

Overcoming the Difficulties Confronted by Grade 10 Students in Using Present Perfect Tense: A Study on T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Several English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language learners around the globe confront difficulties in using present perfect tense according to appropriate context. This study was conducted with the aim of overcoming the difficulties encountered by grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka in using present perfect tense. In this study, 30 students in grade 10 were systematically selected for data collection, and quantitative method was used for data collection. A test and a questionnaire were used as research instruments. The test was set focusing on identifying the difficulties faced by the students in using present perfect tense. The questionnaire was designed to gather participants' opinions regarding grammar, tense and present perfect tense. The findings of the test show that 16 participants obtained 1 – 5 marks, 9 participants obtained 6 – 10 marks and 5 participants obtained 11 – 15 marks out of 15 in the test. The findings of the questionnaire show that 18 participants were disinterested in learning English, 21 participants liked to learn grammar than other components like reading, writing, speaking etc., 26 participants encountered difficulties in using tense according to appropriate situation and 27 participant faced challenges in forming and using present perfect tense. And, several factors such as insufficient knowledge of basic grammatical rule, lack of practice, insufficient knowledge of the use of tense and lack of writing and speaking activities regarding the use of Present perfect tense in classroom lead to face difficulties in forming and using present perfect tense. The ability of forming and using present perfect tense according to suitable situation can be improved when more emphasis is given to teach the correct use of tense and Present perfect tense practically, and give a number of reading, writing and speaking practices in classroom.

Index Terms: Appropriate, Confront, Present perfect tense, Teaching grammar, Tense

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has been the significant language around the globe since it is an international language. It is widely spoken as the first language, a second language or a foreign language. In several countries around the world, English language is recognized as the national or official language in every country, which seems the language of law, administration, business, education, media etc. According to Crystal (2006), 1.5 billion people speak English around the world. In this sense, English is learnt and spoken as a second language in Sri Lanka and the current status of English language is link language.

Abeywickrama (2008) says that English language is considered as a highly prestigious language which provides access to all kinds of privileges. As a result, more prominence is given to learning English in Sri Lanka. English is taught from grade 3 to 13 at government schools in Sri Lanka. According to General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) Ordinary Level (O/L) curriculum, English language is a compulsory subject. In a language, there are many sub-components in which grammar seems a significant component to improve the accuracy in both written and oral communication and to overcome the errors made by the speakers. In particular, learning grammar is significant for second/foreign language speakers. With regard to grammar of English language, tense is a vital part in verbal communication which takes part to develop grammatical accuracy (Cakir, 2011).

Nevertheless, the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners confront difficulties in using appropriate tense in their writing and speaking according to the context. It is one of the challenges for a large number of ESL and EFL learners. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, English Language is taught as a second language in educational contexts. English Language seems one of the compulsory subjects and English tense is introduced in the textbook from grade 6, which starts from simple present tense according to the ESL curriculum of Sri Lankan schools. Likewise, present perfect tense has been included in grade 10 textbook. Regarding present perfect tense, when a past action was related to the present, we use the "present perfect tense". Appropriately using present perfect tense in writing and speaking has been a challenge for most of the learners in Sri Lanka. In this sense, many grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka encounter challenges in forming and using present perfect tense appropriately. Although some students are good at constructing correct sentences in present perfect tense, they are unable to use it in their writing according to its usage. Therefore, with the aim of overcoming the challenges and of improving the ability of using present perfect tense according to suitable context, this research was carried out.

1.1 Problem Statement

Tense is a significant element of English grammar to develop the accuracy of verbal communication. Therefore, according to the ESL school curriculum in Sri Lanka, English Tense is included as a major part in the school textbook from grade 6 to 13. However, learning Tense seems challengeable for most of the students, particularly in the use of tense according to appropriate situation. It was observed in classroom teaching that a large number of grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka confronted difficulties in forming and using present perfect tense appropriately. Further, they were not aware of the signal words used in present perfect tense and got confused with simple past tense, past perfect tense and present perfect tense.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To identify the difficulties confronted by the grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka in forming and using present perfect tense
- To explore the reasons that contribute to the difficulties in using present perfect tense
- To furnish appropriate remedies and recommendations to overcome the difficulties in forming and using present perfect tense

