

STUDENTS' ABILITY IN USING PAST VERBS IN RECOUNT TEXT: A CASE STUDY AT SMPN 1 GUNUNG SARI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ability of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Gunung Sari in using past verbs in recount texts. The study was conducted because many students still experience difficulties in applying correct past verb forms when writing about past events. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify students' level of ability in using past verbs in recount texts, to examine the difficulties they face, and to explore the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected through a multiple-choice test as the main instrument, supported by a questionnaire and interviews. The participants of this study were 35 students from class VIII J of SMPN 1 Gunung Sari. The results show that the majority of students have low ability in using past verbs, with 82% of students categorized in the low level, while only 9% are categorized as high ability and 9% as medium ability. The questionnaire results reveal that the main difficulties experienced by students include forgetting the second form of irregular verbs, confusing regular and irregular verbs, and using the present tense instead of the past tense when writing recount texts. Furthermore, the interview results indicate that students try to overcome these difficulties by memorizing verb forms and asking teachers or classmates for help. However, these strategies are still limited and not fully effective in improving students' grammatical competence. Therefore, more effective and contextualized grammar instruction is needed to help students improve their mastery of past verbs in recount texts.

Keywords: past verbs, recount text, students' ability

A. Introduction

English is widely recognized as a global language and plays a significant role in various aspects of life, including education, socio-cultural activities, technology, arts, science, and economy. Its mastery is considered essential for students at all

levels, as it enables effective communication and provides access to global knowledge and opportunities (Thohir et al., 2025, p.1). In Indonesia, English has become a compulsory subject across all educational levels, particularly in junior high schools, where students are expected to

develop competence in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Listening and reading are receptive skills that allow students to understand language input, whereas speaking and writing are productive skills used to produce meaningful language output. Grammar serves as the foundation of these skills, enabling students to construct correct and meaningful sentences (Sujana et al., 2017, p.1; Mulyaningsih, 2013, p.16). According to Klammer et al. (2000, p.3), grammar is a system of rules that guides the formation of accurate sentences, while Isyam (2001) defines grammar as principles to arrange words and other elements correctly to convey intended meaning in both written and spoken forms. Grammar allows learners to use language naturally and effectively, reducing the likelihood of miscommunication (Mughtar et al., 2019, p.2).

Despite its importance, many students face challenges in applying grammar correctly, particularly in using past tense verbs in recount texts. Based on preliminary observation at SMPN 1 Gunung Sari, many eighth-grade students struggle with past verbs. They often confuse regular and irregular verbs or

incorrectly use present tense forms. For instance, students frequently add “-ed” to irregular verbs such as “eat,” reflecting a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. These challenges are evident in both written and oral tasks, especially when students are asked to describe past experiences such as daily routines or vacations. This situation indicates that students’ mastery of grammar rules does not necessarily translate into effective use in authentic language contexts, highlighting a critical issue in English language learning.

Previous studies have examined grammatical errors in recount texts. Ananda (2020) and Situmorang (2021) identified frequent errors in using regular and irregular verbs, including the misuse of present tense and other misinformation errors. However, these studies mainly focused on error identification rather than evaluating students’ overall proficiency or their strategies for overcoming difficulties. The present study addresses this gap by assessing students’ abilities in using past verbs, categorizing them into high, medium, and low proficiency levels, and investigating the strategies they

employ to overcome challenges. By combining quantitative methods (test results) and qualitative data (questionnaires and interviews), this research provides a comprehensive understanding of students' grammatical competence, performance, and self-awareness in learning past tense verbs.

The study focuses on eighth-grade students' use of past verbs in recount texts, aiming to analyze not only their errors but also the difficulties they face and the strategies they adopt. The research investigates factors influencing students' grammatical performance, such as prior knowledge, understanding of regular and irregular verbs, and the complexity of past tense rules. By exploring these factors, the study seeks to provide practical recommendations for improving teaching strategies and learning outcomes in EFL classrooms. The research is titled "Students' Ability in Using Past Verbs in Recount Text: A Case Study of Eighth-Grade Students of SMPN 1 Gunung Sari."

