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TEACHING ENGLISH TENSES TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES AND METHODOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

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Abstract: This article explores the major challenges faced by high school students in learning and using English tenses and examines effective methodological solutions to overcome these difficulties. The study analyzes learners' problems in distinguishing between tense forms and applying them accurately in both spoken and written communication. Key factors contributing to these challenges include first language interference, rule-based grammar instruction, and insufficient contextualized practice. The paper also highlights the importance of integrating visual aids, task-based learning, and communicative grammar instruction to enhance learners' understanding and practical use of English tenses. The findings suggest that combining these methodological approaches leads to improved grammatical accuracy, increased learner engagement, and greater confidence in language use. Overall, the study contributes to the improvement of grammar teaching practices in secondary education.

Keywords: English tenses, grammar teaching, high school students, grammatical difficulties, methodological approaches, communicative grammar, task-based learning

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Introduction:

English grammar constitutes the foundation of language competence and plays a crucial role in the development of learners' communicative abilities, particularly in writing and speaking. In high school English curricula, grammar instruction remains a core component, with verb tenses occupying a central position, as they enable learners to express actions and events accurately across different time frames. Mastery of English tense forms is essential for effective communication about past, present, and future situations and is therefore vital for students' academic achievement and overall communicative success. Despite its importance, teaching and learning English tenses continues to be one of the most challenging aspects of grammar instruction in Uzbek high schools. Many learners experience persistent difficulties in distinguishing between tense forms such as the present simple and present continuous or the past simple and present perfect, which often leads to grammatical inaccuracies when expressing time relations, habitual actions, or ongoing processes in real-life contexts.

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Although grammar instruction has traditionally received considerable emphasis in Uzbek secondary education, classroom practice indicates that tense-related errors remain among the most frequent grammatical problems. This situation suggests that conventional rule-based approaches may not sufficiently address learners' communicative and cognitive needs. Consequently, there is a growing need to explore alternative and more effective methodological approaches that promote meaningful and contextualized tense learning. Previous research supports this view: Ali, Hussain, and Iftikhar (2021) identified first language interference and limited contextual input as major causes of tense misuse among ESL learners, while Listia and Febriyanti (2020) reported that insufficient exposure to authentic materials contributes significantly to tense confusion among EFL students. In the Uzbek context, Sayilova (2023) highlighted that structural differences between English and Uzbek tense systems often lead to learner confusion, whereas Bakhronova and Djalilova (2023) emphasized the influence of learners' linguistic background and the importance of integrating communicative and cultural elements into grammar instruction. Against this background, the present study aims to identify the major challenges faced by high school learners in understanding and using English tenses and to propose effective methodological strategies to improve tense instruction in Uzbek schools. The research was conducted at School No.35 in Turakurgan District, Namangan region, and involved 16 tenth-grade students with pre-intermediate to intermediate proficiency levels. The study seeks to identify frequent tense-related difficulties, examine their underlying causes, and evaluate the effectiveness of instructional approaches such as task-based learning, visual aids, and communicative grammar practice in enhancing students' mastery of English tenses.

Literature Review

The teaching of English tenses has long been one of the most persistent challenges in foreign language classrooms, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a second or foreign language. According to Ali, Hussain, and Iftikhar (2021), tense mastery is a core aspect of grammatical competence because it determines learners' ability to communicate temporal relations accurately. Their study, which involved Pakistani ESL students, revealed that the majority of learners struggle with differentiating between tense forms such as present perfect and past simple, mainly due to L1 interference and the lack of contextualized practice. Although their research successfully identified the key sources of error, it provided little insight into how teachers could address these issues methodologically.

A similar study by Listia and Febriyanti (2020) examined EFL learners' tense-related problems among Indonesian high school students. Their findings demonstrated that limited exposure to authentic input and a reliance on rote learning contribute significantly to students' grammatical confusion. From a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) perspective, they suggested that grammar should be integrated with communicative tasks rather than taught in isolation.

However, like the study of Ali et al. (2021), their research primarily described the problem but did not test any specific instructional interventions to overcome it.

