

Teaching the Simple Past Tense through Explicit Instruction and Implicit Instruction

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Abstract: *This study investigated whether there is a statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit instruction and implicit instruction on the students' mastery in the simple past tense. The researcher also tried to find out the constraints of teaching and learning the simple past tense through explicit and implicit instruction. Sixty students from two classes in the second grade of SMPN 6 Metro participated in this study. This study were quantitative and qualitative research. The result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit instruction and implicit instruction on the students' mastery in the simple past tense ($p=0.006 < 0.05$). The constraints were revealed such as, being difficult to understand the questions or material, not knowing the meaning of the language, changing the present to the past form, etc. The researcher suggests that explicit instruction is needed to improve the students' grammar ability.*

Keywords: *simple past tense, explicit, implicit*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini meneliti apakah ada perbedaan yang signifikan secara statistik antara pengaruh pengajaran secara eksplisit dan pengajaran secara implisit terhadap penguasaan *simple past tense* pada siswa. Peneliti juga berusaha untuk mengetahui permasalahan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran melalui pengajaran secara eksplisit dan implisit. Enam puluh siswa dari dua kelas di kelas dua SMPN 6 Metro berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara pengaruh pengajaran secara eksplisit dan pengajaran secara implisit terhadap penguasaan *simple past tense* pada siswa. Masalah telah terungkap seperti kesulitan dalam memahami pertanyaan atau materi pelajaran, tidak mengetahui arti bahasa, mengubah dari bentuk sekarang ke lampau, dan lain-lain. Peneliti menyarankan bahwa pengajaran secara eksplisit dibutuhkan untuk menaikkan kemampuan tata bahasa siswa.

Kata kunci: *simple past tense, eksplisit, implisit*

INTRODUCTION

According to Dykes (2007:44), the term tenses is derived from the Latin word '*tempus*' which means time. In English, the teachers/learners use tense as a method to indicate time. Tense is a part of grammar and it is a system which is used to refer time; past, present, and future. Azar (2003:25) states that the simple past is used to talk about activities or situations that began and ended in the past (e.g., yesterday, last night, two days ago, in 1999).

Tenses can be taught explicitly and implicitly. Implicit and explicit instruction has been part of language teaching since its beginning. According to Ellis (2009:17), explicit instruction requires learners to develop metalinguistic knowledge of the rule "by providing them with a grammatical description of the rule or assisting them to discover the rule for themselves from the data provided". Thus the instructions such as rule explanation, overt error correction, L1/L2 contrast, and metalinguistic rules are considered explicit teaching. In short, it focuses on language forms presentation, explanation of the grammar rules and practice through drilling hold a traditional view of language teaching.

On the other hand, Ellis (2009:16-17) suggests that implicit instruction is directed at enabling

learners to infer rules without awareness. According to Scott (1990:779) as cited by Basoz (2014:378), "an implicit approach suggests that students should be exposed to grammatical structures in a meaningful and comprehensible context in order that they may acquire, as naturally as possible, the grammar of the target language". Ellis (2009:17) suggests that implicit instruction can take the form of task-based teaching where any attention to linguistic form arises naturally out of the way the tasks are performed. In this case, attention to form is primarily reactive in nature. However, it can be also proactive, as when tasks are designed to elicit the use of a specific linguistic target, and performance of the task naturally creates opportunities for experiencing the target feature.

Since junior high school, the students are introduced to some genres of texts such as description, recount, narrative, and news item. Lin (2006:226) in Genre Based Approach, teaching and learning focuses on the understanding and production of selected genres of texts. Today, to many teachers in Indonesia, teaching genre to their students is quite frightening. They focus more on teaching how to make written or oral texts and the function of the text related to daily life. In fact, they rarely ask them to understand the grammatical features needed in writing the text. Students

did not aware the rule of tenses in the text that they learn. In other words, tenses are taught implicitly but they are integrated with teaching many kinds of text. It might cause the students lack of grammar knowledge which can be seen from the accuracy of sentences they produce. Hence, they can not produce a good text.

