



Morphosyntactic and Semantic Analysis in English Language Learning to Students of Law, Management, and Information Systems at Universitas Murni Teguh

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the morphosyntactic forms and semantic meanings of English tenses in students' utterances across three study programs Law, Management, and Information Systems at Universitas Murni Teguh. Data were collected from 43 respondents through 40 grammar test items covering four tense categories: Present, Past, Present Perfect, and Future. Findings show that students' understanding of tense structures varied. The highest mastery was found in the Past and Future tenses, while the most common errors appeared in the Present Perfect Tense. Morpho syntactically, students generally understood basic subject-verb agreement, yet struggled with consistency in auxiliary verb usage and temporal alignment. Semantically, errors were mainly caused by first language interference (Indonesian) and limited exposure to English in academic contexts. This study emphasizes the importance of meaning-based and contextual grammar instruction that integrates both form and meaning, enabling students, particularly from non-language disciplines, to use tenses accurately in academic and professional communication.

Keywords: *Morphosyntax, Semantics, Tense, English Learning, EFL Students*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk morfosintaksis dan makna semantis dari tense bahasa Inggris dalam pernyataan mahasiswa di tiga program studi yaitu Hukum, Manajemen, dan Sistem Informasi di Universitas Murni Teguh. Data dikumpulkan dari 43 responden melalui 40 butir tes tata bahasa yang mencakup empat kategori tense: Present, Past, Present Perfect, dan Future. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman mahasiswa tentang struktur tense bervariasi. Penguasaan tertinggi ditemukan pada Past dan Future tense, sedangkan kesalahan yang paling umum muncul pada Present Perfect Tense. Secara morfosintaksis, mahasiswa umumnya memahami kesesuaian dasar subjek-kata kerja, namun mengalami kesulitan dengan konsistensi penggunaan kata kerja bantu dan keselarasan waktu. Secara semantis, kesalahan terutama disebabkan oleh interferensi bahasa pertama (Bahasa Indonesia) dan keterbatasan paparan terhadap bahasa Inggris dalam konteks akademik. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran tata bahasa berbasis makna dan kontekstual yang mengintegrasikan bentuk dan makna, sehingga memungkinkan siswa, terutama dari disiplin non-bahasa, untuk menggunakan tenses secara akurat dalam komunikasi akademik dan profesional.

Kata Kunci: Morfosintaksis, Semantik, Tense, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Siswa EFL.

INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as a global lingua franca that permeates various spheres of human activity, including education, law, business, technology, diplomacy, and scientific communication. Its status as an international language means that the ability to use English effectively has become not merely an academic requirement but a practical necessity for individuals seeking to participate in global exchanges of knowledge and professional expertise (Anyanwu et al., 2024; Nevens, 2022). In higher education, English proficiency enables students to access a vast array of academic resources, engage in scholarly discourse, and prepare themselves for careers in increasingly internationalized professional environments. Beyond the general communicative competence required for speaking and writing, mastery of English involves a deeper and more systematic understanding of linguistic components such as morphology, syntax, and semantics. These three components work interdependently in shaping how meaning is constructed, organized, and conveyed in English sentences (Aqsa, 2023; Gulzar & Javed, 2024; Kusumawardhani & Syihabuddin, 2022).

One of the most fundamental yet complex linguistic features in English is the system of tenses. Tenses function not merely as grammatical markers indicating time; rather, they embody the intricate relationship between form, structure, and meaning. The accurate use of tense enables speakers and writers to differentiate actions occurring in the past, present, or future, express relationships between events, and signal nuances such as duration, completeness, habitual actions, and relevance to the present moment (Haryani, 2022; Pramerta, 2024; Silalahi & Rakasiwi, 2022). From a morphological perspective, tense implementation requires mastery of verb forms, including the correct use of auxiliaries, regular and irregular verb patterns, and inflectional endings such as *-s*, *-ed*, and *-ing*. Syntactically, tense usage

demands an understanding of how verbs interact with other sentence components, including subjects, adverbials, and clause structures. Semantically, tense choices reflect how speakers conceptualize time, sequence, and the nature of events. Thus, tense competence reflects the integration of linguistic knowledge across multiple domains (Adawiyah, 2023; Murti et al., 2024; Nurfitriani et al., 2023).

Despite its importance, mastering English tenses presents challenges for learners, particularly those from non-English educational backgrounds or academic disciplines where explicit language instruction is limited. At Universitas Murni Teguh, students from non-language programs particularly Law, Management, and Information Systems are required to use English in both academic and professional contexts. Law students, for example, often engage with legal texts, case studies, and international regulations written in English, where precise tense usage is essential to understanding obligations, rights, conditions, and chronological sequences of events. Management students are expected to read business reports, financial analyses, and strategic planning documents, all of which frequently rely on specific tenses to differentiate between past performance, present conditions, and future projections. Similarly, students in Information Systems must comprehend and produce documentation, guidelines, and research related to emerging technologies, where tense usage often indicates system processes, timelines, and operational states. In these contexts, errors in tense not only hinder comprehension but may also lead to misinterpretation of meaning, potentially affecting academic performance and professional competency.

