

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC QUẢN LÝ VÀ CÔNG NGHỆ HẢI PHÒNG



KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP

NGÀNH: NGÔN NGỮ ANH

Sinh viên : Nguyễn Thùy Linh

HẢI PHÒNG – 2025

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**EFFECTIVE METHODS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH
GRAMMAR LEARNING FOR FRESHMEN AT HAI
PHONG UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT AND
TECHNOLOGY.**

KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP ĐẠI HỌC HỆ CHÍNH QUY
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For Freshmen At Hai Phong University of Management And
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Hải Phòng, ngày tháng năm 2025

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Learning For Freshmen At Hai Phong University of
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Giảng viên chấm phản biện

(Ký và ghi rõ tên)

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ABSTRACT

Learning to master English verb tenses remains a persistent challenge for Vietnamese learners, particularly for first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology. This research seeks to uncover the key difficulties students face when navigating English tenses and to identify effective methods that could better support their learning journey.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with semi-structured interviews, the study reveals significant barriers: confusion between similar tenses, limited exposure to authentic English contexts, and the influence of native language structures. The preference among students for communicative and task-based learning methods highlights a shift away from traditional grammar-centered teaching.

Drawing from the data analysis, the study proposes a blend of strategies, such as interactive practices and task-based learning to contextualized instruction and blended learning environments. These methods are designed not only to address the technical aspects of grammar but also to build learners' confidence and foster more natural language use.

Although the study's scope is limited, the findings offer valuable insights into how a more dynamic, practice-oriented approach can bridge the gap between grammar knowledge and real-world communication. Future research may extend these insights to other aspects of English grammar learning.

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale of the Study

English is undeniably the global language for communication, used in various sectors like international business, academia, science, and technology. According to a report from the British Council (2020), English is now spoken by over 1.5 billion people worldwide, with over 750 million non-native speakers using it for daily communication, academic pursuits, and professional endeavors. In Vietnam, the importance of English is increasingly emphasized due to the growing need for global connectivity and the country's integration into the international economy. English is taught at all educational levels in Vietnam, and proficiency in it has become essential for academic and career success.

Despite the widespread focus on learning English in Vietnam, many Vietnamese students, particularly those at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology continue to struggle with understanding and applying English grammar effectively. A common challenge that many Vietnamese learners face is the complexity of English grammar rules, especially when compared to Vietnamese grammar. Unlike Vietnamese, which is a more analytic language, English grammar involves more nuanced structures such as verb tenses, articles, and prepositions. It especially relies heavily on verb tenses to convey different meanings, timeframes, and actions. This difference often creates confusion for students who are accustomed to the simplicity and structure of their native language.

The tendency of students to rely on direct translation between Vietnamese and English leads to errors in tense usage, as the rules governing tense in English do not directly match those of Vietnamese. Research by Hinkel (2002) highlights that the over-reliance on translation strategies can result in students failing to produce grammatically accurate sentences in English. For instance, students might say, "I am going to the market yesterday," because in Vietnamese, the tense does not always need to match the time of the event, leading to confusion when translating ideas into English.

Moreover, the lack of sufficient exposure to authentic English contexts and the overemphasis on grammar drills rather than contextualized practice also contribute to students' challenges. According to the study by Lightbown and Spada (2013), learners who only engage in mechanical grammar exercises without contextualizing them in real-world scenarios tend to have difficulty applying grammar rules correctly in spontaneous communication. This is particularly evident in first-year students, who may not have had enough opportunities to practice grammar in authentic communication, resulting in a lack of confidence and incorrect usage of tenses in both spoken and written English.

A number of studies have shown that students' grammar knowledge often lags behind their listening and speaking skills. According to research by Swan (2005) and Celce-Murcia (2001), learners frequently overlook grammar, focusing instead on improving their conversational fluency. While fluency is important, it is equally essential for students to understand and apply correct grammar rules to ensure that their communication is accurate and effective. This gap in grammar knowledge, particularly with verb tenses, can hinder students' ability to fully express themselves in academic writing, professional settings, and even during casual conversations.

From the difficulties mentioned above, along with the students' limited exposure to practical grammar applications, highlight the need for more effective grammar instruction, especially focusing on verb tenses. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving the overall English proficiency of students in general, and first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology in particular, thus enabling them to communicate more effectively in both academic and professional settings.

2. Aims of the Study

This study is conducted to raise first-year students' awareness of the importance of grammar learning at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, especially verb tenses. It also introduces effective learning methods to support students in improving their understanding and correct use of tenses in both spoken

and written communication. The research is expected to provide useful orientation for those who seek to strengthen their grammar competence for academic and practical purposes.

3. Scope of the Study

Due to the limited time and scale of this research, the study only focuses on several essential methods that can help first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology improve their learning of English verb tenses. It mainly explores common difficulties in acquiring tenses and provides practical solutions to enhance learning effectiveness. Other aspects of English grammar beyond verb tenses are not included in this research.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews. The quantitative data from the questionnaires will be analyzed using statistical methods to identify common patterns and challenges. Qualitative data from interviews and observations will be coded and thematically analyzed to explore perceptions, attitudes, and effectiveness of grammar learning methods.

5. Design of the Study

The structure of this study consists of three main parts:

- Part I: Introduction - Presents an overview of the research, including the rationale, aims, scope, methodology, and design.
- Part II: Development - is the core of the study, covering three chapters: the theoretical background of English verb tenses, a practical investigation into the current learning situation among first-year students, and proposed methods to enhance grammar learning.
- Part III: Conclusion and recommendations - concludes the research by summarizing the findings, discussing implications for teaching and learning, identifying limitations, and offering suggestions for future research.

Each part is logically connected to ensure coherence and flow throughout the research project.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

1. CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A solid understanding of the theoretical foundations is essential for exploring the difficulties in learning English verb tenses and identifying effective instructional methods.

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of key concepts related to English verb tense usage, second language acquisition theories, and previous research findings, which together form the basis for the present study.

1.1. The Importance of Learning English Verb Tenses

English verb tenses are crucial, in helping learners show the time of actions and organize their ideas clearly in both speaking and writing. If students do not understand how to use tenses correctly, they may find it hard to express their thoughts smoothly. This can lead to mistakes and misunderstandings in daily communication or academic work.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) explain that verb tenses are not just grammar rules; they are also useful tools for helping people organize their speech and writing across time. For example, there is a clear difference between saying “I lived in Hanoi” and “I have lived in Hanoi.” The first sentence talks about something that happened and finished in the past, while the second one shows that the action may still continue until now. This example shows why learning verb tenses is necessary to avoid confusion and make the meaning clear.

A Global Learner Survey by the British Council (2020) found that over 80% of English learners consider verb tenses as one of the most difficult parts of English grammar. Many students, especially those who learn English as a second language, feel confused when using perfect tenses or continuous forms. This global data confirms that tense usage is a big challenge for learners everywhere.

In Vietnam, Dan (2008) did research on grammar problems of Vietnamese learners and found that mistakes related to verb tenses were the most common in

both speaking and writing. Even after many years of studying English, many students still confused tenses like past simple and present perfect, especially when telling stories or describing experiences.

Moreover, correct use of verb tenses is also an important criterion in many international English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEIC, and TOEFL. According to the IELTS Speaking and Writing band descriptors (British Council, 2020), grammatical range and accuracy, including appropriate use of tenses, directly affect the score. Similarly, in the TOEIC test, tense errors are among the most common reasons for losing points in the speaking and writing sections. This demonstrates that mastering verb tenses is not only helpful for classroom communication but also vital in achieving high scores in standardized English tests, which are often required for academic success and job opportunities.

These findings show that knowing how to use English verb tenses well is not only about getting good marks in grammar exams. It is also essential for students to communicate clearly in school and in their future jobs. Therefore, helping first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology improve their use of verb tenses will support them to be more accurate and confident when using English.

1.2. Definition and Classification of English Verb Tenses

Verb tenses in English are grammatical forms that show the time when an action or event happens. According to Azar and Hagen (2009), English verb tenses are used to describe whether an action occurs in the past, present, or future. Each tense helps speakers and listeners clearly understand the exact time of events or actions.

English verb tenses are traditionally classified into three main groups: past, present, and future, each containing four aspects: simple, continuous (progressive), perfect, and perfect continuous (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). This creates a total of twelve commonly taught tenses in English grammar instruction.

To illustrate, the present simple tense (e.g., "I study English every day") is used to describe routines or general truths. In contrast, the present continuous tense (e.g., "I am studying English now") describes actions happening at the moment of speaking. The present perfect (e.g., "I have studied English for five years") indicates a past action with relevance to the present, while the present perfect continuous (e.g., "I have been studying English all morning") emphasizes the duration of the ongoing action (Azar & Hagen, 2009).

The past tenses similarly include past simple, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous, each having distinct functions. For instance, the past simple (e.g., "She studied English yesterday") expresses completed past actions. Meanwhile, the past continuous (e.g., "She was studying English at 8 PM last night") describes an action occurring at a specific past moment (Murphy, 2019).

Finally, the future tenses (future simple, future continuous, future perfect, future perfect continuous) describe actions expected to happen later. For example, the future simple (e.g., "I will study English tomorrow") refers to planned or spontaneous future actions. The future perfect tense (e.g., "I will have studied English for two years by next month") describes actions that will be completed before a future point in time (Murphy, 2019).

Clearly understanding these twelve tenses and their specific functions is essential for first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, as it provides a structured way to learn grammar effectively. Knowing the distinctions and usages of each tense enables learners to express their ideas precisely, improving their English communication and academic writing skills significantly.

1.3. Common Challenges in Learning English Verb Tenses

One of the greatest challenges Vietnamese students face in learning English verb tenses stems from fundamental grammatical differences between Vietnamese and English. Unlike English, Vietnamese verbs do not change their forms to indicate tense. Research by Swan and Smith (2001) clearly emphasizes that learners whose first language does not use verb conjugation often have difficulty adapting to the

complexity of English tenses. For instance, Vietnamese students frequently omit tense markers, mistakenly saying sentences such as “Yesterday I go to school” instead of the correct form “Yesterday I went to school.”

A further common difficulty involves distinguishing between verb tenses that are similar in meaning but differ significantly in usage, such as the present perfect and the past simple. According to an influential study by Hinkel (2004), ESL learners consistently confuse these two tenses because both relate to actions in the past. For example, Vietnamese learners often incorrectly produce sentences like “I have visited Hanoi last year,” instead of “I visited Hanoi last year,” due to confusion over the specific time reference required by each tense.

Irregular verb forms represent another significant obstacle. Ellis (2008), a leading researcher in second language acquisition, points out that irregular verbs require rote memorization since they do not follow standard grammatical patterns. Vietnamese students often make errors with these forms, such as using incorrect past forms (goed instead of went, eated instead of ate), because they rely heavily on regular conjugation patterns.

