Student Perceptions of English Tense Learning Difficulties: A Mixed-Method Investigation in Pakistani Higher Education

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Abstract

Learning English tenses presents significant challenges for ESL students globally, particularly in Pakistan, where English serves as an official language and instructional medium in higher education. Despite extensive grammar instruction, students struggle with practical applications of the tense, creating gaps between theoretical knowledge and communicative competence. This study investigated undergraduate students' perceptions of difficulties in learning English tenses to identify problem areas and inform pedagogical improvements, employing a mixed-methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. From 256 English Department students at the University of Malakand, 110 were selected through stratified random sampling for questionnaires and 10 for semi-structured interviews. Data collection utilised a validated 30-item Likert scale questionnaire and an interview guide. Quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics via SPSS 22.0, while qualitative data underwent six-step thematic analysis. Results showed students demonstrated confidence in basic tense structures and sentence recognition, but acknowledged difficulties with complex combinations, voice conversions, perfect continuous tenses, and temporal prepositions. The study recommends implementing communicative teaching approaches and addressing cognitive and affective factors in tense instruction.

Keywords: English tense learning; student perceptions; ESL difficulties; mixed-method research

Introduction

English as a second language (ESL) has gained significance in today's globalised world, where many learners face diverse learning challenges due to their varying linguistic and cultural

backgrounds. The challenges then differ considerably in terms of factors, including the natively spoken language, educational foundation, readiness for English, and personal approaches to learning (Rizoqulovna, 2023). In Pakistan, where English is not only an official language but also a language of instruction at tertiary education institutions, the perception of grammatical problems is crucial in developing proper pedagogical approaches tailored to student characteristics.

With its complex structure of tenses, English grammar is highly challenging for many ESL learners, especially those who have English as a foreign language. Students often struggle with applying grammatical rules when speaking and writing (Elturki, 2014). All these are worsened by a belief that English grammar is dull and rigid to learn using the traditional textbook method of teaching grammar (Vannestal & Linquist, 2007). Although there have been improvements in designing interactive grammar units that incorporate peer discussion and problem-solving tasks, students appear to lack motivation to learn about grammar in English (Vannestal & Linquist, 2007; Mestari & Malabar, 2016).

The English language's grammatical system presents challenges to students whose native language has a different grammatical system. The structural variance between the Urdu and Pashto languages, which students primarily use, and the English language poses more challenges to tense understanding (Sunarto, 2012; Çakır, 2011; Inayati & Damayanti, 2016). Learning English grammar is recognised as essential for developing students' overall English proficiency and enabling them to use the language accurately and meaningfully (Bram, 2014; Kurniasari, 2017). However, students often struggle to transition from memorising rules to applying them in communicative contexts.

The significance of tense mastery extends beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass effective communication in both spoken and written forms. Students need a comprehensive understanding of tenses to engage successfully with English texts at the university level, particularly in programs where English serves as the primary medium of instruction (Mestari, 2016; Lie, 2007). The challenges become more pronounced when students encounter the twelve basic tenses of English, each with specific forms, functions, and contextual applications.

Previous research has identified various factors contributing to tense learning difficulties. Marcos-Llinas and Garau (2009) categorised these factors into linguistic and non-linguistic elements, noting that students' knowledge of their mother tongue often interferes with foreign language acquisition, affecting the internalisation process. Common errors include punctuation mistakes, spelling errors, incorrect preposition usage, inappropriate article selection, inconsistent verb tenses, and irregular word forms (Khatter, 2019). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of learning challenges and underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of student perspectives.

The pedagogical approach prevalent in Pakistani educational institutions has traditionally emphasised the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which focuses primarily on teaching rules and translation skills rather than practical language application (Shamim, 2008, 2011). This method enables students to translate isolated sentences but often fails to develop communicative competence for real-life situations (Behlol & Anwar, 2011; Diaz-Rico, 2004; Lubis,

2016). There is a gap between rule learning and its practical application in communicative contexts, which prevents students from using tenses effectively.

It is essential to understand students' perceptions of tense learning challenges for three reasons. First, the way students perceive things has a direct impact on their motivation, engagement and success. Students may develop a negative attitude towards grammar if they perceive it as too complicated or unimportant. Second, identifying areas in which students express confidence or weakness can be informative for specific teaching interventions. Third, students' views can be used to understand the quality of the existing teaching methodology and identify areas that need improvement in pedagogy.