The purpose of this study is to identify students' abilities in using past verbs in recount texts, determine the difficulties they encounter, and

examine the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The study also aims to highlight factors contributing to these difficulties and provide practical guidance for teachers to enhance instruction. Its scope is limited to the use of simple past tense verbs in recount texts produced by eighth-grade students and does not include other tenses or grammatical aspects.

This research carries both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of students' grammatical competence in using past verbs and serves as a basis for further research in English grammar and writing skills. Practically, it informs English teachers about common difficulties faced by students and strategies that can be implemented to improve grammar teaching methods. The study also benefits students by increasing their awareness and mastery of past verbs, allowing them to produce more accurate and meaningful recount texts.

Key concepts used in this study include ability, defined as the process by which students can understand and apply English language skills, including grammar, writing, reading,

speaking, and listening (Faozan Muchtar et al., 2019, p.4; Laurence, 1968, p.3). Past verbs are verbs that express actions or situations that occurred in the past and are no longer happening (Azar, 2002), including both regular and irregular forms. Recount texts reconstruct past experiences by retelling events in chronological order, using past tense verbs and time connectives to inform readers about previous events (Hyland, 2004; Ruh Raihanah et al., 2016, p.5).

In summary, this study addresses a critical gap in students' ability to use past verbs in recount texts by analyzing their errors, proficiency levels, difficulties, coping strategies, and the underlying factors influencing their performance. It combines theoretical perspectives, field observations, and supporting data to provide a comprehensive understanding of English grammar teaching and learning in the context of Indonesian junior high schools.

B. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate students' abilities in using past verbs in recount texts, the

difficulties they encounter, and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The population consisted of eighth-grade students of SMPN 1 Gunung Sari in the academic year 2024/2025, with one class selected purposively based on the English teacher's recommendation due to its varied proficiency levels. Data were collected using three instruments: a multiple-choice test to measure students' mastery of past verbs, a close-ended questionnaire to identify difficulties, and semi-structured interviews to explore strategies employed by students. The test consisted of twenty-five items scored for accuracy, the questionnaire focused on Yes/No responses from five students representing high, medium, and low ability levels, and the interviews provided in-depth insights into students' coping strategies. This methodological combination allowed the researcher to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a complete picture of students' performance and learning challenges.

The data were analyzed using descriptive methods for the test results, percentage calculations for the questionnaire responses, and

thematic analysis for the interview transcripts. Test scores were categorized into high, medium, and low proficiency levels according to the school's standard. Questionnaire results highlighted common difficulties, while interview data were coded into broader strategy categories, such as memorization, practice, help-seeking, and technology-assisted strategies. By integrating these instruments and analysis techniques, the study ensured triangulation, strengthened the validity of the findings, and provided a comprehensive understanding of students' abilities, difficulties, and strategies in applying past verbs in recount texts.

C. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study, focusing on students' abilities in using past verbs in recount texts, the difficulties they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The primary data were obtained from a multiple-choice test, while questionnaires and interviews served as supporting data.

The multiple-choice test was administered to measure students'

ability in using past verbs in recount texts. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1 .The Results of Multiple Choice Test (VII J)

No	Name Of Students	Scores	Level Of Ability
1	ASJ	45	Low
2	AZ	30	Low
3	BMZ	45	Low
4	BRR	50	Low
5	DRA	55	Low
6	ES	25	Low
7	FAR	30	Low
8	IA	50	Low
9	IJ	55	Low
10	II	25	Low
11	KAP	65	Medium
12	KFT	100	High
13	LGBM	80	High
14	LYB	20	Low
15	L	35	Low
16	LW	35	Low
17	MRDH	45	Low
18	MS	45	Low
19	MA	40	Low
20	MRN	50	Low
21	MAM	50	Low
22	NFA	15	Low
23	NR	100	High
24	NAA	50	Low
25	RR	50	Low
26	RLI	85	High
27	RA	55	Low
28	STP	50	Low
29	SRP	40	Low
30	SH	55	Low
31	SZ	50	Low
32	TA	80	High
33	ZAAM	50	Low
34	ZF	50	Low
35	ZH	25	Low

