

VERB TENSES REVISITED: INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND TASK-BASED LEARNING IN GRAMMAR TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper explores innovative methods for teaching verb tenses to primary and lower secondary school students by integrating technology and task-based language teaching (TBLT) approaches. Traditional grammar instruction often fails to engage young learners or promote long-term retention. By combining interactive digital tools with meaningful, context-driven tasks, students develop a deeper understanding of tense usage in real-life communication. The study draws on recent pedagogical research and classroom-based practices to demonstrate how technology-enhanced TBL fosters active learning, motivation, and grammatical accuracy. Findings suggest that this integrated approach significantly improves both student engagement and mastery of verb tenses in primary and lower secondary grammar teaching and learning.

Keywords: *verb tenses; PPP approach; TBLT approach; technology; interactive activities; student-centred learning;*

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Introduction

Teaching grammar at primary and lower secondary level presents significant challenges, as learners often have limited awareness of grammar in their first language. Variations in learning styles and emotional factors further complicate the acquisition of tenses, which cannot be secured through method variation alone. Particular difficulties arise with the multiple forms of expressing the future, the complexities of the present perfect simple, and the memorization of irregular past tense forms. Effective mastery of tenses requires sustained practice, while modern technology can support learning when applied in a structured manner.

Theoretical Perspectives on Teaching Verb Tenses

A clear distinction must be made between ‘tense’ and ‘time.’ ‘Time’ is an extralinguistic concept that exists independently of language, whereas ‘tense’ is a linguistic category that marks the verb to indicate the temporal relationship between an event and an orientation point, typically the moment of speaking, or another temporally related reference point. Time is “a universal, non-linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present and future; by tense we understand the correspondence between the form of a verb and our concept of time” (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973:40). Lock (2008:165) states that “it is hard to establish the meanings and usages of the tenses with rules, explanations, and isolated examples, and learners are unlikely to get a feel for how combinations of tenses work together to express time relations in different kinds of contexts.”

Considering Thornbury’s view (1999:2) “grammar is conventionally seen as the study of the syntax and morphology of sentences. Put another way, it is the study of linguistic chains and slots. That is, it is the study both of the way words are chained together in a particular order, and also of what kinds of words can slot into any one link in the chain”. Furthermore, he implies that “grammar is a process for making a speaker’s or writer’s meaning clear when contextual information is lacking” (Thornbury, 1999: 4). For instance, the Present Perfect tense represents a particular challenge for Romanian learners, as it has no direct equivalent in Romanian grammar. Moreover, the variety of ways to express future in English increases grammatical complexity. English also emphasizes aspect, particularly the duration and continuation of actions, which contrasts with Romanian, where the temporal reference is usually conveyed solely through the verb. In English, time adverbials are often essential both for correct tense usage and for accurately identifying tenses in speech and writing. In the Romanian lower secondary English curriculum, verb tenses are systematically revisited each year, reinforcing and expanding upon previously learned structures. This approach ensures that students not only recall but also deepen their understanding and application of English tenses over time.

In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (Celce-Murcia, 2001), the author outlines some key principles for effective grammar instruction: teaching should be systematic and goal-oriented, yet flexible enough to accommodate learners at varying proficiency levels; strategic use of the learners' first language may be appropriate, especially for beginners; instruction is most effective when delivered in small, frequent doses with repeated exposure; text-based and problem-solving activities can foster active grammatical understanding; corrective feedback and elicitation enhance learners' control over grammar; and grammar instruction should be integrated into meaningful, communicative tasks to provide immediate practice opportunities. Furthermore, Thornbury (1999) identifies key features of effective grammar rules for learners: they should be accurate and reflect linguistic reality (truth), define their full range of use (limitation), be presented clearly and in accessible language (clarity), maintain simplicity while balancing accuracy (simplicity), build on familiar concepts (familiarity), and relate to learners' native language where appropriate (relevance). The same author outlines key principles for effective grammar instruction, emphasizing that grammar should be taught within meaningful contexts ('context'), reinforced through ample practice ('use'), explained concisely without sacrificing comprehension ('economy'), focused on unfamiliar material ('relevance'), supported by conditions that facilitate learning ('nurture'), and tailored to learners' levels, interests, and needs ('appropriacy').

