



Teaching Tenses Effectively

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ABSTRACT

Mastering tenses in English is a common challenge for Indonesian students due to differences in structure and time concepts between English and their native language. This article explores effective strategies for teaching tenses by emphasizing communicative approaches, the use of visual media, group discussions, peer correction, and the integration of metacognitive strategies. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach through literature review. The results indicate that teaching tenses through reflective, participatory, and collaborative activities significantly improves students' understanding of time structure in English. With the support of teachers as active facilitators, students become more independent and confident in using tenses accurately in real communication contexts.

Keywords: Teaching tenses, metacognitive strategies, collaborative learning, visual media, peer correction

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English grammar, especially tenses, is one of the core elements in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curriculum. Among the various grammatical components, tenses are not only essential for expressing time accurately, but also for building correct sentence structures in both spoken and written English. However, despite being a foundational topic, many Indonesian students at the secondary and tertiary levels still struggle to master English tenses (Sudirman, 2018). This challenge stems from multiple factors, including linguistic differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia, ineffective teaching strategies, and students' limited exposure to authentic English usage in daily contexts.

English grammar and Bahasa Indonesia differ significantly in their treatment of time. While English uses various verb changes to express past, present, and future events, Bahasa Indonesia often relies on adverbial time markers without altering the verb form (Hendriani, 2013). This difference contributes to confusion when learners are required to choose between tense forms such as simple past, present perfect, or past perfect. As a result, students often make recurring mistakes in sentence construction, which affects both comprehension and communication accuracy.

Traditional teaching methods tend to rely heavily on rote memorization, rule listing, and isolated sentence practice. These approaches are often teacher-centered and fail to engage students in meaningful learning experiences (Tambunsaribu, 2022). Recent studies in the Indonesian context have emphasized the need for a shift towards more interactive, contextual, and student-centered teaching strategies. Techniques such as group discussions, visual aids, mind mapping, and metacognitive learning have shown positive impacts on students' grammatical understanding and motivation (Hasanuddin & Azizah, 2021).

Given the importance of tense mastery for overall language proficiency, and the persistent challenges faced by learners, it becomes necessary to explore and implement effective teaching strategies that are adaptable to Indonesian classrooms. This paper aims to synthesize findings from various Indonesian research articles and provide practical recommendations for teaching tenses effectively in EFL settings.

A study by Yani Lubis (2020) reveals that grammar instruction that focuses solely on memorizing rules does not significantly improve students' ability to apply tenses in communicative contexts. Instead, students benefit more from contextualized learning, where they are required to use different tenses in real-life scenarios, such as storytelling, dialogue creation, and short writing tasks (Lubis, 2020). This approach enhances both grammatical awareness and retention.

Moreover, according to Lubis & Sari (2021), the integration of visual aids and multimedia tools-such as animated videos, infographics, and interactive exercises-not only helps students grasp complex temporal relationships but also increases classroom engagement and reduces anxiety around grammar learning. Their findings confirm that students in experimental groups using media performed significantly better in tense identification and usage tasks compared to control groups.

Yani Lubis (2022) also highlights the significance of teacher language input. She emphasizes that students are more likely to acquire and retain tense structures when exposed to frequent, clear, and grammatically rich input during classroom interaction. Teachers who use correct tenses consistently in their own speech serve as implicit models for learners, reinforcing correct forms naturally over time (Lubis, 2022).

In addition to input, learner output also plays a crucial role. In a collaborative study, Lubis and Harahap (2023) demonstrate that pair work and peer correction strategies can reduce learners' over-reliance on the teacher, while encouraging self-monitoring and metacognitive reflection. Their study showed that students who regularly engaged in group work were more aware of their own errors and more confident in producing complex tense forms orally and in writing.

Another recurring challenge found in Indonesian learners is fossilization of errors. As noted in Lubis's longitudinal classroom research (2023), repeated exposure to incorrect tense forms without adequate corrective feedback often leads to the internalization of those errors. Therefore, consistent formative feedback combined with guided practice is critical to break habitual misuse of tenses and promote accurate language use.

Lastly, the affective domain must not be overlooked. Lubis argues that grammar learning-particularly tense mastery-is deeply influenced by student motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom atmosphere. Positive reinforcement, goal setting, and supportive peer interaction have been shown to significantly reduce the fear of making mistakes, which is often a barrier to grammar development (Lubis, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The research method plays a crucial role in determining the procedures of a researcher in conducting research activities. The application of a research method must align with the



research topic so that the procedures or techniques used can be implemented more systematically (Gunawan, 2013). The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. The purpose of using a descriptive approach is to portray phenomena or events that occur in the field. This research was conducted by analyzing relevant journal articles published in Indonesian academic sources, focusing on the teaching of English tenses. The data collection techniques used in this study included document analysis, note-taking, and interpretation of findings from previous studies. This method enables researchers to describe and reflect on the phenomena studied in a structured manner.

