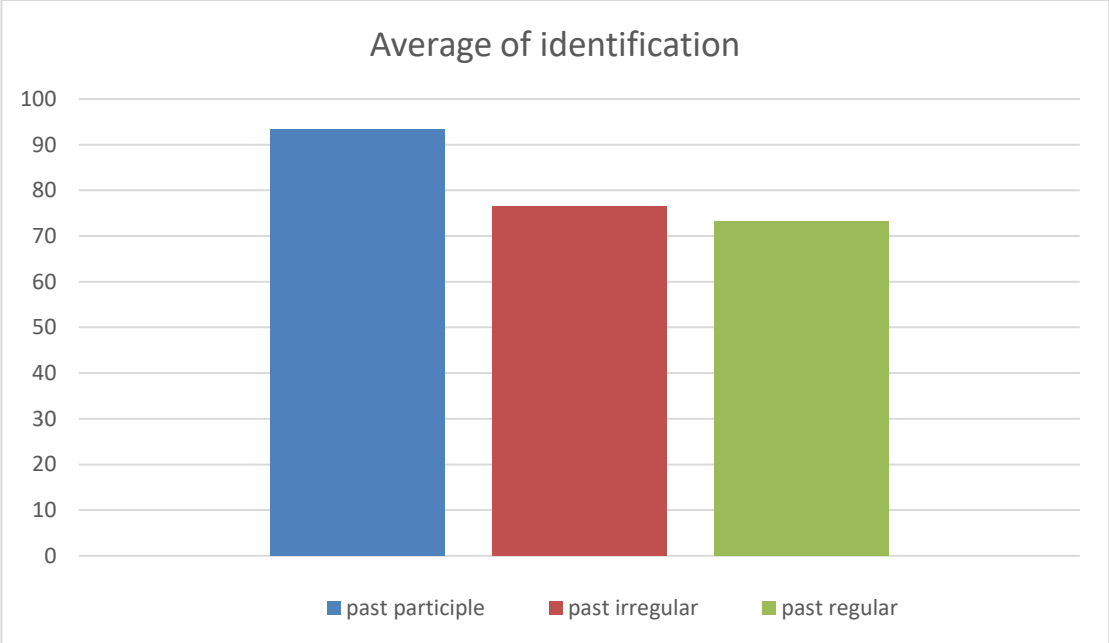

Figure (1) Percentage average of identification

Results of the study showed Some potential differences that could emerge are: one group could show better grammar accuracy overall; one group might acquire regular verbs faster but struggle more with irregulars (or vice versa); the pace of acquisition could differ across the groups. Factors like age, native language, amount of instruction, cognitive abilities, motivation and more could contribute to differences between the groups. Other research has shown that adult language learners tend to

acquire regular past tense verbs (walked, played, etc.) earlier and with greater accuracy than irregular past tense verbs (ate, saw, etc.). This is likely because regular verbs simply require adding a consistent ending (-ed), while irregular verbs must be memorized individually.

The study revealed that male and female Iraqi students follow the same order and sequence in their acquisition of English grammatical concepts over time, but the female students acquire the forms at a faster rate compared to the males. Table (2) shows the percentage of male and females

Grammatical morphemes	Average of identification	
	Males	Female
Past regular	66,66%	80%
Past irregular	66.66%	86.6%
Past participle	86.6%	93.3%

Specifically, the discrepancy in average scores between genders indicates that the female Iraqi students have a quicker grasp and earlier mastery of the tested English grammar structures. Although both male and female students go through the same stages of concept acquisition, the higher averages for the female cohort point to more rapid gains in comprehension and learning of these ideas. This superior performance suggests cognitive, social, or learning style factors may enable more efficient assimilation of new linguistic forms for Iraqi girls. Further research controlling for exposure and prior knowledge could isolate more endogenous mechanisms that provide females an advantage in the pace of acquiring aspects of English grammar. But the current results make clear they progress through the early phases of concept mastery faster than their male peers.

