



## **COMMON ERRORS IN USING ENGLISH TENSES BY EFL STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

The correct use of English verb tenses remains one of the major challenges for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). At the elementary level, students frequently encounter grammatical difficulties that affect their ability to communicate accurately in both written and spoken forms. Among the various tense forms, the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses are particularly problematic because they both refer to actions connected with the past while expressing different temporal meanings. The present study investigates the common errors EFL learners make in the use of these two tenses and examines the factors contributing to such errors. The research is based on an analysis of previous studies concerning tense usage and grammatical difficulties experienced by foreign language learners. The findings indicate that students often have difficulty distinguishing between the communicative functions of the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses. The most frequent errors involve the misuse of temporal expressions, incorrect verb forms, and the substitution of the Present Perfect with the Past Simple. These difficulties are largely attributed to first-language interference, insufficient grammatical competence, and limited opportunities for authentic language practice. The study highlights the need for more effective instructional strategies to improve learners' mastery of English tense usage.

### **Keywords**

Present Perfect, Past Simple, EFL learners, tense errors, grammar learning, English verb tenses, language interference.

**Аннотация.** Правильное употребление английских временных форм глагола остаётся одной из наиболее сложных задач для изучающих английский язык как



иностранный (EFL). На начальном этапе обучения учащиеся часто сталкиваются с грамматическими трудностями, которые негативно влияют на их письменную и устную коммуникацию. Особые сложности вызывают времена Present Perfect и Past Simple, поскольку оба они связаны с действиями в прошлом, но выражают различные временные отношения. Цель данного исследования заключается в выявлении типичных ошибок, допускаемых учащимися EFL при использовании этих времён, а также в определении факторов, способствующих возникновению данных ошибок. Исследование основано на анализе ранее опубликованных работ, посвящённых употреблению временных форм и грамматическим трудностям в процессе изучения английского языка. Результаты показывают, что учащиеся испытывают значительные трудности при разграничении функций времён Present Perfect и Past Simple. Наиболее распространёнными ошибками являются неправильное использование временных маркеров, неверный выбор глагольных форм и замена Present Perfect временем Past Simple. Основными причинами подобных ошибок являются интерференция родного языка, недостаточная грамматическая компетенция и ограниченная практика реального общения на английском языке. Полученные результаты подчёркивают необходимость совершенствования методов преподавания английской грамматики.

**Ключевые слова:** Present Perfect, Past Simple, учащиеся EFL, грамматические ошибки, употребление времён, английская грамматика, интерференция родного языка.

**Annotatsiya.** Ingliz tili zamonlarini to'g'ri qo'llash ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganayotgan (EFL) talabalar uchun eng murakkab grammatik masalalardan biri hisoblanadi. Boshlang'ich bosqichdagi o'quvchilar ko'pincha grammatika bilan bog'liq qiyinchiliklarga duch keladilar, bu esa ularning yozma va og'zaki nutqdagi aniqligiga salbiy ta'sir ko'rsatadi. Ayniqsa, Present Perfect va Past Simple zamonlari o'quvchilar



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uchun murakkab hisoblanadi, chunki har ikkisi ham o‘tmishdagi voqealarni ifodalasada, vaqt bilan bog‘liq turli ma’nolarni anglatadi. Mazkur tadqiqotning maqsadi EFL o‘quvchilarining ushbu zamonlarni qo‘llashda yo‘l qo‘yadigan keng tarqalgan xatolarini aniqlash hamda ushbu xatolarning sabablarini tahlil qilishdan iborat. Tadqiqot ingliz tilida zamon qo‘llanilishi va grammatik xatolar bo‘yicha olib borilgan avvalgi ilmiy tadqiqotlarni o‘rganish asosida amalga oshirildi. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatdiki, talabalar Present Perfect va Past Simple zamonlarining vazifalarini farqlashda sezilarli qiyinchiliklarga duch keladilar. Eng ko‘p uchraydigan xatolar vaqt ko‘rsatkichlarining noto‘g‘ri ishlatilishi, fe‘l shakllarining xato tanlanishi hamda Present Perfect o‘rnida Past Simple zamonining qo‘llanilishi bilan bog‘liqdir. Ushbu muammolar asosan ona tilining ta’siri, grammatik bilimlarning yetarli emasligi va muloqot amaliyotining kamligi bilan izohlanadi. Tadqiqot natijalari ingliz tili grammatikasini o‘qitishda samaraliroq metodlardan foydalanish zarurligini ko‘rsatadi.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** Present Perfect, Past Simple, EFL o‘quvchilari, zamon xatolari, grammatik kompetensiya, ingliz tili zamonlari, ona tili interferensiyasi.

