JURNAL MUDABBIR

(Journal Research and Education Studies)

Volume 5 Nomor 2 Tahun 2025

http://jurnal.permapendis-sumut.org/index.php/mudabbir **ISSN: 2774-8391**

Effective Strategies to Overcome Learning Difficulties in Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense for Fifth-Grade Elementary Students

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengatasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh siswa kelas V sekolah dasar dalam memahami *Simple Past Tense* dan *Past Continuous Tense*, serta strategi untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran mereka. Dengan menerapkan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi faktor internal seperti perkembangan kognitif, motivasi, dan pengetahuan Bahasa sebelumnya, serta pengaruh eksternal seperti metode pengajaran, alat pendidikan, dan dukungan dari lingkungan mereka. Berdasarkan teori ahli tentang pemerolehan bahasa dan teknik pengajaran, berbagai solusi dianalisis, termasuk pengajaran interaktif, pembelajaran kontekstual, dan penggunaan alat digital yang dapat menambah pemanahan tentang konsep tata bahasa. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan belajar yang menarik, strategi *scaffolding*, dan integrasi multimedia secara signifikan meningkatkan pemahaman siswa terhadap struktur Past Tense. Kolaborasi antara guru, siswa, dan orang tua memainkan peran penting dalam mengatasi hambatan ini, sehingga memastikan pembelajaran tata bahasa yang lebih efektif dan bermakna.

Kata Kunci: *Pembelajaran Bahasa, Pemerolehan Tata Bahasa, Simple Past Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Pendidikan Dasar, Strategi Pengajaran.*

ABSTRACT

This research explores the challenges faced by fifth-grade elementary students in understanding Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense, along with strategies to improve their learning. Applying a qualitative case study approach, the study identifies both internal factors such as cognitive development, motivation, and prior language knowledge and external influences like teaching methods, educational tools, and support from their environment. Drawing from expert theories on language acquisition and instructional techniques, various solutions are examined, including interactive teaching, contextual learning, and digital tools that reinforce grammar concepts. The findings highlight that engaging learning environments, scaffolding strategies, and multimedia integration significantly enhance students' comprehension of Past Tense structures. Collaboration among teachers, students, and parents plays a crucial role in overcoming these obstacles, ensuring more effective and meaningful grammar instruction

Keywords: *Language learning, Grammar acquisition, Simple Past Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Elementary education, Teaching strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a crucial part of a child's cognitive development, with grammar playing an essential role in enabling effective communication. One of the fundamental aspects taught at the elementary level is the Past Tense, specifically the Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense, which help students describe past events accurately. However, many fifth-grade students struggle to grasp these concepts due to the abstract nature of grammatical structures, irregular verb usage, and difficulties in distinguishing different tenses in context.

To better understand these challenges, it is important to consider cognitive and linguistic development theories. Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952) suggests that elementary school students are in the concrete operational stage, meaning they process information more efficiently through tangible experiences rather than abstract explanations. This implies that traditional grammar teaching methods may be ineffective, as students need engaging and interactive approaches to truly internalize linguistic rules. Similarly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) emphasizes the significance of social interaction in learning, reinforcing the idea that collaborative activities and meaningful examples enhance comprehension. Additionally, Krashen's input hypothesis (1985) posits that students acquire language more efficiently when exposed to comprehensible input, or language structures that are slightly beyond their proficiency level but made accessible through context and guidance.

Difficulties in mastering past tense forms stem from internal and external factors. Internally, students may struggle with cognitive processing, lack motivation, or have difficulties memorizing irregular verb patterns (Brown, 2007). Externally, ineffective

teaching strategies, limited exposure to authentic language use, and inadequate reinforcement activities can further hinder their progress (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). A common issue among learners is distinguishing between Simple Past Tense, which describes completed actions, and Past Continuous Tense, which refers to ongoing past events interrupted by other actions. Misconceptions regarding verb conjugation, the use of negative and interrogative forms, and time indicators further complicate the learning process.