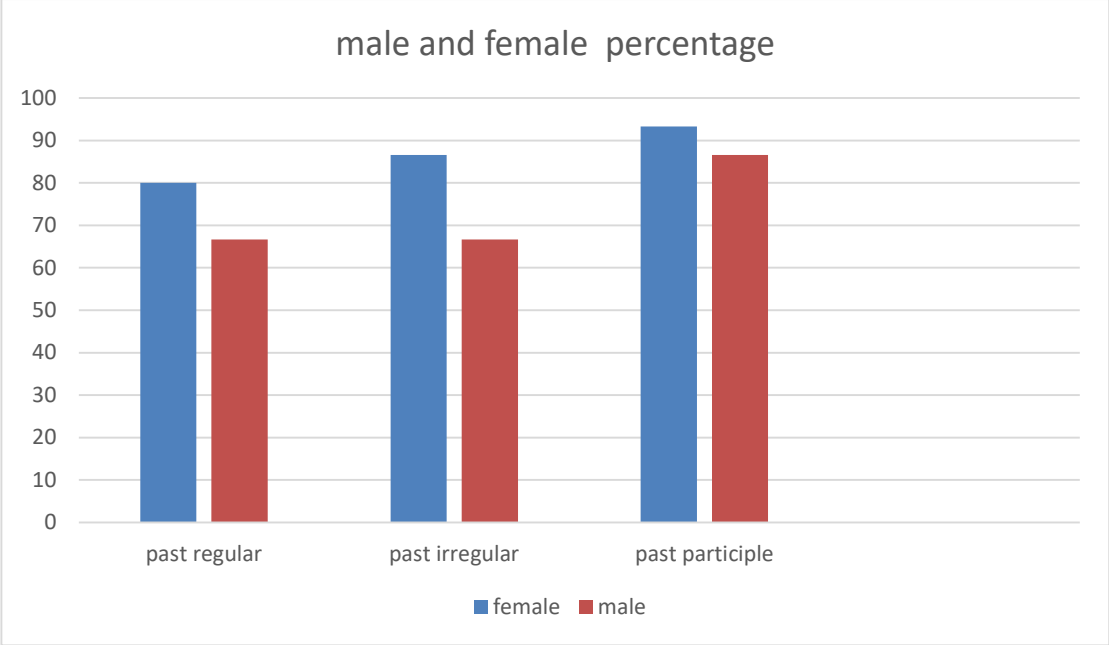

Figure (2) Percentage of male and female average of identification

7.Discussion

The results of the study show that the acquisition of past participle is more developed than past regular and past irregular in collage of nursing students. This is likely due to the fact that past participle is a more common form than past regular or past irregular. Additionally, past participle is often used in more complex sentences, which may provide more opportunities for students to practice using it. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the acquisition of English grammar. For example, one study found that children were able to produce past participle forms earlier than past regular forms (Brown, 1973). Another study found that adults were more likely to make errors with past regular forms than with past participle forms (Cazden, 1968).

There are a number of possible explanations for why past participle is more developed than past regular and past irregular in collage of nursing students. One possibility is that past participle is simply more common than past regular or past irregular. This would mean that students would have more opportunities to hear and use past participle, which would lead to better acquisition. Another possibility is that past participle is more salient than past regular or past irregular. This means that past participle is more likely to stand out in students' minds, which would also lead to better acquisition. Finally, it is also possible that past participle is simply easier to learn than past regular or past irregular. This could be due to a

number of factors, such as the regularity of the form or the frequency of exposure to the form.

The findings of this case study suggest that nursing students are able to understand and use a variety of English grammatical morphemes. However, there were some areas where the students could improve their use of morphemes. For example, some students had difficulty using morphemes to form plural nouns and past tense verbs. The enhanced acquisition of past participles in nursing students may stem from their higher frequency in language, increased grammatical complexity, and greater regularity. The frequent exposure to past participles across academic and professional settings reinforces learning. In addition, the grammatical intricacy of past participle usage in passive voice constructions, verb phrases, and adjectival forms provides contextual diversity. Finally, the consistency in past participle formation patterns, in contrast to irregular past tense verbs, allows for more predictable application of rules. Taken together, these complementary factors of language exposure, grammatical sophistication, and pattern regularity likely facilitate robust learning of past participle forms within the nursing student population. Additional research can further investigate the precise mechanisms behind this effective acquisition process.

8. Conclusion

The study's findings highlight the importance of past participle forms in the English language and emphasize the need for effective teaching strategies to support nursing students in acquiring this grammatical feature. Further research is warranted to explore the factors influencing past participle acquisition and inform language teaching practices for nursing students. Despite respectable performance with certain basic morphemes, this case study demonstrates the significant difficulty that persists establishing consistent subject/verb agreement for nursing students with this linguistic background. Implementing more targeted instruction, practice opportunities and feedback through TESOL informed medical writing workshops, supervised clinical placements and online learning tools could provide vital support in advancing the present tense proficiency levels required for healthcare careers, a growing necessity globally. This case study demonstrates the ongoing development this nursing student cohort exhibits with accurate use of English grammatical morphemes for effective communication in healthcare environments. Findings will inform tailored language and writing instruction as well as professional support in clinical placements, targeting areas of difficulty

highlighted like subject/verb agreement. Further progress monitoring is warranted and will aid advancement.

9,Recommendations and Implications

The study's findings that past participle is more developed than past regular and past irregular in collage of nursing students suggest several implications for education and research. The study highlights several implications for effectively educating nursing students in acquisition of past participle forms in English. Educators should place greater emphasis on explicit teaching and practice of past participle rules and forms. Additionally, contextualized learning opportunities should be integrated, such as utilizing past participles in writing patient care notes about interventions and outcomes. Scaffolding and supports are also beneficial in gradually developing mastery, including clear explanations of forms, targeted exercises, and feedback on proper usage in context. Focusing instruction in these key areas can enhance nursing students' understanding and application of past participles in real-world practice.

Further studies employing diverse methodologies would significantly expand understanding of past participle acquisition in nursing students. Longitudinal tracking of development over time can reveal influential factors and lead to optimized teaching strategies. Cross-linguistic analysis comparing native language backgrounds provides insight on transfer effects from prior languages, enabling customized materials per language. Examining the neurocognitive processes underlying past participle usage through neuroimaging informs the learning mechanisms involved. Pursuing research across longitudinal, cross-language, and neurocognitive domains will provide a multilayered perspective on the complex developmental trajectory of mastering past participles. Integrating discoveries across these complementary lenses will enable tailored, evidence-based educational approaches for this population.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this case study:

1-Nursing educators should provide students with explicit instruction on the use of English grammatical morphemes.

2-Nursing students should be given opportunities to practice using morphemes in their writing and speaking.

3-Nursing students should be encouraged to use morphemes to create clear and concise nursing notes and documentation.

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