Grammar is essential to successful language learning, and EFL teachers continually seek to refine their methods for more effective instruction. While learners often prefer quick and easy acquisition, mastery of a foreign language is not possible without attention to grammar. Various approaches to teaching grammar have both strengths and limitations. Modern pedagogy often favours inductive methods, while traditional instruction tends to rely on deductive approaches. In the deductive approach, teachers explicitly present grammatical rules with examples before learners practice and generate their own. This method offers efficiency, allowing more time for practice and personalization, and is particularly effective with older learners who can engage through questions. However, it may be less suitable for younger learners, who may struggle with grammatical terminology and benefit less from teacher-centred explanations, which also reduce student speaking opportunities. By contrast, the inductive approach engages learners in examining examples to infer underlying rules, requiring active participation. This method fosters learner autonomy, increases student talking time, and encourages language practice. However, it can be time-consuming, risks misconceptions without guidance, and may frustrate learners who prefer explicit instruction. In addition, teachers must carefully plan step-by-step activities to ensure effective discovery-based learning. Consequently, it is difficult to determine which approach is more effective. Teachers should select methods based on the language structure being taught, as well as learners' proficiency levels and preferred learning styles. Nixon and Tomlinson (2003:8) state that "young children cannot be expected to understand isolated grammatical terms and

concepts, but rather learn linguistic structures unconsciously through practising them with a meaningful context.” The purpose is to help children learn in a fun way, reproducing structures instinctively.

The Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP) approach is a widely used model in language teaching that provides a structured framework for introducing new language items. The presentation stage of the lesson is the stage when a new language item or grammar structure is introduced to the learners. Its aim is to match a language form (such as the Present Simple) with a meaning (for example, repeated actions). Therefore, the examples that are used should be meaningful to the students, using visual aids, mime or gestures, contextualized in a text or in a situation. Thornbury (2006: 178) explains that in a presentation “a situation is established, e.g. using board drawings, which generates a number of examples of the target structure” in order “to ensure that the learners can detect the key features of the rule or pattern that is being taught.” Grammar presentations should include means of assessing learner understanding, which may involve eliciting rule statements, generating additional examples, personalizing the target structure, asking concept-checking questions, or translating examples into the learners’ first language. Presenting grammatical items is the first stage when students learn how to put words in their right order and how to master the grammar structures in order to use them properly. A good presentation has certain features that make it successful: it should be clear, efficient, lively and interesting, appropriate, and productive (Harmer, 2007).

According to Scrivener, students “need to have exposure to the language; they need to notice and understand items being used; they need to try using language themselves in ‘safe’ practice ways and in more demanding contexts; they need to remember the things they have learnt” (Scrivener, 2005: 253). Therefore, learners should engage with authentic materials that present realistic language input to develop language skills. The materials should be appropriately challenging, neither too difficult nor too easy, to maintain interest. Teachers are encouraged to use the target language consistently, supporting comprehension with visual aids, realia, or gestures when necessary. Although initially challenging, consistent exposure to the target language enhances understanding and long-term language acquisition. To promote awareness of language structures, teachers must provide texts that highlight specific target items, allowing learners to notice and understand their use. Thus, students practise the items either through controlled repetition or in varied communicative contexts, reinforcing both new and previously learned language. Incorporating exercises, games, and other engaging activities can further support learners’ attention to form. Consequently, revision and repeated use are necessary to consolidate learning, particularly for young learners, ensuring that new structures are retained and integrated into active language use. Opportunities for meaningful communication in realistic and supportive classroom settings are crucial, as knowing grammatical rules or being able to complete exercises

