REFLECTIVE TEACHING UPON THE ACQUISITION OF THE SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN YOUNG LEARNERS: IMPLEMENTING KOLB'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the implementation of reflective teaching in facilitating young learners' acquisition of the simple past tense through the framework of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Grammar lessons for young learners require repetitive drilling to develop awareness of grammatical functions in a real context. With young learners, the engagement occurs when teachers integrate meaning while introducing forms implicitly, avoiding pressures to grammar rules. Given this, the procedures may be time consuming, which contradicts real classroom conditions, where teachers often face with very limited time to deliver grammar lessons in a meaningful way. In the case of Indonesian young learners, learning the simple past tense involves more than a single effort. This is because Indonesian does not have a tense system, nor does it have verb changes to indicate time. Moreover, understanding past time reference holds another challenge for young learners. This study specifically reports on the struggles young learners faced when acquiring the simple past tense in the verb inflection and the use of its forms in complete sentences. Since the analysis is drawn from real classroom practice, reflective teaching was employed to review the learning process and the instructional approach implemented by the writers, who took the roles of teachers in the study. Reflective teaching is expected to identify best practices and implementations that need improvement in order to make a more effective approach. Referring to Kolb's four-stage cycles, which are concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, this study explores how experiential learning combined with teacher reflection can enhance students' simple past tense acquisition. The finding indicates that learners in the study found it difficult to retain newly introduced irregular verbs, such as feed, ride, have, and see. Learners also struggled to use these verbs in sentences when doing classroom activities. Reflective teaching helped the writers as teachers map the teaching process, and therefore, gained suggestions for improvement. The study suggests that reflective teaching, supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, provides a pedagogical framework for facilitating the acquisition of the simple past tense. Teachers are suggested to introduce irregular verbs in stages, beginning with more familiar verbs and gradually progressing to less familiar ones among young learners.
Keywords*: simple past tense, acquisition, young learners, reflective teaching, experiential learning*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menyajikan penerapan pengajaran reflektif dalam memfasilitasi pemerolehan simple past tense pada pembelajar usia dini melalui kerangka Siklus Pembelajaran Eksperiensial Kolb. Pembelajaran tata bahasa untuk pembelajar anak-anak memerlukan pengulangan (drilling) untuk mengembangkan kesadaran terhadap fungsi gramatikal dalam konteks nyata. Pada anak-anak, keterlibatan belajar terjadi ketika guru mengintegrasikan makna sambil memperkenalkan struktur gramatikal secara implisit, tanpa memberikan tekanan pada aturan tata bahasa. Oleh karena itu, prosedur ini membutuhkan waktu lebih lama dari ketersediaan waktu di kelas. Guru sering kali berkejaran dengan waktu untuk menyampaikan pembelajaran tata bahasa secara bermakna. Dalam konteks pembelajar usia dini di Indonesia, mempelajari simple past tense membutuhkan proses lebih panjang. Hal ini karena bahasa Indonesia tidak memiliki sistem tenses, maupun perubahan bentuk kata kerja untuk menunjukkan waktu. Selain itu, pemahaman tentang referensi waktu lampau juga menjadi tantangan tersendiri bagi pembelajar anak-anak. Studi ini secara khusus melaporkan kesulitan yang dihadapi anak-anak dalam menguasai simple past tense, terutama dalam perubahan bentuk kata kerja (infleksi) dan penggunaan bentuknya dalam kalimat lengkap.Karena analisis diambil dari praktik kelas nyata, pengajaran reflektif digunakan untuk meninjau proses pembelajaran serta pendekatan pengajaran yang diterapkan oleh penulis, yang berperan sebagai guru dalam penelitian ini. Pengajaran reflektif diharapkan dapat mengidentifikasi praktik terbaik serta aspek implementasi yang perlu diperbaiki untuk menghasilkan pendekatan yang lebih efektif. Mengacu pada empat tahapan siklus Kolb, yaitu pengalaman konkret (concrete experience), observasi reflektif (reflective observation), konseptualisasi abstrak (abstract conceptualization), dan eksperimen aktif (active experimentation), studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman yang dikombinasikan dengan refleksi guru dapat meningkatkan pemerolehan simple past tense siswa.Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peserta didik mengalami kesulitan dalam mengingat kata kerja tidak beraturan (irregular verbs) yang baru diperkenalkan, seperti feed, ride, have, dan see. Peserta didik juga mengalami kesulitan menggunakan kata kerja tersebut dalam kalimat saat melakukan aktivitas di kelas. Pengajaran reflektif membantu guru memetakan proses pembelajaran, sehingga memperoleh masukan untuk perbaikan. Studi ini menganjurkan pengajaran reflektif, yang didukung oleh Siklus Pembelajaran Eksperiensial Kolb, menyediakan kerangka pedagogis untuk memfasilitasi pemerolehan simple past tense. Guru Dimaranan untuk memperkenalkan

kata kerja tidak beraturan secara bertahap, dimulai dari kata kerja yang lebih familiar dan secara bertahap beralih ke yang kurang familiar bagi pembelajar muda.

Kata kunci: kala lampau sederhana, akuisisi bahasa, pembelajar muda, praktik mengajar reflektif, pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Reflective Teaching

In a broad sense, the early concept of reflection was introduced by Dewey as an "[a]ctive, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief [...]" (Dewey, 1910, p. 6) that "involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence—a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors" (Dewey, 1910, p. 2). Reflection, then, is not an immediate result of thinking from a momentary contemplation, rather it is more to a collection of thoughts based on experiences of events that are connected over a period of time.

