Learning the Simple Past Tense in Narrative Texts: A Study of the Difficulties Experienced by Year 11 High School Students

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Abstract

This research was conducted to investigate the difficulties experienced by year 11 high school students at SMA Negeri 3 Makassar. The purpose of this study was to describe the difficulties faced by the students in learning the simple past tense in narrative text, the factors that cause the students' difficulties, and students' and teacher's efforts in solving the issues. This research used a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of a case study. The subject of this study was the 11-year social science students, including five males and four females. In this study, data was gathered through interviews and class observations. The results of this study indicate that there are four difficulties faced by the students in learning the simple past tense through the narrative text, such as difficulties in memorizing irregular verbs, having a lack of vocabulary, do not comprehend the teacher's directions, and students are still unsure about how to utilize the present and past tense. These difficulties are caused by several factors, internal and external factors. The internal factors are mind block, interest, lack of motivation, and anxiety while the external factors are game addiction, family, social environment, and facility. All the challenges and their underlying causes may be resolved with the students' intention and efforts.

Keywords: *Simple Past Tense, Narrative Text, Students' Difficulties, Factors and Efforts.*

1. Introduction

Learning difficulties cannot be avoided by anybody, including students and teachers. Of course, there will be challenges in learning, particularly in learning English, which is not our native language. Even individuals who speak English on a daily basis might make mistakes and have difficulties, especially those of us who are learning English as a foreign language. Brown (1980: 41) in Ameliani (2019) stated in the process of language learning, learners will get more problem and some difficulties, for example

their pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and other aspects of language.

Grammar problems are common among learners; they should know the structure or form of the phrase when studying English because it differs from their native tongue. When it comes to constructing grammatically correct sentences, students are frequently perplexed. This occurred while the writer was doing teaching practice at Negeri 3 Makassar. The writer gave the

assignment of narrative text content at the time. The writer then challenged them to recreate the fairy tale "Cinderella" in their own words. As a result, some of them write in the simple present tense when they supposed to be written in the past tense.

2. Literature Review

Many academics address the challenges that students experience when learning English, particularly in many abilities such as reading, writing, and listening. However, the writer will cover a variety of subjects connected to the study that the writer will conduct in this chapter. Previous research here is used to determine the gap between this study and previous research that has been carried out by previous researchers.

Abdullah (2013) was about to point out mistakes in the use of the simple past tense. It was discovered that many students make grammatical errors in subject-verb agreement, tenses, parts of speech, and vocabulary. A lack of understanding and proficiency in English grammar, the impact of mother tongue, loan words, and a lack of exposure to English are all cited as contributing factors to the problem.

Hidayat & Rahmawati (2019). The purpose of this study was to look into the difficulties that students had learned the simple past tense. Students who do not achieve the minimum passing mark in the simple past tense face four challenges: difficulty recalling formulae, difficulty memorizing irregular verbs, difficulty using 'Did' or 'Was/Were' assistance, and difficulty interpreting questions and commands.

Susanti (2017) assessed students' errors in the usage of simple past tense in narrative text. The most common type of error was misformation, which accounted for 52 percent of all errors. Students are also unable to differentiate between regular and irregular verbs. Putri (2018). Her research aims to find out the problems faced by students in the simple past tense at SMPN 22 Padang. Students are hesitant to distinguish between simple past and present perfect verb forms as high as 32.725%. They also have 29.995% doubts about the use of past, present, and time symbols.

Anwar (2014) researches identifying and explaining errors made by students when writing narrative texts in the simple past tense. Types of errors are grouped into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

Aminah (2016). This study examines errors in the usage of the simple past tense in English narrative writing. The most prevalent error, with a percentage of 65.09 percent, is an error of misformation, with 69 from 106 faults. Researchers believe this may be due to the fact that it is difficult to spot these errors.

Lastly, Pardosi, Karo, Sijabat, Pasaribu, and Tarigan (2019) identified the common mistakes made by students in writing narrative texts. According to the study, ninth-graders made 233 mistakes in ordinary verbs. This was followed by 150 information discrepancies, 38 additions, 29 omissions, and 16 ordering errors.

Based on the writer's findings, as well as various previous studies and the writer's

teaching experience, there is currently no specific research on the difficulties experienced by students in the simple past tense through narrative text. To fill the gap, the writer will investigate the students' difficulties and explore the way students solve the problems particularly related to the use of the simple past tense. That way the writer can immediately help to find the solutions to the problems encountered.

