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## Postgraduate Students' Grammatical Knowledge and Perspectives Toward Learning English Via "Headway Academic Skills Level 2 Student's Book"

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### Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the postgraduate students' grammatical knowledge and perspectives toward learning English language via the "Headway Academic skills level 2 student's book". The participants were 49 postgraduate students from the departments of Arabic, History, and Sociology at the College of Arts in the University of Anbar. A diagnostic test and a questionnaire were prepared to collect the data. The instruments' validities and reliabilities were calculated. The results revealed that the students' scores in "Grammar test" were ranged between good and very good, this was due to learning the grammar via English for Specific Purpose (ESP) materials, while there was a negative perspectives toward learning the English language via the "Headway Academic skills level 2 student's book", and there was no significance difference between the male and female students' negative perspectives toward learning English via the textbook, furthermore, there was no significance differences among the postgraduate students' negative perspectives toward the book that can be attributed to the specialization.

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## الآراء والمعرفة النحوية لطلبة الدراسات العليا نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بواسطة كتاب الطالب هيدوي للمهارات الاكاديمية المستوى الثاني

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### الملخص:

يهدف البحث الى التحقق من المعرفة النحوية و آراء طلبة الدراسات العليا نحو دراسة اللغة الانجليزية بواسطة كتاب هيدوي للمهارات الاكاديمية المستوى الثاني. بلغ عدد المشاركين في الدراسة ٤٩ من طلبة الدراسات العليا من أقسام اللغة العربية، التاريخ، و علم الاجتماع في كلية الآداب، وكذلك كلية الادارة والاقتصاد قسم الاقتصاد، وكلية التربية الرياضية. تم إعداد اختبار تشخيصي و استبيان لجمع بيانات الدراسة. تم استخراج الصدق والثبات لادوات الدراسة. كشفت نتائج الدراسة ان الدرجات التي حصل عليها الطلبة في اختبار قواعد اللغة تراوح بين جيد و جيد جداً، هذا يعود الى ان قواعد اللغة يتم دراستها بواسطة مواد اللغة الانجليزية لاغراض التخصص، بينما هناك آراء سلبية نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بواسطة كتاب هيدوي للمهارات الاكاديمية المستوى الثاني، و كذلك لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة بين الذكور والاناث في آراءهم السلبية نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بواسطة الكتاب، كذلك لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة باراء طلبة الدراسات العليا نحو تعلم اللغة الانجليزية يعزى الى متغير التخصص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتاب الاكاديمي، طلبة الدراسات العليا، المعرفة النحوية، آراء الطلبة

### 1. Introduction

The Headway series have been adopted to be the English language materials for all Iraqi universities. Concerning the postgraduate students, Headway Academic Skills level 1 is adopted for the diploma program, Headway Academic Skills level 2 is adopted for the master program, and Headway Academic Skills level 3 is adopted for doctoral program.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

English language course is compulsory for all Iraqi universities programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate. Recently, the series of Headway Academic Skills books are used in teaching English language for all students enrolled in public and private universities in Iraq. The nature, the aims, and the objectives of these books are to develop



English language learners' academic skills, this means that the focus is on academic skills such as spelling, writing techniques, reading strategies, listening strategies, summarizing, paraphrasing, using different kinds of dictionaries, etc. The language skills are embodied and not the major task of the books. The researcher notice that the non-departmental English language postgraduate students' language performance is under the level, since the implementation of the Headway series books. Reviewing the previous local and international literature as an attempt to find similar cases, it was found that in order to reveal the students' language performance, the text- books need to be analysed and evaluated. Studies of Ahmadi and Derakhshan (2016); Alshehri (2016); Laabidi and Nfissi (2016); Medina (2016); Sahragard and Rahimi (2018); Dos Santos, (2019); Caner and Kurt (2020); and Serasi and Hakim (2022) who evaluated a student's textbook that specific for teaching English language in several countries to investigate the students' language low levels, the significant of the textbook, and the. While Tang (2019) study's investigated the English language teachers' perspectives toward the English language textbook. In addition, another attempt which investigates the poor performance in English language was done by Canga and Cifone (2015); Rahmawati (2018); Adi (2019); Asakereh et al. (2019); and Vitta (2021) who conducted content analysis to reveal the purpose of the students' low performance in English language. All the researchers" efforts focused on the textbook. Thus, this study tries to reveal students" grammatical knowledge and their perspectives toward the "Headway Academic skills level 2 student's book".