When used in English Language Teaching (ELT), reflection serves as an essential tool for teacher professional development (Aliakbari et al., 2019). Through reflective practices, teachers are encouraged to become more aware of their actions and underlying beliefs in the classroom, while also identifying their strengths and areas that require improvement. Reflection provides an opportunity for teachers to evaluate their work, take ownership, and manage their own professional development, ultimately fostering new insights and perspectives (Chung et al., 2021; da Silva, 2023; Ekarina & Engliana, 2025).

One of the models that is widely used for reflective practice is Kolb's experiential learning. The model has consistently reported benefits, for instance, enhanced technical proficiency (Henríquez et al., 2025). In Kolb's model (1984), teachers as learners reflect on their teaching and learning through four modes of a cycle, which takes place within two phases, capturing the experience and transforming the experience (ibid.).

Phase 1: Capturing the experience follows inductive thinking where real, concrete, and tangible experiences are transformed into abstract experiences.

1. Concrete Experience (CE)
   In this study, learners refer to both the students at Tri Tutorial Center and the writers, Santhy and Rosen, who were also teachers of Tri Tutorial Center, a tutoring center for school-aged children, where research and concrete experiential learning took place. They experienced teaching and preparation directly, including creating lesson plans, providing supplementary materials, and selecting instructional approaches. Morris (2019) summarised five key elements that constitute CE: (1) active participation, (2) physically present and collaborate, (3) knowledge construction with community engagement, (4) responding to challenges and taking risks, and (5) progressive in difficulty (Morris, 2019). These five elements lead to the process of meaning-making, which involves critical thinking skills (James & Williams, 2017; Scogin et al., 2017, as cited in Morris, 2019).

2. Reflective Observation (RO)
   Reflective observation is essential as a mediator of meaning-making. Learners define problems and study the conditions to formulate a working hypothesis. Based on Kolb's model (1984), learners must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO). The learner acts as an investigator, testing the fit of the interpretation (reflective observation) with the concrete experience in the present time (Henriquez, 2025).

Phase 2: Transforming the Experience. Deploying a deductive thinking process where learners translate their abstract conceptualisation into actions (Kolb, 1984, as cited in Henríquez et al., 2025).

3. Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)
   Learners analyse the phenomenon they encounter and draw conclusions on how the specific context represents broader reality to be generalised (Arnold, 2017, as cited in Henríquez et al., 2025). In Kolb's model (1984), learners are expected to develop concepts that synthesize their observation into coherent and logical theories (AC). Learners examine how the specific context of an experience can represent a wider reality and therefore be generalized. They also consider whether the experience leads to internal change and helps learners develop new understanding (Arnold, 2017, as cited in Henriquez et al., 2015)

4. Active Experimentation (AE)
   Morris (2029) stated that a key benefit of contextual-specific abstract conceptualization is that it helps learners act in a practical way by using their real experiences. They apply their ideas when facing new situations and test whether those ideas are appropriate based on new experiences. Learners return to their real-world practice to test their hypotheses or theories granted from the previous stages (Henríquez et al., 2025). Henriquez et al. (2025) explained that learners move beyond their comfort zones and begin to understand that conditions can change over time and across different contexts. They also test their understanding by comparing it with real situations in the original context.

Referring to Kolb's model, this reflective study captures moments and presents hypotheses from a teaching practice at Tri Tutorial Center, Jakarta in November 2025. Classroom evidence is included to support the analysis and this reflection in learning to teach English for young learners. This reflection addresses the question: *How did the teachers' instructional choices support or hinder students' learning process?* Drawing on classroom evidence, this small-scale qualitative reflection analyzes key teaching moments to better understand the researchers' development as a teacher of English for young learners.

1.2 Children's Acquisition of English Past Tense

In an earlier study, Kuczaj (1977) drew a conclusion on the past tense verb acquisitions. "The first past tense forms used by the child appear to be irregular forms such as *fell* and *broke"* (Brown, 1973, as cited in Kuczaj, 1977, p. 598). Soon when children recognise some correct irregular past tense forms, they begin to produce forms such as *walked, helped, buyed,* and *goed* (Ervin, 1964, as cited in Kuczaj, 1977). In this second stage, the irregular forms are syntactically unanalysed. It means, children do not realise that the forms are part of a generic system in the language. They see the forms as only semantically appropriate, fits in situations when they use the forms (Kuczaj, 1977).

Later at the third stage, children begin to realise that irregular forms are part of the language syntactic system. However, since their knowledge is still developing, they may not know that *went* is the only past form of *go,* so they will produce *goed.* Then, children have more awareness of the syntactic past forms at stage four, but they must learn the relation between each irregular base form and the past forms. In the later stage, while the acquisition of the regular past tense rule is completed early, the acquisition of the irregular past tense forms continues (Menyuk, 1969, as cited in Kuczaj, 1977).