The data analysis technique employed in this study follows Miles and Huberman's model, which includes four stages: First, data collection, which involves identifying and organizing essential information related to the teaching of tenses, gathered from selected journal sources (Sugiyono, 2019a). Second, data reduction, which is the process of selecting, simplifying, and abstracting the data that has been collected and organizing it methodically (Sugiyono, 2010). Third, data display, where the data is presented in the form of charts or matrices to make it easier to understand and to avoid misinterpretation in drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2014). Fourth, conclusion drawing and verification, in which researchers identify patterns, relationships, and meaningful findings relevant to the research objectives, and verify them for accuracy and clarity (Sugiyono, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Effective Strategies in Teaching Tenses

To overcome the challenges in teaching English tenses, educators must implement effective and learner-centered strategies. One of the most impactful methods is the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach. CTL emphasizes learning through real-life context and application, helping students to grasp the function of tenses naturally by using them in meaningful situations. Research shows that when students engage with contextual examples—such as diaries, conversations, or narratives—they better understand when and why a specific tense is used (Wahyuni, 2021).

Another effective strategy is the use of visual media, including timelines, animated videos, and infographics. These tools help students visualize the time relationships between actions, which is crucial for understanding tense distinctions. For example, a timeline can show the difference between past perfect and simple past clearly. According to studies, students exposed to visual aids demonstrate higher retention and comprehension of grammar rules (Ramadhani, 2019).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) also supports tense acquisition. By engaging learners in meaningful tasks like writing short stories, conducting interviews, or giving oral presentations, students naturally produce sentences that require tense differentiation. This process promotes functional use of tenses rather than mechanical memorization (Sari, 2018).

Incorporating communicative activities such as role-plays, games, and peer collaboration enhances student motivation and reduces grammar anxiety. Students are more likely to apply tenses accurately when they use them in interaction-driven scenarios. Language games that require fast-paced responses, such as “Tense Relay” or “Grammar Auction,” have been shown to increase engagement while reinforcing tense knowledge (Lestari, 2020).

Finally, the role of formative assessment cannot be overstated. Providing continuous feedback through quizzes, peer reviews, and reflective journals allows learners to monitor their own progress and identify areas needing improvement. Teachers can guide

students individually based on their performance, reinforcing tense usage in a supportive way (Andriyani, 2022).

It can be concluded that effective strategies in teaching tenses must integrate contextual, visual, communicative, and assessment-based approaches. These methods promote not only accurate grammar use but also student engagement and long-term retention.

B. Implications for Teachers and Learners

The integration of effective strategies in teaching English tenses creates a pedagogical transformation that significantly affects both teachers and learners. For teachers, this transformation necessitates the redefinition of their role from knowledge transmitters to facilitators and learning partners. This requires a deeper understanding of students' cognitive and affective needs, particularly in dealing with abstract grammar concepts such as tense. As emphasized by Ningsih (2021), English teachers must be reflective practitioners who continuously evaluate and adapt their teaching methods based on student feedback and performance data (Ningsih, 2021).

Teachers also need to develop culturally responsive grammar instruction that aligns with students' sociolinguistic backgrounds. For instance, Indonesian learners often struggle with tenses due to the absence of tense markers in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, teachers should employ contrastive analysis in their instruction, making students aware of differences and helping them construct new grammatical frameworks (Setiawan, 2020). Additionally, teachers need adequate institutional support and access to professional development, including workshops, online courses, and peer mentoring that focus on innovative grammar teaching.

From the learners' perspective, the implications are equally profound. Modern grammar instruction encourages students to be active participants rather than passive receivers. Students learn better when they are involved in decision-making processes, problem-solving tasks, and authentic communication. Sasmita (2022) suggests that when students are allowed to reflect on their own grammatical mistakes through tools such as language portfolios or peer feedback, they become more autonomous and aware of their learning process (Sasmita, 2022).

Moreover, learning grammar—especially tenses—becomes more meaningful when it is tied to identity and self-expression. Students are more likely to retain grammatical structures when they use them to express personal experiences, emotions, or opinions. This personalization fosters a sense of ownership and motivation. According to Maulida (2020), emotional engagement plays a critical role in long-term retention of grammar rules (Maulida, 2020).