To address these issues, educators must adopt dynamic, student-centered teaching strategies that encourage active engagement with grammar concepts. Techniques such as contextual learning, task-based instruction, and multimodal approaches provide a bridge between abstract rules and real-world language application. Additionally, digital tools, gamification, and scaffolded learning can enhance students' ability to grasp past tense structures. The incorporation of visual aids, story telling , and peer discussions has been proven to improve comprehension and fluency, making grammar lessons more meaningful and effective.

This study aims to explore expert-recommended strategies to overcome these challenges, focusing on pedagogical techniques, learning methodologies, and technological interventions that facilitate fifth-grade students' mastery of past tense structures. By identifying effective solutions and integrating interactive and engaging teaching methods, educators can foster a supportive learning environment where students develop a strong foundation in grammar, leading to greater fluency and confidence in language use.

RESEARCH METHOD

The methodology of this research is designed to thoroughly examine the difficulties faced by fifth-grade elementary students in understanding Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense, as well as identifying effective solutions based on expert theories in language acquisition and pedagogy. This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, allowing for an in-depth exploration of both internal and external factors influencing students' learning outcomes. Through this framework, the research aims to generate rich descriptive insights into the cognitive and instructional barriers faced by learners, alongside strategies that can enhance comprehension and retention of grammatical concepts.

To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, data collection includes multiple methods such as written tests, classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. The written tests provide direct insight into students' abilities to recognize and correctly apply past tense structures in various contexts, helping to pinpoint specific grammatical difficulties such as verb conjugation errors, incorrect tense selection, and confusion over time expressions. Classroom observations allow researchers to assess real-time interactions between students and educators, shedding light on teaching methodologies,

student engagement, and the effectiveness of instructional aids. Additionally, interviews with teachers and students offer qualitative perspectives on learning challenges, motivational factors, and instructional preferences. Lastly, document analysis involves the review of textbooks, lesson plans, and educational materials to evaluate their alignment with recommended pedagogical practices.

The research applies Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative data analysis framework, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Through data reduction, raw information is systematically organized to identify recurring themes related to grammatical difficulties and effective learning interventions. In the data presentation phase, findings are structured using tables and thematic groupings, offering clear visual representation of patterns observed across different data sources. Finally, the conclusion drawing and verification step involves cross-referencing student performance with linguistic theories and teaching practices, ensuring that results are robust and valid. The application of triangulation, where multiple data sources are compared, enhances reliability and accuracy in determining effective solutions for student learning challenges.

Furthermore, the study is conducted with strict adherence to ethical considerations, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent from all participants. Student identities are anonymized, and participation is voluntary, with parents and educators fully informed about the research objectives. By maintaining ethical integrity, this study ensures that findings are transparent and contribute meaningfully to educational advancements.

By employing a multi-faceted qualitative methodology, this research offers a holistic perspective on the obstacles fifth-grade students face in mastering past tense structures. Through the integration of comprehensive data collection and rigorous analytical techniques, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for educators seeking to improve grammar instruction, ultimately fostering more effective and engaging learning experiences for elementary students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fifth-grade elementary students often experience difficulties in mastering Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense, primarily due to challenges in recognizing the differences between completed and ongoing past actions. One of the key cognitive hurdles observed is their struggle to distinguish whether an event occurred at a specific moment in the past or whether it was in progress when interrupted. This lack of clarity leads to frequent grammatical errors, such as the omission of auxiliary verbs or incorrect conjugation of irregular verbs. Furthermore, students tend to overgeneralize rules, applying standard verb conjugation patterns to irregular verbs, which highlights gaps in their foundational understanding of Past Tense structures.

Another prominent issue affecting students' grammar learning is their low level of engagement with instructional methods, particularly when lessons rely heavily on

memorization and teacher-centered explanations. Classroom observations reveal that students are often disengaged during grammar lessons that lack interactive elements, resulting in minimal participation and retention of key grammatical concepts. Instead of understanding past tense structures through practical usage, students attempt to memorize verb forms without recognizing their contextual significance. Research suggests that active learning approaches such as story telling, peer discussions, and real world applications enhance grammatical retention and comprehension, yet many traditional teaching methods fail to incorporate these techniques effectively.