Many findings captured student's difficulties in learning the simple past tense but less research has been conducted to investigate how the students solve the difficulties.

3. Research Methodology

3. 1. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study process. The researchers aim to find phenomena or problems that are being faced by 11-year high school students, which are in accordance with the objectives of this study.

The participants in this study are year 11 social science students at SMA Negeri 3 Makassar. The writer chooses a year 11 high school students because based on the writer's previous teaching experience in this school, they tend to struggle with the simple past tense. In addition, the writer chooses year 11 high school students because they have studied various sources of narrative texts from junior high school to senior high school. And it turns out that even after studying it several times; some students are still having trouble learning it. This is also supported by numerous prior studies that addressed learning challenges in the simple

past tense with research subjects ranging from junior high to high school students.

3. 2. Research Instruments

a. Observation
The things that are observed are usually the symptoms, behavior, living things, and inanimate objects being studied. The writer made observations when the writer did teach practice at the school. The writer has observed the class situation, condition, and students' knowledge in English texts.

b. Test
The writer gives the task to the students to rewrite one of the texts in Narrative text using their own words. The result of the test is to determine who the sample will be interviewed.

c. Interview
The interview questions will be separated into two categories: types of issues and causes generating difficulties. The variables that generate problems are also classified as internal factors and external ones. The writer conducts face-to-face interviews with selected students.

4. Findings and Discussions

There are thirty-three students in a year - 11 social sciences 1. Eleven of them are male and twenty-two are female. After giving a test in the form of recreating one of the legend stories from narrative text, namely The Legend of Surabaya City, the writer discovered that nine students had errors in their writing. These nine students took part in the writer's study.

Errors in writing format are frequently found by the writer in students writing. Where students are supposed to write in the past tense but instead write in the present tense. On the other side, the writer discovered incorrect words as well as some students who did not grasp the directions offered.

4. 1. The Difficulties in Learning Simple Past Tense

According to the findings of the research, that most of the difficulties experienced by students when learning the Simple Past Tense material through narrative text are as follows;

a. Memorizing irregular verb/regular verb
According to the findings, the first issue is remembering irregular/regular verbs. Students struggle with learning irregular verbs in this problem since normal verbs simply add –ed at the end of the verb. Students are having difficulty since they have not memorized irregular verbs. Students note that in English, words evolve in a variety of ways, such as buy becoming bought, go becoming went, and write becoming wrote. Although it appears to be simple, students believe that this is the most difficult element of the simple past tense since most students find it difficult to memorize irregular verbs.

b. Having the lack of vocabulary
According to the findings of the interviews, all participants realized they had a restricted basic vocabulary. They have a lack of vocabulary knowledge, which makes learning challenging for them. In addition, they only rely on mobile phones as a tool or medium for translators. Thus, they will depend on the device continuously.

c. Do not comprehend the instructions
One of the issues that students confront is that they do not grasp the teacher's directions. According to the findings of the interviews, students frequently did not comprehend the material presented by the teacher. They also stated that they did not always grasp the assignments given by their teacher. This is undoubtedly an impediment to students' learning. When they do not comprehend from the start, the entire lesson is not adequately absorbed by them. Students' ability to complete tasks might be hampered by a lack of understanding of the directions provided.

d. Confused when to use the present and past tense
All of the students who participated stated they were still unsure about how to utilize the present and past tenses. This is also a barrier to their learning. They admit that they are still perplexed about where the verbs should be placed. They stated that it was difficult for them to identify whether to use the present form of the verb and when to use the past form of the verb.

4. 2. Factors that cause students' difficulties in learning simple past tense

The internal factors that cause students' difficulties in learning simple past tense in narrative text are (a) mind blocking, (b) interest, (c) motivation, and (d) anxious. The description of these factors can be seen in the following line:

a. Mind blocking
One of the variables that become an impediment in the student learning process is mind blockage. Students will find it challenging to understand a topic if they have

unfavorable opinions about it. Students said that it was difficult to learn English, particularly in the basic past tense content found in narrative texts. In this situation, mind blocking occurs when students repeatedly mutter "difficult" in their heads. As a result, students will struggle to begin and learn the topic. The following are some instances of participant responses:

