

# The First Semester Students' Mastery on Gt/F, Ra and Sc Uses of Simple Present Tense

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This study aims to find out whether or not the students have mastered simple present tense, types of problems they face and their level of mastery in learning the uses of simple present tense. To analyze the data, we revised the students' answers, gave scores, and categorized their scores. To give them scores, we counted the total number of the right answers divided with the total number of the whole items times 100%. Then, to know their average score, we counted their scores divided with the total number of the students times 100%. Finally, to categorize their scores, we applied the standard score of mastery level ranging from 0-100 as used in Timor University Academic Regulation. The results of data analysis show that they have mastered the uses of simple present tense. The data shows that the students' average score is 84. Then, they still found difficulty in mastering the use of general truth of fact indicated by 112 (or 28%) right answers and 46 (or 11.50%) wrong answers. Finally, their level of mastery is categorized very good because 16 of 20 students have scores ranged from 80-100 while 4 students are good. Therefore, it is suggested that the teachers pay more attention to teaching about the uses of simple present tense using attractive and innovative ways that can motivate to participate in learning simple present tense.

**Keywords:** *Students, mastery, learning, simple present tense*

## 1. Introduction

Learning English tenses means learning the change of verb due to the context it attaches. To learn it understandably, students have to know its form tied with subject. If a subject is singular, a verb is also singular. But if the subject is plural, the verb is of course plural. For example: “I need a pen”. The subject “I” agrees with the verb ‘need’. It is then understood that it a simple present tense. Other example: Siti needs money’. In this example, the subject ‘Siti’ is the third singular person’; therefore, the verb ‘need’ should get ‘-s’ ending. In Indonesian context, the above example is still a great problem for the students to learn. It is understandable that Indonesian does not have time. Consequently, when Indonesian students try to master the simple present tense, for example, they might be really confused to master it all. Whereas, English has been taught from elementary school to university level, new problems of learning the first foreign language grow from year to year.

The writer’s experience as the lecturer of grammar at Timor University found that many students could not understand the changes of plural verbs, change the statements or affirmative to interrogative and negative forms. So, they still had difficulties in mastering subject-verb agreement. They found difficulties in mastering simple present tense they did not get enough practice in using it and had no motivation in learning English in general. Their difficulties contradict with what Hudson’ (2003: 2) statement that a sentence with a good grammar is important because it tests students’ understanding. But, the students’ low mastery in learning English is supported by Setiyadi (2003: 22) and Muhsin (2016) who claim that English tends to be very difficult to be learnt in Indonesia because it has different grammar from Indonesian. This difference might be difficult for language learners to understand the system of target language, that is, English. In addition, Widodo (2006: 122) believes that by learning grammar students can express meanings in the form of phrases, clauses, and sentences that establish communicative tasks.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Previous Researches

Many studies have been done in simple present tense. In general, their findings are the same meaning that although there were many ways or techniques used to teach it, the difficulty still hampered the students. Firstly, Juwitasari, Raja, and Kadaryanto (2013) revealed that the students could use simple present correctly (73.81%), whereas the rest was the error (26.19%). In addition, Muhsin (2016) found that the students made 16.79% omissions, 5.11% addition, 75.18% missed formation, and 2.92% improper ordering errors. Furthermore, Herlina & Ramasari (2018) reported that 34 (62.91%) students were categorized low, 15 (27.50%) students were good and 5 (9.59%) students were excellent. Finally, Fauzi (2020) shows that students

made omission (46%), misformation (33%), addition (20%), and misordering (1%) in simple present tense.

The same studies on simple present tense were also done in applying certain techniques that might help the students to master simple present tense. Firstly, Amrudin (2013) found that substitution drill is effective in improving the students' ability in using simple present tense. It is based on the data that their mastery got improvement from cycle I, that is, 17.86% to 96.43% in cycle II. Secondly, Taslim (2016) exposed that Climbing Grammar Mountain Game could improve the ability of the students in using Simple Present Tense realized in the gradual improvement from 64 (insufficient) to 79 (sufficient) of the mean scores of the two cycles applied. Thirdly, Aryaningtyas, Sundari and Tasnim (2017) reported that stick figures was effective to improve the students' active participation and mastery in learning simple present tense. Fourthly, Wulandari, S. (2019) found that jumbled word technique was effective in teaching simple present tense. At last, Sartika (2020) exposed that flashcards could increase the students' achievement in learning the simple present tense.