To enhance students' grasp of Past Tense structures, scaffolded instruction can be applied to progressively introduce grammatical concepts in a structured and accessible manner. This strategy involves breaking down complex rules into smaller, manageable learning segments, supplemented by visual aids, sentence mapping activities, and contextual illustrations. For example, teachers can utilize story sequencing exercises where students visually organize past events before constructing sentences, helping them better understand the relationship between completed and ongoing actions. These methods align with Bruner's scaffolding theory, which emphasizes the importance of structured learning steps in supporting knowledge acquisition. Additionally, incorporating multimodal learning techniques such as digital applications, interactive grammar games, and animated lessons can provide students with repeated exposure to past tense structures in engaging ways, reinforcing their understanding through dynamic learning formats.

Peer collaboration and discussion-based learning have also proven to be effective strategies in improving grammatical fluency. Observational data suggest that students who engage in peer-led story telling exercises make fewer errors in sentence construction compared to those who practice grammar individually. This highlights the benefit of learning through social interaction, where students develop a deeper understanding of past tense usage by actively discussing sentence structures in real-time conversations. Teachers can facilitate dialogue-based exercises where students narrate past experiences while identifying the appropriate tense forms, helping reinforce grammatical concepts. Furthermore, small group review sessions provide opportunities for learners to analyze each others sentences and offer constructive feedback, supporting better comprehension of tense distinctions. These approaches are consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, which argues that language acquisition is strengthened through collaborative learning and interactive engagement.

The implementation of technology-driven learning tools can further support students in developing greater accuracy and confidence in their grammar usage. Findings indicate that students who regularly engage with digital grammar exercises and gamified learning platforms demonstrate higher proficiency in Past Tense application than those who rely solely on conventional worksheets. The use of interactive applications provides instant feedback, allowing students to recognize and correct their mistakes in real time, which accelerates learning. Additionally, features such as animated tutorials, grammar

puzzles, and storytelling simulations create an immersive learning environment that makes grammar practice enjoyable and effective. Gamification methods, including reward-based progress tracking, also encourage students to continue refining their grammatical skills, leading to long-term retention and improved sentence construction abilities.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that fifth-grade elementary students encounter various cognitive, linguistic, and instructional obstacles when learning Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense. Many of these challenges stem from difficulty distinguishing completed past events from ongoing actions, errors in verb conjugation, and confusion in applying tenses within story telling exercises. Additionally, limited engagement with traditional grammar instruction which often relies on memorization rather than interactive learning has been identified as a contributing factor to weaker comprehension and retention. Observations and interviews confirm that when grammar is presented without meaningful context, students struggle to grasp its practical usage, leading to frequent errors in tense application.

This study identifies several effective pedagogical approaches that can help improve students' ability to use Simple Past Tense and Past Continuous Tense correctly. One key strategy is scaffolded instruction, which introduces past tense gradually through structured activities and guided learning experiences. Bruner's scaffolding theory supports the idea that progressive learning techniques such as visual timelines, illustrated narratives, and sentence mapping exercises allow students to build proficiency step by step rather than confronting complex grammar rules all at once. Additionally, peer collaboration and discussion-based learning have proven effective in reinforcing grammatical accuracy, as students learn best through direct engagement and interactive dialogues.

Beyond these methods, technology-based instruction has shown great potential in enhancing grammar comprehension. Students who regularly use digital learning tools, including gamified grammar exercises, animated tutorials, and interactive storytelling apps, demonstrate greater retention and proficiency compared to those relying exclusively on textbook-based instruction. These findings suggest that blended learning approaches combining traditional grammar instruction with multimedia-rich, interactive experiences can significantly improve students' mastery of Past Tense structures.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting dynamic and student-centered teaching strategies to ensure effective learning. Grammar instruction should go beyond rote memorization, incorporating contextualized learning, scaffolded approaches, peer interaction, and technological innovations to provide students with meaningful engagement with grammatical concepts. By shifting toward more interactive and adaptable instructional methods, educators can enhance students' understanding,

retention, and confidence in applying past tense structures, empowering them to use English fluently and effectively in both written and spoken communication.

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