In the Pakistani higher education context, this research focuses on the perception of undergraduate students regarding learning problems with English tenses. Cross-examining quantitative and qualitative data about students' experiences will help this study generate a comprehensive understanding of the challenges students encounter when using the English tense system. The results can be applied to the process of curriculum development, teacher-training and the methodology of instruction in ESL settings where the application of English is essential both academically and as a professional means of communication.

Literature Review

Challenges in English Tense Learning and Student Perceptions

There is literature on the complexity of English tense systems and their multi-layered complications of first or second-language acquisition. Studies consistently reveal that ESL students struggle to learn English tenses, and challenges appear to vary according to the level of proficiency and country of origin.

Ali and Hussain (2021) explored the opinions of teachers and students regarding tense application challenges among ESL students. They discovered that learners had the most problems with the future indefinite and future continuous tenses. They found that such problems could be explained by the fact that inappropriate teaching methodologies in government high schools involved unstructured classroom environments, favouring speaking practice, overemphasis on grammatical rules, and underemphasis on the actual applications of grammar, as well as linking the teaching of sentences as an unconnected entity rather than organically related parts of discourse. This study demonstrates the direct impact of pedagogical teaching on students' perceptions of learning difficulty related to tense.

Wahyuningtyas and Bram (2018) investigated the basic understanding of tense among first-semester college students, finding that the students were especially weak in understanding the present continuous tense, the present perfect tense, and the present perfect continuous tense. Students signified the difficulties in memorising the tense formulas and admitted that there is not enough routine work with the materials on the tenses. The research found that students believe they have an insufficient understanding of grammar in the classroom, suggesting that the teaching and learning processes are not aligned. These results suggest that students' subjective perceptions of difficulty also correlate strongly with cognitive load and practical instruction.

Tense learning has been investigated in a multiplicity of psychological dimensions. Febriyanti (2020) discussed issues encountered by students in the first semester of their university education, showing that 28 per cent of them sought help with the use of present indefinite tense,

followed by those struggling with present continuous (37.5 percent), with an increasing proportion struggling with more complex tenses, reaching 68 percent on future perfect continuous. They found that when students held the idea that something was hard, it was related to the difficulty in applying the aspect and tense to the appropriate situation, the student interference caused by their mother tongue, failure to have repeated practice, and a general lack of confidence in expressing themselves in language.

Cultural and linguistic interference issues play a significant role in shaping how students learn tenses in English. Dennis (2012) conducted a study of the same and found that students made errors in the present simple, past simple, present continuous, past continuous, and present perfect tenses without exception. The cases of such errors can be explained by the lack of a knowledge base in English grammar and by interference from mother tongue influence.

Pedagogical Approaches and Their Impact on Student Perceptions

Correlation between teaching approach and the perception of tense learning difficulty constitutes an important research topic. Conventional methods have taken a hit since studies have shown that they are ineffective in developing communicative competence. Saun (2014) studied the issues relating to teachers who teach tense in the communicative context and determined that sentence-pattern methods to facilitate language use do not apply to tense teaching. The research highlighted that grammar instruction should prioritise form and function, with the teacher explaining semantic meaning before providing communicative practice exercises.

Such practices as innovative pedagogical interventions have indicated the success level in modifying student perception towards tense learning. Nurlaela and Nawir (2020) compared the use of Kahoot as one of the digital learning media in enhancing tense understanding in higher education. The mixed-methods article involving 15 students revealed that the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is significant, and the qualitative results illustrate the effectiveness of the study, supporting the quantitative results by indicating that the students' understanding of translation, interpretation, and extrapolation improved. The present study suggests that interactive digital tools can have a positive impact on students' perceptions of tense learning, as they make the process more engaging and accessible.

Confirmatory experimental designs have been used to test the role of reinforcement in tense learning. Tarmin et al. (2022) conducted a pre-experiment on a sample of 27 first-year students to investigate the effects of teacher reinforcement on knowledge of the six English tenses. They used a one-group pre- and post-design in six forty-five-minute group treatment sessions. The significant gap between the pre- and post-test results indicated that systematic reinforcement methods could increase student comprehension and even alter their perceptions of learning difficulty.