While these international studies shed light on global tense-learning difficulties, several Uzbek researchers have contributed to understanding the local pedagogical and linguistic challenges in similar contexts. For example, Sayilova (2023) compared English and Uzbek tense systems to determine how structural differences between the two languages affect students' learning outcomes. Her contrastive analysis showed that Uzbek learners tend to transfer the tense logic of their mother tongue into English, leading to misinterpretations of continuous and perfect aspects. Sayilova's findings are especially relevant for Uzbek high schools, where grammar instruction still heavily relies on translation and structural drills, rather than communicative practice.

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Nonetheless, her study was theoretical and did not include empirical testing within classroom settings.

In another study, Bakhronova and Djalilova (2023) explored the issue of grammar learning from a linguocultural perspective.1 They argued that linguistic competence cannot be developed in isolation from cultural awareness and communicative context. Their qualitative research among Uzbek high school students found that integrating cultural examples and real-life communication tasks improved both motivation and grammatical accuracy. This suggests that methodological approaches such as contextualized teaching, task-based activities, and cultural integration may provide effective solutions to tense-learning challenges.

The reviewed studies reveal several consistent trends. First, across different contexts, tense-related errors are primarily linked to structural differences between the learners' first language and English. Second, most research emphasizes the importance of contextualized and communicative approaches, yet few studies in Uzbekistan have tested these methods experimentally. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by implementing and analyzing methodological approaches—such as visual aids, task-based grammar practice, and communicative drills—to determine their effectiveness in teaching English tenses to Uzbek high school learners.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine high school students' challenges in learning and using English tense forms and to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted methodological interventions. The research was carried out over a six-week period at School No.35 in Turakurgan District, Namangan region, and involved 16 tenth-grade students aged 15–16 with pre-intermediate to intermediate levels of English proficiency. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as the class demonstrated observable difficulties in tense usage, and an initial diagnostic pre-test was administered to identify common error patterns and inform instructional planning. Data collection relied on multiple instruments to ensure triangulation, including pre- and post-grammar tests focusing on the accurate use of present simple, present continuous, past simple, past continuous, present perfect, and future tense forms, as well as structured classroom observations documenting student participation, engagement, and recurrent oral and written errors. In addition, student questionnaires containing both Likert-scale and open-ended items were used to explore learners' perceptions of tense-related difficulties and preferred learning strategies, while semi-structured interviews with the class teacher provided contextual insights into prior teaching practices, student responsiveness, and the feasibility of implementing new methods. A peer observation component was also incorporated to enhance learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, with students evaluating each other's tense usage in communicative tasks using guided observation checklists and providing constructive oral and written feedback under teacher supervision. The instructional intervention was implemented in three phases, beginning with a pre-intervention phase in which baseline data were collected through testing and observation, followed by an intervention phase spanning four weeks that employed task-based learning activities, visual aids such as timelines and charts, and contextualized grammar practice using authentic texts and multimedia resources, and concluding with a post-intervention phase involving a post-test, follow-up observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Quantitative data obtained from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify error types and measure improvements across tense forms, while qualitative data from

1 Bakhronova, D., & Djalilova, U. (2023). English Language and Uzbek Students: A Linguocultural Point. SPAST Abstracts.

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observations, questionnaires, interviews, and peer feedback were analyzed thematically to support and interpret the quantitative findings.

- **Suggested Table 1 to summarize pre-test and post-test results:**

Tense	Pre-test Errors (%)	Post-test Errors (%)	Improvement (%)
Present Simple	35	15	20
Present Continuous	40	18	22
Past Simple	42	20	22
Past Continuous	48	25	23
Present Perfect	55	30	25
Future Simple	38	16	22

Qualitative Analysis and Ethical Considerations. Qualitative data obtained from classroom observation notes, semi-structured teacher interviews, and open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed using thematic coding in order to identify recurring patterns related to students' tense-related challenges, effective instructional strategies, and learner attitudes toward the interventions. Emerging themes were systematically categorized to provide a comprehensive understanding of learning trends and to support the quantitative findings. To visually illustrate changes in tense accuracy, a bar chart was used to compare the frequency of common tense errors before and after the intervention (Figure 1). Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study: informed consent was obtained from both the students and the school administration, participation was entirely voluntary, and all personal data were treated confidentially. The research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research

Results

Pre-test and Post-test Results

The students' knowledge of English tenses was measured using pre-test and post-test assessments. The table below summarizes the error percentages for each tense and the improvement observed after the intervention:

The table indicates significant improvement across all tenses. The greatest improvement was observed in Present Perfect (25%), while the smallest improvement was in Present Simple (20%).