In a different study, based on the aspect hypothesis from Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig (2000), the findings demonstrate that learners seem to "find it easier to mark past tense on verbs that refer to something whose end point can easily be determined" (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2021, p. 57). This kind of verb is called 'accomplishments' verb and 'achievements' verb. For example, the verbs like *fixed, took,* and *broke* have clear end point. The verbs like *swam*, or a state verb *seemed* are less likely to be noticed and then acquired easily. These differences are due to the lexical aspect, that means the kind of meanings carried by the different verbs (Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

The studies presented above consistently indicate that acquisition of the simple past tense is similar to both first language learners and second language learners. They begin to acquire the irregular verb over the regular verb (Brown, 1973, as cited in Kucjaz, 1977; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 2021; Pinter, 2018). The word *went* is the easiest to notice since children can frequently hear from adults around them. But at a later stage, when they learn regular past tense *–ed,* children may overgeneralise the rule to irregular verbs: *go-goed* (Pinter, 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2021).

Overgeneralisation, also termed overregularisation, refers to a condition when language learners generalize or extend the use of regular grammatical forms in irregular tenses or forms (Ambridge et al., 2013). In the morphological level, children overgeneralise inflectional morphemes, such as *sitted* and *drawed,* which are irregular past verbs that occurs at certain stage of children language development, or what Kucjaz (1977) classified in stage two. Additionally, Gass and Selinker (2008) brought the discussion of child second morpheme order studies in one section of their book chapters. A study conducted by Dulay and Burt (1974) to 60 Spanish and 55 Chinese children revealed similar patterns of development in child first language acquisition and child second language acquisition, diminishing the significance of the role of native language (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

As for Indonesian learners, a study conducted by Mahmud and Erizar to two Indonesian young learners aged 2 years, 4 months, and 9 years, 3 months, indicates that there is no evidence of cross-linguistic transfer in their morphology acquisition. Indonesian language has relatively limited

inflectional morphology, therefore, Indonesian learners tend to produce more bare stems of verbs (Mahmud & Erizar, 2024; Halimi, 2011). Meanwhile, in a sentence level, a study to 140 students aged between 11 and 12 with elementary English level, suggests that a cross-linguistic influence of the Indonesian language (L1) in acquiring linguistic items exists, thus students made errors and overgeneralise rules (Sidupa, 2018). However, the two studies clearly revealed that overgeneralisation seems to be a normal developmental learning trajectory by young learners. It is one of the strategies children use to simplify their utterances (Mahmud & Erizar, 2024; Sidupa, 2018). In brief, over the years when learners have more exposure to inflectional verbs and increased awareness of inflectional necessities, overgeneralisation occurrences seem to be reduced (Mahmud & Erizar, 2024).

Following the classroom practice conducted by the writers, the topic of the acquisition of the simple past tense is interesting to examine in terms of how Indonesian children learn in a short period. The writers saw the challenges faced by the children when learning simple past tense over two meetings. Not to mention the speaking sentences production using simple past tense, learners struggled to retain information about the verb transformation, from base verbs to past tense verbs. The study explores the acquisition of the simple past tense in young learners and the teaching strategies implemented in classroom practice.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative self-reflection study design to evaluate the teaching process and students' learning outcomes after two teaching sessions implemented at Tri Tutorial Center. The reflection focused on students' participation, their performance in using simple past tense, the difficulties they faced, and the effectiveness of the teaching strategies and materials applied during the lessons.

2.1 Setting

The teaching practice was conducted at Tri Tutorial Center, a private tutorial institution. The tutoring sessions were outside of the students' regular school time, considered as part of an additional English learning program. The lesson was conducted as a community service teaching practice focusing on helping students improve their ability to use simple past tense writing and speaking activities. The writers acted as the teachers and the third and fourth writers as mentors during the community service teaching sessions. Meanwhile, participants were students consisted of 12 children (six females and six males), ranging from 11 to 12 years old, in Grade 4.

The teaching sessions were conducted in two meetings held every Saturday on November 1st and 8th, 2025, with each session lasting 90 minutes. In the first session, all students were present, but in the second session, only eight students were present. The names and approximate age in Table 1 are pseudonyms.

Table 1. List of Students

No.	***Students***	***Age***	***Male/Female***
1	Dio	12	Male
2	Sarah	11	Female
3	Kartika	11	Female
4	Gilang	12	Male
5	Farah	11	Female
6	Putri	12	Female
7	Adam	11	Male
8	Fatih	12	Male
9	Jelita	12	Female
10	Lisa	11	Female
11	Helmi	11	Male
12	Vino	11	Male

For contextual purposes, the twelve students appeared to generally demonstrate sufficient English simple speaking skills during the lessons with minimal hesitations and manageable use of lexical/vocabulary choices during classroom observations. Though there were no standardized proficiency test was administered prior and after the administered lessons, the observations suggest that these students were at a developing level of communicative competence for basic interactive task. Their language competence did not hinder lesson delivery and interactive communication between teachers and students.

The lesson objectives were designed to have learners recognize and use simple past tense in describing past leisure activities. In the lesson, students were encouraged to describe their free-time experiences by answering questions about whether they had a good time, using the simple past tense.

2.2. Data Source

This study was conducted as a small self-reflection to evaluate the teaching implementation and students' responses during the learning activities. The data were collected from several sources, including teaching journals, syllabus, teaching materials, lessons plan, and classroom observation records during the teaching sessions.

