

INTRODUCTION

When learning a new language, grammatical accuracy is very important for being able to communicate well. English is now the language of choice for people all over the world, no matter where they are from. Because being able to speak and write English well is so important, applied linguistics teachers have spent a lot of time thinking about how to teach and learn the language. In today's globalised world, knowing how to use grammar correctly is necessary for clear and effective communication in English. Because English is the language of choice for business, education, and everyday life around the world, students who know how to use grammar correctly are more likely to be understood and be able to say what they mean. Research conducted in Indonesia corroborates this. Grammar is still the hardest part of writing in English for college students. A lot of students said that grammar mistakes often made their sentences hard to understand or changed the meaning they were trying to get across. This shows how important it is to be accurate when sending messages (Riana et al., 2022). Having good grammar skills is very helpful for having good pragmatic skills, which is the ability to use English correctly in real-life situations (Adam & Sailuddin, 2023). Their research indicates that students possessing superior grammar skills are likely to communicate more clearly and naturally in both spoken and written English. These findings underscore the significance of grammar instruction in applied linguistics; a deficient understanding of grammar impedes learners' abilities in both form and meaning, as well as their capacity for effective communication.

There are two kinds of English skills: productive and receptive. The productive skills are the linguistic abilities that pupils use to make the language themselves. Writing and speaking are productive talents. Reading and listening are skills that you use to receive information. Writing is a productive ability in English that ESL learners need to develop. Spoken language is a limit, a ceiling not only on the ability to understand but also on the ability to write, beyond which literacy cannot progress (Prensky, 2001).

Writing talent is the hardest thing on the list (Prensky, 2001). When writing, there are a lot of things to think about in order to get the concept over. Students need to figure out what they want to say in writing and then put those ideas together in a way that makes sense. Many researchers have proposed pedagogical solutions for the challenges encountered by both learners and educators in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting; however, these solutions may not be universally applicable to all English learning contexts. One of the most common problems that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students have is using the wrong verb tense when they write (Takahashi, 2024). Mastering verb tenses is important because it makes it clear when things happen and in what order. But even at advanced levels of language learning, many students still make tense mistakes, which makes their written work less clear and accurate. Tense mistakes in writing can make it hard for readers to understand, change the meaning, and lower the overall quality of the text.

Writing skill, as a productive language skill, necessitates both vocabulary proficiency and grammatical expertise. Brown (2007) says that grammatical competence is one of the most important parts of communicative competence. This is what lets students make sentences that are clear and have meaning. Verb tense is one of the hardest parts of grammar because it has to do

with both form and meaning. Students need to know not only how to make tenses correctly, but also when and why to use a certain tense in a sentence. One of those words that is everywhere but hard to define is writing quality. We can tell when something is poorly written by reading it, and we can tell when something is well written by using descriptive words like "coherence." However, finding an accurate and complete definition of writing quality is much harder. In addition to coherence, evaluations of writing quality have examined the quantity and precision of words and sentences produced. (Lavigne et al., 2023)

The many forms and functions of English verb tense make it hard to understand. There are twelve basic tenses in English, and each one has its own meaning and time reference. Many learners' first languages, like Bahasa Indonesia, don't have verb conjugations that show tense, on the other hand. This difference in structure often causes mistakes and negative transfer. Experts introduced the concept of interlanguage, elucidating how learners develop a distinctive linguistic system shaped by their native language. For Indonesian learners, the absence of tense marking in Bahasa Indonesia significantly contributes to errors in English tense usage (Andiny et al., 2024)

The English tense system is hard to learn because it interacts with time reference, aspect, and modality. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) assert that English verbs convey both temporal relationships and the speaker's perspective on the action, rendering tense usage more intricate than a mere indication of time. Learners frequently conflate the selection among simple, progressive, and perfect forms due to the nuanced distinctions in meaning that these forms convey (Diane Larsen-Freeman.Pdf, n.d.). EFL learners often have trouble telling the difference between form and function when using tenses. The multitude of tense forms and their overlapping functions lead to frequent errors, especially in written production, where precise verb forms are necessary for clarity and coherence.