**Introduction.** English grammar plays a vital role in the development of learners’ language competence, and one of its key elements is the system of verb tenses, which enables speakers and writers to indicate time, sequence, and the connection between events. Among the various tense forms in English, the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses are widely used in both oral and written communication. Nevertheless, many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) encounter considerable difficulties when attempting to use these tenses accurately. Successful mastery of these forms requires not only familiarity with grammatical structures but also an understanding of the contexts in which they are used. As a result, students often find it challenging to determine which tense should be applied in a particular situation. This difficulty becomes even greater because the English tense system differs significantly from that



of many learners’ native languages. In certain languages, there is no direct grammatical equivalent of the Present Perfect tense. Consequently, learners frequently depend on literal translation from their first language when constructing English sentences, which often leads to incorrect tense usage and grammatical inaccuracies. Another important factor contributing to confusion is that both the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses refer to actions connected with the past. The Past Simple is generally used to describe actions that were completed at a definite point in the past, while the Present Perfect is employed to express past actions that have relevance to the present and usually occur without a specific time reference. Because the distinction between these two tenses is subtle, many students struggle to recognize their different functions. As a consequence, they often misuse time expressions, auxiliary verbs, or verb forms, which may reduce the clarity of their communication and create misunderstandings. Due to these ongoing challenges, it is necessary to investigate the nature of students’ errors in greater detail. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to identify and analyze the most common mistakes made by EFL learners in the use of the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses. The research is guided by the following question: *What are the most common errors made by EFL students in the use of the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses?*

**Literature Review.** The literature selected for this review primarily examines grammatical errors made by EFL learners in different educational environments, including secondary schools and higher education institutions. These studies provide a comprehensive perspective on the challenges students face when learning English grammar, particularly verb tenses. Most of the researchers employed methods such as error analysis and classroom observation to identify learners’ difficulties in using English tense forms. The findings of these studies consistently indicate that tense usage remains one of the most problematic aspects of English grammar for foreign language learners. For instance, Ma’mirova (2026) investigated the challenges students encounter



while learning English tense forms and reported that many learners experience difficulty distinguishing between the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses. According to the study, this confusion is mainly caused by structural differences between the Uzbek and English languages in expressing completed actions and references to time. As a result, students frequently rely on direct translation from Uzbek when producing English sentences, which often leads to incorrect tense selection. Furthermore, the researcher emphasizes that learners require more opportunities to practice English in meaningful communicative situations in order to overcome these difficulties and develop greater grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Handayani (2020) explored common tense-related errors in students' writing at Putera Batam University. The findings revealed that many learners struggle to choose the appropriate tense when describing events that occurred in the past. In particular, students often confuse the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses because both are associated with past actions. Consequently, learners may use the Past Simple in contexts where the Present Perfect is required. For example, some students produce sentences such as "I finished my homework already" instead of the grammatically correct form "I have finished my homework." The study also identified frequent errors involving auxiliary verbs, especially the misuse of "have" and "has," which results in incorrect sentence construction and reduced grammatical accuracy.

Likewise, Listia and Febriyanti (2019) examined difficulties in learning English grammar and concluded that tense usage presents considerable challenges due to the large number of rules and exceptions that students must learn. Their research highlights learners' confusion between tense forms that have similar meanings and functions. In addition, students frequently misuse important time expressions such as "already," "yet," "since," "yesterday," and "last year." Since these expressions play a significant role in determining the appropriate tense, misunderstanding their function often results in incorrect tense choice. Moreover, the researchers argue that limited exposure to



English and insufficient opportunities for real-life communication contribute significantly to the persistence of these grammatical difficulties.