Learners also struggle significantly with understanding perfect and continuous tenses, as these forms do not have direct equivalents in Vietnamese. Research by Lightbown and Spada (2013) demonstrates that learners from non-inflectional language backgrounds, such as Vietnamese, commonly find perfect and continuous tenses confusing because these forms require understanding subtle differences in meaning. A clear example is the confusion between “I have lived here for two years” (indicating a continuing situation) and “I lived here for two years” (indicating a completed action).

Tran and Baldauf (2007) found that learners’ reliance on direct translation exacerbates these issues, producing errors like “I have gone to Hanoi last week.” Dang (2013) additionally identified omission of third-person singular “-s,” misuse of auxiliary verbs (“do/does/did”), and confusion between simple and continuous tenses as persistent problems. Nguyen and Hudson (2012) attribute much of this to

the traditional grammar-translation method, which emphasizes memorization over meaningful communication. Furthermore, Le and Barnard (2009) report that limited authentic practice—few opportunities to engage with native materials or real-life conversations—leads to low confidence and poor automaticity in tense selection.

Finally, lack of meaningful practice and exposure also poses a significant barrier for many learners. According to Nation (2009), without sufficient exposure to authentic English contexts, learners often struggle to internalize tense usage effectively. A recent survey conducted among first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology (2022) supports this view, showing that over 70% of students felt unsure about using correct tenses in spontaneous speaking tasks, despite having good theoretical knowledge.

Clearly understanding these specific challenges underscores the importance of adopting targeted and effective teaching approaches, aiming to improve freshmen's ability to master English verb tenses confidently and accurately.

1.4. Effective Approaches to Teaching and Learning English Verb Tenses

To overcome the challenges in learning English verb tenses, various teaching and learning strategies have been recommended by researchers. The following sections present several effective approaches that can support learners in mastering English tense usage.

1.4.1. Integrating Explicit Grammar Instruction with Contextualized Practice

One of the most effective approaches to teaching English verb tenses is the integration of explicit grammar instruction with contextualized practice. According to Ellis (2006), learners who receive clear explanations of grammatical structures are more likely to internalize rules accurately when these explanations are followed by meaningful communicative practice.

Explicit grammar instruction is particularly crucial for Vietnamese students, who often rely heavily on translation strategies. Without clear explanations, they may transfer Vietnamese structures into English inaccurately.

For instance, after presenting the structure of the past simple tense, the teacher can ask students to write a short diary entry about their activities the day before. This allows students to immediately apply the rules (“I played soccer yesterday”) in a realistic context.

Ellis’s (2006) research on grammar teaching showed that students who experienced explicit instruction combined with communicative practice achieved 30% higher accuracy in using verb tenses compared to those taught through implicit methods alone.

Thus, for first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, combining explicit teaching with real-life practice will help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and spontaneous use, improving both confidence and fluency in applying English verb tenses.

1.4.2. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is considered a highly effective approach in teaching English verb tenses, especially for beginners. According to Willis and Willis (2007), TBLT focuses on engaging students in real-world tasks that require them to use target grammatical structures naturally, rather than simply manipulating isolated forms.

In this method, grammar emerges as a tool to complete meaningful communication tasks rather than being taught in isolation. For example, instead of drilling students on the rules of the present perfect tense, the teacher might assign a task where students interview their classmates about experiences they have had, leading to natural use of the structure (“Have you ever traveled abroad?” “Yes, I have visited Thailand.”).

TBLT is particularly beneficial for first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology because it encourages active language use in authentic contexts. Studies by Ellis (2003) have shown that students taught through TBLT improved both their grammatical accuracy and fluency more significantly than those taught through traditional grammar exercises alone.

Moreover, TBLT addresses common difficulties such as confusion between similar tenses (e.g., past simple vs. present perfect) by embedding these forms in communication, making differences more noticeable through practical use rather than abstract explanation.

A sample classroom application could involve a "Life Timeline" project, where students chart important life events and present them to their peers, practicing past simple and present perfect naturally. This activity not only reinforces tense usage but also promotes speaking skills and confidence in communication.

1.4.3. Use of Visual Aids

Visual aids are powerful tools for clarifying abstract grammatical concepts, especially when teaching English verb tenses. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), visual representations such as timelines, charts, diagrams, and color-coded tables significantly enhance learners' ability to grasp the time relationships expressed by different tenses.

Many Vietnamese students struggle to distinguish between tenses like the past simple and present perfect because the concept of time framing is handled differently in Vietnamese. Timelines offer a simple yet effective way to visualize these differences. For example, a teacher can draw a timeline showing a completed action at a specific past time ("I visited Hanoi in 2020") versus an action that has relevance to the present ("I have visited Hanoi recently").

In addition, visual aids such as charts comparing tense structures side-by-side (e.g., form, signal words, usage examples) can help students more systematically memorize and differentiate forms. Research by Nation (2009) found that visual

formats improved memory retention by over 25% compared to text-only explanations.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, integrating visual aids in grammar lessons can particularly address confusion about tense structures and improve their ability to choose the correct tense when speaking or writing. A practical classroom activity could involve students creating their own timelines or tense comparison charts as homework assignments or group presentations, fostering deeper internalization of tense usage.

1.4.4. Technology-Enhanced Learning

Technology-enhanced learning offers valuable support in mastering English verb tenses, especially for learners who need frequent practice and immediate feedback. Chapelle (2003) emphasizes that technology-mediated language instruction, including interactive exercises, online quizzes, mobile applications, and multimedia resources, helps improve grammatical competence by promoting active engagement and autonomous learning.

For instance, platforms like Duolingo, Grammarly, and Quizlet provide grammar-focused practice activities, where learners can repeatedly practice forming correct tense structures, detect errors, and receive instant corrections. Through these tools, students not only practice isolated sentences but also engage in mini-dialogues, stories, or contextualized exercises that make tense usage more meaningful.

Empirical studies, such as those by Stockwell (2010), show that students who regularly use mobile-based grammar apps demonstrate 15–20% improvement in grammatical accuracy within a few months. Technology also allows learners to study anytime and anywhere, fostering flexibility and individualized pacing, which is particularly beneficial for students who struggle with traditional classroom pace.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, incorporating technology-based grammar activities can effectively supplement in-

class instruction. A practical application could involve assigning online quizzes focusing on common tense confusion (e.g., past simple vs. present perfect), allowing students to monitor their own progress and identify specific areas for improvement.

1.4.5. Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis, which systematically compares the learner's native language with the target language, has proven to be an effective approach for reducing grammatical errors, including tense-related mistakes. According to Swan and Smith (2001), when students are made explicitly aware of the structural differences between their mother tongue and English, they can more easily anticipate and avoid common interference errors.

Vietnamese learners, for example, often omit tense markers because Vietnamese verbs do not change form to express time. By clearly contrasting this with the English tense system, teachers can help students understand why it is essential to modify verb forms according to the time frame (e.g., "I go to school yesterday" vs. "I went to school yesterday").

Contrastive analysis also helps address confusion between tenses that do not have direct equivalents in Vietnamese, such as present perfect and past simple. For instance, through side-by-side comparison, students can see that Vietnamese might only use time adverbs to indicate past actions, while English requires tense inflection.

Research by Ellis (2008) suggests that students exposed to contrastive explanations were 25% more successful in using correct tenses compared to those who learned through inductive exposure alone.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, incorporating contrastive analysis into grammar lessons can directly target common mistakes arising from native language influence, helping to build a stronger foundation for mastering English verb tenses.

In conclusion, understanding and flexibly combining different approaches to teaching verb tenses form the essential foundation for improving grammar proficiency among freshmen. These theoretical bases will support the development of practical solutions in subsequent chapters."

1.5. Review of Previous Studies on Improving Tense Acquisition

Several empirical studies have provided valuable evidence supporting the effectiveness of these teaching approaches. The following sections review key research that contributes to understanding how to enhance learners' mastery of English verb tenses.

1.5.1. Explicit Grammar Instruction (Ellis, 2006)

One of the most influential studies on explicit grammar instruction was conducted by Ellis (2006). He investigated the effects of providing clear, detailed explanations of grammar rules, particularly verb tenses, combined with contextualized practice. His research involved 220 second language learners divided into two groups: one received explicit grammar instruction plus tasks, while the other learned through exposure without explicit focus.

The results showed that the group receiving explicit instruction performed 35% better in both controlled tests and spontaneous speaking tasks. Ellis concluded that explicit instruction helps learners build a cognitive framework to recognize and correctly apply grammatical rules, especially complex structures like perfect tenses.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, applying this method—explicit explanations followed by practice tasks—can be an effective strategy to improve both their understanding and use of English verb tenses in real communication.

1.5.2. Task-Based Language Teaching (Willis & Willis, 2007)

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has received strong support from empirical studies, particularly the work of Willis and Willis (2007). Their research emphasized that engaging learners in meaningful communication tasks requiring

specific grammar usage naturally promotes grammatical development. Instead of teaching grammar rules directly, TBLT encourages students to use correct tense forms through real-world language tasks.

Willis and Willis designed experiments where students participated in communicative tasks such as recounting personal experiences, discussing future plans, or solving problems collaboratively. Their findings showed that students in TBLT classrooms demonstrated higher fluency and grammatical accuracy compared to students taught through traditional methods focusing heavily on grammar drills.

Moreover, the study highlighted that students retained grammatical knowledge longer and used it more spontaneously when they acquired it through tasks rather than explicit instruction alone. This approach particularly benefits learners who struggle to apply grammar rules outside of artificial exercises.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, applying TBLT could encourage more natural usage of English verb tenses in speaking and writing. Instead of memorizing isolated rules, students can practice grammar meaningfully, which increases both retention and confidence.

1.5.3. Technology-Enhanced Learning (Chapelle, 2003)

Chapelle (2003), a pioneer in computer-assisted language learning, conducted comprehensive research on how technology can support grammar acquisition, especially tense usage. Her studies explored the effectiveness of interactive grammar software, online exercises, mobile learning applications, and web-based platforms in enhancing learners' grammatical competence.

In one of her key experiments, learners who used interactive grammar programs for 30 minutes daily over 10 weeks improved their grammatical accuracy by nearly 20% compared to a control group receiving traditional instruction. These programs provided immediate feedback, adaptive correction, and varied contextualized activities, which helped learners notice their errors and internalize correct tense forms more effectively.

Chapelle emphasized that technology not only offers unlimited practice opportunities but also promotes learner autonomy, as students can engage with grammar exercises anytime, anywhere, at their own pace. This self-directed learning environment was particularly beneficial for mastering complex grammatical structures like perfect and continuous tenses.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, integrating technology-enhanced learning tools, such as grammar apps, online quizzes, and learning management systems (LMS), can significantly supplement classroom instruction, encourage regular practice, and improve confidence in tense usage.