- Teaching Journals

  Teaching journals were written after completing the second teaching session. The journals contain the students' participants, performance, difficulties in using the simple past tense and the teachers' reflection on the effectiveness of teaching strategies applied in the two sessions. Reflective journals in the form of a written record function as "a place for teachers to experiment, criticize, doubt, express frustration, and raise questions" (Bailey, 1990, as cited in Cirocki & Widodo, 2019, p.218). Teachers can reflect upon their sound decision and become more aware of their teaching practice with its strength and weaknesses. Writing a journal can also engage teachers in developing educational perspectives that they can share with and used by other practitioners (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019).

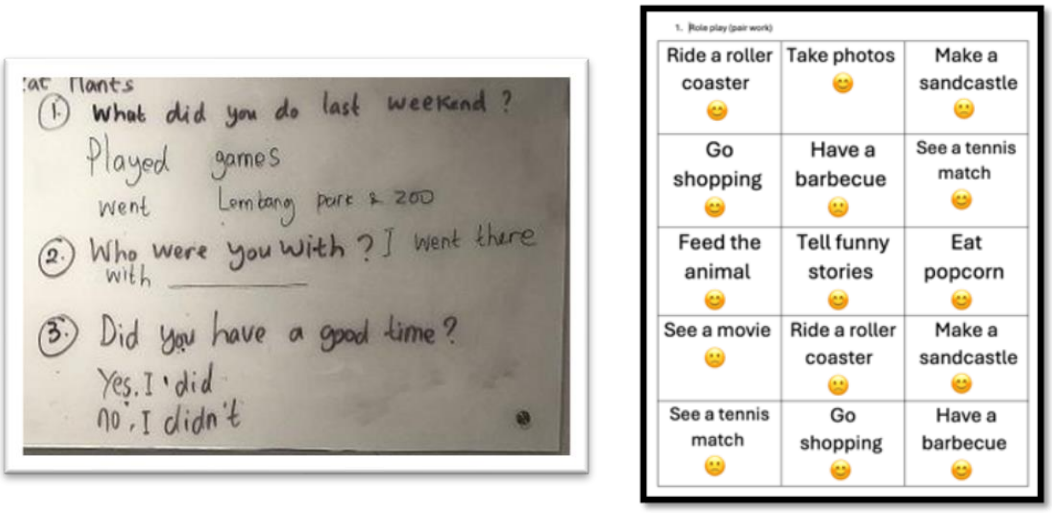
- Syllabus

  A syllabus is served as a reference to analyse the match between learning objectives and teaching implementation. A syllabus is a more specific and operational document consisting teachable units. It operates at the micro level, focusing on how and when to teach (Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2015, as cited in Soraya et al., 2025). The main components of a syllabus are specific learning materials, such as topics, grammar structures, vocabulary, and communicative functions. The learning sequence is a crucial aspect to provide systematic direction for teachers so they can organise activities to support students achieve language competence in a structured manner. Additionally, a syllabus includes timeline, time allocation, division of learning sessions, and an evaluation schedule (Soraya et al., 2025).

  The two sessions at Tri Tutorial Center were designed to enable students to engage in a conversation exchange with a speaking partner using the simple past tense. In the first session, students were introduced to leisure-time vocabulary and expressions through videos and flashcards (see Figure 1). Guided questions and cue cards were used to help students practice asking and answering simple questions about their weekend activities (see Figure 2). Students also participated in physical games to reinforce vocabulary and verb forms.



Figure 1. Flashcards presentation of verb phrases about leisure activities



(a) (b)

Figure 2. (a) Guided questions written on the whiteboard; (b) the cue cards

In the second session, activities focused on a reading activity as the input and a speaking task to use the past tense verbs in a short conversation. This progression supported students' understanding of how the simple past tense is used in context, which was beneficial for reinforcing their speaking practice. A short presentation activity was conducted to allow students share their past weekend experiences using the target vocabulary (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Students worked in pairs for a speaking activity

- Lesson Plan

The lesson plan was designed to support the writers in framing their lessons with a clear time duration. Lesson plans play a role in increasing learning effectiveness by formulating objectives, strategies, methods, and learning evaluations in a structured manner. If done right, lesson plans create a conducive learning environment, increase student participation, and achieve optimal learning outcomes (Ali & Juanda, 2025). Activities include vocabulary practice, guided speaking, writing of fill-in-the blanks and a reading task. The use of learning resources, including videos, cue cards, flashcards, and hangman game, were chosen to engage students in various activities.

The lesson plan also included assessment of pretest and post-test, which helped measure students' learning progress. There were two parts of the pretest and post-test. Part A was a vocabulary matching activity, following the target phrases from the student textbook. Part B was a fill-in-the-gap activity with the focus of simple past tense irregular verbs.

- Teaching Materials

  The teaching module was taken from the student textbook (see Figure 4), *Big Show 4*, Unit 4, *Did You Have a Good Time?* (Foster, 2019) with modified supplementary materials created by the writers. The supplementary materials were designed to enrich students' participation in vocabulary introduction, past tense verb transformation, spelling of the verbs, and the speaking practice. A video and visuals through flashcards were included to support the context setting of leisure activities (see Figure 5).