The question:
In your opinion, is basic past tense content in narrative text difficult? Which part is difficult?
Responses:
1) *"Susah. Tidak mengerti, semuanya tidak mengerti."*
   "It's hard because I don't understand. I don't understand everything."
2) *"Susah susah gampang. Susahnya pada saat penggunaan Verbnya (kata kerja)."*
   "It's neither easy nor difficult. It's difficult when adding the verbs."
3) *"Lumayan susah. Apalagi pemelihan katanya. Kadang saya lupa-lupa."*
   "It's pretty tough. Especially in terms of word choice; I always forget it.

b. Interest
Based on the results of interviews, the Narrative text material has been repeatedly studied by students, since they were in junior high school. This causes students to become bored and disinterested in studying it, especially if the tale is uninteresting and there are a lot of unfamiliar vocabularies for them. Students will struggle to study if there is no intention or interest on their part. As an example of the following students' responses:

Question:
How do you feel when you learn narrative text? Are you happy, excited, bored, or tired?

Responses:
"Bosan, apalagi teksnya yang cukup panjang." "Yes, it is boring, especially if the text is long."

c. Motivation
Motivation is one of the factors that can be said to greatly hinder the learning process. With the motivation will certainly make students more active in learning. However, if the opposite happens, there is a lack of curiosity and lack of motivation that can be used as a reference to encourage students to learn simple past tense material in narrative texts, and then the learning process will be hampered, both in obtaining language elements and in acquiring the material.

d. Anxiety
It is critical for students and teachers to express and grasp the content offered by the teacher during the learning process. In this case, not all students grasp what their teacher is saying right away. As a result, students' heads will be filled with questions. The question is certainly not directly conveyed by students because they feel anxious and afraid to ask. In addition, they also feel less confident to answer questions from the teacher. With this feeling of anxiety, students will not have good results in obtaining material and assignments.

Question:
Do you often ask the teacher when you do not understand the material? Have you ever felt anxious because you were afraid of getting the wrong answer or asking the question?
Responses:
1) *"Iya takut salah jawab, malu-malu.*
   "Yes, I'm afraid to answer wrongly, I'm shy.

2) *"Ragu, sering cemas. Sebenarnya saya mau jawab tapi takut."*
   "I am doubtful, often anxious. Actually I want to answer but I'm afraid."
3) *"Iya selalu, karena takut diejek-ejek."*
   "Yes, always. Because I am worry of being mocked".

The external factors that cause students' difficulties in learning simple past tense in narrative text are (a) game addict, (b) social environment, and (c) family support, and (d) facility can be seen in the following line:

a. Game addiction
Games have positive and negative impacts on student activities. The good impact of this position is that besides being able to improve physical abilities, games can also increase students' intellectual and fantasy abilities. While the negative impact of the game for students is the neglect of activities or homework, the use of free time to play games, and a decrease in learning motivation. In this case, students spend time to focus on playing online games. According to the students' confessions, they can stay up all night playing online games such as Mobile legend, Free Fire, and PUBG (Player unknown's Battlegrounds). Of course, this is a bad influence in the student learning process. Staying up late at night can reduce their focus on studying in the morning so that learning cannot be absorbed properly. Addiction to the video games has a huge impact on the environment, as students become lack sociability with the community, forget about people closest to them, suffer eye issues, and use harsh phrases.

Question:
Do you enjoy play a game or online game with your friends or hanging out with your friends?

Responses:
1) *"Iya, saya cukup aktif main Mobile Legend."*
   "Yes, I am quite active in playing Mobile Legend."
2) *"Iya, saya sering main, tiap hari. Setiap pulang sekolah sampai malam."*
   "Yes, I often play, every day. From the time I get home from school till late at night."
3) *"Kalau saya, main Free Fire, kak. Sering begadang demi game."*
   "I prefer to play Free Fire. I often stay up late for the game."

b. Social environment
The environment surrounding students might be one of the aspects that either supports or hinders the learning process. A pleasant, clean, and peaceful environment can assist the students focus on their studies as well as the breadth of their friendship. Students will participate in the spirit of learning if they are surrounded by peers who are passionate about learning. Aside from that, it can assist in providing friends with a comprehension of the material that has not been grasped. In contrast, if the learning environment does not make students feel at ease, the learning process will suffer. In this case and based on students' experiences, they have friends and associates who enjoy playing games and hanging together. As a result, they are less motivated to study.

c. Family support

Parental characteristics, family management strategies, and family conflicts can all have a positive or negative influence on learning activities and student results. Parental support for their children's education is very influential in improving student's learning achievement. If parents can provide proper support to their children such as motivating, guiding, paying attention, providing comfort in learning, and completing every student's learning facilities, then students will be able to achieve better achievements. In this case, some students stated that they were not very close and intimate with their parents for some reasons. This can certainly be the cause of possible obstacles for students in learning. As an example of the following students' response;

Question:

Are you close to your parents? Do your parents often ask about your activities at school or vice versa?