1.5.4. Other Relevant Studies

Beyond the major studies mentioned above, several other researchers have contributed valuable findings on improving the acquisition of English verb tenses.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) emphasized the importance of visual aids, such as timelines, charts, and diagrams, in clarifying the temporal relationships between different tenses. Their research found that students who were taught with visual support demonstrated better comprehension and faster recall of tense forms than those taught only with verbal explanations. Visual tools help learners internalize abstract grammatical concepts by making them concrete and easier to process.

Lightbown and Spada (2013) explored the impact of contextualized practice on grammar acquisition. Their findings indicated that learners who practiced grammar through communicative activities—rather than mechanical drills—achieved greater accuracy and fluency over time. Contextualized tasks, such as story-telling, project work, and real-life simulations, allowed students to apply tense rules naturally and reinforced correct usage in meaningful contexts.

Swan and Smith (2001) investigated the influence of first language (L1) interference on second language (L2) grammar acquisition. They pointed out that

Vietnamese learners, whose native language does not mark tense morphologically, are prone to errors in tense usage. Their findings support the necessity of contrastive analysis, where teachers explicitly highlight differences between English and Vietnamese grammar structures to reduce transfer-related mistakes.

These complementary studies reinforce the idea that effective grammar instruction must combine multiple strategies: visual aids, meaningful contextual practice, and awareness of L1-L2 differences. For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, integrating these elements into teaching can significantly enhance their grasp of English verb tenses and their overall communicative competence.

1.5.5. Summary and Implications

In summary, a wide range of previous studies has confirmed the effectiveness of various approaches to improving English verb tense acquisition. Ellis (2006) highlighted the value of explicit grammar instruction combined with meaningful practice. Willis and Willis (2007) emphasized the benefits of task-based learning, where grammar is learned naturally through real-world communication. Chapelle (2003) demonstrated how technology-enhanced learning supports grammar acquisition by providing interactive, flexible, and personalized practice opportunities.

Additionally, research by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999), Lightbown and Spada (2013), and Swan and Smith (2001) further emphasized the importance of visual aids, contextualized practice, and contrastive analysis to address first language interference.

These findings collectively suggest that no single method is sufficient on its own. Instead, an integrated approach that combines explicit instruction, communicative practice, technology use, visual support, and awareness of first language influence is the most effective strategy for mastering English verb tenses.

For first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, applying these evidence-based strategies can address the major challenges they face in learning tenses—such as confusion between similar tenses, lack of practice opportunities, and interference from Vietnamese grammar. These insights form a strong theoretical foundation for the practical study conducted in the following chapters.

Chapter I has provided the theoretical and research background necessary for understanding the importance of learning English grammar, particularly verb tenses. The chapter first highlighted the essential role of grammar in English communication and the challenges Vietnamese learners often encounter due to linguistic differences.

It then reviewed effective approaches to teaching and learning verb tenses, including explicit instruction, task-based learning, the use of visual aids, technology-enhanced learning, and contrastive analysis. Finally, a range of previous studies was analyzed to confirm the effectiveness of these approaches, offering strong theoretical foundations for the present research.

This theoretical background not only frames the research problem but also guides the investigation and practical solutions proposed in the following chapters.

2. CHAPTER 2: A STUDY ON THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH VERB TENSES AMONG FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY OF MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

To propose relevant teaching solutions, it is crucial first to understand the current learning situation of English verb tenses among first-year students. This chapter systematically presents the current challenges, common errors, preferred learning methods, and perceptions based on empirical data collected through surveys and interviews.

2.1. Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the current situation of learning English verb tenses among first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology and to identify effective methods for improving their grammar learning.

A mixed-methods approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. According to Creswell (2014), mixed methods are particularly valuable in educational research as they combine the breadth of survey data with the depth of interview insights. The quantitative component focuses on measuring the general learning habits, common difficulties, and perceptions of students regarding verb tense acquisition. The qualitative component complements this by exploring students' deeper experiences, attitudes, and suggestions through semi-structured interviews.

By combining these two methods, the study ensures the reliability of the findings through data triangulation, while also gaining insights that cannot be captured through quantitative data alone. Furthermore, this approach allows the researcher to validate the statistical trends with real-life narratives from learners, offering a more holistic view of the learning challenges and possible solutions.

2.1.1. Research Design

This research follows a descriptive design, which is appropriate for observing, describing, and analyzing the current situation without manipulating variables. Descriptive research aims to provide an accurate profile of the participants' learning conditions and difficulties regarding English verb tenses.

In this study, the researcher collects data on students' usage patterns, error types, learning habits, and preferred learning methods. No intervention or experimental treatment is introduced. Instead, the design focuses on capturing authentic learning experiences and identifying trends in students' challenges and strategies. This descriptive approach ensures that the findings truly reflect the actual circumstances faced by first-year students at the university.

2.1.2. Research Subjects

The study involves data collection from first-year students who are taking English as a compulsory subject at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology. A total of 40 students were randomly selected from different classes to ensure the sample's representativeness. Afterward, 10 students with diverse English proficiency levels were invited for semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into their experiences.

2.2. Data Collection Instruments

To collect sufficient and reliable data for the study, two primary instruments were used: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. These tools were designed to serve different purposes within the mixed-methods approach, providing both broad quantitative data and in-depth qualitative insights. The careful design of both instruments ensured the triangulation of data, enhancing the overall validity and credibility of the findings.

2.2.1. Questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on students' proficiency in using English verb tenses, common mistakes they encounter, their

learning challenges, and their preferences for different learning methods. Its structure was developed based on previous studies on grammar learning (e.g., Swan, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2013), ensuring relevance to the research objectives.

The questionnaire consists of five main parts:

- ✓ Part 1: Personal Information – Includes questions about students' gender, major, and years of learning English.
- ✓ Part 2: Proficiency in Using Verb Tenses – Focuses on students' self-assessment of their ability to recognize and use verb tenses correctly in writing, speaking, and tests.
- ✓ Part 3: Common Errors in Using Verb – Identifies the typical mistakes that students often make when applying verb tenses.
- ✓ Part 4: Challenges in Learning Verb Tenses – Explores the major difficulties students face in learning and applying verb tenses, such as confusing structures or interference from their native language.
- ✓ Part 5: Perceptions of Learning Methods – Gathers students' opinions on the effectiveness of various learning methods for verb tenses, including Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), and Blended Learning Approach.

The questionnaire was administered using Google Forms (Vietnamese version) to ensure convenient distribution and anonymous data collection. This online platform allowed the researcher to easily reach a larger number of participants, streamline the collection process, and automatically organize responses for statistical analysis.

The questionnaire was distributed to 40 first-year students from different classes at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology. The responses were collected, coded, and analyzed using frequency counts and percentage distributions to identify common patterns, challenges, and students' preferences regarding grammar learning methods.

2.2.2. Interviews

To complement the quantitative data from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. These interviews were designed to explore students' personal experiences, detailed opinions, and attitudes toward different learning methods for verb tenses. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for deeper probing while maintaining consistency across interviews.

The interview questions focused on the following topics:

❓ *Why do you think many students still make mistakes with verb tenses, even after learning the rules?*

❓ *Can you share a time when you used verb tenses incorrectly? What happened?*

❓ *Which learning method has helped you the most with verb tenses? Why?*

❓ *If you could create a lesson on verb tenses, what activities would you include?*

A total of 10 students were invited to participate in the interviews. The participants were selected based on their willingness and availability to ensure voluntary participation and to cover a range of English proficiency levels.

All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to help participants express their thoughts comfortably and clearly. The responses were later translated into English, and categorized through thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights.

2.3. Data Analysis

In this section, data collected from the survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are systematically analyzed. Quantitative data were processed using frequency counts and percentage distributions, while qualitative responses obtained from the interviews were analyzed thematically. This mixed-method approach offers

a comprehensive insight into the challenges and learning preferences of first-year students in mastering English verb tenses.

2.3.1. Background Information of Participants

Before exploring students’ current performance and challenges in mastering English verb tenses, it is important to begin with a brief description of the participants’ background information. This helps frame the scope of the study and provides useful demographic context for interpreting the results.

Table 2.1: Gender Distribution of Survey Participants

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	18	45%
Female	22	55%

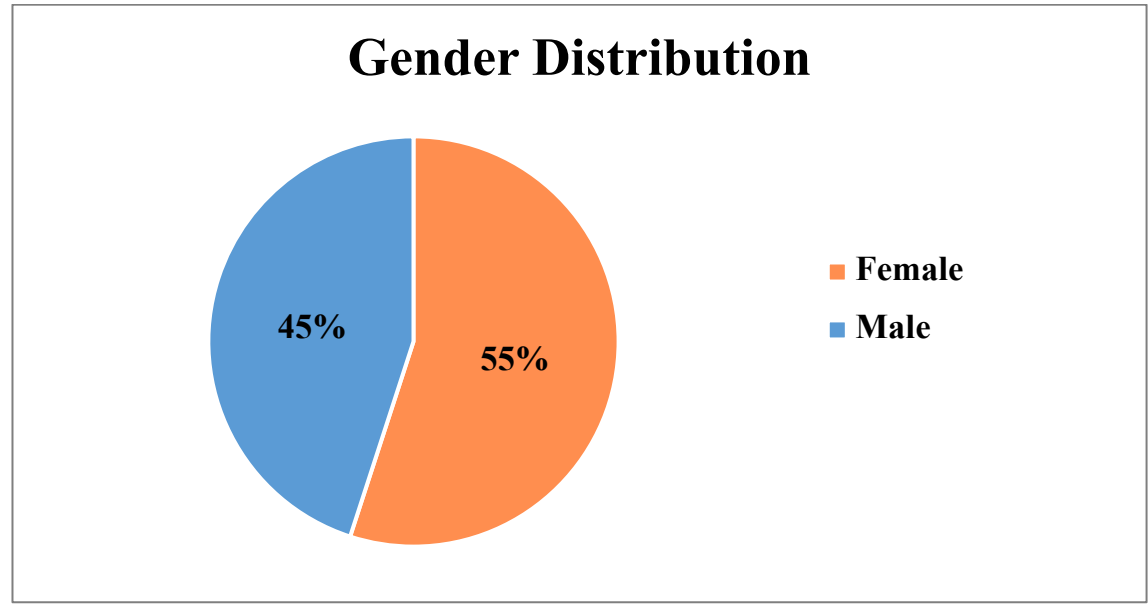


Figure 2.1: Gender Distribution of Survey Participants

Among the 40 participants surveyed, the gender distribution was slightly skewed towards female students, with 55% identifying as female and 45% as male. While gender was not a central variable in this study, acknowledging this distribution helps provide demographic context and may contribute to understanding group dynamics in learning environments, particularly in language acquisition.