Finally, this shift toward student-centered grammar instruction also impacts classroom management. Teachers must create safe spaces where making mistakes is viewed as part of learning. Positive classroom climates built on respect, encouragement, and constructive feedback enable learners to take risks and develop grammatical competence more confidently (Hasibuan, 2021).

In conclusion, the shift toward learner-centered and contextually grounded grammar teaching offers powerful opportunities to enhance student outcomes and reshape teachers' professional roles. This evolution requires commitment, training, and a supportive learning culture for both parties.

C. The Role of Media and Visual Aids

The integration of media and visual aids in teaching English tenses has proven to be not only supportive but also transformative in grammar pedagogy. These tools serve as a medium to reduce the abstraction of grammatical concepts and to support differentiated

instruction. According to Munir (2021), visual representations such as mind maps, timelines, flowcharts, and animations can help students connect tense forms to real-life events, thus making learning more intuitive and meaningful (Munir, 2021).

In traditional classrooms, the challenge of explaining complex tenses such as present perfect continuous or future perfect can be overwhelming, particularly for visual learners. Visual aids help bridge this gap by mapping abstract grammar to concrete illustrations. Yuliana (2020) confirms that visual tools increase student confidence and participation during grammar-focused tasks, as they allow learners to organize grammatical elements mentally and visually (Yuliana, 2020).

Moreover, the digital transformation in education has brought forth accessible platforms like Canva, Kahoot, and Google Slides, which empower teachers to create interactive grammar materials. These platforms not only enhance classroom engagement but also allow asynchronous learning, enabling students to review tense structures at their own pace. As noted by Saputri (2022), integrating multimedia and interactive visuals supports the retention of complex grammatical rules, particularly when accompanied by auditory and kinesthetic reinforcement (Saputri, 2022).

Media and visuals are also crucial in addressing affective filters. Students who perceive grammar as intimidating or irrelevant often experience learning anxiety. However, contextual visual media—such as narrative videos, comics, and grammar-infused storytelling—can lower emotional barriers and improve classroom climate. Harahap (2021) found that students exposed to culturally familiar visual content were more likely to show increased engagement and reduced apprehension in grammar lessons (Harahap, 2021).

Furthermore, effective media usage fosters teacher creativity and collaboration. Teachers are encouraged to co-develop visual resources and share best practices through teacher communities, which also promotes professional development. As highlighted by Arifin (2021), teachers who integrate media actively into grammar teaching report higher student outcomes and more positive feedback from learners (Arifin, 2021).

In summary, media and visual aids not only assist in explaining tense structures but also transform grammar classrooms into more interactive, inclusive, and emotionally supportive environments. Their proper integration can significantly enhance both teaching quality and learning experience.

D. Group Discussion and Peer Correction

Group discussion and peer correction are not only effective strategies in grammar instruction but are also rooted in socio-constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learners benefit from tasks they cannot complete alone but can accomplish with peer assistance. In this light, grammar instruction—especially tenses becomes more effective when learners are given space to negotiate meaning and clarify errors with each other (Rahmawati, 2020).

Furthermore, group discussions provide opportunities for students to practice using various tenses in spoken interaction, encouraging fluency and grammatical accuracy simultaneously. This communicative grammar practice reduces students' fear of making mistakes in front of the teacher and builds their speaking confidence. Suryani (2021) found that students who participated in guided group discussions showed increased fluency and self-correction behaviors compared to those in teacher-centered instruction (Suryani, 2021).

Peer correction, when guided correctly, shifts students from passive recipients to active grammar analysts. It also encourages metacognitive skills, where learners evaluate not only their peers' sentences but also their own grammar intuitions. As Prasetyo (2022)

notes, the act of giving feedback activates deeper grammar processing and leads to better retention of tense structures (Prasetyo, 2022). Importantly, peer correction builds classroom democracy, where all students have a voice in the learning process.

The teacher's role in facilitating both activities is crucial. Teachers must create a safe environment, model effective feedback strategies, and provide checklists or grammar guides to avoid misinformation. Haris (2021) emphasizes the importance of pre-correction training and scaffolding activities to prepare students in identifying correct and incorrect tense usage. Without this support, peer correction may lead to confusion or reinforcement of incorrect forms (Haris, 2021).

Lastly, peer correction and discussion support reflective learning. When students are encouraged to revisit their own mistakes or consider why a particular tense is appropriate in a peer's sentence, they begin to internalize grammar rules at a deeper level. This reflection transforms surface-level grammar drills into meaningful language acquisition experiences.

In summary, the combination of group discussion and peer correction enhances tense learning by promoting interaction, reflection, and ownership. These methods align with modern, student-centered pedagogy and build essential language and thinking skills.