Contemporary studies have looked at constructivism in the teaching of tense. According to a study by Pranoto and Levinli (2023), the learning design of sixteen tenses is investigated based on a constructivist approach and since sixteen tenses are divided into two different categories of learners (present tense and past tense). The strategy would help make the learning process more systematic and structured, as students would feel more confident when navigating the tense system. This approach to presenting verb changes in a hierarchical, holistic, non-complicated,

and engaging way would help resolve students' mental images of the subject as a complex entity with a tremendous volume of information that cannot be processed.

Student-Specific Factors Influencing Tense Learning Perceptions

Individual and situational factors primarily influence the perceptions of students regarding the study of English tenses. The study by Holeha, Ardian, and Amri (2020) on the identification of issues regarding the present perfect tense among university students highlighted that more than half of them described the present perfect tense as a problematic English content. The factors they identified in their research that contributed to this are a lack of interest in the subject of English and a lack of vocabulary knowledge, problems with identifying present perfect tense auxiliary verbs, and failure to maintain verb form changes in control. These results emphasise the fact that the attitudes of students, the knowledge of language, and awareness further affect the issue of learning difficulty.

Communication skills research has served to explore the psychological aspects of learning tenses. Through a study of English as a Foreign Language learners at the graduate level, Tayyab, Hassan et al. (2023) found that the students believed they had issues with their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Students noted that they lacked exposure opportunities in speaking English, felt gaps in confidence and fear in communication, and received inadequate guidance and motivation. These results reveal the role of broader anxiety in language learning in determining certain attitudes towards grammatical elements, such as tenses.

The instructional effectiveness and teacher awareness are also of great significance to student perceptions of tense learning. Rahmawati, Nugraha, and Sorohiti (2024) measured aspects of teacher understanding of learning problems and highly recommended teaching methods for mastering English grammar. In their qualitative report on ten teachers, the authors found that teachers, as a collective, recognised the problem with grammar learning among students, which led to their disappointments due to lower exposure to English in this case and motivation gaps. Teachers employed effective learning strategies, such as guided spoken sentence construction and game-based learning, to overcome difficulties. These approaches provided structured learning experiences that made grammar more interesting and enjoyable for students.

Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach to understanding the perception of English tense learning problems among undergraduate students. The mixed approach to data collection enabled the collection of both statistical and in-depth information, providing a balanced analysis of the study sample's experiences and issues. Quantitative data were devoted to the structured answers to certain elements related to tense learning, recognition of the grammatical element, understanding of structures, and the strains in real applications. The qualitative data were collected through interviews, ensuring that the students' reflections, experiences, and the influential context surrounding these perceptions were accurately captured. Combined, these sources of data enabled the presentation of trends and compelling stories. The sample consisted of 256 undergraduate students from the University of Malakand (2023-24) who were studying English. A stratified random sampling was used to select 110 students, ensuring representation from each semester. In the qualitative data, ten students were selected purposively through semi-structured interviews, which allowed different views to emerge. Two principal tools were

created: a 30-item Likert-type questionnaire with quantitative data and a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions, ten questions related to qualitative inquiry. This was achieved by revising the pertinent literature to ensure that the questionnaire covered the perception dimensions comprehensively. The validity and reliability were confirmed through expert review by five specialists in the field of English language teaching, who evaluated the relevance, appropriateness, and structure. The responses have been incorporated into the revision of the two tools. Fifteen students piloted and tested it, and its respective clarity was established. According to Cronbach's alpha, it achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.83, which is well above the required threshold. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, in SPSS (version 22.0). Qualitative data were analysed using the thematic method, which includes six steps: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. This helped represent the voices of the students with their numerical findings. Ethics informed the procedure. Informed consent was obtained by clearly stating the study's objective and procedure, and participants were informed of their voluntary participation in the study, confidentiality, and anonymity. All data handling procedures safeguarded identities, and before any data gathering could get underway, formal approval had been obtained from the department chairman. Comprehensively, the mixed-methods approach, representative sampling, appropriate validation of instruments, and sound analysis served to present an in-depth and ethically well-provided research into the perception of tense learning challenges, alongside statistical patterns and firsthand recollections to provide insight into this linguistic challenge.

Data Analysis and Results

Demographic Profile of Participants

The study involved 100 undergraduate students from the Department of English at the University of Malakand, representing a diverse cross-section of the student population.