Preliminary observations at Universitas Murni Teguh revealed that despite the significant exposure students receive through general English courses, many still face difficulties in applying tense forms accurately and consistently (Beauty & Rahmawati, 2020; Kusumaningsih, 2015; Rachman et al., 2019). Early assessment data

showed that 28 students (65%) demonstrated excellent mastery with scores ranging from 90 to 100. This indicates that a substantial portion of students possess adequate structural understanding of tense forms (Syahrani et al., 2024; Tarigan et al., 2022). However, the remaining students exhibited noticeable variations in performance and recurrent patterns of error. Common issues included incorrect auxiliary selection, particularly in the formation of the Present Perfect and Future tenses; irregular verb errors in the Past Tense; and frequent omission of -s or -es in the Present Simple. While these errors may appear minor on the surface, they significantly affect the clarity and precision of meaning, especially in academic writing (Iswari et al., 2019; Muklas et al., 2025; Ramadhiyanti, 2020).

These variations in student performance raise important questions regarding how non-language students conceptualize and internalize the relationship between morphological forms, syntactic patterns, and semantic functions of tense. Students may be able to recognize or memorize tense forms in isolation, yet struggle to apply them appropriately in context-sensitive situations. For instance, some may know how to construct the Present Perfect correctly but lack semantic understanding of its use to indicate experiences or events affecting the present. Others might apply the Past Tense mechanically without recognizing distinctions between simple past events and past actions with continued relevance. This suggests that the challenge does not lie solely in structural mastery but also in the ability to link linguistic forms with their contextual meanings (Irawan, 2018).

Understanding these challenges is important for several reasons. First, analyzing student errors from a morphosyntactic perspective allows researchers to identify specific areas where learners struggle structurally, such as verb inflection, agreement, and auxiliary usage. Second, examining errors from a semantic perspective uncovers deeper issues related to meaning interpretation, conceptualization of

time, and discourse understanding. Third, identifying the intersection between structural errors and conceptual misunderstandings provides a more comprehensive picture of students' linguistic competence. This holistic approach aligns with contemporary linguistic and pedagogical theories emphasizing the integration of form and meaning in second language acquisition (Celce-Murcia et al., 1983).

Furthermore, students in non-language programs often approach English primarily as a supplementary subject rather than a central field of study. As a result, their exposure to linguistic theory is limited, and their learning tends to be more practical or task-oriented. While this approach may aid basic communication, it may not provide sufficient depth for mastering more complex linguistic features such as tense semantics. A detailed analysis of their morphosyntactic and semantic understanding of tense can therefore provide valuable insights into their learning processes, challenges, and potential instructional needs (Payne, 2011).

This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive linguistic analysis of students' competence in using English tenses, focusing on the interplay between form, structure, and meaning. By examining how students from Law, Management, and Information Systems programs apply the Present, Past, Present Perfect, and Future tenses, the research seeks to identify both strengths and weaknesses in their linguistic performance. The analysis covers not only the structural accuracy of tense forms but also the semantic appropriateness of tense selection across different contexts. Through this dual lens, the study intends to uncover patterns of error, tendencies in conceptualization, and areas where semantic understanding remains incomplete or overly mechanical.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute significantly to English language pedagogy in non-language higher education contexts. By highlighting specific morphosyntactic and semantic

challenges faced by students, the study can inform instructional strategies, curriculum design, and classroom practices aimed at improving tense mastery. Such improvements can enhance students' overall communicative competence, preparing them more effectively for academic tasks such as essay writing, case analysis, and presentations, as well as for professional communication in their respective fields. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of integrating linguistic analysis into English language teaching and the need for more targeted support for non-language students who must use English accurately and meaningfully in academic and professional domains.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design complemented by quantitative elements to ensure a comprehensive examination of students' tense usage. This design was selected because the primary aim of the research was not to test hypotheses or manipulate variables, but rather to portray, analyze, and interpret the natural occurrence of morphosyntactic and semantic features in students' use of English tenses. Through this approach, the study was able to explore the patterns, tendencies, and underlying reasoning behind students' grammatical choices in authentic learning contexts.

The qualitative component allowed the researcher to examine errors and usage behaviors in rich detail, capturing nuances that numerical data alone could not reveal such as students' linguistic awareness, their interpretation of time references, and the influence of first language structures. Meanwhile, the quantitative data, derived primarily from grammar tests and scoring rubrics, served to strengthen the findings by providing measurable indicators of performance across different tense categories. The combination of both approaches yielded a more holistic understanding of how learners construct tense forms, where their difficulties lie, and

what factors contribute to the accuracy or inaccuracy of their grammatical production.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study consisted of 43 undergraduate students enrolled in the Law, Management, and Information Systems programs at Universitas Murni Teguh. All participants had completed a minimum of two semesters of study and had taken at least one foundational grammar course, ensuring that they possessed basic exposure to English tense structures prior to the research process.

