

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia. Jijel
Faculty of Letters and Languages
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The Difficulties Students Face in Applying Past Complex Tenses in Written Expression Classes

Case Study: Third Year LMD Students of English at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia-Jijel

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of Master in didactics of foreign languages

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2020-2021

Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled” The Difficulties Students Face in Applying Past Complex Tenses in Written Expression Classes” is my own work and all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of references. I also certify that I have not copied or plagiarized the work of other students or researchers partially or fully. In case any material is not documented, I shall be responsible for the consequences.

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Signature 2

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to:

*The dearest people to my heart: dear **father** and beloved **mother**.*

*I would like to send a sincere thanks to my three **sisters** and my **brother**.*

*To all my family **chetioui***

*My deepest gratitude goes to my precious friends **Zahra**, **Nour elimane**
and **Amine**; for their ceaseless moral, unconditional support, to whom
am deeply proud.*

Feyreuz.

DEDICATION

There is no way I can express how much I owe to my family for their love,

Generous spirit and support through the many years of my education.

I dedicate this humble work to:

My tender mother for her never -ending love.

I will always be grateful to my father for his trust in me and for his sacrifices and support.

*To my precious sister **Lamis** and my dear brothers **Amine** and **Djamel**.*

*To my life partner, my fiancé , **Amine**.*

*To all my closest friends **Charifa**, **Khayra**, **Rania**, **Nossaiba**, **Rayan**.*

*And special thanks go to my sweetheart **Imen**.*

To all my colleagues with whom I shared the university and campus life with its lights and shadows.

To all my teachers and those who love me.

***Amel**.*

Acknowledgments:

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to our supervisor, miss. **Tiouane Hiba**, for her patience, support, valuable guidance, and constructive feedback during our master dissertation.

Besides the advisor, we also would like to express our warm thanks to the jury members: Mr.**Naili Redouane** and Ms. **Amal Boukhedenna**, who kindly accepted to examine this humble piece of research.

The warmest gratitude, and thanks to written expression teachers for their collaboration and kindness when dealing with the practical part.

Our whole hearted thanks to third year EFL students at Mohammed Seddik ben Yahya University. For their help and collaboration in accomplishing the test.

Abstract

The current study attempts to identify the main difficulties students face in using past complex tenses including: past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous. Through highlighting and finding out the errors students make while applying these tenses in their writing two research questions are raised: 1) What kind of difficulties students encounter in applying the past complex tenses in written expression classes? 2) What kind of errors students produce while using the past complex tenses in their writing. Data for this study were collected using a grammar test that was given to a sample of fifty third year students at Mohammed Seddik ben Yahya university . Moreover, a questionnaire was administered to ten written expression teachers at the department of English of the same university. The results obtained from this study showed that the most problematic tenses are past perfect and past perfect continuous, students have less difficulties concerning the past continuous in comparison with the rest past complex tenses. Furthermore, students face difficulties in using the past complex tenses in their writing both at the level of use and form. Regarding the tense use, Most of the students struggle to apply the past complex tenses appropriately within the context. They feel confused to differentiate between their complex uses. They either substitute the tense with other tenses, or use simpler tenses to avoid their complexity. Regarding the tense form, the main types of errors are omission, addition, Misordering, and misformation. Students find it challenging to offer the correct form that suits each tense in their writing. Consequently, teachers are recommended to provide a deep explanation concerning the functions and forms of tenses; especially those are rarely used in order to overcome all kinds of confusion that can lead students to avoid using these tenses in their writing.

Key words: Difficulties, Past Complex Tenses, Written Expression

List of abbreviations

1. **EFL** : English as a foreign language
2. **%**: Percentage
3. **Vs**: versus
4. **H**: hypothesis
5. **FL**: foreign language
6. **WA**: wrong answer
7. **CA**: correct answer
8. **NA**: no answer
9. **T**: total
10. **Q**: question
11. **N**: number

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General Introduction

Introduction

Writing is a highly demanded skill for non-native and native speakers of English. However, it is a great challenge to produce a coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing (Nunan, 1999, p.271). Truly, writing demands the learners to pay attention to many features including Grammar. Underscoring this view, Brooks and Penn (1970) stated that “..... for one thing , in writing , we must understand the structure of the languages , what parts of speech do , how words relate to one another” p (20) . Thus, Grammar is the skeleton of any language. It is needed to use adequate number of grammar rules in any writing task. As a matter of fact, English grammar has its challenges of meaning and structure for foreign learners. Some of the most troublesome yet are concentrated in the area of the finite verbal phrase, including, in particular “the English tense». The situation gets more even complicated when it comes to mastering past complex tenses with long formula which are rarely used. Accordingly, learners often undergo different kinds of difficulties regarding the use of these tenses.

1. Background of the Study

In EFL teaching and learning processes, grammar is one of the important aspects that EFL students need to master; Debata (2013) stated that anyone who tries to communicate by using a particular language becomes aware of the grammar of that language (p. 483).

Researches in the field of education have shown that there is a complementary relationship between grammar and writing ,that is, the students need to apply grammar rules to produce a piece of writing .Equally important, tenses are essential part of grammar that need to be mastered by EFL Learners to deliver messages, express ideas and state different views. It is considered as the backbone of each language. Thus, forming a

meaningful sentence requires appropriate use of tenses. Nevertheless, most of students face difficulties and get confused especially in determining the form and usage of a tense in their written forms, due to language interference and the existing distinction between tenses. In this vein, Cowan (2008) pointed out that "the use of verb forms is one of two or three most difficult areas for English learners to master"(p.350) .This view is shared by Tyner (1987, p.83) who viewed that forming tenses appropriately with their subjects creates serious problems for second language writing students . Similarly, parrot (2010, p. 106) highlighted the learners difficulty of choosing between different tenses.

Within the same vein, Sukasame, Kantho and Narot (2014) studied the grammatical errors in learning English structures of tenses, in which students' errors in learning tenses were analyzed and showed in the form of percentages. The results revealed that the past perfect tense was the most problematic tense (87, 1%), (as most students were unable to use it appropriately), whereas the past continuous was in the fourth rank (54%). Similarly, Listia and Febriyanti's (2020) study aimed to find out learners problems in using English tenses, by using multiple-choice test and a questionnaire ; the findings showed that complex tenses' uses and formulas create troubles to the learners since these tenses point specific time but express different aspects (perfect , continuous) . The results of this study are approximately the same with Alzuharni (2016) ; Fallacy (1998); Carrido and Romero , 2012; Jufriзал , 2014 (as cited in Listia and Febriyanti 2020) in which the past perfect continuous is on the top of the most three difficult and rarely used tenses by the student .

Correspondingly, Cakir (2011) investigated "Problems in Teaching Tenses in Turkish Learners" at University level in Turkey. The main score (86, 5%) proved that the majority of participant have problems and get confused in mastering the past continuous tense.

The above-mentioned studies and particularly their findings proved that past complex tenses including past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous are among the most challenging tenses in English. Accordingly, the current study concerns itself with investigating the problems students face while applying past complex tenses ; aiming to build grammatical awareness concerning the English tense ; since the latter is highly indispensable to achieve communicative competence .

2. Statement of the Problem

Writing is a major skill that learners seek to improve when learning a foreign language. Therefore, learners are recommended to enhance other aspects of language such as punctuation, spelling, grammar rules and especially the use of tenses. However, many language learners have serious problems in performing writing tasks without conspicuous tense's errors. It has been noticed that third year students of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University, face many difficulties in applying the past complex tenses in written expression classes. Hence, it is extremely important to determine the exact nature of these difficulties and suggest the appropriate solutions in order to help learners to enhance their level.

3. Research Questions

To investigate the problems raised above, the following research questions are posed:

- What kind of difficulties students encounter in applying the past complex tenses in written expression classes?
- What kind of errors students produce while using the past complex tenses in their writing?

4. Aim of the Study

This research aims to identify students' difficulties in using past complex tenses including: past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous tenses. In addition, it aims to analyze the errors students make while applying these tenses in their writing.

5. Methodology

For the purpose of achieving the defined objectives in this research, two instruments were carried out. A grammatical test was given to 50 third year EFL students at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University. In addition, a questionnaire that was administered to ten (10) written expression teachers at the department of English. Both a quantitative and qualitative data collection analysis is done in order to check the validity of the current research and test the hypotheses.

6. Significance of the Study

The results of this study shed light on students' difficulties in using past complex tenses and the types of errors they face in using the past continuous, past perfect continuous, and past perfect. It is expected to be beneficial in the sense of increasing both the reader and the researcher awareness to apply the aforementioned tenses as well as, motivating students to make more efforts to learn about these tenses in order to find and overcome their difficulties while applying these tenses. Furthermore, by identifying student difficulties in using tenses, the teacher would be able to provide better teaching methods to overcome these problems.

7. Structure of the Study

The present study is composed of two chapters; the first one provides a review of literature while the second chapter is devoted to the field work. Chapter one is divided into

two sections; the first one is dedicated to grammar in general and tenses in particular. The second section provides a brief overview about the writing skill. As far as the second chapter is concerned, it describes the methodology followed and the research instruments used, then provides analysis and discussion of the results obtained; eventually, the overall results are discussed by means of answering the questions raised in the study and testing the hypothesis advanced. Ultimately, the chapter attaches the limitations of the study, and some worthy pedagogical recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter One: Review of Literature.

Section One: Grammar and the Use of Tenses.

Introduction:

Grammar is the skeleton of language, it is the set of rules upon which language is built. Learning tense and aspect is part of learning grammar. They are obligatory categories in the sense that whenever we encode an event through a piece of language, we need to select one tense or another, one aspectual category or another. They represent two angles of vision on our experience of events in time. However, these systems are language specific. Thus, they can be problematic to the learners of a foreign language, especially if the latter has a system that is different from that of the source language. In this section, we will talk about grammar in general and past complex tenses in specific. We will investigate the areas that can be problematic to learners, and we will also shed lights on student's difficulties when using past complex tenses.