Table 1: Sample profile of the sampled BS level students

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	53	53
Female	47	47
Age		
Less than 20 Years	25	25
Greater than 20 Years	75	75
Semester in which to Study		
2nd	27	27
4th	25	25
6th	23	23
8th	26	26

The demographic report in Table 1 showed that 53 out of the respondents were male students, 47 were female students, with a somewhat equal representation of the genders. Regarding the age distribution, 25 per cent of respondents were below 20 years old, whereas 75 per cent of

respondents were more than 20 years old, indicating that most respondents have attained academic maturity and have had considerable experience learning the English language. The proportion distribution was semester-wise, where 27 per cent of the students were in the second semester, 25 per cent in the fourth semester, 23 per cent in the sixth semester, and 26 per cent in the eighth semester, representing all learning levels and stages of education.

Student Perceptions of Basic Tense Comprehension

The quantitative analysis of student perceptions regarding fundamental aspects of English tense understanding revealed predominantly positive self-assessments across multiple dimensions.

Table 2: Perceptions of students about the first five items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Recognition of subject, object and verb in a sentence	02	04	00	32	62	4.48	.858
2	Familiarise yourself with the use of different forms of verbs in different tenses	01	09	04	60	26	4.01	.870
3	Familiarize yourself with the use of different forms of helping verbs in different tenses	02	05	09	48	36	4.11	.909
4	Knowing different parts in a sentence	01	03	09	38	49	4.31	.837
5	Knowing the use of "s" or "es" in a sentence	01	01	03	36	59	4.51	.703

The students were very confident in recognising grammatical elements, with an average of 4.48 (SD = 0.858) in identifying subjects, objects, and verbs in sentences, as shown in Table 2. Respondents' interpretation of this observation is that undergraduate students feel they have mastered simple sentence formation, which gives them confidence in stressing more complex tenses.

Regarding familiarity with the forms of verbs in various tenses, students demonstrated a range of confidence, with an average score of 4.01 (SD = 0.870). This observation suggests that students feel they know what morphological changes are needed to use some forms in different tense constructions. However, the fact that the meaning in this perception is slightly lower than in the one called basic sentence component recognition seems to demonstrate that students are not as confident in this aspect. Similarly, students expressed confidence in understanding verb usage across tenses, achieving a mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.909), indicating perceived competence in selecting and applying auxiliary verbs.

Students' perceptions of their ability to identify sentence components yielded a mean score of 4.31 (SD = 0.837), reinforcing the finding that fundamental grammatical analysis is perceived as manageable. The highest confidence level was observed in understanding the use of "s" or "es" in sentences, with a mean score of 4.51 (SD = 0.703), suggesting that students feel secure in their grasp of singular present tense formations and basic morphological rules.

Perceptions of Negative and Interrogative Sentence Formation

Analysis of student perceptions regarding negative and interrogative sentence construction revealed consistent confidence across multiple tasks related to tense.

Table 3: Perceptions of students about six to ten items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Know how to make negative sentences of each tense	04	02	08	31	55	4.31	.992
2	Knowing of helping verbs used to make negative sentences of each tense	02	09	07	40	42	4.11	1.014
3	Knowing how to make interrogative sentences in different tenses	01	01	05	40	53	4.43	.728
4	Knowing which helping verb is used in present indefinite tense in negative and interrogative sentences when third person pronoun is used (He, She, and It)	01	11	07	42	39	4.07	.998
5	Knowing the form of verb used in past tense	03	09	07	31	50	4.16	1.089

Students reported high confidence in creating negative sentences across different tenses, achieving a mean score of 4.31 (SD = .992). This perception suggests that students believe they understand the structural modifications required to negate statements in various temporal contexts.

Understanding of helping verbs for negative sentence construction received a mean score of 4.11 (SD = 1.014), indicating moderate to high perceived competence. Students expressed strong confidence in forming interrogative sentences, with a mean score of 4.43 (SD = .728), suggesting that question formation is perceived as a manageable grammatical task. However, when addressing specific contexts, such as the present indefinite tense with third-person pronouns, student confidence decreased slightly to a mean of 4.07 (SD = 0.998), indicating some uncertainty in applying the rule to specific grammatical contexts.

Knowledge of past tense verb forms received a mean score of 4.16 (SD = 1.089), indicating that students perceive themselves as competent in understanding past tense morphology. However, the higher standard deviation suggests greater variability in confidence levels among participants.