## 2.2 Tense

The term 'tense' refers to verb form that shows the time of the action. Downing (2006: 352) defines tense as the grammatical expression of the location of events in time. It means that an event stands for the time of event. Furthermore, Toago (2013: 1- 2) states that tenses can give us further information about some events or actions done at present, past or future time. Using traditional perspective, Aarts, Chalker and Weiner (2014: 414) view tense as a grammatical system to encode (or grammaticalize) the time of verb. Typically tense is realized through inflectional endings on verbs. Depraetere & Langford (2012) argue that tense is meaning-based locating a situation in time.

The definitions of tense signify the fact that tense realizes the 'when' of an activity done. The time of activity, of course, denotes to verb that stands as a predicate in a sentence. Remember that a verb on predicate tells us, such as what a subject does, is doing, will do and has done.

## 2.3 Types of Tenses

Many experts of education have different views on the types of tense. Azar and Hagen (2006: 22-25, 36-37, 81-94, 105-110, 111-115), for example, divides tense into five types. They are simple present tense, present progressive, simple past, past progressive and future tense. Then, Powell, Walker and Elsworth (2008: 40-70) classify seven types of tense. They are present tense, present progressive, past tense, past perfect, past progressive, past future and future simple.

## 2.4 Uses of Simple Present Tense

Leech & Svartvik (2013), Herring (2016) and DeCapua (2017) state that the label 'present time' refers to general habits, customs, characteristics, or truths. It describes timeless events that have no terminal point. To sharpen their analysis, they claim that to express the frequency of an event

or action, present tense often applies frequency adverbs, as in *He **often** takes the motorcycle home.*; *Maria **usually** goes to church on Sunday.*

Leech & Svartvik (2013) have proposed three important meanings of simple present tense. They are: (1) A present state indicates a state which exists now that refers to a fact which is generally true as in *The sun rises in the east* and refer to state that can change as in *Where does your uncle work? I'm sorry, I don't know. I think he works in a fashion company.* (2) A present habit referring to an action repeated regularly such as habit or custom as in *Robby smokes. Anita plays tennis* and used with frequency adverbs like *always, never, sometimes, ever, usually, often,* etc. as in *She **often** goes fishing in the winter.* And (3) A present event whose meaning is less common. It is used to describe an event which occurs at the very moment of speaking as in *I am sorry I was wrong.*

Furthermore, Herring (2016: 618-619) proposed two uses of simple present tense. They are described as follows: First, the present simple tense is used to describe general true that which is always the case, or that which is scheduled to happen. It is made up of only the basic form of the verb: the infinitive (+ *-(e)s* if used with the third-person singular) as in *I come from Jakarta. The bus leaves at 2 PM. She has breakfast every morning.* And second, the simple present tense is used to talk or write about repeated or habitual activities. It attaches *-s* to a verb whose subject is a singular noun or *she/he/it*. Final *-s* has variations in spelling and pronunciation.

Finally, Buckmaster (2014: 34) mention five uses while DeCapua (2017: 157) offers six uses of present tense. Their ideas are summarily described. (1) It describes repeated actions, customs or habits as in *Ned leaves for school at 8:00. Blair and Jamie work at a bank.*; (2) It describes general truths or facts as in *The sun rises in the east. The president and his family live in Istana Negara.*; (3), It describes certain characteristics, mental states, emotions, and senses as in *Gina is thin. The sky looks gray. Good teachers understand their students' needs. Max loves pizza. Helen seems happy.*; (4) It applies certain verbs such as *feel, smell, taste, hear, see* used intransitively, with the idea of using one of the “five senses” as in *A baby's skin feels smooth. The soup smells delicious. The noodles taste salty. The audience hears the orchestra tuning up. The worshippers believe God sees everything.*; (5) It narrates stories and events as in *She gets up, turns on the oven, leaves the room, and the next thing you know, there's smoke coming out of the kitchen.*; and (6) It summarizes stories and articles as in *The president addresses the soldiers and asks for their continued support in the fight against terrorism. The reviewer argues that the researches are erroneous.*; (7) It talks about states as in *I work here.*; (8) It tells jokes (the historical present) as in *A man walks into a bar.*; and (9) It talks about future time tabled events as in *The train leaves at 5.10.*

On the basis of the uses, the writer only involved three uses of simple present tense. They are general truth of fact, repeated action, and state or condition. He argues that these three uses are always applied in daily communication.

### 3. METHOD

This research used the descriptive qualitative method, because all the data collected are in forms of written words. This research is qualitative in nature with an observational case study. It can be defined as a type of research method that describes and interprets the data. It is intended to give a descriptive account of kinds of errors in using English tenses especially simple present tense.