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

- A large number of students in grade 10 encounter difficulties in using present perfect tense according to its proper usage in verbal communication.
- Lack of writing and oral practice is the major cause for learners' difficulties in using present perfect tense
- The ability of forming and using present perfect tense can be improved when number of reading, writing and speaking practices are given in classroom.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the grade 10 students of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka to overcome their difficulties in forming and using present perfect tense as well as to improve the ability of using present perfect tense in their writing. Further, this study is significant for the ESL teachers of T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka to implement the necessary remedies and recommendations to facilitate their teaching process. In particular, this study is beneficial for the ESL curriculum designers to bring a practical change in teaching grammar. Also this study is significant for all other ESL/EFL learners, teachers, material designers, test developers, and text book writers around the globe.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

In English language, tense seems a vast area which consists of three tenses and four aspects in each tense, and grade 10 students find difficulties in using each aspect of tense. Identifying a specific problem is challengeable when a vast area is considered for investigation in a research. Therefore, present perfect tense had been focused to identify the difficulties in forming and using present perfect tense. There are over 70 students in grade 10 at T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. However, to limit this study, 30 students were selected as sample population for data collection. There are several primary research instruments for data collection in which two instruments such as test and questionnaire were chosen as the data collection instruments of this study.

1.6 Methodology

This study was carried out with the aim of overcoming the difficulties confronted by grade 10 students in using Present perfect tense appropriately. The setting of this research was T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Mutur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka and the total population

of this study was 75 students in grade 10. Amongst the total population, 30 students were selected as sample population for data collection. With regard to sampling technique, systematic sampling technique was used to draw the sample of the study from the total population. Further, in this study, two instruments namely: test and questionnaire were used to collect the primary data. The data collection methods of this study was quantitative. The test was designed based on reliability and practicability which was used to identify the difficulties and mistakes of the students in forming and using present perfect tense. The test consisted of 15 questions which was distributed among the participants with proper instruction. The questionnaire on the other hand was used to gather opinions among the participants regarding the interest in learning English, learning difficulties and attitude of the participants in learning grammar and tense. It consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. After the data collection process was over, the collected data were analyzed in systematic and descriptive manner by using statistics.

2. RESEARCH ELOBARATION

2.1 Concept of Tense and Present perfect tense in English

Tense is a significant component in English grammar which helps the learners to construct grammatically correct sentence according to time. Numerous ESL and EFL learners confront difficulties in using the tense appropriately. As a result, several research studies were carried out regarding the tense for investigation. As reviewing the previous studies, Lyons (1977) explains that the word of “tense” is derived ultimately from the Latin word “tempus” which means “time”. Similarly, according to Thomson and Martinet (1986), tense can be said to be the mixture of present and past. It always implies a strong connection with the present and it is chiefly used in conversation, letters, newspapers and television and radio report. With regard to the difficulties in using tense, Quirk et al (1975) argue that most students get confused in determining tenses, because before they use verb form they have to understand the relationship between the form of the verb and their concept of time.

In particular, present perfect tense is one of the important aspects in English tense in which a large number of learners encounter challenges and difficulties in using it in both written and oral communication. There are a number of previous studies which were conducted locally and internationally. According to Eastwood (1999), present perfect tense tells us about the past and the present “The aircraft has landed” which means that aircraft is on the ground now (p. 14). Moreover, with regard to present perfect tense, in a similar study, Azar (1989) explains about Present perfect tense that the present perfect expresses the idea that something happened (or never happened) before now at an unspecified time in the past. The exact time it happened is not important.

2.2 Other Relevant Studies

According the review of previous studies, Cowan (2008) points out the problems in learning tense and using it in writing and speaking. He states that use of verb forms is one of the two or three most difficult areas for English language learners to master. Similarly, in another study carried out by Maisari (2011), the findings show that the students confronted difficulties in understanding present perfect tense. As found above, in the current study also, difficulties and problems were observed in using present perfect tense among most of the students. Therefore, use of tense and use of present perfect tense have been a common problem among most of the learners around the globe.

Further, in another similar study, according to Rizka (2017), there are many factors that cause students’ problems in using present perfect tense: they are: a lot of tenses in English, interference First Language (L1), differences between English structure and Indonesian structure, lack of vocabulary mastery, lack of textbook to support learning process, lack of interesting in teaching learning process, lack of motivation, family background and classroom environment. Similarly, the participants of this current study were observed in classroom teaching that several factors such as insufficient basic knowledge of English grammar, lack of practice, disinterest in learning English and get confusing with different aspects of tense. For instance, use of simple past tense instead of using present perfect tense and use of past perfect tense instead of using present perfect tense which contribute to confront the difficulties in using present perfect tense in writing. Further, Buba (2015) states that some grammatical deformities occur in learners’ use of present perfect tense. These mistakes are committed by the non-application of the appropriate rule of present perfect tense. For instance, the “ed” or “en” participle has not been added to the verbal node. Likewise, one of the major difficulty encountered among most of the students was grammatically constructing sentence in present perfect tense. They commit mistakes in using past participle form of irregular verbs. According to the review of previous studies and the problem of the current study, it is obvious that the form and use of present perfect tense has been a crucial problem which has to be investigated to furnish remedies to overcome the problems in present perfect tense.