While some may underestimate the importance of grammar in the teaching practices; others put grammar in the forefront of the language teaching. Students also believe that in order to master a language, it is necessary to study grammar. Zeng (2004) as cited by Sopin (2015:69) found that learners valued grammatical instruction as a tool for communicating in an acceptable way, and especially for writing. However, what is happening now is that most students find that learning grammar is difficult and boring because when they learn grammar, they have to face many tenses and complicated rules. Thus, which one is the best way to teach grammar?

Furthermore, based on the preliminary observation held in SMPN 6 Metro, the students still faced difficulties in learning the simple past tense whether in writing text or sentences. When they were asked to change verbs or to be from the simple present tense to the simple past tense in some recount texts, they still did many errors. Most students changed from simple present tense to present continuous tense. It indicates

that they are still lack of grammatical knowledge, such the use of verb and to be. So that this study tried to compare explicit instruction and implicit instruction to improve students' mastery in the simple past tense.

Previous studies emphasized explicit instruction while others tended to implicit instruction. Eliasi, Salehi, and Borji (2013:476) found that there were few grammatical structures that learners knew implicitly and didn't have any awareness of their rules. For EFL teachers, the study offers that providing learners with explicit grammar rules can contribute to successful foreign language learning. Soleimani, Jahangiri, and Gohar (2015:257) showed no difference between EI and II in promoting second language implicit knowledge.

Nahavandi & Mukundan (2013:92) showed that additional or alternative instruction TE+ rule presentation is more beneficial in triggering learners' intake of the target form. Nazari (2012:156) supported the arguments regarding the importance of metalinguistic awareness in language learning. Nazari (2014:121) found that implicit tasks were beneficial in terms of allowing learners to autonomously make improvements in terms of grammatical accuracy in their writings.

Thus, this study was aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any increase in the students' mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through explicit instruction?
2. Is there any increase in the students' mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through implicit instruction?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit and implicit instructions on the students' mastery in the simple past tense?
4. What are the constraints of teaching and learning the simple past tense through explicit and implicit instruction?

METHOD

This research investigated the students' achievement in the simple past tense as quantitative research and applied pretest posttest and true experimental design. The qualitative research used interview to know students' constraints after being taught through explicit and implicit instruction.

The research was conducted at SMPN 6 Metro for about two months, from January to February 2017. It was held in the second semester. The population of this research was the second grade students. The researcher took two classes as the sample of the research randomly using lottery as experimental Class 1 (explicit instruction) and experimental Class 2 (implicit instruction). In addition,

one class was assigned as try-out class.

The researcher administered try out test before the pretest. The treatments in both classes were held in three meetings. After that, the posttest was done. The interview was also conducted after the posttest.

Triangulation strategy in collecting the data which employs more than one data collecting technique was used. This research employed two types of instruments including test and interview. There were pretest and posttest. The researcher used multiple choice test and making a simple paragraph test. The items of the interview developed from the theory of perception, explicit instruction, implicit instruction, TBLT, and GTM. The theory of perception taken from Kara (2009) as cited by Abidin, Mohammadi, and Alzwari (2012:121) states that attitude concept can be viewed from these three dimensions i.e., behavioral, cognitive and affective.

The results of the grammar test on both classes were analysed using paired sample t-test and independent group t-test. The interview data were analyzed descriptively after the researcher transcribed and grouped the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding to the first research question, the researcher found that there was a significant increase in the

students' mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through explicit instruction. Table 1 showed

what they have learnt before. The grammar exercise (Activity 3) and exam (Post Activity) practiced the

Table 1. Increase of the Students' Achievement in Experimental Class 1 (Explicit Instruction)

Paired Samples Test										
		Paired Differences								
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	2.43	9.134	1.640	27.70	21.00	14.845	30	.000	

the increase of the students' achievement in experimental Class 1 using paired sample t-test.

students' knowledge in the simple past tense. They helped the students familiar with grammar practices.

Based on Table 1, the *p-value* was 0.00. It was lower than 0.05 ($0.00 < 0.05$). So that, H_1 was accepted. It could be concluded that there was a significance increase in the students' mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through explicit instruction.