Furthermore, prior research (Oxford, 1990) has suggested that gender may influence preferred learning strategies - females often tend to adopt more metacognitive and social strategies in language learning. Although this study does not focus on gender differences, such distribution might subtly affect classroom dynamics and should be considered in broader pedagogical discussions.

In addition to gender, the study collected information on how many years participants had studied English, as this factor may influence their familiarity with verb tense usage.

Table 2.2: Years of English Learning Experience among Participants

Year	Number	Percentage
Less than 5 years	3	7.5%
5 – 10 years	15	37.5%
More than 10 years	22	55%

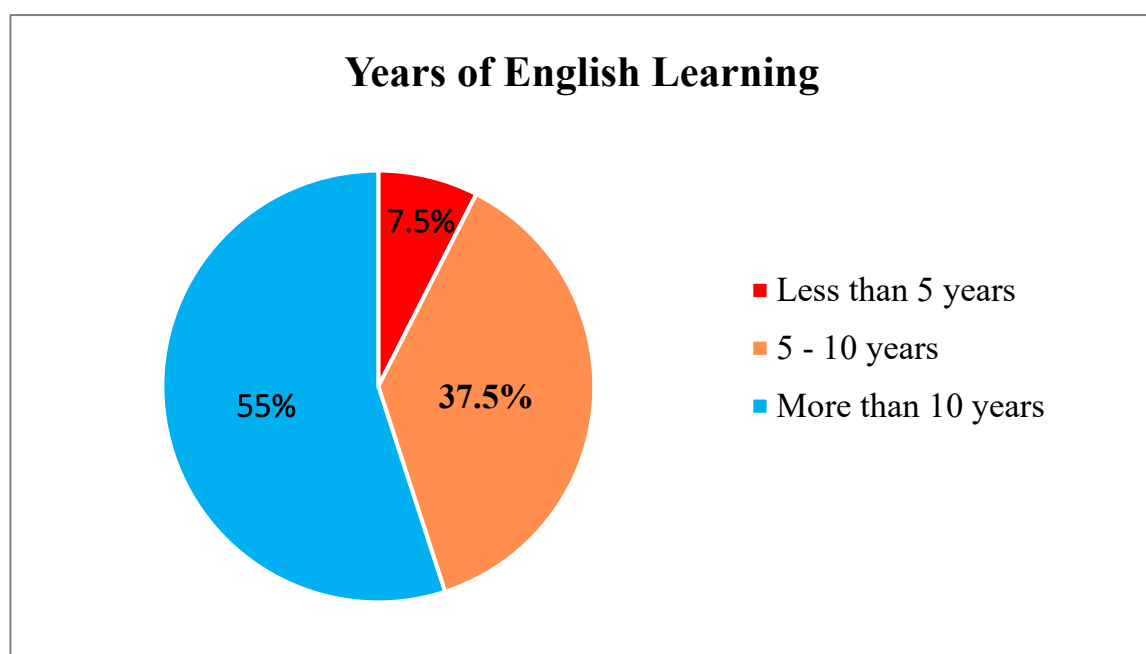


Figure 2.2: Years of English Learning Experience among Participants

As shown in Figure 2.2, 55% of participants had studied English for more than 10 years, while 37.5% had between 5 and 10 years of learning experience, and only 7.5% had less than 5 years.

This indicates that the majority of students had a considerable amount of exposure to English prior to university. However, as later analysis will demonstrate, prolonged exposure does not always translate into mastery of grammar, particularly verb tenses. This reinforces the need for more targeted and effective grammar instruction.

Moreover, this finding echoes previous research by Ellis (2006), who emphasized that mere exposure is not sufficient unless accompanied by meaningful input and guided practice. The high percentage of students with over a decade of English learning but limited tense competence suggests that the instructional focus at lower levels may have prioritized rote learning and exam preparation over communicative application.

Therefore, while the background information appears promising in terms of duration, the disparity between exposure and actual grammatical competence serves as a foundation for analyzing why many students continue to struggle with English verb tenses despite years of study.

With the participants' background information clarified, the next section will examine their current status in learning and using English verb tenses, as reported in the survey.

2.3.2. Current Status of Learning English Verb Tenses Among First-Year Students

The survey results show that first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology have different levels of confidence in using English verb tenses. The table below illustrates their responses:

Table 2.3: Students' Self-Confidence in Using English Verb Tenses

Level of Confidence	Number	Percentage
Very confident	2	5%
Quite confident	11	27.5%
Sometimes confused	13	32.5%
Often confused	10	25%
Very difficult/confusing	4	10%

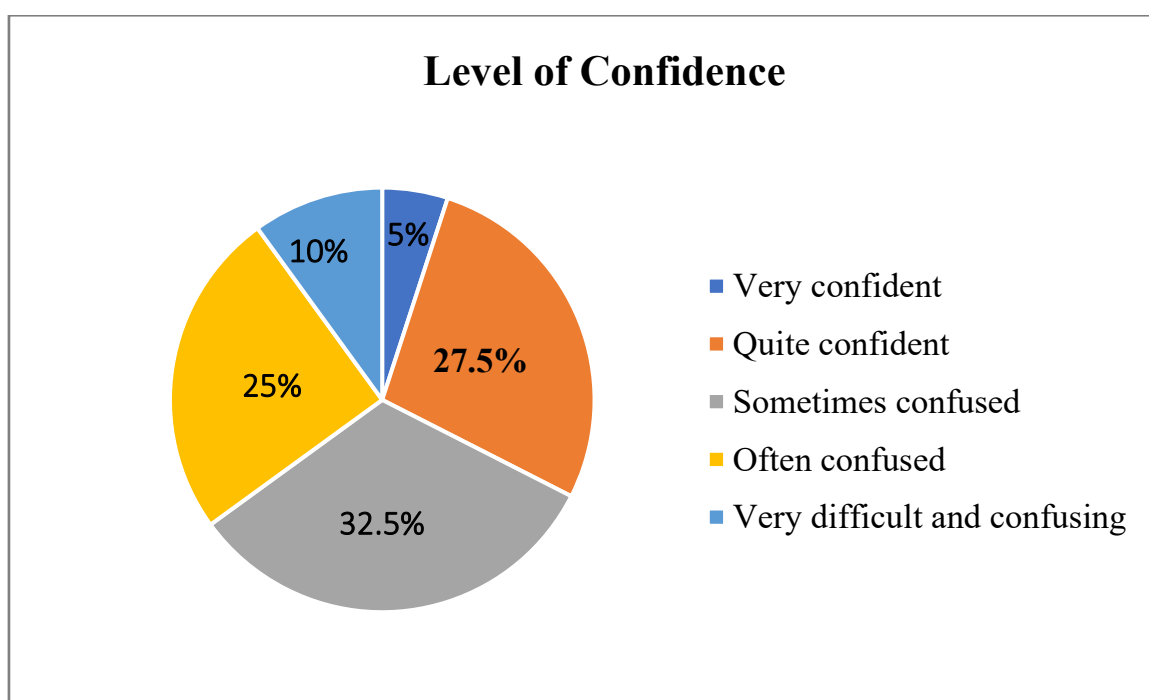


Figure 2.3: Students' Self-Confidence in Using English Verb Tenses

The analysis of Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 reveals that more than half of the students (67.5%) admitted to experiencing confusion when using verb tenses, either sometimes, often, or very frequently. Only a small proportion, 5% felt very confident in their ability to use tenses correctly. This result is particularly notable when contrasted with the findings in Section 2.3.1, where 55% of students reported more than 10 years of English learning experience. The low level of confidence, despite prolonged exposure, suggests a disconnect between instructional time and practical

competence. This supports Ellis's (2006) theory that grammar learning must move beyond declarative knowledge into procedural fluency.

Students who rated themselves as "sometimes confused" (32.5%) or "often confused" (25%) suggest that although they have some theoretical knowledge, they struggle with consistent application, especially in speaking and spontaneous writing. These findings are consistent with the idea that memorizing grammatical rules without sufficient real-life practice often leads to uncertainty in usage. This lack of consistency may also stem from the way tenses are presented—often in isolation, without contextual cues. Learners who practice grammar in decontextualized drills may fail to transfer that knowledge to communicative tasks, such as describing events or narrating stories.

Moreover, the group that selected "very difficult/confusing" (10%) indicates a critical need for remedial instruction focusing specifically on tense distinctions and real-world usage. These students may require additional support through tailored exercises, peer collaboration, and guided practice sessions. In SLA theory, such persistent difficulty is often linked to "fossilization," where errors become permanent due to insufficient correction and lack of communicative practice. This group would benefit from diagnostic assessments and scaffolded support to address entrenched misunderstandings.

The fact that only 5% of students feel "very confident" shows that current grammar instruction methods may not yet be providing enough opportunities for students to develop automaticity and fluency in tense usage. Therefore, improving the teaching of tenses through interactive and practice-based strategies is crucial. This reinforces the importance of integrating tense instruction with speaking, writing, and listening activities that simulate real-world communication. According to Canale and Swain (1980), true communicative competence requires not only grammatical accuracy but also fluency, appropriateness, and strategic use.

2.3.3. Challenges in Learning English Verb Tenses

To better understand the difficulties that first-year students face in learning English verb tenses, this section first identifies the common mistakes they often make, followed by an analysis of the major challenges in mastering tense usage.