These students were selected because they represented a diverse academic background while sharing a common foundation in English as a required general course. Their varied disciplines provided valuable insights into how students from non-English majors engage with grammatical concepts, particularly tenses, which are frequently used in academic writing, presentations, and professional communication. The inclusion of students from three different study programs also enriched the data by revealing differences and similarities in language performance that may be influenced by academic orientation, linguistic experience, or program-specific curriculum demands. Based on the assessment results, there are three score ranges that describe the students' performance levels. In the 90–100 score range, 28 students fall into the Excellent category, indicating outstanding achievement. Meanwhile, 8 students are in the 80–89 range, categorized as Good, which reflects a solid understanding of the material. Additionally, 2 students scored within the 70–79 range and are classified as Fair, indicating that their performance still requires improvement.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study were obtained through four complementary instruments designed to capture students' mastery of English tenses from multiple linguistic dimensions morphological, syntactic, and

semantic. These instruments provided both quantitative measures of performance and qualitative insights into students' thought processes while producing tense-based utterances.

First, a grammar test consisting of 40 items served as the primary quantitative instrument. The test covered four major tense categories simple present, simple past, present perfect, and simple future. Each tense was allocated ten items, allowing balanced coverage of verb forms, auxiliary usage, temporal markers, and sentence structure. The test format included sentence completion, verb transformation, and error identification. This component offered a clear numerical overview of the students' accuracy and frequency of errors across different tense categories.

Second, oral production tasks were employed to capture how students expressed tense structures in spontaneous or semi-controlled communicative contexts. Students were asked to create sentences and short dialogues based on visual prompts, situational descriptions, or instructor-led questions. This method was particularly useful in examining real-time morphosyntactic choices, hesitation phenomena, auxiliary omissions, and tense consistency within longer utterances. The oral tasks also revealed several patterns of L1 interference that did not always surface in the written test.

Third, short semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the students' linguistic awareness and their reasoning behind tense selection. During these interviews, students were encouraged to explain why they chose specific verb forms, how they interpreted time expressions, and what rules they believed governed tense usage. These interviews provided valuable qualitative data, uncovering cognitive patterns, misconceptions, and the internalized rules (both accurate and inaccurate) guiding their grammatical decisions. The interviews also helped identify affective factors such as confidence, anxiety, or reliance on

memorized formulas that influenced tense performance.

Finally, documentation analysis included the examination of students' written assignments, classroom notes, and observational records taken during teaching sessions. Written works such as essays, reflections, and short descriptive texts allowed the researcher to analyze tense use in more natural, less test-driven contexts. Observation notes captured behaviors related to learning strategies, error frequency during practice sessions, peer interactions, and teacher feedback. These data enriched the overall findings by showing the students' actual language use patterns beyond controlled testing situations.

Together, these four instruments provided a comprehensive and triangulated dataset, enabling a deeper understanding of students' tense mastery. The grammar test measured accuracy, oral tasks demonstrated real-time linguistic behavior, interviews uncovered cognitive and semantic awareness, and documentation reflected long-term performance in authentic contexts. This multi-source approach ensured that the results of the study were robust, reliable, and reflective of students' genuine language proficiency.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis followed four stages. Firstly, was Morphological Analysis – examining verb form accuracy. Secondly was Syntactic Analysis – identifying sentence structure patterns. Thirdly was Semantic Analysis – interpreting temporal meaning and aspect. Fourthly was Quantitative Analysis – determining accuracy percentages per tense. Data validity was ensured through method triangulation, peer review, and interpretation consistency. Ethical considerations ensured anonymity and voluntary participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below was the result finding in doing Morphosyntax and Semantics Analysis.

These exercises were followed by 43 students. They were doing Grammar Present

Tense, Past Tense, Present Perfect, dan Present Future.