### 1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims to investigate the following:

- 1- Postgraduate students' grammar knowledge level.
- 2- Postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via the "Headway Academic Skills level students' book"
- 3- Postgraduate students' perspectives toward the "Headway book" according the gender variable (males and females).
- 4- Postgraduate students' perspectives toward "Headbook textbook" according to specialization.

### 1.3 The Hypotheses

To achieve the aims of the study, the following hypotheses have been set:



1- The postgraduate students have a high level of grammar knowledge.

2- There is astatistically significant difference in postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via the "Headway book".

3- There is a statistically significant difference in postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via "Headway book" according to the gender variable.

4- There is a statistically significant difference in postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via "Headway book" according to the specialization variable

### **1.4 The Significance**

The study's results shed light on the scientific value of the "Headway Academic skills level 2 student's book". Which is used as a major instructional material in teaching English language for the postgraduate students at the university of Anbar English language university Professors, curriculum makers, and English language materials planners could benefit from the findings of this study.

### **1.5 The Purpose**

The purpose of this study is derived from postgraduate students (From non-English specialist departments) Low achievement in English language course. This study hopes to reveal the role of the instructional material in students' achievements.

## **2. Literature Review**

Learning English language in Iraq is a challenging case, especially at university level. Postgraduate students consider learning English language a heavy course (Jameel, 2022).

Learning English language is influenced by several factors, one of these factors is the textbook (Dos Santos, 2019). Investigating EFL instructors' attitudes toward academic skills, thus it is important to evaluate its content to reveal its significant for postgraduate students' levels, needs, and interests.

To investigate learners' weakness in English language, Ahmadi (2010) investigated EFL teachers' perspectives toward " Prospect 1" textbook to evaluate its content, to measure teachers' knowledge of assessing textbook, to reveal if the textbook meets learners' needs, and finally to reveal textbook's merit and demerit pedagogical aspects. Ahmadi's study shed the light on the importance of the textbook on the pedagogical context, it is considered the main source that students get



knowledge, information, and idea in learning. To a dopt a certain textbook series to teach for example the English language is based on the specialists evaluation, assessment, and investigation concerning the usability, practicality, benefits, and the educational and social values which plays a major role in developing learners' language abilities, competences, and performance (Sahab and Abduljadir (2022), Samoudi and Mohammadi (2021), Vitta (2021), Adi (2019), and Zhang (2017).

Teaching English language based on a textbook does not reflect the positive side only, the interest in this field believe that any textbook has drawback sides such as: The textbook may not present valid language model, it may affect negatively on a teacher's or a learner's role, it may not include sufficient drills or activities to practice the language, the culture of the target language may not presented in suitable way, the materials and the strategies may be a major hinder of the teacher's creativity (Richards and Renandya (2002).

As an indicator of English language students' weakness in English, Sabzalipour and Mousavi (2013, cited in Ahmadi, 2016) investigated students' perspectives toward English language textbook, to reveal its merits and demerits, the finding revealed that students' satisfaction level was neutral which means that the textbook met the expectations of the students.

In the context where the English language is used as a foreign language, a textbook is considered a major source of information that both the teacher and the students depend on it. The evaluation of a textbook is very important in and modification the information to meet the context requirements, such as to integreat technology in trading English language (Al-Harbi,2017).

Involving students in the textbook evaluation is back to 1978. When Bruder (1978) presented the textbook Eight assessment standards, Tucker (1978) recommended that an English language textbook should be evaluated by students in addition to the teachers' evaluation, During the 1980s the "Theory of English textbook analysis" was founded. The most important theories concerned with the English language textbook were the rivers theory (1981, citedin Al-Harni 2017), (Cunningsworth Theory (1984), Dougill Theory (1987), and Sheldon Theory (1988).

Alshehri (2016) evaluated English language textbook from teachers' perspectives and concluded that the English language textbook can be assessed based on skills, language types, activities,



subjects, design, and practicality criteria. Most teachers are satisfied with the textbook's design, while few of them are satisfied with the textbook content. Based on this finding, the author recommended to evaluate the textbook form students' perspectives toward the English textbook they study.

Asakereh et al (2019) analyzed the "Prospect and Vision" series textbook' activities to reveal their significant in teaching listening and speaking skills. the researchers found that the textbooks lack information and activities which expose students to authentic situations, reflect cultural aspects of the target language, and the textbooks do not provide sufficient realities of the English language system. Thus, the textbooks are the major source of students' poor performance in English language.