Response:

"Tidak dekat. Jarang ditanya tentang kegiatan di sekolah."

"Not close. I am rarely asked about activities at school."

d. Facilities

Almost all students do not have any English dictionary. They simply rely on smartphone translators. As a result, students become less self-sufficient in answering questions and completing homework. They utilize mobile phones as translators and have access to the internet to look for answers. This will undoubtedly have a long-term influence on students.

4. 3. Students' and Teacher's effort in solving the problem

a. The teacher

Teachers, as the primary players in the implementation of educational programs in schools, play a critical role in obtaining the intended learning outcomes. The teacher's job is not only to educate and explain instructional materials, but also to train, lead, and assist their students. For example, when a teacher aims to assist students in mastering reading, writing, or speaking abilities, she behaves as a coach. As a facilitator, the teacher does not dominate students through stories, lectures, or explanations, but she views students as responsible individuals, who are able to process learning resources so that they carry out learning activities based on the right instructions.

The writer then discussed with the teacher concerned about the difficulties faced by the students and the possible causes. The writer also discusses about how to increase students' motivation and interest in learning English, especially on repetitive materials such as narrative texts. Of course, the teacher has also attempted to present content that is well-explained so that students may readily grasp it. To help the students overcome the challenges, the writer provides recommendations for the teacher to create creations of the content to be taught. Of course, this will enhance learning in both online and face-to-face. Students will love reading if it is presented in PowerPoint with fascinating, innovative content and video demonstrations.

The writer also talked with the teacher on how to organize activities in the classroom so that the teacher can listen rather than

dominate. It is critical to put students as the primary role and actor in learning. So, as a facilitator, the teacher must give chances for her students to participate in the classroom. During the previous several meetings, the teacher demonstrated her efforts to assist students in achieving their learning goals. Here are a few examples:
1) Wait patiently
2) Appreciate the students
3) Comprehend the students
4) Be pleasant
5) Provide intriguing content

b. The student
Several components are required to meet the learning objectives, including the role of the teacher and the participation of students or student activities. The teacher is in charge of all learning activities in the classroom and hence plays a significant part in the learning process. However, the involvement of students in learning is no less important.
The student role is where the student participates in the process of learning that is provided or led by the teacher. Students are needed and expected to participate actively, not just as listeners or receivers of information from the teacher, but also to actively think and talk. All of these things can be reflected in student learning activities in the classroom when the teacher teaches.

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1) Become more confident
2) Reduce noise in the class
3) Pay attention to the teacher
4) Taking notes in the class
5) Studying together

5. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, nine students had difficulty understanding the simple past tense, particularly in narrative texts. The difficulties are; memorizing regular and irregular verbs, having the lack of vocabulary knowledge, do not comprehend the teacher's directions, and students are still unsure about how to utilize the present and past tense.

Those difficulties are caused by several factors, internal and external factors. The internal factors such are; mind block, interest, lack of motivation, and anxiety. While the external factors are; game addict, family, and facility. All challenges and their underlying causes may be resolved with the students' own intention and effort. In addition, support from the surrounding environment such as teachers can also influence these changes. The following are the types of efforts and improvements that students and teacher have implemented:

a. Teacher
First, teacher allows students to learn the topic being taught, notably the simple past tense. Even though certain students continue to struggle with it, the teacher is patient and continues to train these students. Teacher also tries to appreciate the student's response even though it is not completely correct. Third, the teacher tried to comprehend the students' situation and condition. Fourth,

maintain the good relationship with students. It should be warm, casual, and heart-to-heart (interpersonal relationship.) and last but not least, provide intriguing content to pique students' interest in learning by displaying examples of videos, resources, and creative texts.

b. Students

First, Students can increase their self-confidence by starting to ask questions if they do not understand what the teacher has said. On the other hand, they have also begun to dare to express their opinions, answering when the teacher asks questions. They also tried to more conducive to learning. Students begin to be able to arrange a good sitting position to study and focus on the learning material. Besides that, students show their curiosity by focusing on learning in class and have a note taking during the learning process. And last, students are being able to work and study together.

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