1. Definition of Grammar

There have been many attempts to define the term grammar. It is viewed by the research community as a multidimensional phenomenon involving elements like, meaning, language use and language learning. Batstone (1994, p. 224) conceived it as "...essentially a formal framework, a set of categories and forms which help us to see language as structured and systematic...or a source which language users exploit as they navigate their way through discourse".

Ur (1991, p.75) defined grammar as the "ways words are put together to make correct sentences". On his turn, Williams (2006) viewed that grammar is "the formal study of structure of a language and describes how words fit together in a meaningful construction" (P. 2). In other quarters, grammar does not deal only with the combination of

words into sentences but also how these words are integrated to create well-formed sentences that communicate meaning. Hence, grammar deals with the syntax and morphology of sentences. Thornbury (1999) added that the grammar is the study of possible forms and structures within a language (p.3). That is, not all types of sentences are accepted.

What does grammar involve exactly? Hudson (1992, p. 27) claimed that there are no natural boundaries to grammar. However, the most common aspects of a word to be covered by grammar, he said, are:

- Classes to which they belong (e.g., nouns)
- Abstract distinctions that are sometimes signaled by those word-structure differences (e.g. Singular versus plural).
- Abstract relations among words in sentences which I have called their grammatical function (e.g., subject).
- Order in which words occur (e.g., ‘too’ +adjective precedes ‘a’.
- Certain parts of word meaning, when those can be related to other matters listed earlier (e.g., the difference between ‘dog’ and ‘dogs).
- Relations between the meanings of words in a sentence (e.g., the different roles of ‘dogs’ and ‘cats’ in ‘dogs chase cats’).
- Informational structures signaled for instance by differences in word order (e.g., the difference between ‘I can’t stand cats’ and ‘cats I can’t stand’);
- Register differences between word patterns (e.g., this is Dick Hudson here’ used only on the Telephone, vs the synonymous ‘I’m Dick Hudson’ used elsewhere’.

In the light of the aforementioned definitions, grammar is no doubt a central pole of the study of language that provides us with the ability to monitor meaning and use the language effectively.

1.2 Tenses

1.2.1. Definition of Tense

Generally, tense is the grammatical category that demonstrates the time at which an event takes place. It is represented by some language expressions changing form to convey information about the time location of the topic situations (Comrie, 1985, p.9). It is a grammatical form referring to a set of grammatical markings which are used to relate the time of the events described in a sentence to the moment when the words are uttered. Tense, thus is deictic, that it points towards time now or time then. In this sense, as Salaberry and Shiray (2002, p.2) said, “Tense is a deictic category that places a situation in time with respect to some other time, usually the moment of speech”. Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) defined tense as the form taken by the verb so that it indicates the time at which the events described are taking place (P.47). Downing and Locke (1992, p. 352) considered that “Tense primarily involves visualizing events as points in a sequence, preceding or following a central point which is usually the present moment”. They also see that tense systems are language specific and vary from one language to another, both in the number of tenses they distinguish and in the way in which these reflect temporal reference. In other words, the change in verb forms specifies time location of a particular action whether in past, present or future. As a result, tenses are the forms of verbs with temporal expressions revealed by the verb.

1.2.2. Types of Tenses

All tenses of English map time with points of reference roughly indicating the relation of one time to another (Leech, 1987, p.4; Downing & Locke, 1992, p. 352). The primary point of orientation is either the moment of speaking “now”, or the moment at which the speaker imagines himself to be speaking. As described by Hoffman (1993, p.121) “In principle, tense shows when an event happens: before now (happened), right now (is happening), after now (will happen) or even all the time (happens)”

The past is all that comes “before now”. This form is morphologically and semantically marked. Concerning the morphological aspect, the vast majority of verbs have a distinctive past forms (stem + Ed for regular verbs and irregular forms for irregular verbs). Semantically speaking, the past tense refers to an action that is visualized as remote either in time or in unreality (Downing & Locke, 1992, p.354). Distinguishing past and present, Hoffman (1993) explained that “The past does not have any special connection to the present tense, i.e. the moment of speaking and really means [not-preterit]. This so called “present tense” is commonly used for future events that are taken as assumed facts...It can also be used for past events if no time is mentioned” (p.25).

The present (also referred to as the non-past) can refer to right now, after now or all the time. It can be used to make a special reference to a future event but not normally to past event (Downing and Locke, 1992, p. 354).

In English, we have two tenses: past and present. They are used to express the three references to time: past, present and future. We cannot really speak about a future tense because it is morphologically parallel to those verbs that express our inner attitudes, the modal verbs (Blair, 1984, p. 33). The future cannot be included in the tense system because of its uncertain nature (Lock, 1996, p.162). The future is expressed by means of the

function word will, and this can only be included under modality. This must be due to the closeness of the future to modal meanings such as likelihood and intention.

The conceptualization of tense brings two essential and complementary notions: absolute tense and relative tense. Absolute tense specifies a relationship between speech time and event time: event time prior to speech time defines past, event time simultaneous with speech time identifies present and event time subsequent to speech time identifies future (Weist, 2002, p. 43). This is what we were referring to as the deictic nature of tense. In fact, for absolute tense, the deictic center is the time of the speech act.

Relative tense specifies the relationship between event time and reference time. Absolute relative tenses include an additional link to speech time. The past perfect, for instance, has an event time prior to a reference time and a reference time prior to a speech time (Comrie, 1985, p.36). Every tense form has a relative tense and an absolute tense. Lock (1996, p.146) believed that there are three absolute tenses:

- Present: at the moment of speaking or writing or an extended period including the moment of speaking or writing.
- Past: before the moment of speaking or writing.
- Future: after the moment of speaking or writing.
- -Two relative tenses:
 - Present: at the same time as the absolute tense selection.
 - Past: before the absolute tense selection.

1.2.3. Tense, Time, Aspect Distinctions

When the concept of tense is taken into question, the difference between the three notions of tense, time and aspect should be highlighted.

Marquez and Bowen (1983) made a clear distinction between tense and time stating that " tense is the grammatical term that indicates the verb form in relation to the sentence meaning ; meanwhile , time refer to clock time in our physical world " (P. 68) . In the sense of clarity, time is the concept which is related to the perception of reality, while tense is the grammatical term that is indicated by the verb forms; that is, we use different tenses to specify different times.

Tense and aspect are the two grammatical categories that are used alternatively (or refer to both as tense). De Capua (2008, p. 166) claimed that "aspect is a grammatical category that indicates temporal features such as duration, frequency and completion, it is indicated by complex tenses that are composed of an auxiliary verb + a main verb " which means that the aspect functions together with tense in order to express different time references because events do not always fit into past, present and future. Aspect indicates whether an action is started, completed, or going, or repeated (as cited in Sabra, 2020, P.4).

According to Celia and Freeman (1999) there are four aspects "simple (sometimes called zero aspect), perfect, progressive, and their combination perfect progressive (p.110). Accordingly, the 12 tenses in English are the result of the combination of both tense and aspect.

1.3. Importance of Teaching Tenses

It is a well-known fact that the English language has been the world's dominant language in all callings. Thus, the efficient communication skills of English language are widely needed. Undeniably, the efficiency of English communication skills depends largely on the awareness extent about the basic structures provided by grammar studies. Consequently, utilizing the proper English tense in order to make coherent and valuable sentences provided better correspondence. In the sense of sharing diverse perceptions and

views .In this respect, Celia and Freeman (1999, p. 111) stated that the tense of English organization is very significant to both ESL and EFL students to enable them to actually comprehend how the system functions and patterns of tenses combine. Likewise Khairunnisah (2018, p.35) who viewed that the mastery of English tenses is important not only as a knowledge of sentence structure, but also as a base of communication. Harmer (2007) added a slight detail stating that the wrong use of tense can lead to inappropriate types of syntax, which can be viewed as obnoxious (p.32). In other words, being aware about the correct use of tenses prevents a learner from some kinds of misunderstandings, and thus better correspondence.

In short, the significance of the overall awareness of English tenses cannot be denied, for being consider as backbone of a language.

1.4. Past complex Tenses(Use, Form)

1.4.1. Past Perfect

Past perfect is a tense that is used to talk about a certain event that occurred the past and finished before another one in the past; in other words, both events A and B happened in the past, however even A happened earlier than B (Scrivener, 2010, p. 176).According to swan (2005), “the basic meaning of the perfect is “earlier past”, a common use is to” go back” for a moment when we already talking about” (p.397).

The past perfect is constructed by the past form of the auxiliary “to have” adding the past participle of the verb in the affirmative form. Meanwhile, it is formed as had + not + past participle in negative form.

Eg1.Jake had gone out when I arrived home

Eg2.We had not gone for camping.

According to Celia and Freeman (1999, p. 116), the past perfect is used when the writer wants to express the following:

- a. One -An action completed in the past prior to some other past event or time.eg:
After Jim came, the train had already left.
- b. Two -Imaginative conditional .e.g. = if I had only know it was the last walk in the rain, I would keep you out for hours in the storm.

Scrivener (2010, p.179) added that "past perfect is commonly used to express superlative experiences, often in sentences started with was ..." e.g. = it was the most terrifying place I had ever seen.

1.4.2. Past Continuous

The past continuous tense is used to describe what was happening or an action in progress in the past , as (Arts et al.,2014,p.355) defined, it is a combination of the past form of the verb to be plus "ing " form with the aim of indicating a progressive action in the past.

The structure of the past continuous tense to be formed as follows: was/were + verb-ing in the affirmative form, meanwhile it is formed as: was/were+ not + verb + ing in the negative form (p. 104). Such as:

Eg1. I was making cookies

Eg2. She was not playing.

