

# EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TENSES TO ESL LEARNERS: A GRAMMAR BASED COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

J. Bimal Roy, Dr. R. Naganathan

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, SRM Madurai College for Engineering and Technology, Pottapalayam Sivagangai-630611*

**Abstract-** Mastering English tenses poses a significant challenge for learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), often due to the complexity of verb forms and differences from learners' native languages. This paper investigates the effectiveness of a grammar-based communicative approach in teaching English tenses to intermediate ESL students. The study was conducted over 10 weeks with 45 learners and employed both explicit instruction and contextual practice through communicative tasks. Using pre- and post-tests, learner interviews, and classroom observations, the research found that combining focused grammar instruction with practical usage significantly improved learners' understanding and application of verb tenses. The findings support the integration of form-focused teaching with meaningful communicative activities to enhance tense accuracy, fluency, and learner confidence. The paper recommends structured yet interactive methods such as tense timelines, real-life speaking tasks, and corrective feedback to foster mastery of English tense usage in ESL contexts.

## I. INTRODUCTION

English tenses are fundamental to accurate communication, allowing speakers to express time, sequence, and aspect. Despite their importance, ESL learners often struggle to use tenses correctly, particularly in spontaneous speech and writing. Traditional methods focused heavily on rules and drills, often detached from real-world use. This paper explores how a communicative grammar approach can enhance ESL learners' understanding and application of English tenses in meaningful contexts.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching grammar, especially verb tenses, has evolved from rote memorization to more learner-centered approaches. Thornbury (1999) emphasizes

that grammar should be taught as a dynamic system rather than static rules. Ellis (2006) differentiates between explicit knowledge (rule-based) and implicit knowledge (automated use), suggesting both are necessary for fluency.

English features twelve primary tenses, including simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous forms in past, present, and future aspects. ESL learners often confuse similar forms, such as the present perfect vs. past simple, due to L1 interference or insufficient contextual understanding. Research (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999) indicates that contextualized teaching and visual aids like timelines improve learners' grasp of tense functions and usage.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Participants

The study involved 45 intermediate ESL learners aged 17–22 at a private language institute. All were placed at B1–B2 CEFR level after initial testing.

### 3.2 Procedure

A 10-week instructional program was implemented. Students were divided into two groups:

- ❖ Experimental Group (EG) – Received explicit grammar instruction followed by communicative tasks.
- ❖ Control Group (CG) – Followed a traditional lecture-based grammar syllabus with workbook exercises.

Tenses covered included present perfect, past perfect, future continuous, and present perfect continuous. Teaching techniques used in the experimental group included:

- Timeline visuals and tense charts
- Role-plays and storytelling activities
- Dialogue reconstruction tasks

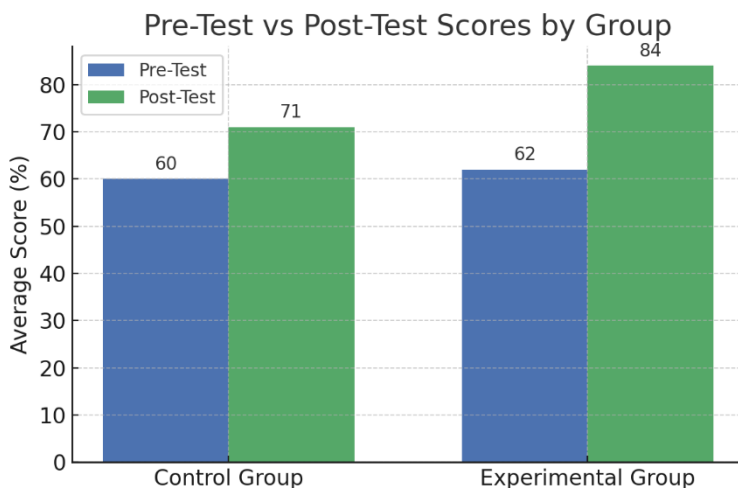
- Real-life writing (e.g., daily journals, letters)
- Peer correction and teacher feedback

### 3.3 Instruments

- Pre- and Post-Tests: Measured accuracy in using various tenses.
- Observation Checklist: Assessed participation and appropriate tense use during speaking.
- Learner Questionnaires: Gathered feedback on confidence and perceived difficulty.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented in the graph below, showing pre- and post-test average scores for both groups:



The experimental group showed a 35% improvement in post-test performance compared to 18% in the control group. Students demonstrated better accuracy in complex tenses, particularly present perfect continuous and future perfect.

Classroom observations and learner feedback indicated higher confidence and greater willingness to use complex tense forms in speech and writing. These findings highlight the value of combining explicit instruction with communicative activities.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

- Use Visual Tools: Timelines and tense grids help learners visualize time relationships.
- Integrate Skills: Combine grammar instruction with reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- Design Realistic Tasks: Include journal writing, future planning, and story sequencing.

- Provide Timely Feedback: Use error correction techniques that guide learners without interrupting fluency.
- Encourage Learner Reflection: Let students track their use of tenses in real-world communication.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Understanding and using English tenses accurately is crucial for ESL learners. This study demonstrates that a communicative grammar approach significantly enhances learners' ability to use tenses effectively. By combining structured grammar instruction with interactive language tasks, teachers can make tense learning both engaging and effective. Future research may explore its application across proficiency levels and in multilingual classrooms.

## REFERENCES

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