In this study, the writers took purposively class B of the first year students of English Study Program of Timor University as the sample. They number 30 students but the writer only involved 20 students.

To get the data needed, the writers applied an essay test consisting of four parts dealing with their daily activities, errors and filling in the blank. It covers 20 items. To complete the essay test, they spent at least 90 minutes.

To collect the data, they made two types of studies. To begin, they read some relevant references to the present study. Finally, they asked permission from the Head of English Study Program and the Dean of Educational Sciences Faculty to meet the students and give them the test. It took place on October 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 starting from 13.00-15.30 PM.

To analyze the data, they revised the students' answers, gave scores, and categorized the scores. To give them scores, they counted the total number of the right answers divided to the total number of the whole items times 100%. Then, to know their average score, they counted their scores divided with the total number of the students times 100%. Finally, to categorize their scores, they applied the standard score of mastery level ranging from 0-100 as used in Timor University Academic Regulation as seen in the following table.

Table 1.  
Level of Mastery

No	Range of Score	Quality Letter	Quantity Number	Level of Mastery
1	80-100	A	4	Excellent
2	70-79	B	3	Good
3	60-69	C	2	Enough
4	50-59	D	1	Poor
5	0-49	E	0	Bad

#### 4. Findings

In this part, the researchers will present the students answers in forms of right and wrong ones. Their answers will be then scored to know whether they have mastered the uses of present tense or not, their difficulties and level of mastery.

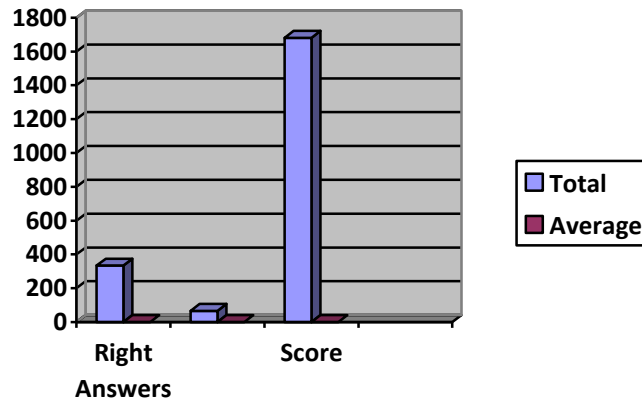


Figure 1. The Students Answers

Figure 1 shows that all students have mastered the use of simple present tense. It is indicated by the fact that their total of score is 1,680 or their average score is 84%. The same figure also points out that the students made 334 (or: 83.50%) right answers and 66 (or: 16.50%) wrong answers. This fact strengthens the assumption that they are really competence in simple present tense. To know their competence, the following figure will figure out the scores that describe their abilities and inabilities as well.