Table 1. Morphosyntax and Semantics Analysis

No.	Initials	Major	Post-Test Score	Present	Past	Perfect	Future
1	A.B.B.	Information Systems	45	7	6	4	1
2	P.F.Z.	Information Systems	77.5	8	5	9	9
3	A.N.H.	Information Systems	92.5	9	10	9	10
4	M.J.H.	Law	87.5	7	8	9	10
5	J.T.	Law	90	10	10	8	8
6	F.J.S.	Law	95	8	10	10	10
7	S.T.	Information Systems	77.5	8	6	7	10
8	M.E.P.Z.	Information Systems	95	8	10	10	10
9	F.D.P.N.	Law	82	10	7	8	10
10	A.H.S.	Management	95	9	10	9	10
11	G.	Law	82.5	8	10	7	9
12	R.S.	Law	90	6	10	10	10
13	M.T.	Law	100	10	10	10	10
14	M.F.J.P.	Law	95	8	10	10	10
15	E.A.	Information Systems	95	8	10	10	10
16	M.J.T.	Information Systems	97.5	9	10	10	10
17	D.R.S.	Law	47.5	6	4	5	6
18	E.S.	Management	92.5	10	9	9	9
19	L.K.H.	Management	92.5	10	9	9	9
20	M.A.	Management	87.5	9	8	10	10
21	A.F.S.	Information Systems	90	7	10	9	10
22	F.G.	Law	40	5	2	6	4
23	E.	Information Systems	57.5	7	3	7	5
24	K.A.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
25	A.L.K.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
26	A.E.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
27	H.K.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
28	G.A.D.Z.	Information Systems	97.5	9	10	10	10
29	M.S.	Law	100	10	10	10	10
30	A.S.	Management	80	7	9	7	9
31	R.S.	Law	95	8	10	9	10
32	D.A.Z.	Management	87.5	8	10	7	10
33	L.B.	Information Systems	85	6	8	10	10
34	D.S.	Law	95	8	10	10	10
35	E.Y.A.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
36	A.G.	Law	92.5	8	10	10	9
37	C.L.P.R.	Management	97.5	9	10	10	10
38	L.P.L.G.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
39	A.B.A.N.	Management	100	10	10	10	10
40	S.B.B.	Law	89.6	10	10	6	6
41	E.	Information Systems	95	10	9	10	9
42	P.J.T.	Information Systems	82.5	10	8	8	7
43	S.S.	Information Systems	90	10	9	10	7

Present Tense

- 1) Correct examples: She works in the office every day. / They study management together.
- 2) Incorrect: She works in the office every day.

There were 7 students (18.4%) failed to apply the –s morpheme for singular subjects,

showing incomplete rule internalization. Most students demonstrated strong performance in the Present Tense, with a significant number achieving 9–10 correct answers. Students such as Jeanne, M. Taufik, Keysia, Ayu Lestari, and many from the Management program consistently scored perfect or near-perfect results. The high

scores suggest that the Present Tense is familiar and accessible, likely because it is frequently used in daily communication and structurally resembles Indonesian patterns.

However, a few students showed lower performance such as Aldy (7), Dominicha (6), and Fikar (5). Their errors were typically related to subject–verb agreement, particularly the omission of the -s marker for third-person singular subjects, and inappropriate use of the simple present to express habitual or factual statements.

Past Tense

- 1) Correct: He visited his friend yesterday.
/ They went to the seminar last week.
- 2) Incorrect: He visits his friend yesterday.

There were 9 students (23.6%) ignored past verb changes, particularly irregular ones, reflecting confusion between event time and verb form. Most students demonstrated strong performance in the Present Tense, with a significant number achieving 9–10 correct answers. Students such as Jeanne, M. Taufik, Keysia, Ayu Lestari, and many from the Management program consistently scored perfect or near-perfect results. The high scores suggest that the Present Tense is familiar and accessible, likely because it is frequently used in daily communication and structurally resembles Indonesian patterns.

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Present Perfect Tense

- 1) Correct: I have finished my task. / She has studied English for two years.
- 2) Incorrect: I have finished my task. / She has studied English for two years.

There were 11 students (28.9%) misused auxiliaries and prepositions, confirming that Present Perfect is the most

challenging tense for EFL learners. The Present Perfect emerged as the most challenging of all tense categories. Scores for weaker students Aldy (4), Dominicha (5), Fikar (6), Eunike (7) show a noticeable drop compared to their performance in other tenses. This lower proficiency reflects the inherently complex nature of the Present Perfect, which integrates tense and aspect simultaneously. Key sources of difficulty include:

(a) Semantic Complexity

One of the central difficulties students faced in mastering the Present Perfect Tense was their inability to distinguish among its three core semantic functions: completed actions with present relevance, life experiences, and actions that began in the past but continue into the present. Each of these meanings requires a different interpretation of time and relevance concepts that are not grammatically encoded in Indonesian. As a result, students often treated all past-related events as belonging to the same temporal category. For example, when expressing a completed action that still affects the present (e.g., *I have finished my assignment*), many students relied instead on the Simple Past (*I finished my assignment*), failing to recognize that English requires a distinction based on current relevance. The difficulty became even more apparent in expressing life experiences, where learners commonly inserted explicit time markers such as *last year* or *yesterday*, which are incompatible with the Present Perfect. Similarly, they struggled with ongoing situations that began in the past and continue into the present (e.g., *I have lived here for five years*), because Indonesian expresses this meaning using a present-tense construction without morphological change. These challenges demonstrate that the absence of grammatical aspect in Indonesian leads to conceptual mismatches: learners understand the meaning in context, but they lack the linguistic tools to map that

meaning onto the appropriate English tense-aspect form. Consequently, the Present Perfect becomes not only a matter of memorizing structure but also a deeper cognitive challenge involving temporal reasoning and cross-linguistic interpretation.