The survey asked students to identify the mistakes they often make when using English verb tenses. The table and chart below summarize the most common errors reported:

Table 2.4: Common Errors in Using English Verb Tenses

Common Errors	Number	Percentage
Confusing present simple and present continuous	6	15%
Confusing past simple and present perfect	19	47.5%
Forgetting to add '-s' for third-person singular	7	17.5%
Misusing auxiliary verbs	3	7.5%
Failing to recognize tense indicators	10	25%

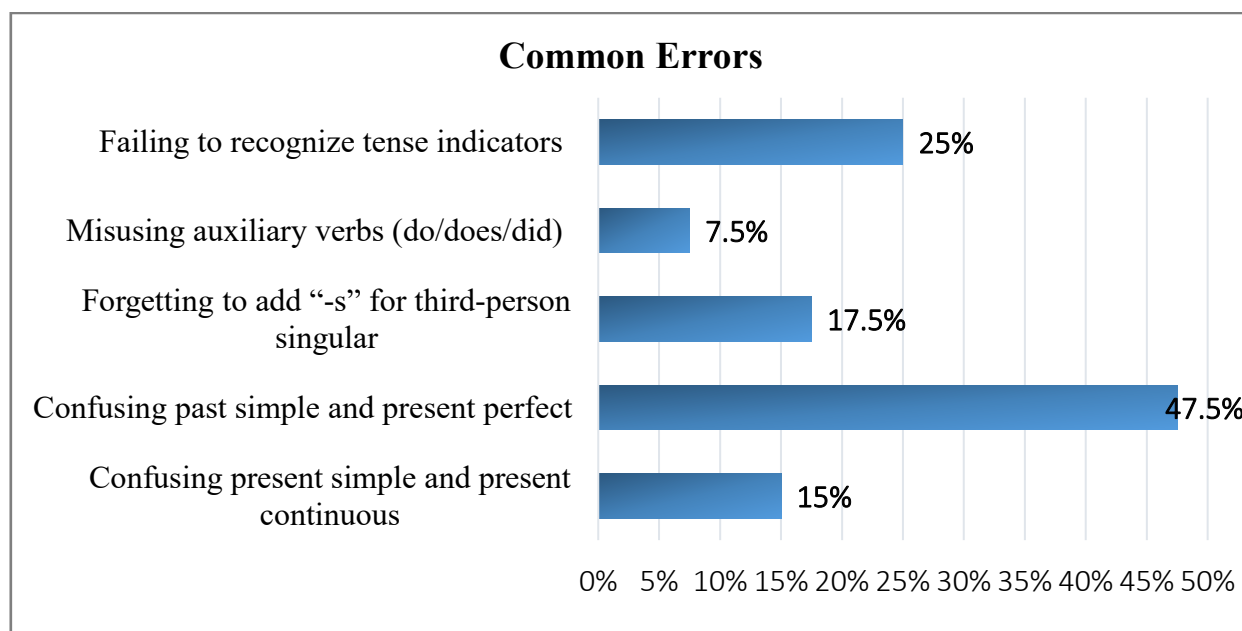


Figure 2.4: Common Errors in Using English Verb Tenses

The survey results show that confusing past simple and present perfect is the most common mistake among first-year students, reported by 47.5% of respondents. This suggests that many students still struggle to differentiate between completed past actions and experiences with relevance to the present. This specific confusion highlights a deeper issue: while both tenses may be taught formally, students may not understand their functional differences without context-rich examples. Learners often memorize grammar forms without grasping when or why to use them, leading to fossilized errors.

Failing to recognize tense indicators was the second most reported error (25%), revealing that students often ignore or misunderstand words like “yesterday,” “already,” or “since,” which help determine the correct tense. This reflects a lack of awareness in connecting temporal markers with verb forms. Without that connection, learners are prone to choose tenses mechanically rather than logically.

Other frequent mistakes include forgetting to add '-s' for third-person singular (17.5%) and confusing present simple with present continuous (15%). Although fewer students misused auxiliary verbs (7.5%), this indicates that even basic tense structures still pose problems for some learners. These errors suggest foundational weaknesses in understanding subject-verb agreement and auxiliary use, often due to interference from Vietnamese grammar where such rules do not apply. These are not isolated issues but indicative of a broader need for contextualized grammar instruction.

To illustrate, a common example of confusion between past simple and present perfect is:

- Incorrect: "I have visited Ha Long Bay last summer."
- Correct: "I visited Ha Long Bay last summer." Students often transfer Vietnamese syntactic patterns into English without adjusting for tense differences, leading to such errors.

Similarly, when failing to recognize tense indicators, students may say:

- Incorrect: "He leaves yesterday."
- Correct: "He left yesterday."

These findings highlight the need for more targeted practice on recognizing time signals and differentiating tense usage through meaningful activities.

In addition to the specific mistakes, the survey asked students about the major challenges they face in learning English verb tenses. The table and chart below present the results clearly:

Table 2.5: Major Challenges in Learning English Verb Tenses

Challenges	Number	Percentage
Too many tenses, difficult to memorize structures	5	12.5%
Ineffective teaching methods	9	22.5%
Lack of practice and real-life usage	18	45%
Interference from Vietnamese grammar	16	40%

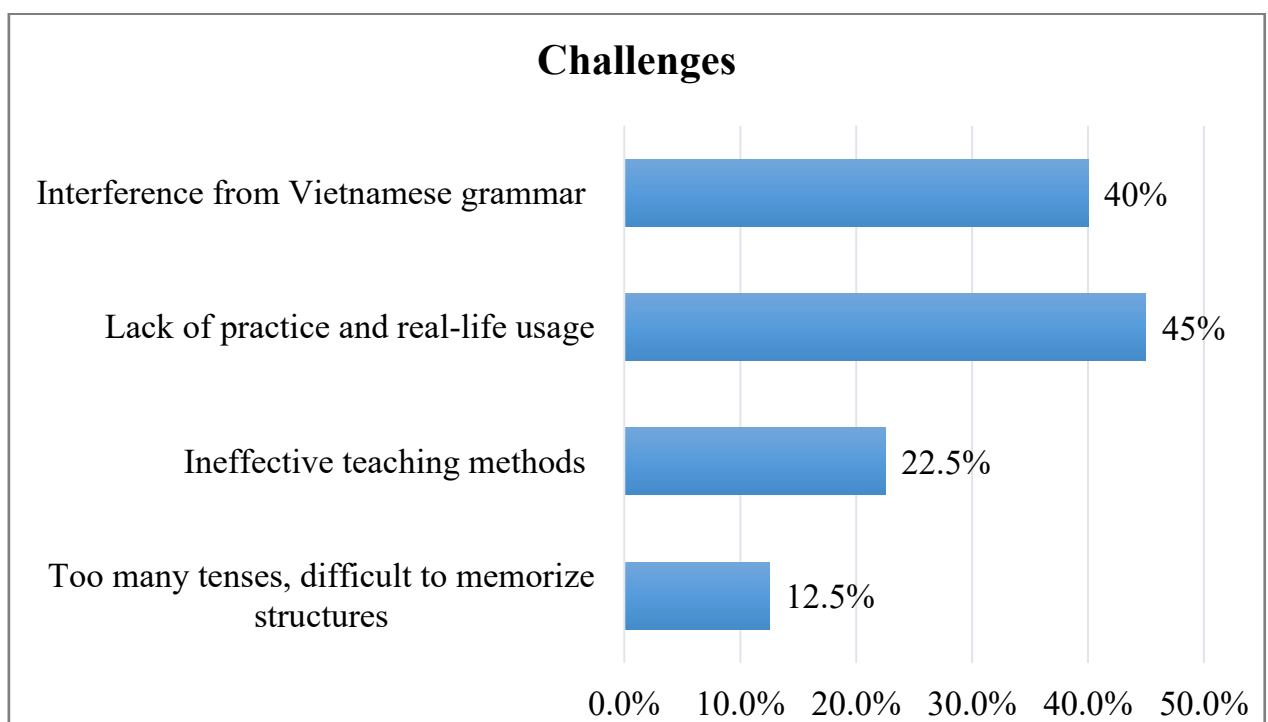


Figure 2.5: Major Challenges in Learning English Verb Tenses

The survey results reveal that first-year students face multiple challenges in learning English verb tenses. Among these challenges, lack of practice and real-life usage was identified as the most serious issue (45%), followed by interference from Vietnamese grammar (40%). Although fewer students considered the complexity of the tense system (12.5%) or ineffective teaching methods (22.5%) as major obstacles, these factors still contribute to the overall difficulty in mastering verb tenses. The following sections will analyze each challenge in more detail.

2.3.3.1. Complexity of the Tense System

Only 12.5% of students considered the complexity of English verb tenses to be their biggest challenge. Although not the most severe issue, this complexity still creates confusion, especially for students accustomed to Vietnamese, a language that does not change verb forms based on time.

For example, in English, a small change like "I eat" vs. "I ate" changes the entire meaning based on tense, while in Vietnamese, the structure would remain almost the same. This structural difference demands more memorization and awareness from students.

This reflects a broader cognitive gap between the two languages. Learners must not only memorize tense forms but also restructure how they understand and express time. The contrast with Vietnamese, which uses time adverbs instead of verb inflection, contributes significantly to tense-related confusion.

2.3.3.2. Limitations of Traditional Teaching Methods

22.5% of students indicated that ineffective teaching methods were a barrier. Traditional grammar teaching often emphasizes memorizing rules and doing mechanical exercises rather than applying grammar in real communication.

In many cases, students learn to complete grammar tests correctly but struggle to use tenses naturally when speaking or writing. This gap between theory and practice is a common cause of hesitation and errors in real-world English usage. This approach results in high test performance but low communicative competence.

Students may pass grammar exams but still hesitate or make errors in spontaneous use. Without integrating form, meaning, and context, the learning remains superficial and short-term.

Celce-Murcia (2001) points out that grammar instruction must balance three dimensions: form (structure), meaning (semantics), and use (pragmatics). Teaching that focuses solely on form neglects communicative competence, making it harder for students to internalize and transfer their knowledge.

2.3.3.3. Lack of Practice and Exposure to English

The most serious challenge, reported by 45% of students, was the lack of practice and real-life exposure. Although students may memorize grammar rules in class, they rarely have the opportunity to use English outside the classroom.

Without regular practice, students often forget the correct forms, hesitate when speaking, and fail to internalize tense patterns. Authentic communication environments, such as English clubs, online exchanges, or project-based learning, are still limited for many students. This confirms Krashen's theory that input alone is not enough; students need opportunities to produce language in low-anxiety, meaningful contexts. Without this, grammar knowledge remains passive and decays over time.

2.3.3.4. Interference from Vietnamese Grammar

40% of students identified interference from Vietnamese grammar as a major obstacle. Since Vietnamese often expresses time through context or time phrases without changing the verb form, students tend to translate thoughts directly into English, leading to incorrect tense usage.

For example, in Vietnamese, it is natural to say: "Hom qua toi di hoc."

If students translate word-for-word, they might say: "Yesterday I go to school." instead of the correct form: "Yesterday I went to school."

This is a classic case of negative transfer. Without explicit contrastive teaching, students continue to apply Vietnamese grammar logic to English, resulting in

persistent, fossilized errors. Addressing this requires focused correction, awareness training, and contrastive grammar tasks.