Figure 4. The first two pages of Unit 4, *Did You Have a Good Time?*



Figure 5. Flashcards presentation of the verb phrases

- Observation Notes

  Notes were written manually by the writers during the class sessions. The writers took notes of the students' learning behaviour, the responses, the challenges, and any relevant info about the class environment. The notes were then used to support the writers' reflective journals.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The data collection and analysis were conducted in several stages. First, the writers prepared the syllabus, lesson plans, teaching material, and assessment activities before conducting the teaching sessions. Second, the teaching implementation was carried out into two meetings at Tri Tutorial Center. During the lessons, the writers observed students' participation, responses, difficulties, and interaction during the activities in the classroom.

After completing the second sessions, the writers wrote reflecting teaching journals to document the teaching experience and the students' outcomes. The reflecting focused on evaluating the

effectiveness of the teaching strategies, classroom activities, teaching materials, and students' ability in using the simple past tense during writing and speaking activities.

The collected data from the teaching journals, lesson plans, syllabus, teaching materials, and classroom observations were then reviewed and analysed descriptively. The writers identified recurring classroom experiences, students' learning difficulties, and successful teaching strategies. The findings from the reflection were used to evaluate the overall teaching practice and students' learning engagement during the two sessions in the classroom.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

The findings below are presented using Kolb's reflective model.

1. Concrete Experience (CE)

   The first session took place on Saturday, 1 November 2025, and the second session was held the following Saturday, 8 November 2025. Two teachers, known as the writers, collaborated in preparing and delivering the lessons at the tutorial centre: Santhy as the writer 1, and the Rosen as writer 2.

   In the meetings, students came early to class and were seen to be ready to learn, which made a good impression on the writers. As newcomers, the writers felt the welcoming ambience through how they responded to the writers' questions during the first few minutes of the class (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Students raised their hands confidently from the beginning of the class

To achieve the learning objectives, the writers followed the sequence presented in the textbook. The verb phrases were first introduced through printed flashcards to familiarize students with the target action verbs they would later use when learning the simple past tense. The phrases were presented below:

(1) Ride a roller coaster
(2) Make a sandcastle
(3) take photos
(4) have a barbecue
(5) Go shopping
(6) See a tennis match
(7) Feed the animals
(8) Eat popcorn
(9) Tell funny stories
(10) See a movie

Most students handled this first stage easily. They confidently guessed the verb phrases that corresponded to the pictures on the flashcards. Although their answers were not always accurate,

they were able to grasp several new phrases quickly. Students were able to retain this information until the end of the second session.

The next stage was introducing the change from the base verbs to the past tense verb forms. The writers noticed that students struggled with this part. More than half of the students were familiar with *go – went,* but only a small number of students knew the changes of *see – saw, eat – ate, ride – rode,* and the other six words the writers managed to introduce on that day. One student even answered loudly "sook" for the past tense form of "see" after we discussed the word *take – took.* To assist students, the target words were written on the board (see Figure 7).

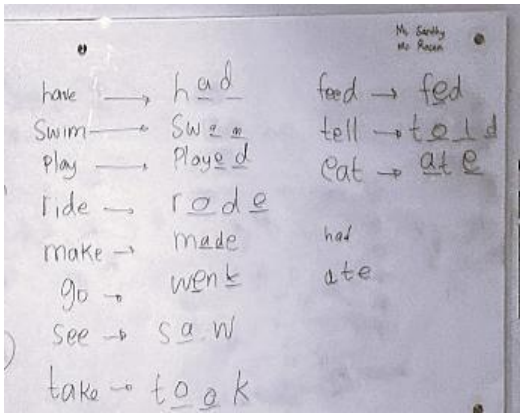


Figure 7. Verb transformation written on the whiteboard

As the student's textbook required students to fill in blanks in short dialogues using past tense verbs, the writers had planned a simple Hangman game on the board. The game was aimed at practicing the past tense verbs spelling where students wrote their answers on a piece of paper (See Figure 8). Even though students made most of the verb changes correct, a few mistakes were found, for example in the spelling of words *told, rode, went, took, had, and saw.*

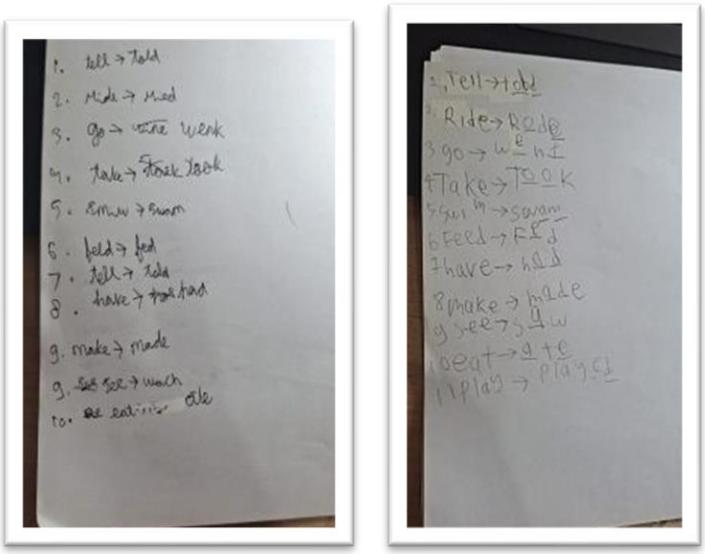


Figure 8. Samples of student's works on spelling

After the spelling exercise, the focus moved to speaking practice. The writers divided this part into two. The first one was a controlled speaking practice where students worked in pairs on the first session with the writers. Students exchanged information about their weekend activities with a cue card scenario the writers made for them (see Figure 2b). An emoji is attached to their card, deciding whether they were happy (😊) or unhappy (☹) with their weekend activity. After a few minutes of practice, each pair presented their dialogue at the front of the class. The controlled practice used the question, "did you have a good time?", with an expected short answer, "yes, I did/no, I didn't". Students then expanded their answer with a short target sentence, such as "we rode a roller coaster", depending on the phrase the students get in their card.