(b) Morphological Demands

Present perfect requires accurate use of: auxiliary *have/has* and a correct V3 form. Students often produced hybrid forms (e.g., combining *has* with V2 or V1), indicating partial understanding of the structure. The correct use of the Present Perfect tense requires learners to accurately combine two structural components: the auxiliary *have/has* and the past participle (V3) form of the main verb. However, many students demonstrated incomplete mastery of this structure, often producing what may be termed “hybrid forms,” where elements of different tense constructions are blended. These hybrids errors typically involved pairing *has/have* with a V2 form (e.g., *has went*, *have ate*) or even a V1 form (e.g., *has go*, *have seen*), suggesting that students possess only a partial or surface-level understanding of the morphosyntactic requirements of the tense. This pattern indicates that while students may recognize that the auxiliary is needed, they have not fully internalized the rule that the main verb must shift to its past participle form in perfect constructions. Such errors reflect a developmental stage where tense markers are recalled inconsistently, and verb forms are retrieved based on familiarity or frequency rather than grammatical requirement.

The tendency to produce hybrid forms is consistent with the performance patterns shown in the dataset, particularly among students who scored between 4 and 7 in the Present Perfect category, such as Aldy (4), Dominicha (5), Eunike (7), and Sarah (7). These students frequently scored higher in the Simple Past category, indicating that they were more confident

using V2 forms. Their difficulty in shifting from V2 to V3 suggests that they may be overgeneralizing their knowledge of past tense verbs to contexts requiring the Present Perfect. This aligns with the hypothesis that learners first acquire simple tense morphology (e.g., V2) before developing the ability to manipulate more complex tense-aspect structures. By contrast, high-performing students such as Amanda, Melani, Taufik, and several Management majors who consistently scored 9 or 10 showed fewer indications of hybridization, implying more stable morphological knowledge and a clearer conceptual understanding of the functional difference between pastness and present relevance.

From a linguistic perspective, the prevalence of hybrid forms can be attributed to the influence of Indonesian, which does not mark tense or aspect inflectionally. Because Indonesian verbs remain morphologically unchanged regardless of temporal reference, learners do not develop the habitual expectation that verbs must alter form to reflect temporal nuance. As a result, Indonesian learners may focus on the auxiliary *have/has* as the sole carrier of grammatical meaning, while the main verb is treated as semantically stable rather than morphologically variable. This leads students to rely on the most familiar or frequently used verb forms often V1 or V2 resulting in structurally incomplete Present Perfect constructions. Such cross-linguistic influence explains why hybrid structures persist even at intermediate levels of proficiency.

(c) Confusion with Simple Past

Learners frequently defaulted to the simple past, especially when time markers appeared, demonstrating underdeveloped aspectual awareness. Despite these challenges, high-achieving students performed exceptionally well, showing that with sufficient exposure and practice, mastery is achievable.

A prominent pattern emerging from the test results is students' tendency to default to the Simple Past whenever an action was interpreted as occurring before the moment of speaking. This pattern was particularly visible among learners with lower Present Perfect scores, such as Aldy (4), Dominicha (5), Fikar (6), and Eunike (7). These students often treated all past-related concepts as belonging to a single timeframe, showing little sensitivity to distinctions between finished actions, continuing actions, and experiences. Their overreliance on the Simple Past suggests underdeveloped aspectual awareness specifically, difficulty understanding how English encodes not only time, but the relationship between time and current relevance. Because Indonesian does not grammatically mark aspect, learners tended to process the test items through the lens of their L1, collapsing multiple English tense aspect categories into the simpler past vs. non-past distinction.

This confusion became more apparent when time markers such as *yesterday*, *last year*, *for five years*, or *already* were included in items. Students in the mid-range scoring group such as Sarah (7), Erika (8), Keysia (7), and several IT majors often interpreted any explicit time expression as a cue to automatically select the Simple Past. For instance, sentences describing long-duration actions were mistakenly framed as completed events (*lived*, *studied*) rather than ongoing processes requiring Present Perfect (*have lived*, *have studied*). This shows that students interpreted temporal markers lexically rather than semantically: instead of examining how the time marker interacts with the verb phrase, they aligned the verb form with the most familiar tense that expresses pastness. As a result, their aspectual interpretation remained superficial, relying heavily on memorized patterns rather than conceptual understanding.

The dataset also reveals a clear contrast between students who struggled and

those who demonstrated strong aspectual awareness. High-achieving students such as Amanda, Melani, Taufik, Herina, Medika, and nearly all Management majors scoring 9–10 in Present Perfect did not show the same tendency to default to the Simple Past. Their consistently high scores across all four tense categories suggest a deeper understanding of how English tense and aspect interact. These students seemed aware that the Simple Past is appropriate only for events completed at a definite time, whereas the Present Perfect is required for experiences, recent events with present relevance, or actions continuing into the present. Their successful performance indicates that mastery of aspect is achievable when students receive sufficient exposure to authentic English input and engage in regular practice involving temporally nuanced contexts.

Moreover, comparison between low- and high-performing students supports the interpretation that the greatest barrier is not the grammatical form itself, but the underlying conceptual framework. Students who performed poorly often showed reasonable accuracy in Simple Past items (e.g., Aldy = 6, Eunike = 7, Fikar = 2), confirming that they could manipulate V2 forms but struggled to move beyond the past-as-default reasoning. Meanwhile, high scorers demonstrated an ability to distinguish between narrated past events and states or experiences that extend into the present. Their success underscores that aspectual awareness is learned not innate and develops through repeated exposure to various tense functions in reading, writing, and speech.