2.3.4. Comparison of Different Learning Methods for English Verb Tenses

To explore students' learning preferences, the survey asked participants to select the methods they found most effective for improving their use of English verb tenses. The results are shown below:

Table 2.6: Students' Preferences for Learning Methods

Learning Methods	Number	Percentage
Memorizing formulas and doing exercises (Grammar-Translation Method)	8	20%
Learning through conversations and real-life situations (Communicative Language Teaching – CLT)	16	40%
Practicing tenses through tasks and activities (Task-Based Learning – TBL)	14	35%
Combining lectures, videos, and exercises (Blended Learning Approach)	10	25%

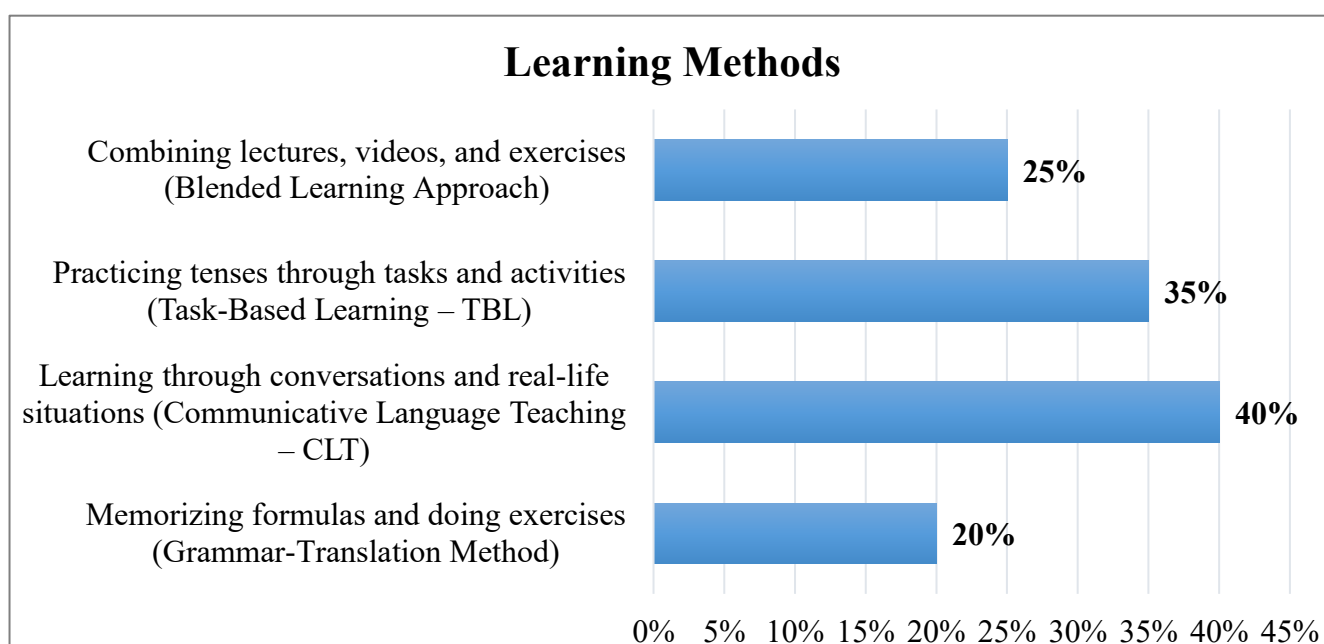


Figure 2.6: Students' Preferences for Learning Methods

The results indicate that students have diverse preferences for learning grammar, with a clear inclination towards communicative and task-based approaches. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of each method based on students' responses.

2.3.4.1. Grammar-Translation Method

According to the survey, 20% of students chose the Grammar-Translation Method, which emphasizes memorizing grammar rules and translating sentences between English and Vietnamese. This method is commonly encountered in Vietnamese educational contexts because it has been traditionally used in school curriculums for decades.

Students who preferred this method stated that memorizing structures helped them perform well in written exams and grammar quizzes. However, the relatively low preference suggests that while this method can reinforce grammatical rules, it may not help students apply tenses fluently in real-life communication. The mismatch between students' long-term exposure to English (as noted in 2.3.1) and their low confidence (2.3.2) suggests that this method alone does not build communicative competence.

This aligns with criticism by modern linguists who argue that the Grammar-Translation Method focuses heavily on accuracy but neglects fluency and spontaneity. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), this method may lead to passive knowledge that does not transfer into real-world use.

2.3.4.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

40% of students selected Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as their preferred method. This is the highest proportion among all options, indicating that students highly appreciate grammar-based learning approaches through conversations and real-life situations. This approach helps learners use verb tenses naturally in spoken interaction, making learning more engaging and practical.

The high preference for CLT contrasts sharply with students' actual self-reported confusion in tense usage (67.5% in 2.3.2). This suggests a gap between learning preference and learning outcome, possibly due to inconsistent implementation of CLT in practice.

In many classrooms, "CLT" is limited to scripted dialogues or question-answer practice, which lacks the authenticity and unpredictability of real conversation. As a result, students may overestimate its effectiveness.

2.3.4.3. Task-Based Learning (TBL)

The second most favored method was Task-Based Learning, chosen by **35%** of students. This shows that many students enjoy learning grammar by completing meaningful tasks and activities. TBL focuses on practical use rather than memorization, and helps students gain experience in applying tenses in functional contexts.

Willis and Willis (2007) argue that TBL supports both fluency and accuracy by embedding grammar into communicative tasks. Learners are more motivated when grammar is not isolated but tied to achieving a purpose (e.g., describing a trip or narrating a story).

TBL's focus on meaning before form is appealing, yet without feedback and error correction, students may develop habits of incorrect tense usage. This partially explains the persistent confusion found in 2.3.3 despite preference for TBL.

Moreover, TBL activities often demand higher levels of language output. Students with weak grammatical foundations may find it overwhelming, which can lead to avoidance or superficial use of tenses.

2.3.4.4. Blended Learning Approach

25% of students preferred the Blended Learning Approach, which combines traditional lessons with digital resources like videos and interactive exercises. This method supports different learning styles and keeps learners engaged. The result

suggests that students appreciate flexibility of accessing learning materials anytime and multimedia support in grammar instruction.

Blended learning is often praised for its ability to personalize learning and provide autonomy. According to Stockwell (2010), digital tools such as grammar games, automated quizzes, and tutorial videos enhance engagement and cater to different learner needs.

Blended learning appeals to digital-native students, yet its effectiveness depends on learners' self-regulation and content quality. Without structured follow-up and feedback, multimedia grammar input may remain passive.

Furthermore, students who choose blended methods often use them for review rather than discovery learning. This limits opportunities for deep grammatical restructuring, which is needed to fix persistent errors.

2.3.5. Perceptions of Students and Instructors Regarding Grammar Teaching Methods

To complement the quantitative findings from the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology. The interviews aimed to explore students' personal experiences, preferences, and suggestions regarding grammar learning methods, particularly the learning of verb tenses.

Overall, students expressed a preference for methods that emphasize practice and real-life application rather than memorization of rules. Many participants agreed that methods like Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) helped them understand and apply verb tenses more effectively.

One student shared: "When I practice conversation, I don't think too much about grammar rules. I just focus on expressing my ideas, and the tenses come more naturally."

Another student reflected on their learning experiences: "I used to memorize formulas, but I often forgot them during speaking. Now, doing tasks and role-plays helps me remember tenses better."

These reflections suggest that fluency, rather than form, takes priority in students' communication. As Ellis (2006) notes, procedural knowledge gained through tasks is more likely to be retained and transferred to spontaneous situations than declarative knowledge from rule memorization.

However, a few students still valued traditional methods for building a solid foundation. As one participant shared: "Grammar exercises give me structure. After I understand the basic rules, then I can practice speaking." This supports the notion that form-focused instruction still has a role in the initial stages of grammar acquisition. According to Celce-Murcia (2001), explicit grammar teaching is most effective when followed by activities that promote communicative use.

Instructors, based on informal discussions, also acknowledged the need for a balanced approach: combining explicit grammar instruction with contextualized activities to promote both accuracy and fluency. This alignment between student and instructor perspectives reinforces the value of integrated approaches. Teachers recognize that neither pure form-focused nor purely communicative methods are sufficient on their own. Instead, they need to be blended thoughtfully.

Furthermore, these insights highlight the importance of flexibility in teaching strategies, adapting methods based on learner needs, context, and stage of development. Such responsiveness is crucial in fostering both competence and confidence in grammar use.

These qualitative insights support the survey findings and suggest that an integrated method - blending explanation, practice tasks, and communication - may be most effective for helping first-year students master English verb tenses.

2.4. Research Findings and Discussion

2.4.1. Summary of Survey and Interview Results on Students' Learning of English Verb Tenses

Based on the survey and interview results, several important findings were identified regarding first-year students' learning of English verb tenses at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology:

- ✓ Many students still struggle with using English verb tenses correctly, especially distinguishing between past simple and present perfect.
- ✓ A major reason for their difficulty is the lack of real-life practice and overreliance on mechanical exercises.
- ✓ The interference of Vietnamese grammar structures, where verbs do not change form according to tense, also leads to frequent errors.
- ✓ Students clearly preferred communicative and task-based learning methods over purely grammar-focused approaches.
- ✓ Although some students appreciated the structure provided by traditional methods, most desired more interactive and practice-oriented activities.

These findings provide a strong foundation for proposing more effective learning strategies in the next chapter.

2.4.2. Discussion of Research

The findings of this study align closely with existing research on English grammar acquisition.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) argued that grammar learning must combine explicit rule explanation with contextualized practice. The preferences of the surveyed students strongly support this view, emphasizing that meaningful communication tasks help internalize grammar structures more effectively than rote memorization.

The confusion between past simple and present perfect, reported by nearly half of the students, echoes Swan's (2005) observation that these tenses are among the most difficult for learners whose first languages lack inflectional tenses. The findings also reinforce Hinkel's (2004) conclusion that students often fail to differentiate tenses when they rely too heavily on their native language structures.

Furthermore, the clear preference for communicative methods (CLT and TBL) suggests that learners appreciate dynamic, student-centered approaches that encourage practical use of grammar. Lightbown and Spada (2013) similarly highlighted that interactive activities can significantly enhance both grammatical accuracy and fluency.

However, the continued appreciation for traditional grammar-focused methods by a small group of students shows that flexibility is important. Not all learners benefit equally from communicative activities; some still require solid grammatical grounding before they can apply language creatively.

Taken together, these findings advocate for an integrated instructional framework that combines form-focused instruction, task-based activities, technological tools, and contrastive analysis. Such a model would directly address the key challenges identified in this study, including confusion between similar tenses, limited exposure to authentic English use, and interference from Vietnamese grammatical patterns. This approach is likely to enhance learners' grammatical accuracy, fluency, and long-term retention.

In conclusion, Chapter II has provided a comprehensive analysis of first-year students' current situation, challenges, and perceptions regarding the learning of English verb tenses at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology.

These findings highlight the necessity of adopting flexible, student-centered teaching approaches that combine rule explanation with meaningful practice.

3. CHAPTER III: EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR ENHANCING VERB TENSES LEARNING

Based on the challenges identified in the previous chapter, this chapter proposes a range of targeted methods designed to enhance first-year students' mastery of English verb tenses. Each method is selected according to its theoretical grounding and its practical relevance to the specific learning context of Hai Phong University of Management and Technology students.

