

PROBLEMS OF TEACHING PAST TENSES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the challenges of teaching past tense forms in English language classrooms. Many learners experience difficulties when trying to distinguish between different past structures, which often leads to errors in both speaking and writing. These problems are mainly related to the complexity of grammatical forms and the use of traditional teaching methods that do not always support practical language use.

This paper explores the key factors that influence students' understanding of past tenses and emphasizes the importance of using more interactive and learner-centered approaches in the classroom. It also presents a number of classroom activities designed to help students practice past tense forms in meaningful contexts.

The results suggest that when teaching methods are adapted to students' needs and include engaging tasks, learners are more likely to improve their grammatical accuracy and overall communication skills.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental part of human existence, and language serves as its primary tool. It allows people to share thoughts, express emotions, and establish connections within society. In the context of globalization, the ability to use a foreign language has become increasingly important. English, in particular, holds a dominant position as a global means of communication in areas such as education, science, business, and technology. As a result, many educational systems introduce English at an early stage to prepare learners for international interaction and future opportunities.

However, acquiring proficiency in English is not always an easy process, especially when it comes to mastering grammar. While grammar provides the structure necessary for clear and accurate communication, it is often viewed by learners as difficult

and confusing. One of the most problematic areas is the use of past tenses. Students frequently experience uncertainty when choosing between different forms, such as the past simple, past continuous, and past perfect. This confusion often leads to mistakes in both speaking and writing.

These difficulties do not only affect learners but also create challenges for teachers, who must explain complex grammatical concepts in a clear and engaging way. In many cases, traditional teaching approaches are not sufficient to ensure deep understanding. Therefore, it becomes essential to explore the specific problems related to teaching past tenses and to identify effective strategies that can support both teaching and learning processes in the classroom.

According to Azizova F. (2008) the essence of continuous learning of foreign languages involves the creation of the necessary conditions for the formation of a creative, socially active, spiritually rich personality: the availability of curricula, textbooks, teaching aids in accordance with state standards, as well as the use of various didactic means and teaching methods (mutual learning, grammar-translation method, deductive and inductive methods, interviews, problem-based search teaching method, presentation, reproductive and creative method, etc.

Teaching past tenses is important because it allows students to describe past events, experiences, and actions clearly and correctly. The ability to use past tenses helps learners communicate effectively in real-life situations, such as telling stories or explaining what happened. Moreover, understanding past tense forms is essential for developing both speaking and writing skills, as it enables students to use English more naturally and accurately.

The teaching of grammar has long been considered a fundamental aspect of language learning, as it provides the structural foundation necessary for effective communication. According to Jeremy Harmer (2007), grammar enables learners to organize words into meaningful sentences and plays a key role in developing both

accuracy and fluency. Without a solid understanding of grammatical structures, learners may struggle to express their ideas clearly.

In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, past tense forms have been identified as particularly challenging for learners. Penny Ur (2012) notes that students often experience confusion when learning different past tense structures due to similarities in meaning and differences in usage. For example, learners frequently mix up the past simple and present perfect because both refer to past actions but differ in their

Furthermore, Scott Thornbury (1999) emphasizes that traditional grammar teaching methods, which focus heavily on rules and memorization, are not always effective in helping learners use grammatical forms in real communication. He argues that learners need meaningful practice and contextualized activities to fully understand and apply grammar correctly.

Another important issue highlighted in the literature is the role of learner difficulties and errors. Rod Ellis (2008) explains that errors in using past tenses are a natural part of the learning process, as students gradually develop their understanding of complex grammatical systems. However, these errors can persist if they are not addressed through appropriate teaching strategies.

In addition, motivation and engagement are crucial factors in grammar learning. Zoltán Dörnyei (2001) suggests that students are more likely to succeed when they are actively involved in the learning process and when teaching methods are interesting and interactive. This is particularly relevant in teaching past tenses, where engaging activities can help learners better understand abstract grammatical concepts.

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

Activity 1: Timeline Story

Objective: To help students understand the sequence of past events.

Instructions: Teacher draws a timeline on the board. Students are given a short

story with mixed sentences. Students must place the events in the correct order on the timeline. They retell the story using past tenses (past simple / past perfect). Teacher checks and gives feedback.

Activity 2: Find Someone Who...

Objective: To practice past simple through speaking.

Instructions: Teacher gives students a worksheet with questions:

- Find someone who visited another country.
- Find someone who watched a movie yesterday.

Students walk around and ask classmates questions. They write names and answers. At the end, students report their findings.

Activity 3: Past Tense Mastery Practice

Objective: To help students practice and differentiate between past simple, past continuous, and past perfect forms in various contexts.

Instructions: Students are given a worksheet with different types of exercises. In Part 1, students complete the sentences using the correct form of the past simple or past continuous. In Part 2, students choose the correct option between past simple and past perfect. In Part 3, students again complete sentences focusing on correct tense usage in context. In Part 4, students read a short text and fill in the gaps using appropriate past tense forms. Students work individually first and then compare their answers in pairs. The teacher checks the answers with the whole class and provides feedback.

Activity 4: Picture-Based Storytelling

Objective: To use past tenses in context.

Instructions: Teacher shows a sequence of pictures. Students create a story based on the pictures. They must use past tenses while speaking or writing. Students present their stories to the class. Teacher gives feedback.

On this point, it is important for teachers to use flexible and engaging methods that meet students' needs. Such approaches not only help learners improve their accuracy but

also support the development of their overall communication skills in English.

CONCLUSION

All in all, teaching past tenses in the English classroom is often associated with various difficulties that affect both learners and teachers. Many students find it hard to clearly understand the differences between past tense forms, which may result in frequent mistakes during communication. These problems are usually connected to the complexity of grammatical rules as well as teaching approaches that focus more on theory than on practical use.

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