In summary, the table data show that confusion with the Simple Past represents a developmental stage common among Indonesian learners of English. Because Indonesian lacks grammatical aspect, students initially treat all past-related meanings as structurally identical, resulting in overgeneralization of the Simple Past. However, the performance of

high-achieving students clearly demonstrates that with adequate practice, explicit instruction, and authentic input, learners can overcome this L1-based simplification and achieve accurate control of the Present Perfect and its aspectual functions.

Future Tense

- 1) Correct: They will attend the meeting tomorrow.
- 2) Incorrect: They will be attending the meeting tomorrow.

There were 5 students (13.1%) misapplied –ing or –s after will, indicating incomplete syntactic understanding.

Analysis of the Future Tense results indicates that students generally demonstrated stronger proficiency in predicting events or expressing intentions compared to other tense categories. This is evident from the consistently high scores across the dataset, where the majority of students achieved between 8 and 10 correct answers. Students such as Amanda, Melani, Ferdi, Arianto, Taufik, Moses, Ezra, and nearly all Management majors reached perfect scores in the Future Tense. This trend suggests that the grammatical structure of the future (*will* + *V1* or *be going to* + *V1*) is more accessible to Indonesian learners, likely due to its relative simplicity and its functional similarity to Indonesian markers such as *akan* and *akan segera*, which do not require morphological changes to the verb. Thus, predicting or indicating future time appears to be an area of lower cognitive load compared to aspect-heavy tenses such as the Present Perfect.

At the same time, the data reveal notable gaps among students who scored significantly lower, particularly those with Future Tense scores ranging between 1 and 6 such as Aldy (1), Fikar (4), and Eunike (5). These lower scores typically arose not from difficulties with verb morphology, as the Future Tense does not require inflectional changes, but rather from uncertainty regarding the contextual functions of *will* versus *be going to*. Many lower-performing

students tended to apply *will* indiscriminately, regardless of whether the context required prediction, intention, or planned action. Errors in this category often involved selecting *will* in situations where *be going to* was semantically more appropriate, particularly in contexts involving prior decisions or observable evidence. This reveals that while the form of the Future Tense may be structurally simple, its semantic distinctions still require careful interpretation.

A closer examination of mid-range performers students scoring between 7 and 9, such as Sarah (10), Gabriel (9), Reynhard (10), and Pricard (7) shows a transitional stage in their grasp of future reference. These students generally demonstrated mastery of the basic future structure, yet inconsistencies emerged when contextual cues required interpretive nuance. For example, promotional or scheduled events sometimes led students to incorrectly select the Present Continuous or Simple Present equivalents, suggesting that their conceptual understanding of future reference is still developing. Additionally, students in this category sometimes confused spontaneous decisions with planned intentions, further confirming that semantic awareness plays a key role in achieving accuracy in the Future Tense.

Interestingly, a comparison between Future Tense performance and the results from Present, Past, and Perfect tenses illustrates a clear pattern: even students with lower scores in other areas often performed relatively better in the Future category. For instance, students like Aldy and Dominicha, who struggled significantly with Present Perfect and Past Tense, still performed modestly better in the Future section compared to their performance in other tense categories. This suggests that difficulties with the Future Tense are less influenced by morphological complexity and more by discourse-level interpretation. Since Indonesian expresses futurity exclusively through lexical markers without altering verb forms, students may find the structural

simplicity of English future constructions easier to internalize.

Overall, the dataset indicates that the Future Tense constitutes one of the strongest areas of performance for the majority of learners. High-achieving students consistently demonstrated full mastery of both form and function, supporting the notion that future reference is an accessible grammatical domain for Indonesian learners when compared to aspectual distinctions. However, the performance of lower-scoring students highlights the need for targeted instruction that emphasizes the semantic differences between *will* and *be going to*, as well as the contextual cues that guide their appropriate usage. Strengthening learners' understanding of these subtle distinctions will ensure more accurate and communicatively effective use of future expressions.

Semantic Analysis

- 1) Present Tense expresses habitual actions or general truths. Errors such as *She works yesterday* show confusion between temporal contexts.

The Present Tense is semantically used to describe routines, habits, and universally accepted facts. In English, it situates actions in an unchanging or repetitive timeframe, indicating that the event occurs regularly rather than at a specific moment in the past or future. However, the data reveal that several students demonstrated difficulty distinguishing habitual contexts from past time references. Errors such as *She works yesterday* indicate a semantic conflict where learners combined a present-tense verb form with a past temporal marker. This reflects an underlying misunderstanding of how English associates verb morphology with temporal meaning, something that Indonesian does not grammaticalize.