As Scrivener (2010, p. 150.151) described, the past continuous is used to talk about something in progress over a certain past period:

1. Something in progress at certain past moment / time - often using at or on.eg =at three o'clock, I was eating dinner.

2. Something in progress at the same time as something else was in progress (and sometimes one action interrupts another) e.g., as I spoke, the children were laughing at my voice.
3. Polite enquiries e.g., I was wondering if you can give me your number.
4. Setting the background e.g., when we got home yesterday morning, the baby was drinking a bottle.

1.4.3. Past Perfect Continuous

The past perfect progressive shows that an action that started and continued up until another time in the past. According to Eastwood (2002) "we use the past perfect continuous for an action over a period up to past time" (P.93).

The past perfect progressive is constructed by the past form of the auxiliary "to have", the past participle of "to be" with the present participle of the verb (had + been + verb + ing).

E.g. = we had been living in Algiers for 15 years, before we left to Jijel.

For the negative form it is formed by adding "not" between the two auxiliaries (had not been + verb + ing)

E.g. = I had not been studying English for very long before I moved to America

As Scrivener mentioned (2010, P.184, 185) we use the past perfect continuous to express

1. For a past event that was in progress up to a certain point in the past. This event could be temporary or unfinished. eg = the child had been playing with the knife, when the mom ran quickly to the kitchen.

2. To emphasize the duration of something, perhaps to make a point of the time, work, stress, commitment, inconvenience etc.eg = he had been talking for over 1 hour , before the teacher stopped him.

3. To explain a reason or a result for something in the past.eg = the kids had been playing, and so the room was a mess!

1.5. Past Complex Tenses Difficulties

Despite the fact that tenses play a crucial role in conveying messages, views and ideas, applying the English tenses precisely and properly is sometimes challenging. In fact, when learning English as a foreign language, learners undergo some difficulties concerning the verbs and their conjugations due to the first language overgeneralization and the existence of many kinds of English tense .Hence, tenses are considered as tricky especially regarding their forms and usage. As a matter of fact, past complex tenses including: past perfect, past continuous and past perfect continuous are among the tenses that cause difficulties for learners when they come to produce a piece of writing or a piece of discourse, since these tenses indicate the past as a tense and both perfect and progressive as aspects. In this sense, Sulastini, (2011) noted that " indicating past time as a reference, and different aspects is potential in bringing problems to students in comprehending tenses ".(p.75)

1.5.1. Past Perfect Difficulties

The past perfect is used to express something that happened in the past and even earlier before another one; being able to deal with it is agreeably a hard matter. In fact, problems can be derived from different kinds of misconstruing both on meaning and on form. The main problem arising in learning past perfect is the confusing to choose which tense is more appropriate in a certain context, especially when some tenses are quite

similar in their functions and uses. It is also the case with the past simple. In this regard, Richards (1979) pointed out that “the basic uses of past perfect are outlined and contrasted with the function of simple past” (p.495).

Consequently, students tend to use the past perfect constantly when the past simple can be sufficient (Scrivener, 2010, p.180). In other words, students overuse it once they learn it in the case when the past simple can be more appropriate. Indeed, it is a similar case with present perfect, when students encounter some difficulties to differentiate between the uses of the two tenses. According to Salkie (1989)," the relationship between perfect and pluperfect poses a sharp and explicit challenge” (p. 3). Accordingly, it can be rather confusing and troublesome to make the suitable choice regarding past perfect use.

While, the regular verbs are not very confusing, because they only followed by suffix-ed on the past and the past participle types, the irregular verbs are considered the most confusing since they consist of the principal part of the irregular verbs that have unpredictable changes at the past and past participle types (Agustina, 2017, p. 25). Hence, students run into troubles when they come to apply irregular verbs (past participle) in forming past perfect tense.

1.5.2. Past Continuous Difficulties

The past progressive tense is another tense that seems challenging to master mainly because it indicates various degrees of the past. Therefore, students may feel frustrated while using it. Beare (2019) stated that “the greatest challenge in using past continuous is deciding which action is the main event”, meaning which action interrupted the other in a specific moment in the past. Beare stated another challenge which is using the past progressive tense to express an action that happened and completed in the past (rather than ongoing action in the past) over a period. That is to say, students may feel troubled to make

the right choice regarding the appropriate use of past continuous in context, especially when the choice is between the past progressive and the tenses with the same time frame. Sulastini (2011) added a further detail concerning the topic stating that unclear or insufficiency of explanation on both tense and aspect, in addition to stative and dynamic verbs distinction is potential in generating confusion to students in comprehending the past progressive tense (p.83). Accordingly, students still struggle to differentiate between past as a tense and progressive as aspect, and between dynamic and stative verbs.

1.5.3. Past Perfect Continuous Difficulties

According to Listia & Febriyanti(2020) ,the past perfect tense is combined with the past to show when an action was happening over time before something began in the past. Therefore students may feel confused since both tenses have a little difference. The tense is also a construction between perfect and continuous Aspects. Thus, this tense is full of properties and full of theoretical explanations, which causes serious problems. (P. 91)

For the reason that it is associated with the past as a tense, and both the perfect and continuous as an aspect, students may have misconceptions and difficulties to recognize the true meaning and function of this tense.

It deserves mentioning that the past perfect continuous tense shows a long complicated formula (subject + had been + present participle), the thing that may create troublesome to some students to memorize the formula, and may take a while to get used to the long construction of the verb tense (Beare ,2018).

Conclusion:

This section tackled the definition of grammar from different viewpoints. Additionally, it discussed the definition of tenses, their types as far as the distinction of tenses. Besides, it highlighted the importance of teaching tenses in foreign language

teaching. Moreover, this section explained in details the form and the use of the three major complex tenses, past perfect, past continuous and past perfect continuous. Finally, it shed light on the main difficulties students usually face with the use of these tenses.

Section Two: The Writing Skill in EFL Classes

Introduction

Language is an important mean of communication. It comprises four aspects which students are required to master: speaking, listening, reading, and writing for different purposes. The latter is seen as the most difficult aspect.

This section presents a broad overview about writing and illustrates its nature. Additionally, it seeks to illustrate a comparison between writing and other skills like speaking and reading. Also, shows the principles and systems of writing. The chapter ends up with some suggestions on how to overcome the already listed writing difficulties when using complex tenses.

2. Definition of Writing

Writing is a system of communication between people, it has to follow conventions which relate letters to words and words to sentences. However, it must be well organized to have a coherent whole called “text” (Bader, 2007, p.7).

Writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is in demand to show control of many variables at once. It illustrates that there is a perplexity within the sentence level which includes the control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter setting up (Nunan, 1989, P, 36). Students should be competent to build and combine information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs. Moreover, Rivers defined writing as the expression of ideas in a formal way to organize the graphic conventions of the language; the ultimate aim of students at this stage is to be able to express themselves in a classy literary form which requires the use of special vocabulary and certain refinement structure (1968, p.243). Widdowson (1978, p.62) viewed writing as an act of producing correct sentences and transmitting them into words

on paper. This involves mainly the use of graphic language. In this definition, we are introduced to the skill of writing as a way to recording one's ideas and feelings, using a correct grammar in a concrete manner.

From the definitions above, writing could be considered as a problematic process that requires many skills like mental, psychological, practical and critical minds. It is also a system in which written symbols means the sounds, syllables or words of language. Writing also requires various techniques such as spelling, capitalization and punctuation, the word function and form. It aids to accomplish a clear meaning. Therefore, writing is a performance to enhance the understanding of whichever topic. However, being able to write is something different to students than understanding writing itself.

2.2. Writing Ability

Writing is a challenging aspect in which the writer is required to demonstrate the ability to form correct sentences, adequate vocabulary, consistent content, good punctuation, and spelling in order to produce a cohesive and coherent piece of writing (Raimes, 1983, p. 335). Thus, it is not a random activity, but it needs cognitive efforts in order to provide the ability to convey clarified and precious messages to the reader.

2.3. Nature of Writing

Any language must include spoken and written forms through which people are able to communicate. In any language learning, speech comes first, reading and writing come later. According to Weigle (2002, p. 24), the nature of writing ability can be illustrated from various perspectives. Among these perspectives, writing can be compared with other productive skills like speaking and reading.

2.3.1. Writing and Speaking

Besides the existed similarities, there are broad differences between writing and speaking in terms of form and process (Harmer, 2004, p.3). Both first language and second language get the differences between writing and speaking from distinct perspectives. Brown (2001, as cited in weigle 2002, p. 25) made four main differences between the two skills as follows:

- **Performance**

Oral language is transitory and it has a limited duration, whereas, written Language is permanent duration and the reader can return and reread what has been writing before.

- **Orthography:**

The speaker should be aware of some phonetics aspects that govern the oral performance such as stress, volume, pauses, phonemes, intonations when the writer has distinct rules to be followed such as punctuation and capitalization.

- **Complexity**

Written language contains language clauses and more subordinators, while speech has short sentences connected by coordinators.

- **Vocabulary**

Written texts contains a wider variety of words. Nonetheless, speaking is required to be clear and simple to be understood

2.3.2. Reading and Writing

It has been agreed by many researchers that reading and writing are deeply intertwined. Reading has a typical connection with writing. The effect of reading on

writing was emphasized by Krashen's claim (as cited in Williams ,2003, p.151) " the reading and writing skills Are connected in the sense that the last comes out as a comprehensible input over time” .As such , reading proficiency is the most useful support the writer needs to enhance his writing skills . A view that is further supported by Stotsky (1983) stating that there is an attachment between reading performance and writing ability, and better readers are able to produce more efficient pieces of writing than poorer ones (p. 636).

Despite the fact that reading is receptive skill while writing is a productive one, these two language skills are extremely interrelated and can be closely developed.

2.4. Purpose of Writing

It is likely that most students do not give much attention to their writing, in terms of the quality of writing, amount of text produced or the different writing subjects they get engaged within. Often, writing in the daily life is likely to be performed for either personal purposes such as shopping lists, messages, reminder notes ...etc., or for work tasks such as office memos, accounting reports, and personal evaluations (Brandt ,2001, p. 44).