The table shows that the majority of students, totaling eighty-two percent, are categorized as having low ability, while nine percent are in the medium category and nine percent in

the high category. This indicates that most students have not yet mastered the use of past verbs in recount texts, suggesting a gap between their theoretical knowledge of grammar and their practical application in writing. According to Witkin et al. (1977), students with low ability often struggle to structure information and apply abstract rules, which explains the high percentage of low scores. Harmer (2007) emphasizes that understanding grammar rules alone is insufficient for accurate language use without meaningful practice and reinforcement, supporting the need for more effective teaching approaches.

The questionnaire revealed specific difficulties in using past verbs, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Results from the Questionnaire

No	Questions	Percentage of "yes Answers"
1	I often confuse regular and irregular past verbs when I write recount texts	40% (2 students)
2	I sometimes forget the second form of irregular verbs	100% (5 students)
3	I still use the present tense instead of the past tense when I write about past events	60% (3 students)

The findings indicate that all five selected students struggled with

memorizing the second form of irregular verbs, three students often used present tense instead of past tense, and two students confused regular and irregular verbs. These difficulties suggest that students' grammatical challenges are not merely technical but reflect deeper issues in understanding tense, verb classification, and application in context. This aligns with Azar (2002), who states that past verbs are essential for recount texts to clearly convey past events. Confusion between regular and irregular verbs also supports previous findings by Ananda (2020) and Situmorang (2021), who identified similar errors caused by overgeneralization of the "-ed" ending to irregular verbs.

Interview results further revealed the strategies students employed to overcome their difficulties. Three students relied on memorization, learning verb lists from textbooks or during English courses, while two students used help-seeking strategies by consulting teachers or classmates. These strategies demonstrate students' awareness of their difficulties, yet the reliance on memorization suggests limited development of deeper understanding

or contextual practice. According to Williams and Burden (1997), social interaction supports language learning, but without integrated practice and reinforcement, grammatical competence remains weak.

In conclusion, the study shows that students' low ability in using past verbs is closely related to difficulties with irregular verbs, tense consistency, and limited learning strategies. These findings highlight the importance of more effective grammar instruction that combines explicit explanation, meaningful contextual practice, and continuous reinforcement to improve students' mastery of past verbs and enhance their confidence in writing recount texts.

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the majority of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Gunung Sari demonstrate a low ability in using past verbs in recount texts. This is evident from the fact that eighty-two percent of the students fall into the low ability category. The main difficulties encountered by the students include

forgetting irregular past verb forms, confusion between regular and irregular verbs, and the tendency to use the present tense instead of the past tense when writing recount texts. Although students employed strategies such as memorizing verb forms and seeking assistance from teachers or peers, these strategies were limited and did not fully enhance their overall ability. These results indicate that students' grammatical competence, particularly in applying past verbs in context, requires improvement through more effective teaching and learning strategies that integrate explanation, meaningful practice, and reinforcement.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations can be made. English teachers are encouraged to provide more contextualized grammar instruction, focusing on the use of past verbs within recount texts. Incorporating regular practice, varied exercises, and engaging activities such as storytelling or language games can help students internalize past tense forms and apply them accurately. Students are advised to actively practice using past verbs in both writing and speaking activities, maintaining vocabulary notebooks,

writing recount texts regularly, and asking questions to clarify misunderstandings. For future researchers, it is suggested to conduct studies with larger sample sizes or different research designs, such as experimental studies, to examine the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies in enhancing students' mastery of past verbs and to provide further insights into grammar learning in EFL contexts. Kesimpulan akhir yang diperoleh dalam penelitian dan saran perbaikan yang dianggap perlu ataupun penelitian lanjutan yang relevan.

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