The second part of the speaking practice was at the end of the second session, the following week. We called this semi-controlled speaking practice. Students worked individually to talk about their weekend activities. Guided questions were available on the board (see Figure 2a), but the writers expected students to tell more than what was written on the board. Students could freely use any weekend activities based on their real experience. The prompt questions were intended to help them frame their speaking on the assigned topic.

(1) What did you do last weekend?
(2) Who were you with?
(3) Did you have a good time?

Eckard and Kearny (1981) divided conversational activities into three, namely controlled, semi-controlled, and free. The degree of control depends on the amount of structure a teacher implements on an activity and the flexibility owned by students to determine their responses. In a controlled practice, directions are very explicit, and the material is presented in the form of a script, thus leaving few choices for the students to make. A few differences with the controlled practice, semi-controlled activity provides less explicit directions, and the material is presented to provide rooms for students to have choices. The choices determine what ideas, information, and feelings are shared with an interlocutor and how they are communicated (Eckard and Kearny, 1981). These two categories were implemented in the two-day teaching practice at Tri.

2. Reflective Observation (RO)

The writers found no difficulties in delivering the lesson in English. Even though the initial plan was to implement translanguaging, a concept to describe multilingual oral interaction and the use of different languages to support learning (Conteh, 2018), it was only the first half hour of teaching that the writers decided to use full English as the medium of instruction.

From that moment, the writers thought it would be easy for students to achieve the lesson objectives of using simple past tense to describe their past experiences. Unfortunately, this was not the case. During the spelling exercise, students used the whiteboard as their source of reference to write. They kept on returning back and forth between the board and their paper. The writers noticed that without the simple past tense verb list displayed, students might have struggled writing the verbs. The writers realized understanding the meaning of a word did not necessarily lead to the ability to write that word on paper.

Then, in both the controlled speaking practice on the first day and semi-controlled speaking practice on the second day, students were hesitant. Their voices faded, and the situation was a bit tense, really in contrast to their natural tendency to be relaxed and loud. The writers appreciated students' willingness to try speaking in front of their peers. Meanwhile, given the challenge the students encountered in the speaking activities, the writers had a thought that achieving the lesson objectives within two meetings were impossible. There must be continuous repetitive exposure to the target language of simple past tense, which could not be done in two once-a-week meetings.

Another one is the discrepancy between learning grammar and learning the spoken expressions. The vocabulary drill at the beginning worked well to introduce and help students acquire the meaning of new irregular past tense verbs. However, students could hardly use the newly acquired verbs directly in their speaking. They looked nervous. Four students even openly asked permission to cheat on the board, where the word list was displayed, while speaking.

The following excerpts 1, 2, 3, and 4 from the students' speaking activity illustrate how they used the simple past tense on the second day of practice. Students were asked to talk about their last weekend activity with three guided questions (see Figure 2a). There are four students in the excerpts, represented by S1, S2, S3, S4, and the teacher (T).

(1) Excerpt 1
S1: I went to my yoga class last weekend. I went there with my dad. I have a good time.
T : Okay. Once again, please. Louder, please. [...]
S1: I went to my yoga class last weekend. I went there with my dad. I did ... I have a good time.

(2) Excerpt 2
S2: I saw a music concert. I went there with my mother. I had good time.
T : Good, very good. I went ... I saw a music concert. I went there with my mother, and I had a good time. Good, very good story about your last weekend activity.

(3) Excerpt 3
S3: Last weekend, I went to Dufan. I went there with my family. I have good time in Dufan.
T : Did you have a good time? Your answer is "I have", is it? Did...
S3: Yes, I did. I have a good time.
T : I had
S3: I had a good time.

(4) Excerpt 4
S4: Last week, I played the games, with my brothers. I have a...had a... have with my [...]
T : Last week, I played a game with, with my mother?
S4: my brother
T : I had? Had
S4: I had a good time.

The four students in the excerpts used *have* instead of *had* for the expected line "I had a good/bad time". We assumed that students were distracted by the question written on the board, "Did you have fun?" They copied the reference on the board. At this stage, students might not have awareness of the changing verbs between declarative and interrogative sentences. As previously stated, even though children acquire irregular verbs earlier than regular verbs, children do not see the formula as a generic system in the language. They are syntactically unanalysed (Kuczaj, 1977). Children use the past tense verbs based on the sense of appropriateness in their immediate speaking context.

3. Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)

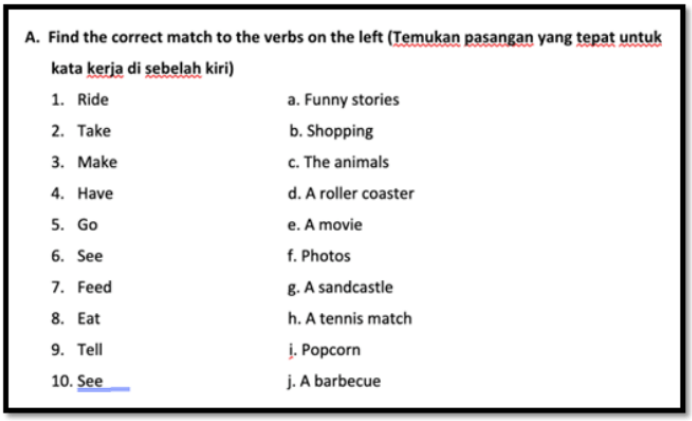
The difficulty to acquire English tenses, particularly the simple past tense, can be due to the absence of inflectional features in Indonesian language (Halimi, 2011). Stem verb is paired with any subject at any time to refer present, past, or future time. In Indonesian language, time reference is expressed by adverbial phrases/words (Ibid.). In the question "Did you have a good time?" above, students did not only notice the verb *have* in the sentence structure but also lacked an understanding that the auxiliary *did* indicates a past time frame. The easiest choice was then to return to the base verb *have* in their response.

The Words-and-Rules theory (Pinker & Ullman, 2002) may explain the phenomenon of returning to the base verb above as the consequence of the distinction between lexicon and grammar of the human language faculty. Based on the theory, irregular forms are words which can be acquired and stored like other words, yet at the same time, these forms have grammatical features (Pinker & Ullman, 2002, as cited in Altakhaineh et al., 2022). The representation of irregular verbs in these two systems, lexicon and grammar, results in blocking production when the inflected form of a verb has not yet been stored in memory. This might be the reason why the students in this study used *have* to answer the question, "Did you have a good time?".

In terms of the students' spelling task, it was not a surprise that students were not confident with their work. English has more sounds (phoneme) than the letters represented in the alphabets (grapheme). Learners make errors due to their beginning stage of understanding phoneme grapheme correspondence (Alipour et al., 2019). This contrasts with Indonesian language, which is known as a phonetic language. The language has a direct relationship between spelling and pronunciation (Karlina, 2020). Therefore, students needed more time to encode the sounds they heard into written form.

Besides the classroom activities, the writers conducted a pre-test in day one and a post-test in day two, which was initially designed to see students' learning progress. Despite the fact that students made significant improvement in their scores, the pre-test and post-test may not be a reliable source to measure the success of the lesson. The test did not include all the target verbs spelling assessment, and more importantly, the test did not assess students' overall

understanding of simple past tense function and use, not to mention the structures of interrogative and declarative sentences (see Figure 9 and Figure 10).



A. Find the correct match to the verbs on the left (Temukan pasangan yang tepat untuk kata kerja di sebelah kiri)

1. Ride	a. Funny stories
2. Take	b. Shopping
3. Make	c. The animals
4. Have	d. A roller coaster
5. Go	e. A movie
6. See	f. Photos
7. Feed	g. A sandcastle
8. Eat	h. A tennis match
9. Tell	i. Popcorn
10. See	j. A barbecue

Figure 9. Pre-test and post-test question part A, vocabulary matching activities



B. Look at the pictures and write what they did last weekend. Use the words in the brackets and change the verb to the past form
Lihat gambar dan tulis apa yang mereka lakukan di akhir pekan lalu. Gunakan kata di bawah ini dan ganti dalam bentuk past tense verb.

a. Take
b. see
c. Feed
d. Go
e. Have

1. She _____ shopping last weekend.

2. They _____ the animal last weekend.

Figure 10. Pre-test and post-test question Part B, fill-in-the-gaps with past tense irregular verbs

From the speaking activity, students used the most common words they hear around their environment, *went* and *played.* High frequency words like *went* and *played* allow the application of inflectional verb forms that are stored in human language memory (Pinker, 1999, as cited in Altakhaineh et al., 2022). In another example, the word *had* is a 'states' verb that may be perceived as constant where learners use simple past tense markers less frequently (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). Therefore, *went* appeared more frequently than the other new words the students learned during the sessions.

4. Active Experimentation (AE)

Leaning a language is a complex process and it takes time (Lightbown & Spada, 2021). When learners are able to absorb meaning of new vocabulary proven by their understanding of matching the words with pictures, that does not always mean they can use the new words in their productive activity, speaking and writing. Repeated use of input-based tasks (i.e. listening) was found effective in enhancing young learners' vocabulary even when learners have relatively limited exposure to the target vocabulary outside of the classroom (Shintani, 2011, as cited in Butler, 2019). Two short meetings with a week gap in between can be a factor of children forgetting a language structure they learn since they did not have the opportunity for more input-based tasks, nor the exposure at home.

The situation aligns with the discussion stated by Lightbown and Spada (2021) where they mentioned learning conditions as the requirement to support second language learning. Different from L1 learners who can have thousands of exposures to the language, L2 learners

mostly have a limited time to learn from a formal classroom setting. Teachers in a tutoring centre might want to extend the time for students to practice, provide more inputs, and when necessary, add more sessions. This aims to support students' language acquisition and help them retain information better.

Otherwise, if class duration is an issue, the writers saw the importance of priority setting in their lesson objectives. Even when a textbook requires spoken and written tasks in a unit, the writers would need to conclude the main goal of a lesson in their lesson plan. Unit 4 in *Big Show* that was used in this study aims at communicative competence to describe last weekend activities. Therefore, focusing on spelling should have not taken much portion of the lessons.