Writing can help you think, it is indispensable for the human mind to reach its highest potential, and it allows students to extract abstract ideas (Walter Ong, 1982, p. 177). Writing allows the external storage of information that can be represented symbolically (letters, numbers, words,) and which can then be analyzed, critiqued, reproduced, and modified, within other possible actions (Menary, 2007, p. 622).

To sum up, writing is an important literacy movement in the human life, for that allows individuals to accomplish a variety of personal, intellectual, and professional goals.

2.5. Writing Principles

Concerning the process of writing, students are supposed to follow specific criteria of acceptability related to various writing aspects in order to craft an effective piece of writing. Many researchers such as Starkey (2004), Nunan (1989), Wilkins (1972), Murat and Hughes (2008), Savage and Shafiei (2007), and Castro (2004) specifies the principal elements of writing including: Grammar, vocabulary, mechanisms, organization, clarity, cohesion and coherence.

2.5.1. Grammar

Grammar is the key element in any writing process. It is concerned with providing the basic rules to conduct correct and appropriate sentences as well as helping the writer to avoid making errors. In this vein, Nunan (1989, p.3) asserted that successful writing involves the use of grammatical system to convey one's intended meaning.

2.5.2. Vocabulary

Based on the fact that the writing skill is deeply connected with the reading process, and the latter is basically dependent on vocabulary package. Hence, effective writing requires the use of adequate vocabulary .as Wilkins (1972) noted that «without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed " (p.14) . Consequently, vocabulary is the furniture for writers to produce a good piece of writing and convey the one's thoughts successfully.

2.5.3. Mechanisms

In the process of writing, mechanisms and its technical aspects have a crucial role, aspects of spelling, punctuation, capitalization. The correct use of these aspects will greatly provide precious and clear writing forms (Starkey, 2004, p.2).

2.5.4. Organization

During the writing process, the writer should present her / his ideas in a well-organized and structured format to obtain the logical meaning and avoid the reader to confusion. Such organization benefits the reader by helping him to see how the various points are combined together "(Starkey, 2004, p.39)

2.5.5. Clarity

The writer should make clear as much as possible what is written down. What enables the reader to get the obtained meaning without any kind of ambiguity. In this sense, Murat and Hughes (2008) emphasized on the importance of clarity as the basic elements to produce an accessible piece of writing (p.85). For them, using short sentences is the best way to achieve clarity.

2.5.6. Cohesion

Cohesion is the ability to connect sentences semantically within a sentence level or at a paragraph level. In this sense, For Castro (2004, p. 215) referred to the connection which link ideas in the text and causes the flow of thoughts to be clear and meaningful for the reader. Accordingly, it is a crucial element that indicates whether the text is well connected and then meaningful.

2.5.7. Coherence

The writing success and failure depend largely on the coherence of students responses. Coherence deals with linking ideas in the way that makes them easily understood. Savage and Shafiei stated that “.....Good writers look for unity, coherence, and grammatical problems” (2007, p. 12).

Besides the above-mentioned principles, simplicity and brevity are important as much as the previous principles. It is much better to be simple and to attempt immediately towards the aim, rather than using a lot and complex sentences.

2.6. Writing Systems

Writing uses a set of tactical signs in order to represent language's units in a systematic way. Cook (2004, p.1) viewed that writing systems are connected and needful in our lives, as being concerned with singing our wills and communicating messages.

Writing systems can be placed into broad categories of notation, Spelling, and practice.

2.6.1. Notation

Notation is the simplest writing forms that emphasize on the representation of sounds. For Rivers and Temperly (1978, p. 297), it is useful for students to differentiate between different sounds.

2.6.2. Spelling

Spelling is the code that uses letters sequences to represent specific words (Berninger & Fayol, 2008, p, 1). In general, recognizing how the letters are merged together to construct words is no doubt a basic part to produce a piece of writing. Spelling and writing system is logical, makes sense, and critical to writing (Hanna et all 1966, as cited in Navalo 2018).

2.6.3. Writing Practice

An efficient piece of writing cannot be conducted without the writing practice method which involves using writing prompts , doing creative writing exercises , finishing writing pieces like essays , short stories etc. in order to present what has been recognized before in mind . Goldberg (1986) asserted, "One of the main aims in writing practice is to

learn to trust your own mind and body, to grow patient and non-aggressive"(p.12). Hence, various kinds of writing practice are a key system to reach sharp writing abilities.

2.7. Classification of Student's writing Difficulties

Writing is an important skill for language production which is hard to acquire. Students face many difficulties in their writing. Brown (1980, p.41) considered that writing is a difficult task; because it includes many aspects of language such as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

2.7.1. Grammar

Grammar is essential for learning English, it is an important part both in written and spoken language. However, many students still have difficulties in grammar when they are learning English, they usually get confused when they want to make grammatically correct sentences. In this respect, Amelliani (2019) suggested that most of the learners face many difficulties in internalizing grammar rules although these have been taught intensively (P. 3).

One of the grammar parts namely tenses are considered challenging to acquire, they are essential part that needs to be mastered by EFL learners in order to be able to express sentences in a correct form of tenses in the right situation. However, most learners are having difficulties in understanding and using English tenses appropriately. Song and lee (2007) stated that tenses are necessary in expressing and understanding English language. But, understanding the use of this tenses in very difficult (p. 430).

2.7.2. Vocabulary

Alzahrani (2011) viewed that teaching and learning vocabulary as one of the main challenges for EFL learners and teachers. Most of the students face many difficulties in

communicating with English language due to their limited vocabulary; with less vocabulary EFL learners are unable to express their ideas and thoughts because it affects their English language negatively (p. 2).

2.7. 3. Spelling

Misspelling is a serious problem that EFL learners face in their writing .Thus, when learners do not have the ability to form correct words they produce a weak writing. Reed (2012, p. 2) claimed that the main reason of spelling mistakes is writing quickly so learners through writing are unaware of the form of words. Another reason that leads to misspelling is the irregularities of the English pronunciation. One sound can be written or pronounced differently. In other words, English writing system is difficult because 26 -letters produce 44 sounds this means it represents various spelling. This make students feel confused.

2.7.4 Punctuation

One of the major challenges EFL learners experience is the misplacement or the omission of punctuation marks. According to Mansouri (2015), many students make an errors or mistakes in using English punctuation marks in their writing. They do not know how to separate phrases and words according to their meaning. In addition, most of the learners often ignore the punctuation in a written essay (p.12).

2.8. The Impact of Teaching Tenses on Students' Writing

Teaching the English tense very important in EFL classes, not only as a knowledge of sentence rules, but also having the ability to write a correct sentences in the right form of tenses .Most of students still struggle to use tenses correctly . In this respect, Quirk et al. (1975) argued that most learners get confused in determining tenses, because of their insufficient knowledge of the different uses and forms of those ones (p. 280).

Ummah (2018, p. 83) stated that having a good knowledge of tenses is believed necessary to support students' ability in both speaking and writing. So, learners can distinguish the time when they come to write and speak and understand the meaning of a sentence, and how to make a sentence in accordance with the tenses that have been studied. The need for learning these tenses gives the students inspiration to construct a correct sentence according to their abilities.

Furthermore, teachers should be able to identify the most common tense problems that students encounter in their writing and try to adapt their teaching since employing the correct tense helps the learners to create clear and meaningful sentences (Derwianka, 1999, p. 3). In this vein, Ummah (2018) claimed that teachers should explain the formula of the tenses in a sentence then give examples of positive, negative and interrogative sentences. After that the teacher gives the problems related to these tenses so that the students will understand how to use English tenses and their aspects appropriately in their writing (P. 84).

2.9. Ways to Overcome Students' Difficulties in Using Complex Tenses

It is very common that English learners commit a lot of errors in grammar, particularly verb form. This could be because twelve verb tenses may not be easy to learn. Most of students have problems in using complex tenses. These problems are related to the difficulty in constructing sentences in the right form of tenses and applying them in the right context.

To overcome these problems, Collins (2007) suggested that the process of teaching and learning complex tenses should focus more on the context-manipulation exercises. So, teachers should make learning complex tenses as interesting as possible by putting them into the context in which the complex tenses are usually used. They should use everyday day experiences and get their class talking about themselves as they learn. Ask a lot of

questions to help the students identify the tense they are using. Another problem which contributes to students' difficulties in using complex tenses is that students learn each verb separately so that they do not have a complete picture of verb tenses. In this respect, Song and Lee (2007) stated that understanding the rules of verb tenses is very confusing because learners learn each verb tense separately so that they do not grasp the large picture of the whole verb tenses (p. 430). In other words, instead of teaching each tense separately consider grouping them. For instance, the teacher could teach all the past complex tenses together this will help the learners see the link between them.

Garrido and Rosado (2012, p. 294) pointed out that in the process of teaching and learning grammar teachers should focus on the tenses in which students are usually confused. A number of grammar practices should be implemented in the classroom to raise the importance of verb tenses and to make the learners more familiar with the tenses forms and their applications, which means that learners should do more training intensively. They should have more effort in doing activities in all tenses in various forms and usages by applying them correctly in their writing.

Conclusion:

The current section has offered a review of the literature related to writing. It provided the definition of writing, its nature, in addition to the relationship between writing and speaking, and writing and reading. Moreover, it discussed the main purpose of writing and its principles which are grammar, vocabulary, mechanism, organization, clarity, coherence and cohesion. Besides, it tackled the indispensable elements of the writing systems that are notation, spelling and writing practice. Furthermore, it listed the main areas of students' writing difficulties. Finally, this section summarized the impact of teaching tenses on students' writing and the ways to overcome students' difficulties in using complex tenses.