**Discussion.** The analysis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that errors related to English tense usage can be classified into several categories. These errors generally occur because students do not fully understand the grammatical structures of English tenses, particularly the formation and use of the Present Perfect and Past Simple. Based on the findings of previous studies, six major categories of errors can be identified. The first category is subject–auxiliary agreement errors. In this type of mistake, learners use the correct tense but fail to ensure agreement between the subject and the auxiliary verb. For example, students may write “She have finished her homework” instead of “She has finished her homework.” Such errors indicate that learners have not yet fully mastered the rules governing subject–verb agreement in English. The second category involves mistakes related to pronouns or subject selection. In these cases, students may use the correct auxiliary and verb form but choose an inappropriate subject pronoun. An example of this error is the sentence “Her have finished the task” instead of “She has finished the task.” This type of mistake suggests confusion regarding the correct use of subject pronouns in English sentence structure.

The third category consists of errors in which the auxiliary verb is used correctly, but the main verb contains an unnecessary ending. For instance, learners may write “She has goes to school” instead of “She has gone to school.” Such errors demonstrate that students sometimes combine Present Simple verb forms with Present Perfect sentence patterns, resulting in grammatically incorrect constructions. Another common category is the incorrect use of auxiliary verbs. In this case, students select an inappropriate auxiliary for the tense they intend to use. For example, a learner may write “I am finished my homework” instead of “I have finished my homework.” This type of error reflects difficulties in distinguishing between different auxiliary verbs and understanding their



grammatical functions within various tense structures. The fifth category includes double-subject errors, where students unnecessarily repeat the subject within the same sentence. An example is "My friend she finished the work yesterday." Such mistakes may be influenced by patterns found in the learners' native language and indicate uncertainty regarding English sentence structure.

The final category involves incomplete sentence constructions. These errors occur when a sentence lacks either a subject or a verb, resulting in an incomplete grammatical structure. For example, the sentence "Finished my homework yesterday" is missing the subject "I," making it incomplete. Errors of this kind demonstrate that some learners have not yet fully acquired the basic requirements of English sentence formation. Overall, the findings suggest that many students' mistakes are caused by an incomplete understanding of tense structures, confusion between the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses, and insufficient knowledge of auxiliary verbs and sentence patterns. These difficulties are further reinforced by interference from the learners' first language and limited opportunities to practice English in authentic contexts. Therefore, teachers should provide more explicit explanations of tense usage, focus on the differences between similar tense forms, and create meaningful communicative activities that encourage students to apply grammatical structures in real-life situations.

In summary, the distinction between the Present Perfect and Past Simple remains a significant challenge for many EFL learners. Although these tenses are essential for effective communication, students often struggle to understand their specific meanings and functions. As a result, they produce various grammatical errors, including incorrect agreement, pronoun misuse, inappropriate auxiliary selection, unnecessary verb endings, double subjects, and incomplete sentence structures. These problems highlight the need for systematic instruction and increased practice opportunities in order to improve learners' grammatical competence.



### **Conclusion**

To conclude, distinguishing between the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses continues to be a major difficulty for many learners of English as a Foreign Language. Although these tenses are fundamental components of everyday English communication, students frequently have trouble understanding their distinct meanings and grammatical functions, which often leads to a variety of errors. The analysis conducted in this study revealed several common mistakes, including problems with subject–auxiliary agreement, incorrect pronoun usage, misuse of auxiliary verbs, unnecessary verb endings, double-subject constructions, and incomplete sentence patterns. These errors are largely the result of limited understanding of English tense rules and the influence of learners' native language structures. The findings of this study have important implications for English language teaching and learning. In particular, teachers should provide clear and systematic instruction on tense usage, emphasize the relationship between grammatical forms and time expressions, and encourage students to practice these structures through communicative activities that reflect real-life language use. Furthermore, learners should be given regular opportunities to compare similar tense forms and receive constructive feedback on their errors. Such approaches can help students develop a deeper understanding of English grammar and improve their ability to use tenses accurately. Ultimately, with sufficient guidance, consistent practice, and strong motivation, EFL learners can overcome difficulties associated with the Present Perfect and Past Simple tenses, thereby enhancing both their grammatical accuracy and overall communicative competence.

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