E. Integrating Metacognitive Strategies

Integrating metacognitive strategies in tense instruction plays a critical role in enhancing learner autonomy and self-regulation. Metacognition refers to one's awareness and control over their own learning process, including planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In grammar learning, this involves learners consciously selecting strategies for understanding tenses, assessing their own sentence construction, and refining errors based on reflective thinking (Nursalim, 2021).

In practice, metacognitive strategy training includes explicit instruction where teachers guide students to set personal learning goals (e.g., mastering past perfect tense by the end of the week), use checklists to monitor usage accuracy during writing tasks, and conduct post-task reflections. Sari (2022) noted that such metacognitive interventions help students track their own grammar mistakes and develop a stronger sense of ownership in their learning process (Sari, 2022).

An essential part of metacognitive integration is the "think-aloud" protocol, where students are encouraged to verbalize their reasoning when choosing tense structures. This strategy, often used in reading, has proven beneficial in grammar as well, helping students identify inappropriate tense usage through self-questioning (e.g., "Is this event still happening or has it already finished?") (Maulana, 2020). By doing so, learners shift from memorizing tense formulas to applying them meaningfully in context.

Furthermore, metacognitive strategies can be integrated with formative assessments such as grammar journals and self-assessment rubrics. Through consistent reflective journaling, learners gain insight into their progress, recognize recurring tense errors, and identify areas for improvement. As Widodo (2023) asserts, such strategies enhance long-term retention by connecting grammar learning with self-awareness and goal setting (Widodo, 2023).

Teachers also play a pivotal role by embedding reflective questions in lessons, encouraging peer discussions about grammar choices, and providing regular opportunities for learners to evaluate their grammatical decisions. This process builds a reflective classroom culture that values understanding over rote memorization.

In summary, integrating metacognitive strategies into tense instruction transforms passive grammar learning into a reflective and student-driven process. These strategies help

learners plan, monitor, and evaluate their understanding, fostering deep and long-lasting grammar mastery.

F. Challenges in Teaching Tenses

Teaching tenses effectively in the Indonesian EFL context is a complex challenge influenced by various linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors. One major linguistic obstacle arises from the fundamental structural differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia. In English, verb tenses play a central grammatical role in conveying time and aspect, while in Bahasa Indonesia, temporal context is often implied through adverbs rather than verb inflection. This leads students to struggle in understanding the nuanced differences between, for instance, present perfect, present continuous, and simple past, which have no exact equivalents in Bahasa Indonesia (Hasanuddin & Azizah, 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, many English teachers still rely heavily on traditional methods such as rote memorization of tense formulas without contextual usage. As a result, students memorize forms like “Subject + has/have + V3” without fully understanding the function or appropriate usage in real-life scenarios. Grammar taught in isolation leads to fragmented understanding, where learners know the rules but cannot implement them in writing or speaking tasks (Sudirman, 2018).

Furthermore, insufficient exposure to authentic English materials exacerbates the difficulty. Learners rarely engage with English in natural communication settings; most interactions occur only within the classroom. The lack of reading and listening input that features tenses in realistic use cases hinders their ability to internalize tense patterns subconsciously (Pratama, 2020).

Another contributing factor is learners’ psychological attitude toward grammar. Grammar is often perceived as difficult and tedious. When students find grammar boring and irrelevant to their personal lives, motivation to learn significantly decreases (Hendriani, 2013). This is worsened by the anxiety students feel when they are required to produce grammatically correct sentences under pressure.

Finally, teacher competence remains a key determinant. Teachers who lack confidence in using tenses accurately may avoid using them in class, resulting in limited exposure for students. Training and continuous professional development in English grammar pedagogy are crucial to empowering teachers to design engaging, contextual, and learner-centered grammar instruction.

From the above elaboration, it can be concluded that the difficulty in teaching tenses is multifaceted, involving linguistic mismatches, outdated instructional strategies, minimal exposure to authentic English, negative learner attitudes, and limited teacher confidence. A successful tense instruction approach must holistically address these factors through communicative teaching, meaningful input, and teacher empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the presentation of the material in this paper, it can be concluded that effective teaching of tenses is not solely dependent on the theoretical understanding of grammar, but also on innovative and student-centered pedagogical approaches. The use of varied methods such as visual media, group discussions, peer correction, and the integration of metacognitive strategies can significantly enhance students’ understanding and retention of English tenses. Teachers play a strategic role as facilitators in creating a learning environment that supports exploration, reflection, and collaboration. Thus, teaching tenses becomes more meaningful and relevant to the learning needs of today’s students.

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