Chapter two: Field Work

Section one: Research Methodology

Introduction:

This chapter outlines the methodology that we followed in conducting the study. It attempts to investigate the difficulties students face in applying past complex tenses in written expression classes. First, this chapter will introduce the research tools, the population and sample of the study will also be identified. Besides, the analysis of the collected data will be presented, followed by the discussion of the results. Lastly, the limitations encountered while conducting the research, along with some suggestions for further research are presented.

1.1.Data Collection Procedures

In an attempt to explore the difficulties students face in using past complex tenses in written expression classes, we have opted for two different tools: a test that was administered to third year students, and a questionnaire for teachers of written expression at the department of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahya University of Jijel.

1.2. Population and Sampling

The sample under scope consists of two groups: sample respondents to the test and sample respondents to the questionnaire.

Sample-Respondents to the Test

This research was conducted with 50 students chosen randomly from 10 groups of third year students. From a population of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahya .Jijel. The rationale behind choosing third year students as a population is that students had already studied the tenses rules in the second year (in grammar module).So, supposedly they were indoctrinated by the main instructions and rules of tenses forms and uses.

Sample-Respondents to the Questionnaire

The sample consists of ten teachers of written expression. The sample was selected on the basis of convenience sampling and is made up of ten teachers who answered the questionnaire.

1.3. Description of the Research Tools

In order to answer the research questions and accomplish the aims of the study, two research tools were used: the writing test and the teachers' questionnaire.

1.3.1. Description and administration of the test

The grammatical test purposed to examine the use of past complex tenses as a mean to identify the difficulties students face in written expression classes while applying past complex tenses. It was addressed to fifty students from ten different groups. It comprises two Tasks. The first one is a multiple choices task, where students were asked to select the correct tense from a list of choices. The objective of the test is to see if students can differentiate the function of each tense and use it for the same purpose. The sentences 1, 5, 6, 9 indicate the Past perfect. While, the sentences 3, 7, 8 indicates the past continuous. Whereas, the Past perfect continuous was indicated in the sentences 2, 4.

Concerning the second task, students were asked to write a paragraph about a pleasant or a sad life experience using the appropriate past tenses. The purpose was to classify what type of difficulties students make when using past complex tenses (past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous) in writing. After students finished their test, papers were collected and corrected than analyzed. However, only 25 out of 50 students participated in the second task.

1.3.2. Description of Teacher's Questionnaire

For data reliability and validity, a questionnaire was designed for written expression teachers to ensure the answers to the research questions. Brown (2000) defined questionnaire as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from existing answers”. (as cited in Dorniey, 2003, p.3). The questionnaire was given to 10 teachers of “written expression” in the department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University, Jijel.

The teacher's questionnaire is made up of 15 questions grouped into three sections. It incorporates a combination of close-ended, and open-ended questions for free response, which provide the opportunity for teachers to justify their answers, provide explanations, or to add further information, to make sure that other elements that were not included in the survey would be collected. The first section encompasses two questions (Q1 and Q2) and provides general information about the participants in terms of their gender and their experience in teaching English. The second section is made up of (5) questions (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, and Q7) teachers were asked to express their opinions concerning students' writing skill. The third question aims to investigate teachers' perception towards their students' level of writing. While, the fourth one was posed in order to explore the importance of writing skill. As far as the fifth question is concerned, it aims to explore students' level of proficiency of writing. As for the next question, it was conducted to find out where the students' difficulties in writing are mostly concentrated. The Q7 attempts to examine the teachers' views about the most problematic grammar aspect for students. Concerning the third section, it includes (Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15) which aim to know teachers' point of view regarding students' difficulties in using past complex tenses. Question (8) was asked for the purpose of knowing whether tenses are a crucial component

in writing or not; the respondents who answered this question were requested to justify their answers. Question (9) aims to determine the type of tenses that creates more problems to students. While question (10) was accomplished to explore the type of errors students usually fall into. Question (11) is addressed to know students' frequency of making errors in using tenses when writing. The next question (Q12) aims to identify the reasons behind students' difficulties in using compound tenses. Question (13) tend to evoke the teachers' views about students' frequency of using compound tenses in comparison with simple tenses. The following item (Q14) attempts to investigate the reasons why students avoid using compound tenses. The last question in this section (Q15) was assigned to explore the teachers' perspectives about the ways that can help students to develop their writing skill.

Section two: Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

The present section is devoted to data analysis and presentations which were collected from the teacher's questionnaire and the writing test.

1.4. Presentation and Analysis of Students' Test

Task one: Multiple Choices

A. The Past Perfect Tense

Table 1:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in The Selection of past perfect Tense in Task One.

		Past perfect							
Function	Example	CA		WA		NA		T	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A. An action that happened before another one in the past.	When I arrived	20	40%	30	60%	0	0	50	100%
	The film had already started.								
	The mom cleaned the house after every one had eaten.	23	46%	27	54%	0	0	50	100%
B_ To express a condition and a result	If I had known you were ill, I would have visited you.	12	24%	37	74%	1	2%	50	100%
C_ To express superlative experiences often in sentences started with "was".	It was the most wonderful scene I had ever seen.	14	28%	35	70%	1	2%	50	100%

Function A

In the first example, the highest percentage (30; 60%) goes to students who got the wrong answer. The majority of participants chose the present perfect (have started) instead of the past perfect (had started) because the two tenses are similar in use. Whereas, the correct answers show a lower percentage (20; 40 %). Hence, students have difficulty and feel confused to choose the appropriate tense especially when it comes to tenses with similar functions.

As for the second example, based on the scores written above, the highest percentage of students (27; 54 %) answered incorrectly. Most of students chose the past simple (ate) instead of past perfect (had eaten). While others provided the wrong form with incorrect past participle of the Verb eat (Had ate Instead of had eaten). Meanwhile, 23 students (46 %) selected the correct tense.

Function B

The example above show that the vast majority of students (37; 74%) provided the wrong answer. Most of the students selected the past simple (knew) instead of the past perfect (had known). While, only (12; 24%) answered correctly. Only one student (2%) did not answer. Thus, students have a difficulty to choose the appropriate tense because the simple past tense are simpler and the past simple tense share the same time frame with the past perfect; what May create some kinds of confusion to students.

Function C

As the table indicates, the majority of students (35; 70) failed to answer correctly. The majority of students selected the present Perfect (have Ever seen) as an Alternative to the past perfect (had ever seen) .Others chose the Correct tenses but with the Wrong form (ever seen) instead of (had ever seen). Meanwhile, a law number of students (14; 28%)

selected the Right answer .Only (1; 2%) didn't provide any answer. As a result, students face difficulties in both past perfect use and form.

B. The past Continuous Tense

Table 2:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in the Selection of Past Continuous Tense in Task One.

Past continuous									
Function	Example	CA		WA		NA		T	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A_ Something in progress at a certain period of time in the past.	At three o'clock, I was revising my lessons	19	38%	31	62%	0	0%	50	100%
B_ setting background events.	When we visited our garden in the countryside, the birds were singing smoothly.	35	70%	14	28%	1	2%	50	100%
C_ To emphasize on something lasted for a while.	I was reading all the evening.	15	30%	34	68%	1	2%	50	100%

Function A

The first example in table (2) shows that 31 students (62%) selected the wrong answer, most of them chose past simple (revised) instead of past continuous (was revising), while other picked up past perfect continuous (had been revising). Whereas, 19 students (38%) went for the correct answer. The findings indicate that students tend to choose

simple tenses rather than complex ones, and get confused with tenses with similar functions in the past.

Function B

The table reveals that the correct answers take the highest percentage (35; 70%). While (14; 28%) of the student's selection was incorrect. Only one student (2%) did not answer. This can be deduced to the fact that most of students recognize the tense' function.

Function C

The scores show that biggest percentage (34; 68%) goes to the wrong answer. The majority of student selected the past perfect continuous (had been reading) Instead of past continuous .While (15; 30%) of students selected correctly .Only one student (1; 2%) did not answer. The results show that the students' comprehension of past Continuous is not absolute when there are some functions that seem difficult for Students to comprehend.

C. The Past Perfect Continuous Tense

Table 3:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in the Selection of Past Perfect Continuous in Task One.

Past perfect continuous									
Function	Example	CA		WA		NA		T	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
A_ Something that started in the past and continued up to another action or time in the past.	I had been Walking for hours, when I finally found the house.	13	26%	36	72%	1	2	50	100%
B_ Something that finished just before another event to show cause or effect.	I had been working before I saw you, that's why I was really tired.	12	24%	37	74%	1	2%	50	100%

Function A

In the first example, the majority of students (36; 72%) Selected the wrong answer. Most of students substituted the past perfect continuous (had been Walking) by present perfect continuous (have been walking). While (13; 26%) provided the correct answer. Only one student (1; 2%) did not answer. This result indicates that Students may feel

confused since this tense associated with the present perfect continuous as an aspect (perfect).

Function B

In the above example, the scores show clearly that the majority of students (39; 78%) Failed in selecting the correct tense. A large number of students chose the past continuous as an alternative to Past perfect Continuous. Only 11students (22%) selected the correct Tense. Owing to the fact that both tenses indicate the continuous aspect. Thus, they have similar functions.

Task Two: Students' Paragraphs.

A. The Past Perfect Tense

Table 4:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in the use of Past Perfect in task two.

The form of tense			
Answers	N	%	Examples
CA	6	40	1. If I had started early ... 2. When we had left ...
WA	9	60	
Addition	2	22,22	I had been told ...
Omission	1	11,11	The moment I ever seen ...
Misformation	6	66,66	1. We had past different things ... 2. I had knew it will rain ...
Misordering	0	0	/
Total	15	100	

As can be observed in the table above, 15 answer were done concerning the use of past perfect tense. 40% of the answers were correct. Whereas, the wrong answers represented the majority (60%). The most committed errors (6) by students are categorized under misformation errors; more specifically in providing incorrect past participle of irregular verbs. For example they applied (*past*) instead of (*passed*), and (*knew*) instead of (*known*). Whereas, other errors (2) were addition errors, for instance, students added the auxiliary “been” to the past perfect tense form (*had been told*) instead of (*had told*). one case was committed of omitting the auxiliary “had” from the tense construction (*ever seen*) instead of (*had ever seen*). Consequently, offering the correct form of past perfect tense is

rather challenging especially concerning past participle of irregular verbs those which are partially hard to memorize.