3. FINDINGS

This part presents the analysis of data which were collected through the test and questionnaire, and the results of the findings of the data analysis. Accordingly, when the findings and results of the test is concerned, the test consisted of 15 questions and 15 marks were allocated for the test. According to the analysis of the test, the findings show that 16 of the participants obtained marks between the

range of 1 – 5, 9 of the participants obtained a range of 6 – 10 while 5 of them scored in between 11 – 15 marks. The following graph shows participants’ test score by percentage.

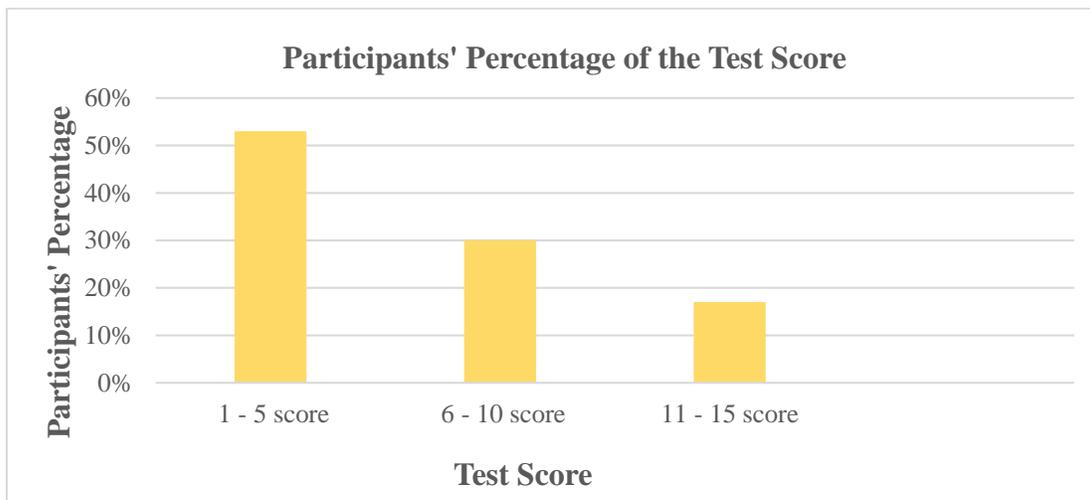


Figure 1

As far as the participants’ performance in the test is concerned, difficulties and mistakes were found in certain significant areas in verb and tense among most of the participants. Regarding basic Subject(S) Verb(V) agreement in sentence, participants made mistakes, for instance: the participants had used “*1She have washed” for “She has washed” and the participants had used “*The students has organized” for “The students have organized”. With regard to forms of verb, the participants did not have proper knowledge of irregular verb and their past participle form, for instance, most of the participants had used “*eated” for “eaten”, “wrote” for “written” “*weared” for “worn” and “saw” for “seen”. Moreover, with regard to the use of signal words in present perfect tense, most of the participants failed to use appropriate signal words like now, already, yet and just according to the context. Likewise, they got confused with the use of present perfect tense and simple past tense, and present perfect tense and past perfect tense.

Further, the questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions which was used to gather opinions among the participants regarding the difficulties faced by the students in using present perfect tense appropriately. According to the findings of the data analysis, 18 of the participants (60%) were not interested in learning English, whereas 12 of the participants (40%) were interested in learning English. Likewise, the participants were asked in the next question that whether they like grammar than other components in English. To which, 21 of the participants (70%) expressed that they like to learn grammar than other components like reading, writing, speaking, etc. whereas 9 of the participants (30%) expressed that they do not like grammar. As far as the use of tense is concerned, the findings show that 26 of the participants (86.5%) encountered difficulties in using tense according to appropriate situation. Just 4 of the participants (13.5%) on the other hand, were able to use each tense according to appropriate situation. Likewise, 27 of the participants (90%) faced difficulties and challenges in forming and using present perfect tense. When the participants who face difficulties in using tense and present perfect tense were asked, they expressed distinct factors and reasons. Therefore, the following table shows the reasons for participants’ disinterest in learning English, interest in learning grammar and difficulties in using appropriate tense, and present perfect tense according to the situation.