At last, it was clear that explicit instruction increased the students' mastery in the simple past tense. It was in line with the research conducted by Eliasi, Salehi, and Borji (2013:476) which found that providing learners with explicit grammar rules could contribute to successful foreign language learning.

In Activity 1, the teacher used mother tongue in presenting the material. It helped students understand the material easier. This rule explanation improved students' knowledge and understanding in grammar. Thus, it was in line with Ling (2015:557) that the students will keep clear when studying the grammar concepts. In Activity 2, the teacher gave some examples of the sentences with incorrect tenses on the white board. Then, the students were asked to analyze whether they were wrong or right. This activity made the students to think deeply

For the second research question, the researcher found that there was a significant increase in the students' mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through implicit instruction.

The *p-value* was 0.00 as can be seen in Table 3. It was lower than 0.05 ($0.00 < 0.05$). So that, H_1 was accepted. It could be concluded that there was a significant increase in the mastery of the simple past tense after being taught through implicit instruction.

Table 2. Increase of the Students' Achievement in Experimental Class 2 (Implicit Instruction)

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	1.38	11.998	2.154	18.20	9.40	6.40	30	.000

In the experimental Class 2 (implicit instruction), the students learned and acquired the language from the input in the pre task. Teacher's story of her past experience gave the input. The teacher told her story communicatively so that the students could enjoy the process. Then, the teacher asked the students' about their past activities or experiences. As a result, the students comprehended more since it was used communicatively.

In Task 1, the students wrote their past activities or experiences as a framework. The teacher always reminded the students that it was past not present activities. Later, they rewrote their writing in the form of letter or diary. By repeating this activity in every meeting, the students could improve their grammar ability. In Task 2 and 3, the students did a pair work. They did dialogue in pairs. Then, they did dialogue again with another pair. They talked about their past activities or experiences based on the result of

Task 1. In effect, these tasks improved their knowledge and use of the simple past tense in communicative tasks. then, the students also did group work in task 4. By sharing each other, they could improve their knowledge in the simple past tense.

The exam in the Post Task made the students understand more about the tenses that they learn implicitly. In effect, their posttest scores increased. Their grammatical errors in writing essay test also decreased. It was in line with what Suntharesan (2013:611) explains that there is restriction on the use of grammatical terms of which students are generally "allergic" and the approach appropriately guides students to correct errors. Eventually, this finding showed that implicit instruction using tasks improved students' mastery in grammar. It supported the research conducted by Nazari (2014:121) which found that implicit tasks improved students' writing in terms of grammatical accuracy.

Regarding to the third research question, the researcher found that there was a statistically significant difference between the effect of

Nevertheless, in implicit grammar teaching, Ellis et al. (2009:3) states that learners cannot verbalize what they have learned because learners

Table 3. Difference of Students' Mastery in the Simple Past Tense after Treatment

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	10.480	.002	2.854	60	.006	7.19355	2.52063	2.15153	12.23556
	Equal variances not assumed			2.854	52.053	.006	7.19355	2.52063	2.13565	12.25145

explicit instruction and implicit instruction on the students' mastery in the simple past tense as can be seen in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, *p-value* was 0.006. It showed that $p < \alpha$ ($0.006 < 0.05$). It could be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit instruction and implicit instruction on the students' mastery in the simple past tense.

In explicit instruction, the students were taught the simple past tense explicitly while in implicit instruction, the students did not have it. The students' practice in grammar worked better than implicit tasks. Thus, the students comprehend more about the rule if the rule was taught explicitly. It was in line with what Ling (2015:557) states that explicit grammar teaching can make students more profoundly understand the grammatical items, and it has a strong system.

remain unaware of the learning that has taken place. So that, not all students realized what rule of tenses they used because not all students had background knowledge in the simple past tense. Moreover, Ellis (2003:9) mentions that a task involves primary focus on meaning. They did not emphasized the rules they studied.