3.2. Discussion

From the teaching practice, it is evident that the acquisition of the simple past tense takes much effort from both students and the writers as teachers in the study. Even though variety in activities helped students engaged and created fun atmosphere in the class, there were moments when students appeared anxious and hesitant to speak. This was mainly due to students' unfamiliarity with the newly introduced irregular verbs and the expectation of using them in both speaking, the controlled and semi-controlled activities, and writing exercises, fill-in-the-blank activities, practiced directly in class. The unfamiliarity might be caused by students' minimum input in the sessions. Butler (2019) suggested more input-based tasks, which are tasks that do not require spoken or written production (i.e., speaking and writing). Input based tasks appear to be effective even among children who have relatively limited exposure to the target language outside of the classroom (Butler, 2019).

Students in the study faced three different challenges in processing the simple past tense. The first one was the introduction to the irregular verbs. From the students' participative nature, it was noticeable that they were familiar with at least the word *go* and *went.* They knew what past events meant, proven by the ability to answer an initial question "What did you do last weekend?" that was asked as a lead-in on day one. At this stage, they answered with base verbs, adding the time reference *last weekend,* for example, "I go to a mall last weekend." It aligns with Mahmud and Erizar's study (2024) that stated it had been predicted for Indonesian learners to produce base verbs. They also highlighted the failure to inflect verbs was caused by developing awareness of the language system (Mahmud & Erizar, 2024, Sidupa, 2018).

When the target vocabulary was presented with flashcards, they could easily grasp meaning but struggled with the inflectional verb changes in past tense. However, the paired verbs *go–went* was repeatedly used by students in their sample sentences. It can indicate existing prior knowledge compared to the other target verbs. The word *played* was also used by some children, although it was not the target vocabulary. Until the end of the second session with the writers, students were still processing the other new irregular verbs. They needed assistance to recall the past form of the words, implying stages of acquiring past tense verbs. The students might be at the second stage where irregular forms are recognised yet syntactically unanalysed (Kuczaj, 1977).

The second challenge is the limited time to expose students with the irregular verbs. The students' textbook offers the right order of introducing irregular verbs over regular verbs, following morphological acquisition order, suggested by scholars. The book also presents the material in context, the simple past tense for last weekend activity. However, the writers shifted the lesson into a spelling exercise, complying with the book content. It took more than thirty minutes that distracted students' focus in achieving the communicative goal of the lesson.

Spelling was another challenge for the students. Children develop strategies to spell by understanding the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. They also need to draw on their memory of how words are spelled. The combination strategies are what Ehri (1993) called as lexical knowledge (Alipour et al., 2019). When they cannot connect the phonemes and graphemes relationship, learners tend to return to the spelling system they encounter daily.

Going through the challenges above, students still needed much more practices and opportunities to speak in English outside and inside classroom. To be able to speak, people should speak and think at the same time. These two processes cause potential struggles for language learners who are still developing their understanding of language system (Pinter, 2018). The student textbook used fully fixed chunks to introduce the simple past tense conversational pattern, such as *what did you do last weekend, did you have fun, we took photos.* Fully fixed chunks are ready to use phrases to help speakers produce language faster because they do not need to think of individual

words (ibid.). Even with the fully fixed chunks, students were still nervous. Not only to use the simple past tense that requires thinking, students might also feel pressures when they had to perform in front of their peers. In this case, the writers prepared students with question prompts and cue cards, allowing students to use them as references while speaking.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that learning the simple past tense requires extended time and repeated practice. The integration of vocabulary, reading as inputs, and implicit grammar drilling through available fully fixed chunks for speaking provide reflective learning for the writers as teachers in the study. Even when the source of material supports the teaching strategy for young learners, limited class duration may hinder the process of simple past tense acquisition.

Selecting the lesson focus and allocating time play an important role in maximising preparation and practice time. When focus is on communicative competence of exchanging information about past time activities, teachers might want to spend little time on spelling for accuracy. Preparing students for their speaking performance should also be well thought. The pressure of performing in front of peers while thinking about the inflectional verb changes at the same time led to the struggle of producing simple past tense in sentences. Even when they were successful with a few assistances, the production was still controlled with the template of fully fixed chunks.

Another strategy to support student past tense acquisition is in the morphological aspect. Providing students with the most common irregular verbs they know follows previous studies that proved irregular verb acquisition begins earlier than the regular verb. As suggested by Pinter (2018), facilitating learners with opportunities to seek vocabulary pattern may help students retain information better. It was mentioned that "lexis can be taught, practiced, and recycled in dynamic and meaningful way" (ibid., p. 89). This means, teachers can invite students to explore a word with other corresponding words to notice pattern. For example, the word *go* can be followed by *swimming,* then the same pattern occurs in *go shopping, go hiking,* and *go cycling.* In the recycling stage, a variety of activities is essential for engaging students and promoting a relaxed learning environment.

Unfortunately, this study has several limitations. The teaching practice was conducted in only two sessions with a limited class time and a small number of participants, which restricted the depth of students' mastery of the simple past tense. The short duration also limited opportunities for more intensive practice, especially in speaking activities, and for observing students' long-term development. Future research is recommended to conduct longer interventions with a larger number of participants and more varied instructional contexts in order to comprehensively examine the simple past tense acquisition in young learners.

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