	Questionnaire questions	Factors and reasons expressed by the participants for yes/no response
01	Are you interested in learning English?	Reasons for expressing disinterest in learning English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor English learning environment • Lack of basic knowledge in English • Lack of motivation • Negative attitude towards learning English
02	Do you like to learn grammar?	Reasons for preferring grammar to learn than other components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy for learning grammar • Deductive method of teaching grammar • No productivity (unlike writing and speaking)
03	Do you confront difficulties in using tense	Reasons behind the difficulties in using appropriate tense

¹ * symbolizes ungrammatical sentence, clause, phrases, or words

	according to appropriate situation?	according to the situation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient knowledge of basic grammar rule • Lack of practice • Lack of writing and speaking activities in classroom • Insufficient knowledge of the use of tense
04	Are you able to use present perfect tense correctly in writing?	Reasons for facing difficulties in using Present perfect tense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of basic knowledge of grammar rule • Insufficient knowledge of the form and use of Present perfect tense • Lack of writing and speaking activities regarding the use of Present perfect tense in classroom

Table 1

4. CONCLUSION

This study can be concluded that the researcher observed in classroom teaching that several students in grade 10 at the T/Mu/Al Hilal Central College, Muttur, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka face difficulties and make errors in forming and using tense and present perfect tense in their writing. With the aim of overcoming the challenges and difficulties, this study was conducted. Accordingly, the primary data were collected among 30 grade 10 students by using a test and a questionnaire. According to the findings of the analysis of the test, the results show that 16 participants had obtained 1 – 5 marks, 9 participants had obtained 6 – 10 marks and 5 participants had obtained 11 – 15 marks. Moreover, the findings of the questionnaire show that according to the response to the close-ended questions, 18 participants were not interested in learning English, 21 participants liked to learn grammar rather than learning other components like reading, writing, speaking, etc., 26 participants encountered difficulties in using tense according to appropriate situation and 27 participant faced challenges in forming and using present perfect tense. Further, according to participants’ response to open-ended questions, there are several factors and reasons which contributed to the difficulties in forming and using tense and present perfect tense. They are: insufficient knowledge of basic grammatical rule, lack of practice, insufficient knowledge of the form and use of present perfect tense and lack of writing and speaking activities regarding the use of present perfect tense in classroom.

The difficulties and challenges can be overcome and the ability of forming and using present perfect tense according to suitable situation can be improved when the following are implemented in the classroom. They are as follow:

- More emphasis is given to teach the correct use of tense and present perfect tense practically using inductive method.
- A number of grammar practices should be implemented using interesting language games and activities.
- More reading practice should be given.
- More focus should be given to writing and speaking practice in classroom.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Test

1. We _____ wash the dishes. They're all clean now (HELP)
2. The Queen _____ her two-week tour through Australia yesterday. (START)
3. Prices _____ up last year, but they _____ by 8% already this year. (NOT GO, INCREASE)
4. The plane from New York _____. The passengers are getting out. (JUST LAND)
5. Maria _____ her suitcase last night. (PACK)
6. She _____ in London for three years. However, when her mom _____, she _____ to Leeds ((LIVE, DIE, MOVE)
7. My aunt flew to Paris last year. She _____ (never / go) on a plane before that.
8. - My students _____ (raise) some money after they _____ (SEE) a documentary on TV about Africa.
9. We didn't need to queue because my wife _____ (already / buy) the tickets.
10. How many books _____ in the last few years? (HE WRITE)
11. I _____ the car. Now it looks great! (WASH)

12. I don't need any new driving lessons. I _____ the test. (ALREADY PASS)
13. John _____ the homework (YET, NOT, DO)
14. _____ he _____ the project in time? (COMPLETE)
15. The student _____ an English Day Competition (ORGANIZE)

Appendix B: Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed to collect the relevant information about the interest in learning English, participants' attitude towards learning English grammar and tense and challenges in learning English and tense, particularly Present Perfect Tense. Therefore, kindly complete this questionnaire and provide your support to achieve the aim of this study.

1. Are you interested in learning English?

If not, why are you not interested in learning English?

2. Do you like to learn grammar?

If so, why do you like grammar than other components in English?

3. Do you confront difficulties in using tense according to appropriate situation?

If so, what are the reasons behind the difficulties in using tense?

4. Are you able to use the Present Perfect Tense correctly in writing?

If not, why do you face problems in using the Present Perfect Tense?

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