Learning Interest and Its Role in Students' Grammar Acquisition

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Abstract
Grammar is central in language learning and acquisition. Learning a foreign language means learning how the sentences are correctly formed and function. In that process, several skills are required to learn with no exception the knowledge of grammar. In addition to that, having an adequate amount of interest can influence the grammar learning outcome. With that consideration, this study aimed to examine the knowledge of simple tenses of fourteen first-year English Education students in one of Indonesia universities and to investigate whether their learning interests have a significant role in their performance. The data were collected through observation, a test, and a close-ended interview, and were analyzed through a descriptive quantitative method. The results of the test show that students' grammar competence was inadequate. Several factors were identified as the causes for such results. However, they showed a great interest in learning the language which can be a starting point for future improvement.
Keywords: Grammar, Simple Tenses, Learning Interest

Abstrak
Dengan mempelajari bahasa asing berarti juga mempelajari bagaimana sebuah kalimat dibentuk dan berfungsi dengan benar. Oleh karena itu, pengetahuan tentang tata bahasa menjadi hal utama dan menjadi sebuah syarat dalam penerimaan bahasa asing. Memiliki minat yang cukup juga akan berpengaruh terhadap hasil belajar. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menguji pengetahuan dasar tentang simple tenses dan untuk mengetahui apakah minat belajar mempengaruhi kinerja pada 14 mahasiswa tahun pertama Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas yang berada di Indonesia. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan menggunakan teknik observasi, tes, dan wawancara tertutup, serta dianalisis menggunakan metode deskriptif kuantitatif. Hasil temuan pada penelitian ini menunjukan bahwa nilai mahasiswa pada tes belum cukup memadai. Dari temuan tersebut, teridentifikasi beberapa faktor yang menjadi penyebabnya. Namun, dalam penelitian ini juga ditemukan bahwa mahasiswa menunjukkan minat yang besar dalam mempelajarai bahasa yang diharapkan dapat menjadi titik awal untuk perbaikan di masa depan.
Kata kunci: Tata Bahasa, Tenses Sederhana, Minat Belajar

INTRODUCTION

A fast and intelligent integration in manufacturing is in urgent need to fulfill the ever-changing life demands. The 4.0 industrial revolution was the result of this highly demanded life with the primary intention to facilitate human works in various sectors. However, the absent of attention paid to human's psychological aspect as an important part of the process had raised a few debates. In 2016, Japan government developed a vision which is called "super-smart society" or known as "society 5.0" following the previous transformational society 4.0. It was aims of promote human-centered society, in which in the middle of the economic vast resolution people can enjoy a fully active and comfortable life to the fullest (Fukuyama, 2018).

Along with this, the development of information and communication technology has taken a

huge impact on the information dissemination process. All aspects of life are forced to move from the conventional way to the digitalized way of communication. As a consequence, parties involved in the educational field are urged to adapt to this vast shifting of knowledge transfer method. The transmitting process of knowledge is assisted through one set of language that is mutually agreed. Being the most spoken language in the world, English becomes the international means of communication. The knowledge of English enables people to communicate with people of different language backgrounds.

In language learning, grammar holds an important role in learning a foreign language to be able to communicate effectively. The rules of grammar have become the standard. Having a decent skill in grammar will contribute to the learners' language competence (Mart, 2013). Furthermore, according to Savage et.al. (2010), grammar could be considered as a necessary skill to develop the other four language skills. An incorrect grammar structure may cause a misunderstanding and lead to a communication disruption. It is described furtherly by Savage et al. (2010) that it is believed by a lot of students that knowledge of grammar is the key for them to acquire a new language.

While grammar has received massive attention, the same cannot be said about its relation to learning interest. Interest has been said as one of the factors influencing one's behavior in completing a certain task. Learning a new foreign language can be tough, as a result, some may get a satisfying achievement, while some may not and even quit in the process. Interest differs from one person to another. Herbart in Schiefele (1991) postulates that interest "promotes long-term storage of knowledge and provides motivation for further learning" (p.300). Weighing on this account, Yaccob and Yunus (2019) state that it is essential to instill motivation in learners for them "to have the drive to learn the grammar" of a foreign language (p. 214).

Based on the explanation above, the present study seeks the answer to whether Indonesian students' learning interests play a role in their acquisition of English grammar. The results of this research are expected to shed light on the correlation between one factor of learning with the learning outcomes that would be beneficial for grammar teaching practice in Indonesia and future related studies towards society 5.0.

METHOD

This research employed the descriptive quantitative method. Fourteen undergraduate students majoring in English Education at one Indonesian university were taken as the samples. The samples' selection was made based on the level of the grammatical rules being tested as students of higher levels are believed to have been well acquainted with such knowledge.

