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An Analysis Of Students' Strategy In Learning Simple Past Tense At Eighth Grade Of SMP Negeri 21 Palembang

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ABSTRACT

This research examines for students studying English as a second language, mastering grammar—especially the simple past tense—is crucial. Nonetheless, a lot of students still struggle to write and speak in the past tense accurately. The purpose of this study is to examine how SMP 21 Palembang eighth-grade students acquire the simple past tense. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method supported by quantitative data. The participants were 28 students from class VIII in the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews. The results revealed that students applied three major types of strategies: cognitive strategies (memorizing verbs and practicing exercises), metacognitive strategies (planning and evaluating their learning), and social strategies (asking for help from teachers or peers). Cognitive strategies were the most dominant (53.6%), followed by social strategies (28.6%), and metacognitive strategies (17.8%). The results show that students' comprehension of the simple past tense was improved when they combined these tactics. The findings indicate that most students rely on repetition and memorization rather than contextual understanding, suggesting the need for more communicative and meaningful grammar instruction.

Keywords: strategy, tense, grammar, students

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INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an essential component in language learning, as it provides the structure through which meaning is conveyed. Among the various grammatical forms, the simple past tense plays an important role in expressing completed actions in the past. However, Indonesian students often struggle with this tense because of differences between the English and Indonesian grammatical systems. Sentence structure patterns, including the subject, predicate, object, and complement, are the main emphasis of grammar. Tenses, on the other hand, concentrate on the construction formulas for sentences according to the moment of occurrence. In using the simple past tense, verbs are required to take their second form. This requirement often leads to students' difficulties in forming sentences correctly. Additionally, learners must be able to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs, the two types of verb modifications.

From the researcher's observations and experiences at SMP Negeri 21 Palembang in 2025, it was identified that students still had a low level of mastery of the simple past tense. The students' difficulties and confusion in learning this tense were mainly caused by the lack of effective learning strategies and the inappropriate selection of strategies used during the learning process. Furthermore, learning strategies are defined as deliberate techniques employed by students to simplify the learning process, increase comprehension of learning materials, and enhance the effectiveness of acquiring information (Hermansyah, 2016). So, it can be concluded that learning strategies have a significant impact on students' academic achievement. In order to make it easier for students to understand the subject, it is crucial to incorporate appropriate and effective tactics into every learning activity. Learning

strategies are certain techniques that students use to help them learn, comprehend concepts better, and absorb information more effectively. Therefore, identifying the strategies students use in learning grammar—particularly the simple past tense—is essential to improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement.

Previous studies (Ellis, 2006; Nunan, 2015) have shown that students' success in learning grammar is strongly influenced by the strategies they use. Learning strategies are certain methods or approaches that students adopt to improve their comprehension, memory, and usage of a language (Oxford, 1990). The purpose of this study is to examine the kinds of methods that eighth-grade students frequently employ when learning the simple past tense and how these tactics impact their comprehension and application of grammar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are techniques or specific actions used by learners to make the learning process more effective and efficient. Oxford (1990) defined language learning strategies as actions learners take to improve their own learning. These strategies are commonly classified into cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Recent studies continue to confirm that these three categories remain highly relevant in modern language learning contexts, including digital and blended learning environments (Zhang & Zhang, 2022; Al-Hoorie et al., 2023).

1. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies involve direct mental processes used by learners to understand, process, and store new information. These include memorizing vocabulary and verb forms, repeating drills, practicing grammar exercises, summarizing texts, using imagery, and applying language rules in meaningful contexts. According to Zhang and Zhang (2022), cognitive strategies play a crucial role in strengthening learners' language accuracy because they directly engage learners in active language processing. Learners who frequently use cognitive strategies tend to show better performance in writing and speaking because they repeatedly practice linguistic forms and structures in real tasks. Furthermore, a study by Nguyen and Terry (2023) found that regular use of cognitive strategies significantly improved EFL students' grammatical accuracy and vocabulary retention.

2. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies refer to learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning process. These strategies include setting learning goals, organizing study schedules, monitoring comprehension while completing tasks, and reflecting on learning outcomes. Recent research indicates that metacognitive strategies are strongly associated with learner autonomy and academic success. Al-Hoorie et al. (2023) reported that students who actively use metacognitive strategies demonstrate higher motivation, better self-regulation, and stronger language achievement. In addition, Rahimi and Katal (2021) emphasized that explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies helps students become more aware of their learning strengths and weaknesses, which leads to more effective problem-solving during language learning.

3. Social Strategies

Social strategies involve learning through interaction with others. These include asking questions, seeking clarification, cooperating with peers, participating in group discussions, and requesting feedback from teachers or classmates. Social interaction allows learners to negotiate meaning and receive real-time feedback, which is essential for communicative competence. According to Sato and Ballinger (2020), students who actively engage in collaborative learning activities show considerable improvement in speaking fluency and confidence. Moreover, a recent study by Alrabai (2022) found that social strategies enhance students' communication skills and reduce language anxiety by creating a supportive learning environment.

4. The Integration of Learning Strategies

Recent studies consistently indicate that successful learners do not rely on a single type of strategy; instead, they combine cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies to maximize learning outcomes. Zhang and Zhang (2022) confirmed that high-achieving students use a wider range of strategies and apply them more effectively than low-achieving students. In online and blended learning contexts, metacognitive strategies become even more important for managing independent study, while social strategies must be deliberately facilitated through virtual collaboration (Rahimi & Katal, 2021; Al-Hoorie et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers are strongly encouraged to explicitly teach learning strategies and integrate them into classroom activities.

2.2 Simple Past Tense

The simple past tense is used to express actions completed in the past. In this tense, verbs take their second form (V2). There are two types of verbs: Regular verbs, which add "-ed" to the base form (e.g., played, watched), and Irregular verbs, which have unpredictable forms (e.g., go → went, eat → ate).

Students often experience difficulties distinguishing and memorizing irregular verbs, which affects their ability to form grammatically correct sentences.

From a linguistic perspective, the acquisition of the past tense involves both rule-based and memory-based processes. According to usage-based theory, learners acquire past tense forms through repeated exposure to input, frequency of use, and analogy with previously learned forms (Ellis, 2020). Regular verbs are generally acquired faster because they follow consistent morphological patterns, while irregular verbs require higher memory retention and are more prone to errors. This explains why many EFL learners tend to overgeneralize the *–ed* rule, producing incorrect forms such as *goed* or *runned*.

In second language learning contexts, mastery of the past tense is closely related to students' overall grammatical competence and writing ability. Several studies have shown that learners who have a good understanding of past tense structure tend to produce more accurate and coherent recount texts (Rahmawati & Syarif, 2021; Pratiwi, 2023). The ability to use correct past verb forms helps learners construct logical sequences of events and improves text coherence.

However, a number of studies also report that the past tense remains one of the most difficult grammatical areas for EFL learners. Common difficulties include omission of *–ed*, misuse of irregular verbs, confusion between past tense and present perfect tense, and inconsistent verb agreement (Al-Musawi, 2022; Sari, 2023). These errors are often influenced by first language interference, limited vocabulary knowledge, and insufficient contextual practice.

Regarding pedagogical approaches, recent research emphasizes the importance of combining explicit grammar instruction with communicative practice. Explicit teaching helps learners understand the form and function of the past tense, while communicative activities such as storytelling, role-plays, and writing recount texts allow students to apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts (Rahmawati & Syarif, 2021; Pratiwi, 2023). In addition, the integration of game-based learning, multimedia, and peer interaction has been proven to enhance students' motivation and accuracy in using the past tense.