does not necessarily translate into the ability to use the language fluently. Practice in language learning can be categorized by the degree of control over language use. Controlled or restricted practice involves repeated use of the target language with limited choice, focusing on accuracy, for instance, learners repeat teacher-modelled sentences such as ‘John gets up at 7:00’ before practising them in pairs. Gap-fill activities are often used for restricted practice or for focusing on a specific language point, e.g. ‘John ... to the park yesterday.’ Freer practice allows learners greater autonomy in language production, enabling them to use the target forms in more personalized contexts, such as discussing their daily routines with peers. Production activities encourage creativity and communicative use of language. At this stage, learners integrate the new structure into meaningful contexts such as discussions, role plays, or problem-solving tasks demonstrating their ability to use the language accurately and fluently.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a learner-centred approach that encourages students to explore, experiment, and discover through meaningful use of the language. Learning is most effective when learners are cognitively engaged and actively participate in the process. Unlike exercises, which focus on accurate reproduction of knowledge, tasks create opportunities for functional language use, experimentation, and learning from mistakes, emphasizing collaboration between teachers and students. It can be defined as “an approach to language education in which students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning exchange and to use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes” (Van Der Branden, 2006: 1). Van Der Branden further explains the meaning of a task: “tasks are activities (‘things people do’) and that these activities are goal-directed. [...] even though the goal that the learner aims to achieve need not be linguistic (e.g. painting a fence), the task necessitates language use for its performance. In other words, painting a fence becomes a language task if it cannot be performed without some use of language (e.g. understanding instructions given by a partner, reading the instructions on the paint pot)” (Van Der Branden, 2006: 3). In TBLT, students use language to achieve specific goals in authentic or real-life contexts. Classroom tasks should foster meaningful communication that reflects real-life situations learners may encounter outside the classroom. This approach increases motivation, promotes learner autonomy, and helps students develop effective learning strategies. Setting clear objectives enables students to plan their actions and understand expectations, while working collaboratively makes tasks more engaging and rewarding. As learners complete tasks, they interact, communicate, and convey meaning, supporting language acquisition. This process also gives them opportunities to monitor their understanding and correct emerging errors. The emphasis is on active learner participation, with students using the target language together to achieve task objectives. Task-based teaching is particularly well-suited for multilevel classrooms. However, because of its complexity and the integration of diverse language

skills, teachers should address both vocabulary and grammar instruction before fully engaging students in task-based activities.

Using Technology and Games to Teach English Grammar Tenses

Barron et.al. (2001) emphasise the advantages of integrating technology in education, noting that it promotes active and collaborative learning while fostering critical thinking. Additionally, technology supports diverse learning styles, enhances individual growth and motivation, strengthens teacher-student interactions, improves communication skills, and facilitates the development of cross-cultural understanding. Integrating technology into teaching enhances the educational process by bridging students' personal and academic lives. As 'digital natives' (Dudeney and Hockly 2007) learners expect modern technologies to be part of their education, and the widespread availability of internet access provides both teachers and students with valuable authentic materials and practice opportunities that cannot be ignored. Beyond supporting learning and practice, technology enables innovative approaches to assessing language skills and fosters collaboration, including interactions across geographical boundaries. It also grants educators access to published materials, e-books, online conferences, and workshops, which are essential for continuous professional development. The increasing mobility of technological devices further allows learning to extend beyond the classroom, while the diverse range of ICT tools enhances the practice of English as a foreign language.

Games serve as valuable educational activities that extend beyond teaching specific language structures. They play a vital role in children's development, offering opportunities to reinforce existing knowledge and acquire new skills. Through games, learners develop communication, patience, and decision-making abilities, while also recognizing the impact of their actions on others. Moreover, games provide an effective means of fostering communicative activities, enabling learners to exchange information and engage meaningfully with peers. In Hadfield's view (1990:5) "games provide as much concentrated practice as a traditional drill and more importantly, they provide an opportunity for real communication, albeit within artificially defined limits, and thus constitute a bridge between classroom and the real word." A key advantage of games is their inherent element of enjoyment, which, combined with the competitive goal of winning, makes them highly engaging and motivating. These features make games particularly valuable in the classroom, where they serve as effective tools for motivating learners to engage in activities that might otherwise be considered monotonous or uninteresting.

Hadfield (1999) categorizes language learning games into several types. Guessing games require one player to hold a piece of information that others must deduce, such as a word, picture, or object. Search games engage the whole class, with each student holding different information

that must be exchanged to complete a task (e.g., Find someone who...). Matching games involve pairing items, while matching-up games require students to negotiate and reach agreement through conversation. In collecting games, learners gather items, such as cards, to complete sets. Combining activities emphasize integrating information, and arranging or ordering games involve gathering information and placing items in a logical sequence.

Using games in the classroom has proven to be a useful way of turning a teacher-centred class into a student-centred one. Games give the learners an opportunity to participate in activities otherwise perceived as boring, and allow them to enjoy the experience of learning. By winning points, they not only engage in competing with their peers but also with themselves, since learning by playing helps them improve their language skills. Also, a task can become considerably much more enjoyable if introduced as a game instead of a homework assignment.

Games can facilitate the learning process for both students and teachers, making them highly adaptable and easy to integrate into classroom instruction. Incorporating game-based activities into English language teaching and learning can be highly effective, as such activities provide meaningful opportunities to practise grammar rules that might otherwise appear too complex to grasp and internalize. In the context of teaching grammar to young learners and lower secondary students, games provide interactive opportunities to practice language structures in a meaningful and engaging way, reinforce correct usage through immediate feedback, and sustain motivation, while accommodating different learning styles and promoting active participation. Monotonous tasks, such as reading sentences and completing gap-fill exercises in notebooks can be transformed into an engaging experience, where learners type in responses rapidly and receive immediate feedback through a point-based system that rewards accuracy.