The data were collected through some observations, a test, and a close-ended interview. First, the students were covertly observed in terms of their awareness of grammar in a few classroom practices. Second, a set of assessments containing 20 questions was distributed to the students. To limit the enormous scope of grammatical aspects, the 20 questions were divided into three basic tenses, simple present tense, simple past tense, and simple future tense. The aspects of tenses being tested were

to be, *to have*, *to do*, *verbs*, and the use of *modal verb will* and *shall*. The tenses types in the test were randomly positioned. Table 1 shows the distribution of each tense in the test sheet.

Table 1. Distribution of Simple Tenses in the Test

Type of tense	Number of questions	Number of Item	The total number of correct answers
Simple Present	8	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 14	112
Simple Past	7	5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, 20	98
Simple Future	5	8, 12, 13, 17, 19	70

The results of the test were calculated and analyzed quantitatively to find out the students' comprehension of simple tenses. The scores were categorized using Arikunto's (2009, p. 245) five levels of score classification. Lastly, a close-ended interview was carried out to learn whether their interest in the course gives an impact on their acquisition of simple tenses mastery. The data attained from the interview were analyzed and presented descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of this research were meant to strive for the answer to the aforementioned question regarding the students' interest in learning English and how it influences their comprehension of basic grammar specifically, simple tenses. The quantitative results are presented in tables and are furtherly explained in words. Meanwhile, the qualitative results from the interview pertaining to the students' interest in English are descriptively presented.

Among twenty questions, eight of them are questions in the matter of simple present tense. The other seven questions were dedicated to test their comprehension of simple past tense. Meanwhile, the simple future tense was given the least number of 5 questions as they showed pretty well performance in this test during the classroom observations. Prior to the test, the participants were asked whether they find grammar courses particularly material about tenses difficult and all 14 participants responded yes to this question.

Table 2. The Number of Correct Answer on the Test

Type of tense	The number of questions	The number of correct answers	Percentage of the correct answers (%)
Simple Present	8	58	52
Simple Past	7	37	38
Simple future	5	41	59

As shown in Table 2, questions in simple future tense got the highest percentage of correct answers which is in line with the results of the initial classroom observation. Simple past tense seems to be the hardest tense for most of the participants. The percentage of correct answers in this tense did not surpass 50% as the other two tenses did. Whil simple present tense fell slightly behind simple future tense, it received 52% of correct answers.

Table 3. Participants' Scores

Score	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
80 – 100	2	14
66 – 79	1	7
56 – 65	0	0
40 – 55	5	36
< 39	6	43

Table 3 shows that from 14 participants, only two got very good scores with the range between 80 to 100 points. Only 1 participant with a good score, and no one fell into the middle category of score. 5 people got between 40 until 55 which is 36% from the total. Whereas, the lowest category of score received the highest number of students with 6 of them scored below 39 which covered almost half of the total samples.

Grammar is considered as a problematic language aspect by all the participants. However, only three out of fourteen students who viewed it as the most challenging course. There were various reasons of why they think tenses are hard to learn. Some of them find it difficult to determine the type of tenses to use in a given situation regardless of the apparent adverb of time. To correctly distinguish the types tenses was also a problem. Limited range of vocabulary appeared in one participant's answer. While, the confusion of placing the words in the correct order in the sentence was noticed as well.

Concerning the types of tenses, the participants were asked to cite the tenses they know and to elaborate on the function of each tense according to their knowledge. In response to the instruction, the participants delivered different answers. One participant mentioned 16 types of tenses, one mentioned 12 major types, while the other wrote a few, and two did not give any response. More than half of the total participants could elaborate the basic functions of the three simple tenses.

The participants have several ways of learning and honing their English skills. Videos, movies, and songs were some of the media they used. Books was also mentioned by some participants. Moreover, one confessed to focus more on enriching their vocabularies through memorizing. Social media was also appeared in some participants' answers as a helpful learning tool.

Although, some of the participants did not take English Education as their first choice, in responding to the question of "Do you like English?", none of them answered no. The responses of present tense being the easiest tense to pick up is in contrast with the initial observation where simple future tense was proved to be the least demanding tense for them. Finally, 9 positive answers were acquired from the last question in the interview "If there is an extra class for grammar, would you like to join?" The factors of the negative responses were caused by their inability to allocate some extra time for the class as some of them have many extra activities and jobs outside of the campus.

Discussion

In an English grammar class, the teachers commonly begin by introducing the personal pronouns and their helping verbs such as auxiliary verbs. Larsen-Freeman (2001) states that grammar is much more than form and teaching it would require more than just the rules of form. The types of

tenses in sentences can be easily recognized through the adverb of time. Hence, tenses learning will be less demanding by being familiar with the adverbs of time. However, acknowledging the tense types through the adverb of time in the sentence was not much of help for some of the students in this study.