Complex Tense Structure Perceptions

Student perceptions of more complex tense structures revealed varying confidence levels across different temporal and aspectual combinations.

Table 4.4: Perceptions of students about eleven to fifteen items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Knowing which form of helping verb is used in past indefinite tense (negative and interrogative)	01	10	04	48	37	4.10	.948
2	Knowing how to change past indefinite into negative and interrogative sentences	02	05	09	46	38	4.13	.917
3	Knowing which helping verbs are used in future tense when "I" and "We" are as subject	02	06	08	33	51	4.25	.978

4	Knowing which helping verb to use in future indefinite tense for emphasis	03	14	15	42	26	3.74	1.088
5	Knowing which helping verbs we use in future tense	01	04	03	48	44	4.30	.798

Understanding of past indefinite tense helping verbs for negative and interrogative forms achieved a mean score of 4.10 (SD = 0.948), indicating moderate confidence in this specific grammatical area. Students reported similar confidence levels for converting past indefinite tenses to negative and interrogative forms, with a mean score of 4.13 (SD = 0.917).

Future tense constructions elicited mixed perceptions among students. Understanding of helping verbs when "I" and "We" serve as subjects received a mean score of 4.25 (SD = 0.978), indicating relatively high confidence. However, knowledge of helping verbs for emphasis in future indefinite tense showed lower confidence levels with a mean score of 3.74 (SD = 1.088), suggesting that students find emphatic constructions more challenging. General knowledge of future tense helping verbs achieved a mean score of 4.30 (SD = 0.798), indicating overall confidence in basic future tense formations.

Advanced Tense Applications and Perceived Difficulties

Analysis of student perceptions regarding advanced tense applications revealed areas of both confidence and uncertainty.

Table 5: Perceptions of students about sixteen to twenty items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Knowing how to make future continuous tense	03	02	04	52	39	4.22	.860
2	Knowing which helping verbs we use when there is singular subject (I, he, she, It) and plural subject (we, they)	01	08	10	35	46	4.17	.975
3	Knowing which helping verb to use in present perfect tense when subject is "you"	02	06	09	44	39	4.12	.946
4	Knowing Which helping verb is used in future continuous tense with subjects like (he, she, it, I, we, you, they)	01	06	09	46	38	4.14	.888
5	Knowing how to make negative and interrogative sentences in future perfect	02	08	06	38	46	4.18	.999

Students expressed confidence in constructing the future continuous tense with a mean score of 4.22 (SD = 0.860), and understanding the selection of helping verbs for singular and plural subjects achieved a mean score of 4.17 (SD = 0.975). Present perfect tense with "you" as subject received a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.946), while future continuous tense helping verbs across different subjects achieved a mean score of 4.14 (SD = .888). The understanding of future perfect negative and interrogative constructions received a mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.999).

Table 6: Perceptions of Students About Twenty-One to Twenty-Five Items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Knowing which form of verb is used when two actions happened in the past is represented in a sentence	02	20	16	39	23	3.61	1.109
2	Knowing which forms of verb are used when there is a combination of future perfect tense and present indefinite tense	02	22	23	33	20	3.47	1.105
3	Knowing Which form of the verb is used to make perfect sentences of present, past and future tenses	01	05	15	43	36	4.08	.895
4	Knowing Which form of the verb is used to make continuous sentences of present, past and future tenses	01	16	04	41	38	3.99	1.078
5	Knowing which forms of the verb are used in the twelve tenses of English language	01	10	22	35	32	3.87	1.012

However, more complex tense combinations revealed areas of perceived difficulty. When two past actions are represented in a single sentence, student confidence decreased to a mean score of 3.61 (SD = 1.109), indicating uncertainty in handling multiple temporal relationships. Combinations of future perfect and present indefinite tenses presented even greater challenges, with a mean score of 3.47 (SD = 1.105), suggesting that complex tense interactions are perceived as particularly difficult.

Areas of Significant Perceived Difficulty

The analysis revealed several areas where students acknowledged substantial difficulties.