A key advantage of digital games is that learners receive instant feedback and can attempt tasks repeatedly without the fear of peer judgment. Time pressure often serves as a motivating factor, though repeated failure may cause frustration. Nonetheless, completing tasks in a dynamic and interactive format generally enhances engagement and sustains learners' interest. According to Wright et al. (2006), when introducing a new game, teachers should begin by explaining the rules and providing a demonstration either themselves or with the help of a few students. Next, one group can try the game in front of the class to model how it works. To support students, it is helpful to write the instructions and key language on the board. Once students have practiced, this support can be gradually removed. The game can then continue, with the teacher monitoring and guiding students' activity to ensure effective learning.

Online video platforms such as YouTube provide valuable resources for revising grammar. With just a computer and projector, teachers can engage the entire class without the need for extra materials or group organization. For instance, in guessing games, only part of an image is

displayed, and students are asked to guess what is happening. This type of activity makes grammar practice enjoyable while focusing on specific tenses, such as the present continuous, past simple, past continuous, past perfect etc.

Numerous online platforms offer free resources and interactive games that support language development. These tools can be easily integrated into classroom practice to introduce or reinforce grammatical structures. For instance, when teaching or revising verb tenses, learners may complete multiple-choice tasks, jumbled-word exercises, and gap-filling activities that promote both accuracy and fluency. While drilling exercises remain important, students may find them monotonous and struggle with motivation. In such situations, digital games provide effective, engaging practice and support learner autonomy beyond the classroom. These tasks foster control and engagement as learners actively manipulate items on the screen. Many games also provide audio support, allowing children to hear and practice correct pronunciation before completing the matching activity.

The ESL Games Plus website (<https://www.eslgamesplus.com>) offers a range of interactive activities designed to support the practice of verb tenses, making it a valuable resource for classroom instruction. Teachers can integrate these games into lessons to provide engaging, student-centred practice, either as a whole-class activity using a projector or in small groups with individual devices. The interactive format allows learners to receive immediate feedback, reinforces correct tense usage, and promotes active participation, helping to maintain motivation while consolidating grammar knowledge in a dynamic and enjoyable way. 'ESL War Game' can be used to practise different verb tenses in English present simple tense, present progressive tense, past simple tense, past progressive tense, present perfect tense and future tenses. 'Monkey Pirate Game' - Irregular Past Tense is a game in which players accompany a pirate monkey on a treasure-seeking quest while encountering irregular verbs in the past tense. Learners select the correct verb forms from multiple-choice options, combining engaging visuals and interactive gameplay with grammar practice. 'Car Racing Game' - Action Verbs with Present Progressive Tenses is a game that provides an engaging way for students to practise action verbs in the present progressive tense. Learners match verbs such as 'running', 'jumping', and 'swimming' with corresponding sentences, receiving immediate feedback and reinforcement. Its interactive, fast-paced format and colourful graphics make it an effective tool for motivating students and supporting grammar learning in the classroom. 'Tic-Tac-Toe' (<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/fun-esl-games-group-activities>) is a collaborative classroom game designed to reinforce knowledge of parts of speech or specific grammar points. The teacher draws a standard tic-tac-toe grid on the board and fills each square with an item to practice, such as verbs in the infinitive form for present tense conjugation. Students are divided into two teams, and each team selects a square, working together to provide the correct grammatical form. If the answer is correct, the team claims the

square; if not, they lose their turn. The game continues until one team completes a tic-tac-toe, promoting both teamwork and active engagement with grammar practice. ‘Conjugation Pyramid’ (<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/fun-esl-games-group-activities>) is a competitive classroom activity designed to reinforce verb conjugations. The teacher draws a pyramid divided into blocks on the board, with each block representing a round. Students are given a verb and a person (e.g., first person singular) and must correctly conjugate the verb, either in a specific tense or across an entire verb chart. Teams earn a block for each correct response, and the first team to complete their pyramid wins. This game promotes rapid recall, accuracy, and active engagement with verb forms. ‘Hot Potato’ (<https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/fun-esl-games-group-activities>) is a fast-paced classroom game designed to encourage quick thinking and practice of grammar points. Using a foam or inflatable ball, students pass the ball around in a circle, and each participant must produce a word or phrase that meets a given grammatical criterion before passing it on. For example, when practicing the present tense, students might each say a verb in the first-person singular form, such as ‘I run’ or ‘I dance.’ The game can be adapted for various grammar topics, with the time allowed for responses adjusted to suit difficulty, promoting both accuracy and fluency in an engaging, interactive format.