The outcome of this study supports what Frantzen (1995) as cited by Rajabi and Dezhkam (2014:72) investigated about explicit grammar teaching improved grammatical knowledge, accuracy and fluency of writing which accuracy are concerned in present research as measured by a discrete-point grammar test (multiple choice test) and free composition (essay test) before and after the treatment. In addition, Ellis (2008) as cited by Rajabi and Dezhkam (2014:62) states that learners could get higher grades on the tests of explicit knowledge by using certain grammatical rules.

The last question was the students' constraints in teaching and learning the simple past tense through explicit and implicit instruction. Students' constraints were the problems that made the students unhappy, difficult, passive, and uninterested as shown below.

Table 5. Students' Constraints on Explicit Instruction

No.	Opinion	Percentage (%)
(The reasons for not being happy)		
1	Being uninterested to be asked by the teacher	4
2	Being difficult to understand the questions/material	21.32
3	Feeling bored	8
4	Avoiding to pay attention to the lesson	8
(The reasons for being difficult)		
1	Being difficult to understand the questions/material	13.32
2	Not knowing the meaning of the language	12
3	Changing the present to the past form	14.66
4	Being difficult to understand the rule	13.32
(The reasons for being passive)		
1	Not being able to answer the questions	2.66
2	Being difficult to understand the questions/material	7.98
3	Not knowing the meaning of the language	1.34
4	Not paying attention	1.34
5	Being prefer to cheat	4
(The reasons for not being interested)		
1	Being difficult to understand the questions/material	10.68

Table 6. Students' Constraints on Implicit Instruction

No.	Opinion	Percentage (%)
(The reasons for not being happy)		
1	Feeling afraid to do some mistakes	12
2	Feeling too many tasks	16
3	Feeling bored	1.34
4	Not knowing the meaning of the language/sentences	10.66
5	Not knowing how to pronounce the words	10.66
6	Not being liked to speak	2.66
(The reasons for not being happy)		
1	Feeling afraid to do some mistakes	12
2	Feeling too many tasks	16
3	Feeling bored	1.34
4	Not knowing the meaning of the language/sentences	10.66
5	Not knowing how to pronounce the words	10.66
6	Not being liked to speak	2.66
(The reasons for being difficult)		
1	Not knowing the meaning of the language/sentences	32.02
2	Having limited vocabulary	8
3	Confusing to change from the present to the past form	12
4	Not knowing how to pronounce the words	9.34
5	Having bad pair/partner in English	5.32
(The reasons for being passive)		
1	Avoiding to pay attention	8
2	Not understanding the questions / material	6.68
3	Little talking in the dialogue / discussion	14.68
4	Not liking to speak English	10.68
5	Not needing to do exam	9.34
(The reasons for not being interested)		
1	Avoiding to pay attention	1.34
2	Being tired of too many tasks	17.34

No.	Opinion	Percentage (%)
3	Being afraid of doing mistakes	2.68
4	Not knowing the meaning of the words	1.34

Some students still had some constraints in most of activities. Some constraints were found during the teaching and learning process. It was in line with Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011:74) that there were difficulties faced by teachers as well as students with regard to grammar instruction in an EFL context. Moreover, the constraints in explicit and implicit instruction were also found in Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011), Burgess and Etherington (2002), and Baleghizadeh and Farshchi (2009) as cited by Kacani and Mangelli (2013:151) that the learners had difficulty in internalizing grammar rules though they valued positively both the use; of formal instruction (explicit instruction) and natural exposure to language through authentic materials (implicit instruction). It means that the students faced difficulties in teaching and learning the simple past tense.

CONCLUSION

The students' mastery of the simple past tense in experimental Class 1 and experimental Class 2 increased. There was a statistically significant difference between the effect of explicit instruction and implicit instruction on the students' mastery in the simple past tense. The constraints were revealed such as,

being difficult to understand the questions or material, not knowing the meaning of the language, changing the present to the past form, etc. Explicit instruction is needed to improve the students' grammar ability. The teacher should consider the constraints in teaching and learning the simple past tense so that the success of the teaching grammar can be achieved.

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