3.1. Theoretical Basis for Proposed Methods

When proposing methods to improve first-year students' mastery of English verb tenses, it is necessary to rely on well-established theories in second language acquisition. These theories provide the foundation for selecting effective teaching strategies suitable for university learners.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) emphasizes that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly above their current proficiency level. Example: In university English classes, students are assigned to read short news articles or blog posts containing various verb tense structures, helping them absorb natural tense usage.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), advocated by Canale and Swain (1980), stresses the importance of real communication and fluency rather than mechanical repetition of grammar rules. Example: Students participate in mock job interviews or academic discussions where they must naturally use present perfect, past simple, and future forms depending on the situation.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), proposed by Ellis (2003), focuses on engaging learners in meaningful tasks that inherently require grammatical accuracy. Example: Students work in teams to design a study plan for their first semester, presenting their schedules using appropriate future and present continuous tenses.

Research by Lightbown and Spada (2013) also underscores that while communicative practice is vital, explicit instruction and corrective feedback are

necessary, especially when dealing with complex grammar points like perfect and perfect continuous tenses. Example: After a group presentation summarizing a scientific article, the instructor provides feedback on students' consistent errors in tense usage.

Finally, Blended Learning, combining face-to-face teaching with online resources, offers flexibility and enhances engagement (Graham, 2006). Example: Students watch recorded lectures about verb tenses on an online platform like Google Classroom, then apply the concepts through case-study discussions during classroom sessions.

3.2. Suggested Effective Methods for Learning and Teaching Verb Tense

Based on the challenges identified in Chapter II, a combination of effective methods is proposed to support first-year students in mastering English verb tenses. Each method targets specific problems such as the complexity of the tense system, the ineffectiveness of traditional instruction, the lack of real-life practice opportunities, and the influence of Vietnamese grammatical patterns.

By balancing explicit grammar instruction with meaningful communication tasks, these methods aim to foster a more practical, engaging, and effective learning experience for students.

3.2.1. Interactive Practice Activities

Interactive Practice Activities refer to dynamic and engaging exercises where students actively apply grammar knowledge-particularly verb tenses-within realistic communicative scenarios. Unlike traditional mechanical drills focused solely on memorization, interactive activities require students to use tenses meaningfully in conversation, collaboration, and problem-solving tasks.

Common forms of interactive practice include role-playing, storytelling, timeline discussions, gamified quizzes (using tools like Kahoot, Quizizz), and real-world simulation tasks. The goal is to build automaticity in tense usage while maintaining communication fluency.

At Hai Phong University of Management and Technology, first-year students can benefit from structured interactive activities integrated into English classes.

Examples of application include:

☞ **Role-Playing Academic Situations:** Students simulate real-life situations such as registering for courses, discussing study plans, or giving academic presentations, using appropriate tenses.

☞ **Tense-based problem-solving games:** Students are divided into teams to solve puzzles or complete missions that require them to correctly use different tenses (e.g., narrating a past event using past perfect tense).

☞ **Timeline Discussions:** Students work in pairs or groups to create timelines of historical events or personal achievements, using the correct tense forms.

☞ **Interactive Quizzes and Competitions:** Using platforms like Kahoot or Quizizz, students participate in tense-related quizzes, encouraging quick thinking and correct tense usage.

This method effectively addresses the lack of real-life practice (Challenge 3) and the overreliance on mechanical exercises (Challenge 2) highlighted in Chapter II. By engaging in real-time communication tasks, students gradually:

- Reduce their hesitation in tense selection.
- Build stronger internalization of correct tense patterns.
- Gain fluency and confidence when expressing ideas both in speaking and writing.

Thus, interactive practice acts as a bridge between theoretical grammar knowledge and practical language application.

3.2.2. Task-Based Language Learning (TBL)

Task-Based Language Learning (TBL) is an approach that encourages students to learn grammar structures, including verb tenses, by completing meaningful tasks rather than through isolated drills. In TBL, the focus is on achieving a

communicative goal, and grammatical accuracy is developed naturally as students work to complete real-world assignments.

TBL addresses the challenges of the complexity of the tense system (Challenge 1) and the lack of real-life practice (Challenge 3). It helps students practice tenses in authentic contexts without excessive focus on memorization.

Examples of Task-Based Learning Activities:

☞ Designing a Semester Study Plan: Students work in groups to design a complete study schedule for their semester. They must present their plan using future tenses (will, going to, present continuous for future).

☞ Reconstructing Past Events: Students listen to a story or watch a short video clip and then work together to reconstruct the sequence of events, using appropriate past tenses such as past simple, past perfect.

☞ Planning a Field Trip: Students collaboratively organize a mock field trip (e.g., to a museum or historical site), using future and conditional tense forms to explain their plans.

☞ Problem-Solving Scenarios: Groups of students are given real-life problems (e.g., how to organize an English club activity) that require them to use a variety of tenses to propose solutions.

Through task-based activities, students are exposed to a natural environment where grammar structures are used meaningfully, thus improving their ability to apply verb tenses accurately in both academic and everyday contexts.

3.2.3. Contextual Learning Strategies

Contextual learning strategies focus on teaching grammar, including verb tenses, through authentic, meaningful contexts rather than isolated sentences. When students encounter grammar as part of a real situation or topic they are interested in, they are more likely to understand, remember, and correctly apply the structures.

This approach addresses the complexity of the tense system (Challenge 1) and the interference from Vietnamese grammar (Challenge 4) by providing clear and relatable contexts that naturally require correct tense usage.

Examples of Contextual Learning Activities:

☞ **Project-Based Assignments:** Students work on semester-long projects such as creating a travel guide or writing a biography of a famous person, where they need to use different tenses appropriately.

☞ **Thematic Discussions:** Students engage in discussions based on real-world themes such as "My Academic Journey," "My Future Career Plans," or "Historical Events," where they naturally apply various tenses.

☞ **Storytelling Activities:** Students narrate true stories or create fictional stories, applying a wide range of tenses in meaningful sequences.

☞ **Case Studies:** Students analyze real or fictional scenarios (e.g., planning a university event), explaining actions in the past, ongoing processes, and future projections, each requiring different tense forms.

By embedding grammar learning in realistic and interesting contexts, students can better internalize tense usage and develop the ability to choose the correct tense naturally depending on the situation.

3.2.4. Error Correction and Feedback Techniques

Error correction and feedback techniques are essential to help students recognize and fix mistakes when using verb tenses. Immediate and constructive feedback not only corrects errors but also raises students' awareness of the grammatical structures they need to improve.

This method addresses the complexity of tense rules (Challenge 1) and the interference from Vietnamese grammar (Challenge 4). It supports students in identifying common tense mistakes and developing greater self-monitoring skills.

Examples of Error Correction and Feedback Techniques:

☞ Peer Correction Activities: After group discussions or presentations, students work in pairs to spot and correct each other's mistakes regarding verb tense usage.

☞ Teacher Immediate Feedback: During speaking tasks, if students use an incorrect tense, the teacher gently recasts or prompts them to self-correct without interrupting the flow of communication.

☞ Error Analysis Exercises: Students are given short paragraphs containing intentional tense errors and are tasked with finding and correcting them.

☞ Reflective Journals: Students keep weekly journals where they reflect on the common tense mistakes they made and how they corrected them.

Providing systematic feedback helps students develop better tense accuracy over time and encourages them to become more independent and critical language users.

3.2.5. Blended Learning Approach

The Blended Learning Approach combines traditional classroom teaching with digital learning tools to create a flexible and diverse learning environment. By integrating online resources, students can practice verb tenses outside of class while receiving structured support during face-to-face sessions.

This method addresses the limitations of traditional teaching methods (Challenge 2) and the lack of exposure to authentic English input (Challenge 3). It expands learning opportunities beyond the classroom and allows students to review and practice at their own pace.

Examples of Blended Learning Activities:

☞ Online Video Lessons: Students watch short video tutorials about different verb tenses before class, then apply the knowledge in communicative activities during class.

☞ Interactive Grammar Platforms: Students practice tenses using platforms such as Grammarly, Quill, or British Council Learn English, which provide instant feedback.

☞ Flipped Classroom Model: Students learn new tense concepts through digital content at home and focus on practice and discussion in class.

☞ Virtual Discussions: Students participate in online forums or discussion boards, where they write posts using correct tense forms on assigned topics.

Through blended learning, students gain more control over their learning process, reinforce tense usage through varied media, and experience language learning in a more dynamic and engaging way.

3.2.6. Peer Collaboration and Group Work

Peer collaboration and group work offer students opportunities to learn from one another through shared activities and peer feedback. Working in groups allows students to practice verb tenses naturally in communication and to benefit from immediate support and correction by their peers.

This method addresses the lack of real-life practice (Challenge 3) and the limitations of traditional teacher-centered methods (Challenge 2). It also helps students become more confident and autonomous learners.

Examples of Peer Collaboration and Group Work Activities:

☞ Group Projects: Students work in teams to complete projects such as creating a magazine, designing a mock event, or writing a collaborative story using various verb tenses.

☞ Peer Teaching: In small groups, students take turns teaching each other specific tense forms and providing examples.

☞ Role-Playing Conversations: Students work in pairs or groups to perform role-plays where they must use appropriate tenses depending on the context.

☞ Peer Review Sessions: Students exchange written assignments and give feedback on tense usage, helping each other identify and correct mistakes.

Through collaboration, students learn not only the correct use of tenses but also essential teamwork and communication skills, which are critical for academic and professional success.

3.2.7. Intensive Tense Review Programs

Intensive tense review programs focus on providing systematic and concentrated practice with English verb tenses over a short period. Such programs aim to help students consolidate their knowledge, correct persistent mistakes, and build stronger automaticity in tense usage.

This method addresses multiple challenges, particularly the complexity of the tense system (Challenge 1) and the lack of practice opportunities (Challenge 3).

Examples of Intensive Tense Review Activities for First-Year Students:

☞ **Weekly Tense Focus:** Each week, students focus intensively on one tense (e.g., Present Perfect), through activities like writing diary entries, short presentations about personal experiences, and mini-dialogue practices.

☞ **Tense Challenge Sessions:** Students participate in tense competitions where they race to correctly complete sentences or paragraphs using different tenses.

☞ **Error Correction Marathons:** Students are given sample student writings containing common tense errors (based on real mistakes collected earlier) and work in groups to identify and correct all the mistakes.

☞ **Mock Test Simulations:** Short, low-stakes mock grammar tests focusing on tense usage are organized monthly to help students check their progress without the pressure of formal exams.

By participating in such intensive review activities, students can reinforce their tense knowledge in a short but focused time frame, improving both speed and accuracy in using verb tenses.

Chapter III has outlined a range of effective methods to support first-year students in improving their mastery of English verb tenses. These approaches are

practical, adaptable, and aligned with the challenges identified earlier, aiming to enhance students' grammatical accuracy and confidence.