It is worth to mention that the "Headway Academic Textbook" series contents are focused on academic accuracy. Recently, the focus on accuracy is replaced by communication in authentic contexts (Philpot and Curnick, 2011).

Bouzid et al (2016) investigated the role of the EFL textbook in improving University Professors professional careers. The idea is that the textbook evaluation can be a good tool as a reflective action which promote the EFL teachers' teaching behaviors. Thus, it is important for all Language teachers to practice the assessment and the evaluation processes of the English language textbooks and also conduct content analysis.

The focus on students' perspectives toward the English textbook is in progress, Daneshfar and Abdollahi (2019) investigated teachers and students' perspectives toward EFL textbook, the results revealed that the students' perspectives toward the textbook is positive, but the textbook's activities, reading passages drills, language skills were not appropriate to their needs and English language background level.

The researchers believe that students' knowledge can be acquired via several sources, the materials, textbooks, the teachers, the environment, etc. concerning the English grammar, the students acquired it via direct learning, the role of the teacher is the center of the education process. Teaching grammar is based on a textbook that is suitable for the students' language level.

Teaching grammar for non-department English covering by presenting and explaining the rules supported by examples. The role of the students is to memorize the rules, the students' progress in grammar



is measured by formative and summative assessment. Thus, the university students' knowledge in grammar is sufficient (Jameel, 2022).

The methods of teaching grammar have been investigated by several researchers, scholars, teachers, and those who are interested by grammar (La Rosa and Godoy, 2021). Most teachers use a textbook to teach grammar (Yunita et al., 2018).

The researchers' efforts since 1970s was to shift the English language process from teachers' center (teaching) to students' center (Learning) in order to develop the learning process naturally, but learning grammar is still teacher's center because it need teacher's experience, in the first rank (Zhou, 2017). Concerning learning grammar as a foreign language system, Al-Abri et al. (2017) investigated the kinds of Omani students' strategies used to learn grammar. The findings revealed that the most used strategies in learning grammar were meta-cognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies.

The researchers believe that to measure and evaluate students' grammar knowledge is considered a millstone of students' perspectives, attitude, and perceptions toward learning English language.

Ling (2015) presented the advantages of explicit and implicit grammar teaching for foreign students. Yunita et al (2018) investigated EFL students' perspectives toward learning grammar. The results revealed that the undergraduate students who learn English as ESP need a clear aims when learning grammar, to high-Light strategies that facilitate learning grammar, the integration of technology in learning grammar.

## 2.1 Previous Studies

Yonan and Aziz (2021) investigated EFL teachers' perspectives toward the evaluation of English language textbook. The participants were 40 teachers. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The result revealed that the negative aspects were higher than the positive aspects, such as the textbook includes typing mistakes, the absent of balance, and lack writing activities.

Sahab and Abduljadir (2022) investigated EFL university professors' evaluation of "Headway book". The participants were 10 EFL university professors. A checklist and a questionnaire were used to collect the data. The results revealed that the university professors have acceptable perspectives toward the textbook, and there are several obstades in learning English language by non-departmental English



students need to be solved.

Nazim (2021) investigated EFL university professors' evaluation to "Cutting Edge" Textbook. The participants were 20 EFL university professors. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results revealed that the professors evaluated the " Cutting Edge" textbook positively.

Al-Abri et al (2017) investigated EFL University students' kind of grammar learning strategies. The participants were 170 undergraduate students. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results revealed that the students' high scores in grammar was due to the use of meta-cognitive strategy in learning the English grammar.

Yunita et al (2018) investigated undergraduate students' perspectives of textbook need analysis to learn grammar. The participants were 44 students. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results revealed that students' progresses in grammar were based on the providing clear aims to learn grammar, providing comfortable atmosphere, and integrating technology in learning grammar.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were 49 from the college Arts, (College of physical education and sport science, and college of Administration and economic during the academic year 2022-2023. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants.

Table 1: The distribution of the participants

College	Specialization	Male	Female	Total
Arts	Arabic	5	9	14
	History	7	2	9
	Sociology	4	4	8
Physical education and sport science.		8	1	9
Administration and Economic	Economic	6	3	9
Total		30	19	49

The researchers distributed 86 questionnaire and received only 56, the number of the valid questionnaire were 49 only. Thus, the 49 participants were considered the total number of the sample.