Considering their background major, it is fair to assume that descent scores would be attained from the test. Yet, there are only 3 students who scored above 55 and one of them got a perfect score of 100. Meanwhile, the rest scored 55 and below and 6 of them even scored below 39. Even though the aspects of tenses being examined in the test are very basic, yet the students give quite poor performance in it. The best explanation for these results would be because they are first-year students with probably very little knowledge of simple tenses.

This quite surprising outcome is seen in the inconsistency of the students' scores in their responses to the most difficult course. Only three out of fourteen students consider grammar as the most challenging course. The discrepancy in scores is very obvious. The one with the perfect score shows a great interest in English and is an active student in the class. This great interest is supported by the facilities that are available to due to the geographical and economical aspects of the particular participant. Whilst, some participants with the lowest scores are those who, and not to generalize the situation for other aspects of research outside of the discussing topic in this study, come from places where learning resources are very limited.

Three data collection techniques deliver quite different outcomes in terms of the least challenging tense type for the students. In the observation, simple future tense turns out to be the easiest type of tense to grasp which is in line with the results on the test. In the case of simple future tense, the percentage of correct answers surpasses half of the total number of students. However, in the interview session, it is the simple present tense for most of the students. Therefore, it is only normal to believe that there might be confusion in the concept of main verbs and helping verbs in the sentence that indicate the type of tenses. As of the simple present tense, it is similar to Ismiyati's study where she finds that learners often forget to insert to do in interrogative and negative sentences (2018).

On the other hand, simple past tense being the hardest tense for the students can be proven from the test. The percentage of correct answers falls below 50% with the most errors being in the case of the form of verbs. Correlating to earlier results of Hidayah (2013), there are a few factors affecting students' errors in using the simple past tense, one of which is the lack of knowledge of grammar. Moreover, one very similar factor to this study is the "inadequate exposure to the target language" (p. 10) which can be said as the main factor in the students' overall performance in simple tenses. Thus, it is believed that providing them more access to the target language would eventually raise their knowledge of grammar.

To investigate their affection towards English, all the participants give similar responses that all are fond of it. Although, grammar as the most demanding course is acknowledged by some of them. In this matter, the teaching of grammar must be adjusted to the students' needs and in the end should encourage the students to be able to apply their knowledge in various situations. Thus, Savage et al.

(2010) suggest that in a grammar class for adults, there are two important factors to consider, the first is the language function that will be needed and used in daily lives outside the classroom, and the second is the environment in which English will be used.

Movies, videos, and songs are some media that can be used to enhance the students' mastery of grammar and other language skills as well. They need to be more familiar with the sentence forms and structures as suggested by Savage et al. (2010) that, the learners cannot go far without knowing how to apply the structure. This way could help the students to understand how the language is used in particular contexts. It is supported by Mart (2013) who argues that teaching grammar in context will provide learners opportunities to see and experience how the sentences are structured and function. Moreover, Social media can also be a very helpful tool in facilitating the students to improve many aspects of their language skills.

Individual learner brings with them cultural trait which subconsciously affects their knowledge and information processing. Therefore, English should be taught by engaging the learners in active interactions where they are given the freedom to use the language (Willis & Willis, 2013). This way their interest in learning would increase gradually.

Finally, in responding to the question of whether they would like to join if there is an extra grammar course opened. Surprisingly, 3 of the students who answered no to an extra grammar class are those who scored less than 50 on the tenses test. Afraid of not having enough free time to take the extra grammar class is the main reason. However, they have been proven to have a respectable interest in English and its learning.

CONCLUSION

Grammar is one of some aspects one must have in acquiring a new language. Particularly speaking of English, grammar is a fundamental aspect one must become proficient with for the other language skills to be decently operated. The results of this study have shown various outcomes regarding of the students' comprehension of simple tenses and how it is related to their interest in English. Some students in this study have more experience than their peers from the same class and the amount of time spent in learning the language influence their learning outcomes. Those with good scores have bigger interest in English and a clear vision of what would they do with the knowledge of it. The same goes for the students whose scores fall behind. They show good interest in English, thereof, their low scores might mostly due to the very less time they spend in learning the language.

The students are hoped to not be easily complacent or discouraged by their current state of tenses knowledge. Instead, the fact that they have quite a good fondness for English should be a helping point for an improvement in the future. The teachers' and lecturers' job is to facilitate the students with the essential amenities to enable them to survive in the global society that keeps developing over time. The present study is limited only in a small scope of participants with limited language aspect in inquiry. Thus, further studies with larger scope of samples and more varied variables should be carried out to

continue answer the existing problems in English as foreign language classes.

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