These mistakes also show that some learners rely more on lexical time indicators (such as *yesterday*) than on verb form to construct temporal meaning. Because Indonesian allows time adverbs

to carry all temporal interpretation (*Dia bekerja kemarin* retains the same verb form), students may not perceive a mismatch when pairing Present Tense verbs with past-time expressions. Thus, the Present Tense errors illustrate a transfer effect where learners fail to integrate English verb morphology into their temporal reasoning. This explains why students in the lower-scoring group for Present Tense (such as Aldy, Sarah, and Lucky) consistently showed confusion between habitual meaning and specific past events.

- 2) Past Tense should mark completed actions, yet some used it for ongoing situations (I studied English for two years without proper time reference).

The Past Tense is used to describe actions that were completed at a definite time in the past. Conceptually, it requires the speaker to frame the event as temporally bounded and disconnected from the present moment. Yet, several students applied Past Tense forms to describe situations that were still ongoing or lacked clear time reference. Errors like *I studied English for two years* (without specifying whether the action has ended) demonstrate a failure to recognize the semantic requirement that the Past Tense implies completion. Without adding a time boundary (e.g., "two years ago"), the sentence becomes ambiguous and semantically inappropriate.

This pattern emerged among mid- and lower-performing students in the dataset, especially those who performed poorly in Present Perfect tasks but relatively better in Past Tense items. Their reliance on the Past Tense appears to be a coping strategy: when learners are unsure whether an action is completed or still relevant, they default to the simplest form that indicates pastness. In Indonesian, duration expressions such as *selama dua tahun* do not specify whether the action continues or has ended, allowing for flexible interpretation. This difference in how Indonesian and English encode

completion leads to semantic misalignment, which can be seen clearly in the students' inconsistent use of the Past Tense.

- 3) Present Perfect Tense conveys results relevant to the present, but sentences like *She has gone yesterday* show misunderstanding of its semantic scope. The Present Perfect is semantically complex because it links past events with present consequences or relevance. It is used for experiences, recently completed actions, or ongoing states, all of which contain an implicit connection to "now." However, many students produced sentences such as *She has gone yesterday*, an error that illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the tense's semantic scope. By combining the Present Perfect with a definite past-time marker (*yesterday*), students unintentionally violated the core function of the tense non-specific time reference. This indicates that learners often interpret the Present Perfect simply as another past form rather than a form that describes a past action connected to the present.

Error patterns in the dataset show that students with lower Present Perfect scores (e.g., Aldy = 4, Dominicha = 5, Fikar = 6, Eunike = 7) struggled most with interpreting the ongoing or experiential functions of the tense. Their tendency to emotionally attach time markers to verbs resembles Indonesian language patterns, in which *sudah* or *telah* may co-occur with expressions like *kemarin* without grammatical conflict. As a result, students transfer these semantic patterns directly into English, leading to mismatches in tense–aspect interpretation. These findings strengthen the argument that Present Perfect difficulty is conceptual, not merely structural.

- 4) Future Tense expresses intention or prediction; however, forms like *I will going tomorrow* reveal semantic overlap between intention and certainty.

The Future Tense in English conveys meanings related to intention, prediction, or scheduled events. Semantically, *will* tends to express spontaneous decisions or predictions, while *be going to* reflects planned intentions or actions supported by present evidence. Errors such as *I will going tomorrow* demonstrate confusion between these semantic categories. In this structure, learners blend two future markers (*will* + *going to*), resulting in a hybrid form that reflects uncertainty about distinctions between intention, certainty, and prediction.

Although many students performed strongly in the Future Tense section especially Management majors and high achievers' errors from lower-scoring learners reveal that the semantic subtleties between the two major future forms remain difficult for some. Indonesian simplifies future meaning through a single marker, *akan*, which does not differentiate between intention and prediction. This creates a linguistic environment where learners are not accustomed to selecting verb forms based on subtle distinctions in degree of certainty or pre-planned versus spontaneous actions. Therefore, the errors highlight a common developmental challenge: while the Future Tense is structurally simple, it demands nuanced semantic interpretation that students may not yet fully control.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Morphological level: Most errors occurred in regular and irregular verb transformations in the Past and Present Perfect tenses. Syntactic level: Some students misused word order and subject–verb agreement. Semantic level: Many learners perceived tense as a mechanical rule rather than a meaningful temporal relation. Hence, students' grammar knowledge is largely structural (form-based) rather than conceptual (meaning-based).

The findings of this study reveal that learners' difficulties with English tense usage arise simultaneously at the morphological,

syntactic, and semantic levels, indicating that their grammatical knowledge is still developing across multiple linguistic domains. At the morphological level, the highest concentration of errors occurred in the transformation of regular and irregular verbs, especially in the Past and Present Perfect tenses. Several students demonstrated uncertainty when converting base forms into V2 or V3, and many produced hybrid forms such as *has went*, *have ate*, or *has go*. These patterns emphasize that learners have not fully internalized the morphological system that underlies English tense formation, particularly the distinction between past-tense marking (V2) and perfect-aspect marking (V3). Because Indonesian verbs do not inflect for tense or aspect, students lack a morphological template that would help them recognize the necessity of changing verb forms based on temporal meaning.