This chapter forms the basis for the final part of the study, which will summarize key findings, discuss implications for teaching and learning, and suggest directions for future research.

PART III: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final part of the study brings together the theoretical insights, empirical findings, and proposed solutions to reflect on the significance of the research and its contributions to English language teaching practices. It aims to consolidate the overall understanding of how first-year students can better acquire English verb tenses and to offer practical recommendations for both instruction and future research directions.

1. Summary of Key Findings

After systematically analyzing the survey and interview results, several major insights have emerged regarding the challenges and learning preferences of first-year students at Hai Phong University of Management and Technology.

This section summarizes the key findings that form the foundation for proposing effective instructional strategies.

The key findings reveal:

- ✓ A significant proportion of students encounter persistent difficulties in distinguishing between similar tense forms, particularly between the past simple and present perfect tenses.
- ✓ Lack of exposure to authentic English use and interference from Vietnamese grammar systems are among the most serious barriers to correct tense application.
- ✓ Students express a clear preference for communicative, contextualized, and task-based approaches over traditional rule-based grammar instruction.
- ✓ An integrated approach — combining explicit rule explanation, real-life practice, technology support, and peer collaboration — is deemed the most effective for enhancing tense mastery.

2. Implications for Teaching and Learning

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications for designing grammar instruction that better supports first-year students. Understanding these

implications is essential for bridging the gap between students' current difficulties and their desired proficiency levels.

Based on the findings, several implications for English grammar instruction are drawn:

- ✓ **Balance Between Theory and Practice:** Grammar teaching should not solely focus on rule explanation but must emphasize applying tenses in meaningful speaking and writing contexts.

- ✓ **Designing Practice-Rich Environments:** Teachers should integrate role-plays, storytelling, project-based tasks, and contextual activities to enhance tense fluency.

- ✓ **Utilizing Technology for Reinforcement:** Platforms like Grammarly, online quizzes, and LMS tools should supplement traditional instruction to provide immediate feedback and autonomous learning opportunities.

- ✓ **Addressing First-Language Interference:** Contrastive analysis between English and Vietnamese grammar structures should be incorporated into lessons to raise awareness of cross-linguistic differences and common pitfalls.

3. Limitations of the Study

Like any empirical investigation, this study inevitably faced certain constraints that may affect the interpretation and generalization of its results. This section discusses the major limitations encountered during the research process.

- ✓ **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The relatively small sample size (40 survey respondents and 10 interviewees) may limit the generalizability of the findings across the broader student population.

- ✓ **Scope Restriction:** The research focused exclusively on verb tense acquisition; other crucial grammar areas such as modal verbs, articles, or conditionals were not examined.

✓ **Data Collection Constraints:** Reliance on self-reported survey data and interviews may introduce bias, as students' self-assessments may not fully reflect their actual grammatical competence.

4. Suggestions for Future Research

Building on the findings and recognizing the study's limitations, several directions for future research are suggested to deepen the understanding of grammar acquisition among university learners.

Future research could consider the following directions:

✓ **Expand Participant Diversity:** Involve a larger and more diverse sample of students from different faculties and levels to improve result validity.

✓ **Broaden Grammar Focus:** Examine the acquisition of other grammar structures such as modals, articles, and complex sentence forms for a more comprehensive understanding.

✓ **Adopt Longitudinal Research Designs:** Track students' development over longer periods to better assess the impact of various instructional methods on tense mastery.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was designed to investigate first-year students' experiences, difficulties, and preferences in learning English verb tenses. Participants were asked to answer multiple-choice questions based on their personal experiences.

APPENDIX A.1: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(Original – Vietnamese)

The following is the original Vietnamese version of the survey questionnaire administered to participants. It was initially designed in Vietnamese to ensure better understanding and more accurate responses.

BẢNG KHẢO SÁT

Các bạn thân mến,

Bảng khảo sát này nhằm thu thập thông tin về trải nghiệm của bạn trong việc học các thì tiếng Anh. Vui lòng trả lời trung thực bằng cách chọn phương án phù hợp nhất với tình huống của bạn. Mọi câu trả lời sẽ được giữ bí mật và chỉ phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu học thuật.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn sự hợp tác của bạn.

Phần 1: Thông tin cá nhân

1. Họ và tên (tùy chọn): _____

2. Giới tính:

☐ Nam

☐ Nữ

3. Ngành học: _____

4. Bạn đã học tiếng Anh trong bao lâu?

☐ Dưới 5 năm

☐ Từ 5-10 năm

☐ Trên 10 năm

5. Bạn đánh giá trình độ ngữ pháp tiếng Anh của mình như thế nào?

☐ Rất tốt

☐ Tốt

☐ Trung bình

☐ Yếu

Phần 2: Mức độ thành thạo của sinh viên trong việc sử dụng thì tiếng Anh

6. Bạn cảm thấy tự tin như thế nào khi sử dụng đúng các thì tiếng Anh trong nói, viết và làm bài kiểm tra?

☐ Rất tự tin

☐ Khá tự tin

☐ Thỉnh thoảng còn nhầm lẫn

☐ Thường xuyên nhầm lẫn

☐ Rất khó và dễ nhầm lẫn

Phần 3: Những lỗi thường gặp khi sử dụng thì tiếng Anh

7. Những lỗi phổ biến nào bạn thường mắc phải khi sử dụng thì tiếng Anh? (Chọn tối đa 2 đáp án)

☐ Nhầm lẫn giữa hiện tại đơn và hiện tại tiếp diễn

☐ Nhầm lẫn giữa quá khứ đơn và hiện tại hoàn thành

☐ Quên thêm "-s" cho chủ ngữ số ít ngôi thứ ba

☐ Sử dụng sai trợ động từ (do/does/did)

☐ Không nhận diện được dấu hiệu nhận biết của thì

Phần 4: Những khó khăn trong việc học các thì tiếng Anh

8. Điều gì khiến bạn cảm thấy khó khăn nhất khi học thì tiếng Anh? (Chọn tối đa 2 đáp án)

- ☐ Có quá nhiều thì, khó ghi nhớ cấu trúc
- ☐ Phương pháp giảng dạy chưa hiệu quả
- ☐ Thiếu thực hành và ứng dụng trong thực tế
- ☐ Ảnh hưởng từ ngữ pháp tiếng Việt

Phần 5: So sánh các phương pháp học tập khác nhau)

9. Bạn thấy phương pháp học nào hiệu quả nhất? (Chọn tối đa 2 đáp án)

- ☐ Ghi nhớ công thức và làm bài tập (Phương pháp Dịch - Ngữ pháp)
- ☐ Học thông qua hội thoại và tình huống thực tế (Phương pháp Dạy học Giao tiếp - CLT)
- ☐ Luyện tập thì thông qua các nhiệm vụ và hoạt động (Phương pháp Học tập theo nhiệm vụ - TBL)
- ☐ Kết hợp bài giảng, video và bài tập (Học tập kết hợp)

APPENDIX A.2: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(Translated – English)

This is the English-translated version of the survey questionnaire, which was used for data coding and analysis purposes.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Participants,

This questionnaire aims to collect information about your experiences with learning English verb tenses. Please answer honestly by selecting the option that best reflects your situation. Your responses will remain confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Part 1: Personal Information

1. Full name (optional): _____

2. Gender :

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Major: _____

4. How long have you been learning English?

☐ Less than 5 years

☐ 5–10 years

☐ More than 10 years

5. How would you rate your English grammar proficiency?

☐ Very good (Rất tốt)

☐ Good (Tốt)

☐ Average (Trung bình)

☐ Weak (Yếu)

Part 2: Students' Proficiency in Using English Verb Tenses

6. How confident are you in using English verb tenses correctly in speaking, writing, and tests?

☐ Very confident

☐ Quite confident

☐ Sometimes confused

☐ Often confused

☐ Very difficult and confusing

Part 3: Common Errors in Using English Verb Tenses

**7. What common mistakes do you often make when using verb tenses?
(Choose up to 2)**

☐ Confusing present simple and present continuous

☐ Confusing past simple and present perfect

☐ Forgetting to add “-s” for third-person singular

☐ Misusing auxiliary verbs (do/does/did)

☐ Failing to recognize tense indicators

Part 4: Challenges in Learning English Verb Tenses

**8. What is the most challenging aspect of learning English verb tenses?
(Choose up to 2)**

☐ Too many tenses, difficult to memorize structures

☐ Ineffective teaching methods

☐ Lack of practice and real-life usage

☐ Interference from Vietnamese grammar

Part 5: Comparison of Different Learning Methods (So sánh các phương pháp học tập khác nhau)

9. Which learning method do you find most effective? (Choose up to 2)

- ☐ Memorizing formulas and doing exercises (Grammar-Translation Method)
- ☐ Learning through conversations and real-life situations (Communicative Language Teaching - CLT)
- ☐ Practicing tenses through tasks and activities (Task-Based Learning - TBL)
- ☐ Combining lectures, videos, and exercises (Blended Learning)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore students' deeper opinions and experiences regarding the learning of English verb tenses.

APPENDIX B.1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Original Version – Vietnamese)

The following are the original semi-structured interview questions conducted in Vietnamese with the participants.

CÂU HỎI PHỎNG VẤN

Các bạn thân mến,

Các câu hỏi phỏng vấn dưới đây được thiết kế nhằm thu thập những hiểu biết sâu hơn về trải nghiệm của bạn trong việc học các thì tiếng Anh. Vui lòng trả lời một cách chân thành dựa trên trải nghiệm thực tế của bạn. Mọi câu trả lời sẽ được giữ bí mật và chỉ phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu học thuật.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn sự hợp tác của bạn.

Câu hỏi 1: Tại sao bạn nghĩ nhiều sinh viên vẫn mắc lỗi về thì, dù đã học các quy tắc?

Câu hỏi 2: Bạn có thể chia sẻ một lần bạn sử dụng sai thì trong giao tiếp không? Điều đó ảnh hưởng đến bạn như thế nào?

Câu hỏi 3: Phương pháp học nào giúp bạn cải thiện việc sử dụng thì tốt nhất? Tại sao?

Câu hỏi 4: Nếu cho bạn thiết kế một bài học về thì tiếng Anh, bạn sẽ chọn những hoạt động nào?

APPENDIX B.2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Translated Version – English)

This is the English-translated version of the interview questions, used for qualitative analysis.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Dear Participants,

The following interview questions are designed to gather deeper insights into your experiences with learning English verb tenses. Please answer sincerely based on your real experiences. All responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Thank you for your valuable cooperation.

Question 1: Why do you think many students still make mistakes with verb tenses, even after learning the rules?

Question 2: Can you share a time when you used verb tenses incorrectly? What happened?

Question 3: Which learning method has helped you the most with verb tenses? Why?

Question 4: If you could create a lesson on verb tenses, what activities would you include?