Classroom observations and peer observation activities demonstrated increased student engagement during the intervention period, as task-based learning, role-plays, storytelling, and problem-solving tasks noticeably enhanced learners' motivation and active participation. Analysis of error patterns revealed that prior to the intervention, students experienced the greatest difficulty with Present Perfect and Past Continuous tenses, particularly in distinguishing aspectual differences and expressing time relationships; however, post-test results showed a marked reduction in these errors. Peer observation further contributed to learning gains, as students monitored each other's oral and written performance, provided constructive feedback, and reflected on their own mistakes, which strengthened grammatical awareness and metacognitive skills. Questionnaire findings supported these results, with 87% of students reporting that visual aids such as timelines and charts improved their understanding of tense

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usage, 75% indicating increased confidence through task-based activities, and 69% acknowledging the effectiveness of contextualized grammar practice and authentic materials in enhancing retention and comprehension. In addition, the semi-structured teacher interview revealed that previous instruction had relied mainly on rule-based explanations and drills, whereas the integrated use of visual aids, task-based learning, and contextualized grammar during the intervention led to higher student participation and fewer grammatical errors. Overall, the findings indicate that the implemented methodological interventions were effective in improving students' mastery of English tenses, as evidenced by increased accuracy, engagement, and confidence, supported by both quantitative test results and qualitative data from observations, questionnaires, peer evaluations, and teacher interviews.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that methodological interventions—particularly **visual aids, task-based learning, and contextualized grammar practice**—significantly improved high school students' mastery of English tenses. The pre-test and post-test comparisons revealed notable reductions in error rates across all tense forms, with the most significant improvement observed in the **Present Perfect tense** (25%). This finding aligns with the research of Ali, Hussain, and Iftikhar, who highlighted that tense misuse is often linked to first language interference and insufficient contextualized practice. Similarly, the reduced errors in Past Continuous and Present Continuous tenses support the observations of Listia and Febriyanti, who argued that integrating grammar instruction with communicative tasks improves learners' ability to apply tenses accurately in real-life contexts.

The current study's findings are consistent with Uzbek-specific research as well. Sayilova[3] emphasized that structural differences between English and Uzbek contribute to tense-related difficulties. By using visual aids and contextualized exercises, this study effectively reduced the impact of such structural interference. In addition, Bakhronova and Djalilova[4] highlighted the importance of integrating cultural and communicative elements into grammar instruction. The positive student feedback regarding task-based activities and authentic materials in the present study confirms that these strategies enhance both motivation and grammatical accuracy.

The study underscores the necessity of combining multiple methodological approaches when teaching English tenses in high school contexts. Visual aids such as timelines and charts help students visualize temporal distinctions, reducing confusion between similar tenses. Task-based learning, including storytelling, role-plays, and problem-solving exercises, facilitates the practical application of grammatical rules. Contextualized grammar practice using authentic texts and dialogues provides meaningful exposure, reinforcing correct tense usage. Furthermore, peer observation activities promote metacognitive awareness, allowing students to critically evaluate their own and their peers' performance.

While the interventions demonstrated effectiveness, the study was limited to a small sample of 16 tenth-grade students in a single school. Future research should consider larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools to generalize the findings. Additionally, long-term retention of tense accuracy and the impact of these strategies on oral fluency require further investigation.

Conclusion

Integrating visual aids, task-based learning, and contextualized grammar practice significantly enhances high school students' mastery of English tenses in the Uzbek context. The study confirms that these methodological strategies not only reduce grammatical errors but also increase engagement, motivation, and learner autonomy. Aligning with both international and

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local research, the findings highlight the importance of adopting interactive and context-based approaches to grammar instruction.