At the syntactic level, students exhibited challenges in word order and subject–verb agreement, particularly in complex tense constructions. Errors such as *She don't goes* or *He have worked yesterday* illustrate a breakdown in syntactic awareness. These mistakes suggest that learners often memorize tense markers or auxiliaries without fully understanding how they interact with sentence structure. When grammatical components are combined incorrectly, the resulting sentences reveal confusion not only about verb forms but also about how English syntax organizes tense and aspect markers. This reflects a developmental stage in which students apply tense markers mechanically and inconsistently, supporting the observation that their syntactic knowledge remains partly procedural rather than fully conceptualized.

The most profound difficulties, however, emerged at the semantic level, where many learners tended to treat tense as a mechanical grammatical rule rather than a system for expressing meaningful temporal relations. Students frequently interpreted tense markers as form-only elements, overlooking the fact that each tense carries

an underlying temporal logic such as continuity, completion, current relevance, intention, or habituality. For example, several learners used the Present Perfect for completed actions with explicit time markers, or the Past Tense for ongoing situations, revealing that they have not yet grasped the conceptual meanings that differentiate English tenses. This finding aligns with the performance gaps observed in the Present Perfect and Past Tense categories, where students often defaulted to familiar forms without considering the temporal relationships encoded in each tense.

Overall, the patterns in the data demonstrate that students' knowledge of English grammar is still predominantly structural or form-based, rather than conceptual or meaning-based. They may successfully recall rules or identify correct forms in isolation, but struggle when required to integrate morphological forms, syntactic patterns, and semantic meanings simultaneously. This disconnect between form and meaning highlights a need for pedagogical approaches that emphasize temporal interpretation, aspectual distinctions, and real communicative contexts. By shifting instruction from rule memorization to meaning-centered understanding, learners can develop a more holistic command of English tense–aspect systems and move beyond structural accuracy toward functional proficiency.

Linguistic Implications

The results of this study highlight several important linguistic implications for the teaching of English grammar to non-language university students. First, the findings strongly suggest that a meaning-based grammar approach is more effective than a purely rule-driven methodology, particularly for learners from non-linguistic disciplines such as Law, Management, and Information Systems. Since many students demonstrated structural knowledge of verb forms but struggled to apply tenses meaningfully within appropriate temporal contexts, instructional approaches must

move beyond memorization of rules. A meaning-based approach encourages learners to interpret the communicative purpose behind each tense rather than relying solely on formulaic transformations. This method allows students to understand grammar as a tool for conveying meaning, making it more relevant and accessible to learners whose academic backgrounds do not emphasize linguistic analysis.

Furthermore, the study underscores the need for integrated instruction that combines morphology, syntax, and semantics to strengthen students' overall functional understanding of tense-aspect systems. The data indicate that errors in tense usage were rarely isolated; instead, they reflected interconnected challenges across multiple linguistic levels. For example, students who misapplied V2 and V3 forms also tended to struggle with subject-verb agreement and misinterpreted temporal meaning. Therefore, an integrated model of instruction that simultaneously addresses verb forms, sentence structure, and temporal interpretation can lead to more holistic grammatical competence. When students learn how morphological changes influence syntactic patterns and semantic outcomes, they develop deeper and more transferable grammatical understanding.

Finally, the findings provide empirical support for contextual grammar pedagogy, particularly within multidisciplinary university environments. Students from diverse academic programs responded more successfully to grammar forms when these were presented within authentic contexts that connected to real-life situations, academic communication, or professional discourse. Contextualized grammar instruction not only enhances comprehension by grounding abstract concepts in meaningful scenarios but also aligns well with the practical needs of students from different fields. In such environments, grammar is no longer perceived as an isolated technical subject but as an essential communicative skill that supports academic writing, presentations, and workplace communication. This

pedagogical orientation is particularly suitable for institutions where English serves as a tool for cross-disciplinary engagement rather than a major field of study.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research analyzed students' use of four English tenses Present, Past, Present Perfect, and Future through both morphosyntactic and semantic perspectives. The findings indicate that students demonstrated strong structural mastery, particularly in the Past and Future Tenses. However, frequent errors were still observed, especially in the selection of auxiliaries, the formation of irregular verbs, and the omission of -s/-es in the Present Tense. In terms of semantic understanding, students tended to rely on mechanical patterns, most notably in the use of the Present Perfect Tense, where many failed to connect the grammatical form with the appropriate contextual meaning. Overall, their performance reflected rule-based learning rather than meaning-based comprehension, underscoring the need for contextualized grammar instruction.

The recommendations derived from this study emphasize four main points. First, English instructors are encouraged to adopt meaning-based and contextual grammar teaching approaches that link tense usage with real-life communication. Second, students are advised to increase their practice in writing and speaking activities that involve authentic temporal expressions. Third, future researchers may extend this study by incorporating error analysis or pragmatic approaches to explore how tenses are used in actual communication. Finally, educational institutions are recommended to implement diagnostic assessments and remedial programs that focus on integrating communicative competence with temporal meaning.

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