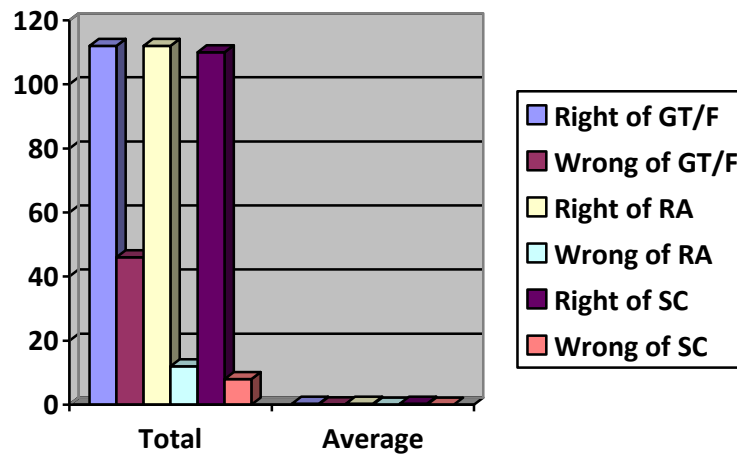


Figure 2. Students Answers on the Uses of Present Tense

*GT/F= General Truth of Fact*

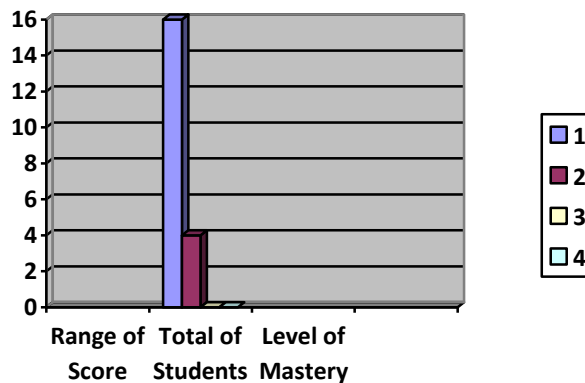
*RA = Repeated Action*

*SC = State of Condition*

The uses of simple present tense applied in Figure 2 are based on the ideas of Buckmaster (2014: 34) and DeCapua (2017: 157). There are actually at least ten uses of simple present tense. However, we just tool three of them. They are (1) simple present tense that describes repeated actions (RA) and (2) general truths or facts (GTF), and (3) state of condition (SC).

Figure 2 shows that they still found difficulty in mastering simple present tense. In general truth or fact (GT/F), they made 112 (or 28%) right answers and 46 (or 11.50%) wrong answers. In repeated action (RA), they made 112 (or 28%) right answers and 12 (or 3%) wrong answers. In state or condition (SC), they made 110 (or 27.50%) right answers and 8 (or 2%) wrong answers. The data shows that general fact of truth is the difficult use of simple present tense for them to master.

After knowing the use of simple present tense which is still difficult for the students to master, we go on the presentation of data related to their mastery levels. The levels will inform the range of score, the total number of the students and their mastery level.



*Figure 3. Students Answers Based on Level of Mastery*

Figure 3 shows that the students' level of mastery is categorized very good because 16 of 20 students have scores ranged from 80-100 while 4 students are good. However, none is average and poor. It means that this figure nuances that their level of mastery is very good.

## 5. Discussion

Overall the results of the present study are different from the previous one. The first result is that the students' average score is 84. This contradicts with the study of Juwitasari, Raja, and Kadaryanto (2013) in their study about *Grammatical Errors In Using Simple Present Tense In Descriptive Text Writing By Students* who found that the students used correct simple present tense on 73.81%, whereas the error was 26.19%.

The second result is that the students still faced problem in mastering the general truth of fact use. In this use of simple present tense, they made 46 (or 11.50%) wrong answers. This result is almost the same with the study of Juliana, Purbarini and Iskandar (2020) in "The incorrect use on tenses in job advertisements" who revealed that the students made auxiliary omission (66.67%), and verb misinformation (33.33%) in simple present tense. It also almost fits with the result of the study done by Fauzi (2020) in "The Use of Simple Present Tense and Adjective in Students' Descriptive Texts" who reported that the students made omission (46%), misinformation (33%), addition (20%), and misordering (1%) in simple present tense.

The last result is that the students' level of mastery is categorized very good because 16 of 20 students got scores from 80-100. This result confirms the study of Herlina & Ramasari (2018) in "Students Ability in Producing the Sentences of Simple Present Tense at STMIK Musi Rawas" who found that 34 students (62.91%) were categorized low, 15 students (27.50%) were good and 5 students (9.59%) were excellent.

## 6. Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussions, the researcher would like to conclude that the students have reached excellent mastery level. It means that they can use simple present tense in their daily communication. In addition, they face the general truth as the difficult use of simple present tense. However, the difficult condition pushes them to increase their ability to master simple present tense. Therefore, it is suggested that the teachers pay more attention to teaching about the uses of simple present tense using attractive and innovative ways that can motivate them to participate in learning simple present tense.



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## Appendix 2

### Instrument

#### Part I

Question and answer.

1. Mention five general truths you know.
2. Mention three examples of your daily habits.
3. Mention three daily activities you do every day.
4. Write three characteristics of wind.
5. Write three sentences that describe your identify.

#### Part II

Answer the following questions.

1. What do you always do on Sunday?
2. What do you always do on holiday?
3. How do you do if you find a problem?
4. Which one do you like, coffee or tea?
5. Who is you best friend?

#### Part III

Improve the errors in the following sentences.

1. Does Pedro walks to work every morning?
2. I'm not understand what you are talking about.
3. My friend does not liking her apartment.
4. I'm not agree with your opinion.
5. I'm not knowing Sam's wife.

#### Part IV

Fill in the blanks with the words in parentheses and pay attention on the right use of simple present tense.

1. My roommate (watch, usually) television, (listen) to music, or (go) out in the evening.
2. When the sun (rise), it (appear) from below the horizon.
3. Kathy (sit, usually) in the front row during the class.
4. Diana (wash) her hands every other day, or so.
5. Do you (lock, always) the door to your apartment when you leave your room?