From an interlanguage standpoint, errors in English tense production among Indonesian learners are an anticipated outcome of first language influence and developmental reorganisation. Notion of interlanguage elucidates how learners formulate a transitional linguistic framework that amalgamates characteristics of both the native and target languages. Because Bahasa Indonesia uses temporal adverbs instead of changing the forms of verbs to show time, Indonesian learners often leave out tense markers or use the wrong verb forms in English (Hafizhoh et al., 2023). Research conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts. These errors are not arbitrary; they signify the learners' methodical endeavour to comprehend English temporal relations through their established L1 framework.

Interlanguage research shows that second language learners develop systematic but evolving linguistic patterns as they move toward mastery of the target language. A research found that Indonesian students often create their own internal system of tense usage that combines features of both Bahasa Indonesia and English. In their study, learners used verb forms that did not completely match either language, reflecting an emerging interlanguage that still carried traces of their first language structure (Fauziati & Maftuhin, 2016). These findings highlight that Indonesian learners' tense errors are not simply random mistakes; rather, they show a logical developmental process as students gradually restructure their understanding of how English

expresses time. Therefore, tense difficulties should be seen as part of an ongoing interlanguage formation, not merely as grammatical failures.

Other studies in Indonesia also support the strong influence of the first language on tense-related errors. English and Bahasa Indonesia tense patterns and observed that many learners incorrectly applied English tenses because their native language does not use verb inflections to express time. Instead, Bahasa Indonesia relies on time adverbs such as *kemarin* (yesterday) or *besok* (tomorrow), which leads learners to omit tense markers or apply them inconsistently (Patters et al., 2016). Verb tense misuse was the most frequent type of grammatical error among Indonesian EFL students, accounting for more than one-third of all mistakes found in their writing. These consistent findings confirm that the lack of tense marking in Bahasa Indonesia and the resulting negative transfer significantly shape Indonesian learners' interlanguage when they acquire English verb tenses (Ramadhami & Ananda, 2020)

Prior studies have consistently identified verb tense errors as a prevalent grammatical issue in EFL writing. Saudi EFL learners often conflated past and present tense forms, particularly in narrative writing (Sastra & Hasanuddin, 2006). In the same way, Rao (2019) found that Indian students had trouble using the right tense forms consistently in their essays. In Indonesia, there have been a lot of studies on grammatical mistakes in general, but not many that look at how often and why university students in English education programmes make mistakes with verb tenses (Muhammadiyah & Rappang, 2025)

A recent study conducted by Alfiyani (2019) examined students' writing at an Indonesian university, revealing that tense errors were the most prevalent grammatical mistakes, succeeded by subject-verb agreement and article errors (Sastra & Hasanuddin, 2006). A showed that students frequently overgeneralize tense rules, which causes them to use the past tense in situations where it is not appropriate. Moreover, another research found that students' inadequate exposure to genuine writing tasks and the absence of explicit feedback led to ongoing tense errors (Hafizhoh et al., 2023). These results show that we need to look more closely at verb tense mistakes in Indonesian EFL writing. (Sukmawan, 2017)

To make teaching better, it is important to know what caused these mistakes. Finding out where mistakes come from helps teachers come up with better ways to teach. Language transfer, overgeneralization, not applying the rules fully, not getting enough practice, or not getting enough feedback could all be reasons for tense errors. By looking into these causes, teachers can come up with more targeted ways to help students who are having trouble with their lessons. (Catabay, 2023)

Another important reason to do this study is that it could help teachers. The goal of writing classes in English education programmes is to help students become good English speakers and teachers in the future. If these students still make a lot of mistakes with verb tenses, it means that the way they are being taught isn't working. Fixing this gap can help students not only write better but also become better teachers in the future. Additionally, this research corresponds with the present focus on cultivating communicative and academic literacy in higher education. (Phommavongsa et al., 2021)

Moreover, the expanding corpus of research on error analysis offers a significant theoretical framework. Errors do not signify failure but rather indicate language development. They offer insights into the process by which learners internalise linguistic rules. This study seeks to enhance the comprehension of Indonesian learners' interlanguage development by analysing the types and causes of verb tense errors, while also offering practical recommendations for language instruction (Jack, 1970).

This study also aims to address a research deficiency. Although prior studies have investigated grammatical errors in a general sense, there exists a deficiency of targeted research on verb tense errors in university-level EFL writing in Indonesia. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of studies that integrate both quantitative (frequency analysis) and qualitative (cause analysis via interviews) methodologies.