B. The past Continuous Tense:

Table 5:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in the use of Past continuous in task two.

The form of tense			
Answers	N	%	Examples
CA	6	54,54	1. I was studying so hard ... 2. He was always thinking about ...
WA	5	45,45	
Addition	2	40	I was been crying ...
Omission	3	60	The moment I ever seen ...
misformation	0	0	/
Misordering	0	0	/
Total	11	100	

According to the data shown in the table above, 11 answer were marked in using the past continuous tense. The correct answers show a percentage of 45, 45%. While 54, 54% of the answers are wrong. The most frequent errors (3)students made were omission errors; in which students recurrently omitted the auxiliary “was” or “were” and developed wrong tense form(*I thinking*) instead of (*I was thinking*). The rest cases (2) represent the addition of ungrammatical elements to the tense form like auxiliaries (*was been crying*) instead of (*was crying*).However, no cases were marked for Misordering and misformation errors. It seems slight problematic to some students to apply the past continuous tense form.

C. The Past Perfect Continuous Tense:

Table 6:

The Distribution of Wrong and Correct Answers in the use of Past perfect continuous in task two.

The form of tense			
Answers	N	%	Examples
CA	3	33,33	I had been waiting for a long time ...
WA	6	66,66	
Addition	0	0	/
Omission	3	50	1. I been preparing for exams ... 2. I had studying for hours ...
Misformation	2	33,33	We had been workings...
Misordering	1	16,66	Something weird had been happening ...
Total	9	100	

As shown in the table (6), a percentage of 33; 33% was noted of correct answers. Meanwhile, the wrong answers indicate the majority (66, 66%) errors regarding the past perfect continuous were marked in all types. The most frequent errors students made (3) were omission errors. Students sometimes omitted some of the elements from the tense form; for example, they omitted the auxiliary “been” (*had studying*) instead of (*had been studying*). Else, they misplaced the auxiliary “had” (*been preparing*) instead of (*had been preparing*) because of the incomplete application of rules of past perfect continuous. Furthermore, they committed two misformation errors; for instance, students provide the wrong morpheme of verb form (*workings*) instead of (*working*). Moreover, one Misordering error was marked, where students misordered the tense form’ elements (*been had happening*) instead of (*had been happening*). While, no addition errors were

committed. This indicates that using the correct form of past perfect continuous is challenging for the majority of the students owing to its complicated formula.

1.4.1. General Findings of Students' Test

The main aim of this grammatical test is to determine students' ability to choose the appropriate use of the under scope tenses in context, as well to examine their ability to apply the correct tense form. From the data gathered and analyzed from both tasks we can dig deeply on the main difficulties come upon using the past complex tenses in the written tasks.

The Past Perfect Tense

The results reveals that the most frequent error students made regarding the past perfect tense use was the selection of present perfect tense instead of the past perfect tense. Based on that, we can conclude the main difficulty face students in deciding which tense is more appropriate in a certain situation; especially when the case specifies tenses with similar functions or indicate the same aspect. Moreover, they sometimes selected simpler tense such as the past simple to avoid the tense' complexity. Furthermore, even in case when they recognized the tense use, they often faced serious challenges to offer the correct tense formulas since it consists the past participle of verbs which is considered hard to memorize.

The Past continuous Tense

Seemingly, students have less difficulties concerning the past continuous tense in comparison with the rest past complex tenses; especially in its simplest uses. However, the state is not absolute, where students occasionally felt confused to choose between the past continuous tense and other tenses which associated with it as an aspect (continuous) such as the past perfect continuous. Also, they sometimes selected the simple past tense instead

of past continuous for being simpler. The past continuous form, despite it represents simpler formula. Yet, it was challenging for students to develop its complete form. They sometimes offered incomplete application of the tense form, either by omitting some of the tense form' elements or adding ungrammatical ones to the tense construction.

The Past perfect continuous tense

The results show that the main difficulty face students while applying the past perfect continuous tense was in differentiating between the tense and other tenses that indicate the perfect and continuous aspects similarly with the past perfect continuous; tenses such as present perfect continuous and past continuous that share some similar functions with the tense. Besides, students felt uncertainty to apply the past perfect continuous' long complicated formula which contains various grammatical elements. They often provided ungrammatical tense form; either by omitting one of its grammatical elements, reordering these elements, or providing wrong morphemes of the tense form.

To sum up, most of the students face serious problems in applying the past complex tenses both in the level of use and form. The tenses' complex uses and their long complicated formula are the main areas of difficulty face students while applying the past complex tenses in their written tasks.

1.5. Presentation and analysis of teachers' Questionnaire

Section One: General information

Q 1: You are male or female?

Table7:

Teachers' Gender

Options	Number	%
Male	0	0
Female	10	100
Total	10	100

The above results show that the entire sample of teachers are females (10out of 10)

Q 2:How long have you been teaching English?

Table 8:

Teachers' Experience in the Field of Teaching English

Options	Number	%
Less than 5 years	5	50
5 to 10 yeas	3	30
More than 10 years	2	20
Total	1	100

The results in table 8 represent teacher's experience in the field of English teaching, which were divided into three categories. Half of the sample 50% have been teaching English for less than 5years. 30% asserted that they've been in the field of teaching from 5 to 10years now. And only 2 were teachers for more than 10years.

Section two: Students' Writing Skill.

Q3: How do you consider your students 'writing skill'?

Table 9:

Teachers' Evaluation of their Students' Writing Skill.

Options	Number	%
Excellent	0	0
Good	1	10
Average	4	40
Weak	5	50
Total	10	100

The above results represent teacher's answers about their rating to their students' writing skills. The table clarifies that half of the participants 50% consider their students 'writing skills as weak. While, 40% of teachers gave an average rate to their students writing skills. However, only 10% of the sample sees that students' level in writing is good. Leaving the excellent column empty with a 0% rate.

Q 4: How important is writing skill?

Table 10:

Teachers' Opinions about the Importance of Writing Skill.

Options	Number	%
Very important	10	100
Important	0	0
Not important	0	0
Total	10	100

The table 10 explores the importance of writing skill. The entire sample of 10 teachers (100%) agreed that writing skill is very important.

✚ Sub question: justify

Teachers' justification can be summarized in the following points:

1. *“it is very important in academic settings students have to be manageable in this skill”*
2. *“Because it is one of the four main skills of the language. It is a way with other parts of the world and students need to be skillful.*
3. *“Helps learners to produce well-structured essays and to access academic writing”.*
4. *“Because it enhances their critical thinking “.*
5. *“It is an important part of communication, students messages can be understood in a better way “.*
6. *“ It fosters our ability to explain and refine our ideas , thoughts to others “*
7. *“It is the base form for studying any language”.*

Q 5: Do students often find difficulties in written expression classes?

Table 11:

Teachers' Views about Students' Difficulties in Written Expression Classes.

Options	Number	%
Yes	10	100
No	0	0
Total	10	100

The results of the table show that all teachers (10; 100%) have affirmed that student often find difficulties in written expression classes.

Q 6: If yes, what type of difficulties?

Table 12:

Teachers' Perceptions about the Type of Difficulties Students Find in Written Expression Classes.

Options	Number	%
Grammar mistakes	10	100
Vocabulary	8	80
placement of punctuation marks	4	40
spelling mistakes	4	40
Total	10	100

Statistics related to this question revealed that all of teachers agreed that students' grammar mistakes in their writing among the most prominent difficulties that students encounter. The lack of vocabulary was confirmed by 80% of teachers as a struggling type of writing. However, spelling and the placement of punctuation marks are each identified by 4 teachers (40%) as a problematic areas of writing .Hence, it is agreed that grammar is a complicated task that creates difficulties to students while writing.

Q 7: What aspect of grammar students have more problems in?

Table 13:

Teachers' Opinions about the Most Problematic Aspect of Grammar for Students.

Options	Number	%
Tenses	7	70
Adverbs/ Adjectives	1	10
Articles	0	0
Prepositions	2	20
Total	10	100

According to the findings shown above, table 13 illustrates teacher's perception toward what aspects of grammar students have problems in. The majority of participant (70%) indicates that tenses are the most problematic aspect for students. 20% of teachers believed that the use of preposition is another issue students face. Whereas, only 10% of the sample claimed that students find difficulty with adverbs and adjectives and none of teachers chose articles as being a problem to student.

Section Three: Students' Difficulties in Using Complex Tenses

Q 8: Tenses are a crucial component in writing?

Table 14:

Teachers' Perspectives about the Importance of Tenses in Writing.

Options	Number	%
Yes	10	100
No	0	0
Total	20	100

As it is shown in this table. All teachers (10) agreed of the fact that tenses are a crucial component in writing due to their importance.

✚ Sub question: justify

Some teachers justified their answers in the following point:

1. *“Because they contribute in giving in detailed description of writing material regarding the time and events”.*
2. *“Since writing contains a group of sentences, tenses are important part of these sentences”.*
3. *“Grammar is the law that governs the system of the language”.*
4. *“The passages written should be grammatically correct”.*

Q 9: What type of tenses students consider as difficult?

Table 15:

Teachers’ Responses about the Type of Tenses which is considered as Difficult to Students.

Options	Number	%
Simple tenses	0	0
Complex tenses	10	100
Total	10	100

The data shown in the table above presents teachers perceptions toward which type of tenses students consider as difficult. All teachers agreed on the fact that complex tenses are the most problematic type students struggle with.