The British Council’s Learn English Kids platform (<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org>) offers a comprehensive selection of interactive activities designed to reinforce English verb tenses such as: matching exercises: pair verbs with correct tense forms or sentence completions; multiple-choice quizzes: select the correct verb form to complete a sentence; fill-in-the-blank activities: complete sentences by typing in the correct verb tense, drag-and-drop tasks: move verbs or words into the correct position in a sentence. These resources encompass a variety of engaging games, printable worksheets, and instructional materials that cover a wide range of tenses, including the present simple, present continuous, past simple, present perfect, and future forms. Each activity is crafted to provide clear explanations, contextual examples, and opportunities for practice, catering to different learning styles and proficiency levels. The interactive nature of these exercises aims to enhance students’ understanding and retention of grammatical structures in an enjoyable and accessible manner. Grammar chants are rhythmic and repetitive songs designed to help young learners internalize grammatical structures in an engaging and memorable way. On the Learn English Kids platform by the British Council, these chants focus on various grammar topics, including verb tenses. For example, the chant ‘Did you go to Dela's party?’ reinforces the use of the past simple tense through a catchy melody and repetitive lyrics. Similarly, ‘At nine o'clock on Monday’ helps students practice prepositions of time and ‘I was at the seaside’ focuses on the past simple tense of the verb ‘to be’, aiding in the understanding of past states and situations. Accompanied by interactive games and printable materials, these chants offer a comprehensive method for practising grammar,

effectively engaging students through active listening, participation, and the integration of music and movement.

Kahoot (<https://kahoot.com>) is a free online application that enables both teachers and students to create or access sets of questions for learning and practice. Simple to use, it can be implemented in class with individual devices or in small groups when resources are limited. Beyond classroom use, Kahoot also supports self-paced study, allowing learners to test their knowledge, monitor progress, and reinforce learning in an engaging way. It can be effectively used in teaching English grammar tenses at primary and lower secondary levels. The platform not only introduces or consolidates tense structures in an interactive way but also allows students to test their knowledge, receive immediate feedback, and track their progress. Teachers can create customized quizzes targeting specific tense structures, such as multiple-choice items on verb conjugation, sentence-completion tasks, or error-identification exercises. Learners participate individually or in groups, depending on device availability, and benefit from the interactive format, which provides immediate feedback, reinforces correct usage, and supports ongoing progress monitoring. The competitive element of Kahoot, combined with time-limited responses, often increases learners' motivation by making tense practice more dynamic and engaging. While some students may feel pressured by the countdown, most respond positively to the challenge, which encourages faster recall of grammatical forms and sustained attention throughout the activity. Hangman can be used to help children revise and practice the past simple form of irregular verbs by completing sentences through word guessing and typing. Similarly, it can be applied to the present continuous tense, where learners guess the correct verb forms to describe ongoing actions, such as "She ____ (read) a book." It is also effective for future simple practice, allowing students to complete sentences about upcoming events, for example, "Tomorrow, we ____ (visit) the museum," reinforcing both tense forms and spelling in an engaging way.

Quizlet (<https://quizlet.com>) engages foreign language students with interactive study material, learning activities and games. It is an effective online learning resource that may be integrated in practising vocabulary. Quizlet provides its users with free learning tools and flashcards. It allows memorising and embedding words and phrases; identifying sound spelling links; rehearsing, recording, and editing spoken work digitally. As a result, it improves learners' pronunciation, and it also boosts students' confidence in the use of the target language.

Conclusion

Learners often face challenges when acquiring and using English verb tenses. These structures become much more accessible when taught in an engaging and clear way. Approaches that provide clear explanations, meaningful examples, and opportunities for contextualized

practice help learners process the material. Teaching English verb tenses effectively requires thoughtful, learner-centred strategies. Using modern tools, such as technology and task-based learning, gives learners real opportunities to experiment with language. They receive instant feedback and develop fluency and accuracy. Contextual, interactive grammar instruction, supported by technology, helps learners internalize verb tenses. This enables confident use of grammar in real-life communication and connects knowledge with practical language use.

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