#### 3.2 Instruments





The data was collected using a diagnostic grammar test, and a questionnaire. The instruments were distributed to a pilot sample consisting of 8 postgraduate students (excluded from the participants) to ensure the reliability the ambiguity of both the diagnostic tests items and the questionnaire the item of each dimensions.

The test was prepared based on the ESP materials that prepared previously by the researchers the test consisted of 4 questions, question one assessed students' model and auxiliary verbs knowledge, question two assessed students' prepositions knowledge, question three assessed students' tenses knowledge, and question four assessed students' passive knowledge.

The questionnaire was prepared based on previous related studies and also from students' responds to a general question which required from them to mention the merits and demerits of learning English language via " Headway textbook level 2". The items were distributed to four dimensions, namely: speaking skills; Reading skills; writing skills; and listening skills.

The overall reliability of the test and the questionnaire were measured using Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be 0.83 at significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).for the questionnaire which considered acceptable.

### 3.3 Procedures

To verify the hypotheses of this study, the following procedures were conducted:

- 1- A diagnostic test and a questionnaire were used.
- 2- The items of the questionnaire were translated from English (The original version) into Arabic language.
- 3- The test was distributed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2022. The questionnaire was distributed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2022.
- 4- The instruments were collected, and then analyzed statistically.

### 4. Results of the Study

To verify the first hypotheses " The postgraduate students have a high level of grammatical knowledge" the mean scores and t-test value for scores of participants in diagnostic test. Table 2 shows the results

**Table 2:** One-Sample Test, Test Value, Paired Sample Test

			T- Value		
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N	M	St	Calc	Tabu	D	S
o	ea	d.	ulate	lated	f	i
	n	D.	d			g
4	66	11	22.39	2.00	4	
9	.8	.8			8	
	1	6				

Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference of students' scores in diagnostic test, the calculated (22.39) higher than T-value is the tabulated t-value to reveal (2.00) the students level in grammar, the effect size (the levels) of the independents variable on the dependent variable was calculated. A chen's equation to extract the effect size was used. The effect size was 3.28 which was the value of the interpretation of the effect size which represent "Good" level. This means that the first hypothesis is rejected, because the students' level in grammar is good.

To verify the second hypothesis "There is astatically significant difference in postgraduate students perspectives toward learning English language skills via the "Headway book", a mean scores, stand and deviation, one-sample test were used to collect the data. Table 3 shows the results.

**Table 3:** One-sample test, test value, paired Sample test

N	Mean	Std. D	Std. Error	Mean
49	33.87	6.57	0.349	

One sample test. The test value = 0

T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
93.86	48	0.563	0.460	-1.059	1.979

Table 3 shows that the mean score is 33.87, with a standard deviation 6.57. Due to this result, the P-value is 0.563 which is higher than 0.05, and the mean difference of postgraduate students' perspectives who respond to the all items of the questionnaire is 0.460, and the confidence interval include zero, its range is basically from (-1.059) with rounding, all the way to (1.979), these results indicate that there is a negative difference in the postgraduate students' perspectives

toward learning English language via "Headway textbook level 2". This results means that the second hypotheses is rejected.

To verify the third hypothesis "there is a statistically significant difference in postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via "Headway book" according to the gender variable", a test for equality of variance and T-test for equality of mans, and variances and T-test for equality of means, and levene's Test for equality of variances were used. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4: Test for equality of variances

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Males	30	34.11	6.33	0.413
Females	19	33.98	7.21	0.702

Levene's Test for Equality of variances

Equal variances assumed	F	Sig	T	Df	Sig 2-tailed	M.d	Std Error	95% confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variance	5.31	0.021	0.581	47	0.552	0.471	0.769	-1.63	1.97
			0.508	179.51	0.571	0.471	0.820	-1.144	2.069

Table 4 shows that the mean score of the males is 34.11 with a standard deviation of 6.33 and the mean scores for the females is 33.98 with a standard deviation of 7.21, and as the F. value is 5.31, which is greater than the significance value 0.05, this means there is equal variance assumed between the males and the females.

To reveal if there is a significant difference between the postgraduate male and female a comparison between the t-value of 0.581 with the (2-tailed) value of 0.552 with the significance of 0.05, which was revealed to be greater than 0.05, thus there is no significant difference. In addition, the confidence interval includes Zero; its range is from (-1.63) with rounding, all the way to (1.97) this indicates that there is no significantly difference in the postgraduate students' perceptions due to the males and females variable, which means that the third hypothesis is rejected.