Sub question: explain

The following are some of the explanations provided by teachers:

1. *“Complex tenses are rarely used. Hence, when it comes to writing students find difficulties to put them into practice”.*

2. *“Complex tenses poses a challenge because students do not know their different uses and they cannot memorize their complicated formulas”.*
3. *“Students consider complex tenses as difficult. They get confused when it comes to apply them in the context, because they do not know too much about their uses. Most of the students use simple tenses and avoid complex ones”.*
4. *“Students face problems with complex tenses because they get confused between the different uses of tenses when and how to use them”.*
5. *“Most of students either avoid using them or making mistakes in the use of these complex tense”.*

Q 10: What type of errors students usually fall into?

Table 16:

Teachers’ Responses about the Type of Errors Students Usually Fall into.

Options	Number	%
Errors in form	1	10
Errors in choice	1	10
Both	8	80
Total	10	100

As shown in table (16), the majority of participants opted for the option both, which means that students make both errors in form and in choice. Meanwhile, 10% of teachers saw that students fall into errors of choice only and the other 10% were suggested that students make errors in form. From the results obtained, it can be noticed that lots of students have difficulties in using complex tenses both at the level of form and choice.

Q 11: How frequently do they often make errors in using tenses in writing?

Table 17:

Teachers' Responses about the Students' Frequency of Making Errors in Using Tenses in Writing.

Options	Number	%
Always	3	30
Often	6	60
Sometimes	1	10
Rarely	0	0
Total	10	100

From the analysis of the results presented in table (17), we found that 6 teachers out of 10 reported that their students often make errors when using tenses in writing. 3 other teachers reported that their students always make errors in writing. Only one teacher stated that her students sometimes make errors in using tenses in writing. We noticed from the obtained data, the majority of students tend to make errors in using tenses in writing, which indicates that complex tenses is a matter of difficulty.

Q 12: In your opinion, why students find difficulty in using compound tenses?

The following are teachers' perceptions toward the reasons why students find difficulty in using compound tenses, they are summarized in these points:

1. *"Because Compound tenses are close in functions, hard to be memorized".*
2. *"Students make use L1 of knowledge, which does not have quite the same tenses".*
3. *"Because Compound tenses contain auxiliaries and complicated formulas that is hard to be memorized".*

4. *“The main reason behind the students’ difficulties of using compound tenses is the lack of practice from the part of the students. When they go home, they do not attempt to read more about tenses”.*
5. *“Because compound tenses are not used in daily basis, students do not use them as simple tenses .Besides, the lack of writing activities they do not write only if they are obliged to and the difficulty to use them correctly”.*
6. *“Because they apply the incorrect forms when they write without paying attention to the correct form and use”.*

Q 13: Do they use them in the same frequency as other simple tenses?

Table 18:

Teachers’ Responses about the Frequency in which Students Use Compound Tenses in Comparison with Simple Tenses.

Options	Number	%
Same as other tenses	1	10
not the same as other tenses	9	90
Total	10	100

The answers generated from this question show that almost all of students (9out of 10) asserted that their students don’t use compound tenses in the same frequency as the other simple tenses. In the other hand, only one teachers were in favor of the first option which suggests that students do you both compound and simple tenses with the same frequency. This implies that students avoid using compound tenses so that they don’t fall into errors since they find difficulty in.

Q 14: What do you think is the reason why students avoid using such tenses?

Table 19:

Teachers' Perceptions about the Reasons behind Students' Avoidance of Using Compound Tenses.

Option	Number	%
A. insufficient knowledge of grammar rules of past complex tense.	3	30
B. lack of writing activities regarding the use of past complex tenses.	5	50
C. insufficient knowledge of the form and use of past complex tenses.	8	80
D. the complicated formulas of past complex tenses.	8	80
Total	10	100

As table (19) outlines, both options c and d gain 80% rate from teachers which indicates that the main two reasons why students avoid using past complex tenses is the insufficient knowledge of the form and use of the latter, and the complicated formula of past complex tenses. Also 50% of teachers opted for option b which proposes the lack of writing activities regarding the use of past complex tenses to be the reason that make students avert from utilize complex tenses. Whereas, 30% of teachers suggested the insufficient knowledge of grammar rules of past complex tenses as the reason why students prefer not to use past complex tenses. No teacher suggested further opinion. The findings entails that all the reasons play a role on students and that the insufficient knowledge of the difficult formula of rules is the major cause.

Q 15: How can students develop their writing skills?

Table 20:

Teachers' Perceptions about the Ways that Can Help Students to Develop their Writing Skill.

Option	Number	%
Both intensive and extensive reading strategies	6	60
Writing strategies.	6	60
present students with appealing / interesting Activities like personal story writing.	2	20
deductive teaching of conjugation	4	40
Total	10	100

As can be seen in the table, 60% of teachers selected both intensive and extensive reading strategies, in addition to writing strategies as the main ways students can rely on to develop their writing skill. Yet, 40% of teachers viewed the deductive teaching of conjugations as an effective way to develop students' writing skill. Whereas, only 20% of teachers viewed that developing the writing skill can be conducted through presenting students with appealing/ interesting activities like personal story writing can develop the students' writing skill. The Results discloses that developing the students' writing skill requires a combination of both intensive and extensive reading strategies and writing strategies.

1.5.1. General Findings of Teachers' Questionnaire

The analysis of teachers' questionnaire reveals that there is an assent among teachers about the importance of tenses in written expression classes. All teachers agree that tenses are a crucial component in writing and that students face difficulties in using

complex tenses. In the first section which is concerned with general information, the findings show that half of teachers have been teaching written expression for less than 5 years. This indicates that their teaching experience would help us for conducting our research's aims.

The results obtained from the analysis of the second section of the questionnaire which is concerned with writing skill, clearly show that the majority of teachers rate their students' writing skill between weak to average. The results also revealed that the most common difficulties faced by students while writing are the misuse of grammar in general and tenses in specific. In addition, all teacher agreed on the importance of writing skill in EFL classes.

The analysis of the last section which is related to the difficulties students encounter when using complex tenses in writing, clearly demonstrates that all teachers consider tenses a crucial component in writing because "they contribute in giving a detailed description of the writing material regarding the time and events". Moreover, the section revealed that students mostly find difficulties when using complex tenses at the level of both form and choice. Teachers also stated that students got confused when it comes to apply them in the context, they don't know when and how to use them, instead they use simple tenses rather than complex ones. Furthermore, findings suggested that the main two reasons why students avoid using complex tense are: the complicated formula of the complex tenses and the insufficient knowledge of the form and use of past complex tenses. Eventually, teachers suggested ways for students to develop their writing skills through using a combination of both intensive and extensive reading and writing strategies.

1.6.Overall Discussion of the Main Results:

Based on the data acquired from both the students 'test and the teachers' questionnaire; we have concluded the following statements about the main difficulties face students while applying past complex tenses in written expression classes. Inevitably, the answers of the research questions introduced at the very beginning are as follows:

Initially, Students face serious problems in deciding which tense is more appropriate in a certain situation. Indeed, they get confused to differentiate between tenses with similar functions or share some properties with the three past complex tenses both as a tense (past) or as an aspect (progressive or perfect) since these tenses is a merge between past as a tense and perfect and continuous as aspect. Hence, deciding which tense is more appropriate in a given situation seems to be extremely confusing to students; owing to the fact that these tenses are seldom to be used. Moreover, The intricate patterns or the long formula of past complex tenses creates troubles to students since these tenses' construction contains auxiliaries and past participle of verbs which do not follow a standard pattern and hard to memorize. Thus, the presentation of various forms of verbs to specify a specific tense is among the major problems face students while applying past complex tenses in written forms.

Furthermore, Students make errors in both tense use and tense form. Regarding the tense use, students recurrently apply the past complex tenses incorrectly in situations. They either substitute the tense with other tenses, or use simpler tenses to avoid their complexity. Regarding the tense form, student make errors in the proper use of verb forms to suit a certain tense. Indeed, they frequently provide ungrammatical, incomplete tense form. The errors made by students were categorized based on Dulay et al. (1982, pp. 154-162) theory into: omission, addition, Misordering, and misformation (incorrect past participle of irregular verbs).

In a nutshell, the obtained data from both students 'test and teachers' questionnaire significantly divulged the first hypothesis of the research which states that students could find difficulties to use past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous in their written forms especially in terms of form and use.

2. Limitations of the Study

During the preparation of this piece of research we encountered some difficulties that worth mentioning:

- ✓ Due to covid 19 and what specific circumstance followed it, it was difficult to fulfill this work especially the practical part because of time constraints, in which third year students were available for only two weeks a semester. Hence, the researchers were unable to communicate freely with the students to accomplish the tests.
- ✓ A large number of students were not cooperative in filling the test. It was hard to convince the students to write a paragraphs.
- ✓ It was difficult to find adequate number of teachers to answer the questionnaire due to the aforementioned circumstance.

3. Pedagogical Recommendations

The current research attempted to provide a deeper understanding of the difficulties students face when using complex tenses in written expression classes. Indeed, after analyzing the teachers' questionnaire and the writing test, we would like to suggest and provide some recommendations for further research:

- Teachers have to inform students about the significant role of the writing skill, and they should motivate them to write.
- Teachers should make students aware of the great value of tenses in writing.

- Teachers should be aware of the areas of difficulty resulting from tenses' complexity that causes confusion to students.
- Teachers should use a variety of strategies and that integrate all skills to make students more familiar with tenses' form and use.
- Concerning the students' level in writing, it is unsatisfactory in which students have to:
 - Be aware of the importance of mastering English tense in developing an efficient piece of writing.
 - Practice the use of tenses inside and outside the classroom in order to improve their level of tense' mastery
 - Students should be taught the grammar functions and how to use the form instead of memorizing the rules that may not serve the context.

4. Suggestions for Further Research

Some suggestions can be put forward to conduct further research about the matter:

- ❖ It is suggested for future researchers to investigate generalizable findings. Then it is also advisable to find out whether there is any correlation between students' ability to use tenses with their proficiency in all skills of English.
- ❖ Other core grammar topics such as passive voice, conditionals, articles, or prepositions are worth discussing to find out more about grammar difficulties among EFL learners by utilizing other instruments for more reliable results.
- ❖ Further researches should be conducted to investigate students' areas of difficulty in applying other problematic tenses and aspects that may causes troubles to students.