Table 7: Perceptions of Students About Twenty Six to Thirty Items

S. No	Items	SDA	DA	UD	A	SA	M	SD
1	Facing problems to change tenses from active voice to passive voice	10	17	19	33	21	3.38	1.270
2	Facing problems in changing narration of tenses	01	28	17	34	20	3.44	1.131
3	Facing problems in sentences related to perfect tenses	13	23	14	35	15	3.16	1.301
4	Facing problems in sentences related to perfect continuous tenses	16	27	14	29	14	2.98	1.333
5	Facing problem using 'since' and 'for' in perfect continuous tenses	26	31	09	10	24	2.75	1.540

Voice conversion from active to passive presented significant challenges, with students reporting a mean score of 3.38 (SD = 1.270) for this skill. This finding suggests that while students may grasp individual tense structures, applying these structures across different voice constructions presents considerable difficulty.

Narration changes from direct to indirect speech also presented challenges, achieving a mean score of 3.44 (SD = 1.131). This difficulty suggests that students struggle with the complex rule systems governing transformations of reported speech across different tense contexts. Perfect tense constructions were perceived as problematic, with a mean score of 3.16 (SD = 1.301), while perfect continuous tenses presented even greater challenges at 2.98 (SD = 1.333).

The most significant area of perceived difficulty involved the use of "since" and "for" in perfect continuous tenses, achieving the lowest mean score of 2.75 (SD = 1.540). This finding suggests that students struggle with selecting and using temporal prepositions in complex aspectual constructions, highlighting a critical area for instructional intervention.

Qualitative Insights into Student Perceptions

The thematic analysis of interview data provided more profound insights into student perceptions of tense learning difficulties. Students generally reported confidence in identifying basic tenses, although some acknowledged challenges with the perfect and perfect continuous tenses. The use of verbs in the various tenses seemed comfortable to most students, although some felt slightly confused by continuous tenses of the future and perfect tenses of continuous form.

Translation challenges have become an important theme; therefore, translating between English and Urdu, as well as Urdu and English, was recognised as an issue by all the students. Students explained these struggles as resulting from a lack of vocabulary and differences in vocabulary between languages. All changes related to voice conversion and narration were considered difficult, and the student spokespeople commented that they found the rules to be differing depending on the type of sentence, especially challenging.

Communication problems were another key theme, with students reporting problems with oral and written communication. The students reported feeling insecure in speaking and afraid of making errors, as well as having fewer opportunities to practice. Such perceptions suggest that tense difficulty is not only limited to grammatical knowledge but also extends to issues related to communicative competence, which is closely intertwined with grammatical understanding and communicative self-confidence in the view of students learning English tense mastery.

Conclusion

The study is a comprehensive examination of the challenges that undergraduate students face in learning English tenses within the Pakistani higher education system. The results reveal a more nuanced picture of student self-reported confidence, which varies significantly across different comprehension/application capacities. Students demonstrate a high level of self-perceived competence in their basic grammatical skills, including the identification of sentence components, verb forms, and tenses. However, they have also reported considerable incompetence in more complex grammatical processes.

The study determines that students feel competent in the basic skill set, such as identifying subject-verb-object, using basic helping verbs, and constructing simple negative and interrogative sentences. The confidence level significantly drops in cases of the advanced tense combinations and voice conversions, as well as the use of temporal preposition cases. The most significant problem points appear to be the misuse of perfect continuous tenses, particularly the

incorrect use of 'since' and 'for', as well as the conversion between active and passive voice and direct and indirect speech.

Instead, qualitatively, the students convey more general issues based on communicative competence rather than grammatical correctness. Communication challenges between the Urdu and English languages, poor visibility of verbal expressions, a lack of confidence in making mistakes, and a limited vocabulary are perceived as the underlying issues that contribute to the tensions associated with learning difficulties. These results suggest that the perception of grammatical complexity is also influenced by psychological factors, including students' confidence, motivation, and anxiety.

As the study shows, traditional methods of learning grammar have empowered students with the skills of recognising simple tenses but have left them lacking in areas of applying it practically, as well as more complicated modifications. The documented problems, as reported by the students, resemble the recognised challenges of second language development, namely mother tongue interference and the lack of opportunities for communication practice.

These results are particularly relevant to pedagogical practice in ESL learning contexts. The separation between the knowledge of grammar and its use in practice indicates that more communicative methods in the work with tenses should be implemented. Interventions are to be provided regarding both cognitive aspects of learning and tense and emotional factors affecting student confidence and motivation. It is recommended that the curriculum going forward place more emphasis on integrated skills, where a synthesis of grammatical accuracy and communicatively meaningful application should be merged without one being sacrificed for the other. This approach should enable students to become both technically competent and practically fluent in English tense use.

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