To verify the fourth hypothesis "There is a significant difference in postgraduate students' perspectives toward learning English language skills via "Headway book" according to the specialization

variable", a multiple comparisons, test of Homogeneity of variances, and ANOVA were used. Table 5 shows the results.

**Table 5:** Multiple Comparisons

Specialization	N	M	Std.	Std Error	95% confidence	
Arabic	14	34.31	6.89	0.46	-2.79	1.01
History	9	30.26	6.069	1.12	-1.21	5.07
Sociology	8	29.89	5.31	0.68	-6.53	-1.54
Physical Education And sport science	9	31.10	4.56	1.09	-5.92	1.73
Administration and Economic	9	30.41	4.59	0.38	-1.02	2.74

#### Test of Homogeneity of Variance

Levene statistic	Df1	Df2	Sig
0.814	4	45	0.481

#### Variances students' specializations

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F.	Sig
Between groups	567.421	4	188.654	4.49	0.21
Within groups	14285.061	45	43.251		
Total	14852.482	49			

Table 5 shows that the highest mean score is 34.31 for Arabic specialization. The leven test value is 0.814 with significant value of 0.481 which means there is no significant difference of students' perspectives.

ANOVA test F. Value is 4.49 with a significant value of 0.21, which is higher than 0.05 significant value. This means that there is no significant difference between the postgraduate students' specializations.

#### 4.1 Discussion of the Results

This study revealed that the postgraduate students with "Non-major English". Had good level in grammar knowledge. The findings also revealed that the postgraduate students had a negative perspectives toward leaning English language via " Headway textbook level 2" due

to several reasons which reflect students' responses to the item of the questionnaire. Following are some reasons that reflect students negative perspectives toward learning English via "Headway textbook level 2"

### 1- Listening Skills:

a- The textbook does not provide authentic listening activities.

b- The listening activities present the listening strategies in general and do not provide any explanation.

c- Listening to a text and answering a missing information cannot develop postgraduate students' listening to a lecture skills. Thus, listening skills is neglected.

### 2- Speaking Skills:

a- The activities of speaking skills do not provide opportunity to communicate in authentic context.

b- The activities of speaking skills need sufficient time which is absent in this course due to the specific lecture time. Thus, speaking skills is neglected.

c- The topic of speaking skills are very far from the postgraduate students, thus, they are not interested to practice speaking.

### 3- Reading Skills

a- All the reading activities, texts and passages are not related to the postgraduate students specialization.

b- The content of the reading passage does not relate to the authentic topic.

c- The aim of the reading passages and activities is to teach the learners how to use reading strategies effectively, but the actual implementation of the reading passages at the university of Anbar is to memorize the passages.

d- The evaluation tool concerning the students' reading ability is not suitable to meet the aim of this study.

e- The validity and reliability of the reading exam are absent.

### 4. Writing Skills

a- The writing skills activities do not relate to postgraduate students' specialization..

b- The writing assessment is not suitable to the students' language levels.

c- The lecture time is not sufficient to practice writing skills. thus, doing and practicing writing skill as a homework do not give the



same interest when the students do it inside the classroom.

In addition, the results revealed that there is no significant difference between the male and female post-graduate students' negative perspectives due to the gender and the specializations.

This means that the males and the females specialized in Arab, History, sociology, physical Education, and Economic had the same negative perspectives toward learning English language via "Headway textbook level 2"

This findings are in line with the findings of the study of ling (2015, Yonan and Aziz (2021) sahib and abduljadir (2022). While the results are not in-line with results of Daneshfar and Abdollahi (2019), Philpot and curnick (2011), and Nazim (2021).

## 5. Conclusion

This study revealed the significant of using "Headway Academic Skills Reading, Writing, and study skills level 2 students' Book" by Sarah Philpot from postgraduate students' perspectives as an English language material. The textbook is not suitable for students' specializations, language level, ability to practice the language, it focus on reading and writing skills only in addition to techniques related to study skills. the listening and speaking skills are presented in a very limited activities.

The study revealed that postgraduate students' grammatical knowledge is at good level which is considered as acceptable level.

Based on the finding of the study the researchers recommended the following:

- 1- To replace the Headway Series textbook with another materials that fit the students' needs, and language levels.
- 2- To select the most useful topics from the Headway, and modify them to be very close to the students' needs.
- 3- To replace the summative exam system.
- 4- Design instructional materials that develop students' specific language purpose.

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