Chapter's Conclusion

This chapter represents the practical part of the study; investigating the difficulties students face in applying past complex tenses including: past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous in written expression classes. The data about the main types of difficulties was gathered through two research tools. Namely a students' test and a questionnaire that was directed to teachers. This chapter portrayed the analysis and discussion of the results, lend credence to the assumptions that students' difficulties are concentrated on the tenses' use and form, and that students provide ungrammatical sentences when applying past complex tenses in their writing.

General Conclusion

Among the crucial difficulties that students face in writing, one may list lack of ideas, vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar essentially tenses. The current piece of research was set up to investigate the difficulties students face in applying past complex tenses in written expression classes. It has comprised of two main chapters. The first chapter of the research is the literature review. The second is a field of investigation which took the form of both a quantitative and a qualitative via two research tools. The teachers' questionnaire, on one hand, revealed that tenses particularly complex ones present a problematic matter in which students still struggle with. Also, it affirmed that the difficulties students mostly face are mainly concentrated both at the level of tense form and choice. As a result of their complex functions and long formulas, thus, they usually avoid using them. Teachers suggested a combination of both intensive and extensive reading strategies and writing strategies as the main ways students can rely on to improve their writing skill. The writing test, on the other hand, shown that students face a serious problem to decide and choose which tense is more appropriate in a certain situation, and differentiate between the tenses' functions. Furthermore, they feel struggle to develop the correct tenses' forms. Indeed, some students provide incomplete application of the tenses' forms. They made omission, addition, Misordering, misformation errors.

To sum up, the results affirmed that students face difficulties when applying complex tenses in written expression classes. There are two main types of errors students make, errors at the level of use which is related to the different functions of each tense. And errors at the level of form that can be divided into four types according to Duley et al (1982) theory which are: omission, addition, misformation, and Misordering.

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Appendices

Appendix (A)

Appendix (B)

Appendix (A)

Students Tests:

Task1: fill in the gaps using the appropriate tense's form.

1. When I arrived , the filmalready(start)
 - Had started
 - Have started
 - Was started
 - Had been started

2. I (walk)for hours, when I finally found the house.
 - Have been walking
 - Had walked
 - Had been walking
 - walked

3. At three o'clock, I (revise) my lessons.
 - Revised
 - Have been revising
 - Am revising
 - Was revising

4. I (work), before I saw you, that's why I was really tired.
 - Was working
 - Worked
 - Had worked
 - Had been working

5. If I (know)you were ill , I would have visited you .
 - Have known
 - Had known

- **knew**
- **had knew**
-

6. It was the most wonderful scene I (ever) (See).

- **Have ever seen**
- **Had ever seen**
- **Ever seen**
- **saw**

7. When we visited our garden in the countryside, the birds (Sing) smoothly.

- **Have sung**
- **Sung**
- **were singing**
- **sang**

8. I..... (Read) all the day.

- **am reading**
- **was reading**
- **have been reading**
- **read**

9. The mom cleaned the house after everyone (Eat).

- **is eating**
- **ate**
- **had eaten**
- **had ate**

Appendix (B)

Teacher's questionnaire:

Dear teacher, the following questionnaire is a part of our master dissertation, which aims to investigate the difficulties students face in applying past complex tenses in written expression classes. We are kindly asking you to provide us with your opinions based in your experience in teaching by answering the bellow questions.

Section one: General Information.

1. You are :

Male

Female

2. How long have you been teaching English?

Less than 5 years

5 to 10 years

More than 10

Section two: Students 'Writing Skill.

3. How do you consider your students 'writing skill?

Excellent

Good

Average

Weak

4. How important is writing skill?

Important

Very important

Not important

- Why?

.....

.....

.....

5. Do students often find difficulties in written expression classes?

Yes

No

6. If yes, what types of difficulties?

Lack of vocabulary

Grammar mistakes

Placement of punctuation marks

spelling mistakes

Lack of exposure to books and reading materials

Others

.....

7. What aspect of grammar student have more problems in?

Tenses

Adverbs /adjectives

Articles

Prepositions

Section three: Students' Difficulties In Using Complex Tenses.

8. Tenses are a crucial component in writing?

Yes

No

Explain.....

.....

.....

9. What type of tenses students consider as difficult?

Simple tenses

Complex tenses

- Explain

.....

.....

.....

10. What type of errors do they usually fall into?

Errors in form

Errors in choice

Both

11. How frequently do they make errors in using tenses when writing?

Always

Sometimes

Often

Rarely

12. In your opinion, why students find difficulty in using compound tenses?

- Explain

.....

.....

13. Do they use them in the same frequency as other simple tenses?

Same as other tenses

Not the same as other tenses

14. What do you think about the reason behind avoiding using such tenses?

Insufficient knowledge of grammar rules of past complex tenses.

Lack of writing activities regarding the use of past complex tenses.

Insufficient knowledge of the form and use of past complex tenses.

The complicated formulas of past complex tenses.

Others

15. How can students develop their writing skills?

Both intensive and extensive reading Deductive teaching of conjugation

Writing strategies

Present students with appealing / interesting activities like personal story writing

Résumé:

Cette présente étude vise à identifier les difficultés principales que les étudiants rencontrent lors de l'utilisation des temps du passé composé: Past Perfect, Past Continuous et Past Perfect Continuous. Comme elle tente aussi d'analyser les erreurs que font les élèves en appliquant ces temps dans leur écriture. Alors, deux questions sont posées :1) Quels sont les obstacles confrontés par les étudiants en ce qui concerne la conjugaison des verbes du passé composé dans l'expression écrite.2) Quelles sont les erreurs commises par les apprenants lors de l'utilisation des temps passés composés dans leurs écrits ?. Les données de cette étude ont été collectées à l'aide d'un test de grammaire qui a été conçu et mis en œuvre auprès d'un échantillon d'un groupe de cinquante étudiants de troisième année à l'université Mohammed Seddik ben Yahya; en plus d'un questionnaire qui a été administré à dix (10) professeurs d'expression écrite au département d'anglais de la même université. Les résultats obtenus de la recherche ont montré que les temps les plus problématiques sont le past perfect et le past perfect continuous , et les étudiants rencontrent également moins de difficultés en ce qui concerne le past continuous par rapport aux temps passés composés restants.En outre,les étudiants rencontrent des difficultés dans l'utilisation des temps du passé composé dans leurs formes d'écriture tant au niveau de l'usage que de la forme. Concernant l'utilisation du temp, La plupart des étudiants ont du mal à appliquer les temps du passé composé de manière appropriée dans leur contexte. Ils se sentent confus de faire la différence entre leurs utilisations complexes. Soit ils substituent le temps par d'autres temps, ou utilisent des temps plus simples pour éviter la complexité. Concernant la forme du temp, les principaux types d'erreurs sont omission, ajout, déformation et désordre. Les étudiants trouvent difficile d'offrir la forme correcte qui convient à chaque temps dans leurs formes écrites. Par conséquent, il est recommandé aux enseignants de fournir une explication approfondie concernant les fonctions et les formes des temps ; surtout que ceux sont rarement utilisés afin de surmonter tous types de confusion qui peuvent amener les étudiants à éviter d'utiliser ces temps dans leur écriture.

ملخص

تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى تحري أهم الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة عند استخدام الأزمنة الماضية المركبة والتي تشمل: الماضي التام، الماضي المستمر، والماضي التام المستمر، من خلال إبراز واكتشاف الأخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلبة يتم طرح سؤالين (1) ما هو نوع الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلبة في تصريف الأفعال الماضية المركبة في حصص التعبير الكتابي. (2) ما هو نوع الأخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلبة عند استخدام الأزمنة الماضية المركبة في كتابتهم. ولتحقيق ما هدفت إليه الدراسة، تم جمع المعطيات اللازمة من خلال اختبار قواعد اللغة والذي تم توجيهه إلى عينة من الطلبة والتي تمثل 50 طالبا من مستوى السنة الثالثة للغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد الصديق بن يحيى. ومن ناحية أخرى تم طرح استبيان إلى 10 أساتذة التعبير الكتابي في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بالجامعة نفسها. وقد أظهرت نتائج البحث المحصلة عليها أن الأزمنة الأكثر إشكالا هي الماضي التام والماضي التام المستمر كما يواجه الطلبة صعوبات أقل فيما يتعلق بالماضي المستمر مقارنة بالأزمنة الماضية المركبة المتبقية. كما أثبتت أن الطلبة يواجهون صعوبات في استخدام الأفعال الماضية المركبة في كتابتهم من حيث الاستعمال والصيغة. فيما يخص الاستعمال، يجد معظم الطلبة صعوبات في استخدام الأفعال الماضية المركبة في السياق على نحو صحيح. بالإضافة إلى ذلك إذ أنهم يواجهون صعوبات في التفريق بين الاستعمالات المعقدة لهاته الأزمنة، فإما إن يستبدلوا الزمن المناسب بأزمنة أخرى أو يستخدموا الأزمنة الأيسر لتجنب التعقيد. فيما يخص الصيغة، الأنواع الرئيسية للأخطاء هي: الحذف، بالإضافة، سوء الترتيب، سوء التشكيل. علاوة على ذلك يواجه معظم الطلبة تحديات عديدة من أجل إعطاء الصيغة الصحيحة التي تناسب كل زمن وكنتيجه تم اقتراح توصيات للأساتذة بتقديم شرح عميق حول وظائف وصيغ الأزمنة وخاصة النادر استخدامها من أجل القضاء على شتى أنواع الارتباك التي تؤدي بالطلبة إلى تفادي استخدام هاته الأزمنة في الكتابة.