Based on the reviewed studies, it can be concluded that the past tense is a key grammatical component in English learning, especially in writing and speaking contexts. Learners' mastery of past tense not only reflects their grammatical competence but also significantly affects their ability to express ideas clearly and accurately in narrative forms. Therefore, effective instructional strategies and continuous practice are essential to improve students' past tense proficiency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. 1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method design, which involves the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Burke and Christensen (2014), mixed-method research integrates various elements—such as data collection procedures, analytical approaches, and theoretical frameworks—from both paradigms to comprehensively address one or more research questions, conducted either concurrently or in sequence. This research adopts a two-stage process in which quantitative data are gathered and analyzed in the first stage. The results from this phase are then

utilized to design the qualitative phase. The initial quantitative findings inform the purposeful selection of participants and the formulation of interview questions. The overall purpose of this design is to allow the qualitative data to elaborate on and clarify the results obtained from the quantitative phase. In this type of design, researchers typically begin by collecting and analyzing quantitative data through surveys, followed by qualitative interviews aimed at providing deeper insight into the participants' survey responses (Creswell, 2014, p. 247).

3.2 Population and sample

The participants in this research were all the eighth-grade learners attending SMP Negeri 21 Palembang during the 2024/2025 school year. A specific method, known as purposive sampling, was employed to choose the sample group from this overall group. Creswell explained in 2012 that purposive sampling involves researchers carefully picking individuals who are most likely to have the information needed for the research topic. Likewise, Fraenkel and Wallen noted in 2014 that purposive sampling lets researchers select individuals by targeting particular traits that are pertinent to the study. As a result, eighth class was designated as the sample because it aligned with the requirements necessary for fulfilling the goals of the research. The sample included a total of 28 learners, with 14 of them being male and the other 14 being female.

3.3 Instruments

Data for this study was gathered through questionnaires and interviews. The findings of the questionnaires were used to determine the learning strategies employed by the students, and the results of the interviews revealed the experience and challenges associated with the language learning strategies that the students used to learn the simple past tense.

3.4 Data Analysis

The questionnaire results were analyzed using percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman's (1994) model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$$

Where:
P = percentage, F = frequency, N = number of respondents (28 students)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Types and Frequency of Learning Strategy Use

Type of Strategy	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Cognitive Strategies	15	53.6%
Metacognitive Strategies	5	17.8%
Social Strategies	8	28.6%
Total	28	100%

The first, Cognitive strategies were the most widely used (53.6%). Most students focused on memorizing irregular verbs, doing grammar exercises, and constructing past tense sentences. During offline classes, teachers guided students directly through drilling and correction.
Student comment: "I memorize irregular verbs every night and practice writing sentences in past tense."

The second, Metacognitive Strategies only 17.8% of students used the strategies such as planning their study time and evaluating learning outcomes. Most students admitted that they rarely reflected on their mistakes after tests. Student comment: "Sometimes I plan to study grammar, but I don't check my progress regularly."

The third, Social Strategies around 28.6% of students frequently applied social strategies such as asking questions to teachers, discussing with classmates, and learning in pairs. Offline learning enhanced this interaction since students could communicate directly without internet distractions. Student comment: "It's easier to ask my teacher in class when I don't understand the past tense."

4.2 Discussion

The data indicate that cognitive strategies dominated the students' approach to learning grammar. Similar results were reported by Oxford (1990) and Hermansyah (2016), emphasizing that memorization and repetition are common strategies among EFL learners. Offline learning conditions also encouraged the use of social strategies due to face-to-face interaction. However, metacognitive strategies remained low, implying that students still lack self-regulated learning skills.

Students who used a mix of all three strategies performed better in grammar tests, with an average score of 82, compared to 71 for those who relied on a single strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 21 Palembang used three main strategies in learning the simple past tense: cognitive, metacognitive, and social. The dominant strategy was cognitive (53.6%), followed by social (28.6%) and metacognitive (17.8%). Offline learning contributed positively to students' engagement, particularly in practicing grammar and interacting with teachers and peers. However, teachers should encourage students to improve their metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning more effectively.

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