

The Effects of Simple Past Tense Verbs and Vocabulary Mastery towards Students' Writing Skills in Recount

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of simple past tense verb mastery and vocabulary mastery towards students' writing skills in recount texts. Employing a quantitative survey design, the research involved 87 eighth-grade students from two state junior high schools in Bekasi City selected through proportional random sampling. Three instruments were used: a grammar test on simple past tense verbs, a vocabulary mastery test, and a writing test in recount text form. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. Findings revealed that (1) mastery of simple past tense verbs significantly affects students' writing skills (Sig. = 0.005 < 0.05; t = 3.226), (2) vocabulary mastery significantly influences students' writing skills (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05; t = 4.565), and (3) both variables simultaneously have a significant effect on students' writing performance (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05; F = 21.370). These results highlight the importance of grammar and vocabulary mastery in enhancing students' writing skills, particularly in recount text production.

Keywords: Simple Past Tense; Vocabulary Mastery; Writing Skills; Recount Text.

Abstrak

.Penelitian ini mengkaji pengaruh penguasaan kata kerja simple past tense dan kosakata terhadap keterampilan menulis teks recount siswa. Dengan menggunakan metode kuantitatif survei, penelitian ini melibatkan 87 siswa kelas VIII dari dua SMP negeri di Kota Bekasi yang dipilih melalui proportional random sampling. Instrumen penelitian meliputi tes tata bahasa (simple past tense), tes penguasaan kosakata, dan tes menulis teks recount. Data dianalisis dengan regresi linier berganda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) penguasaan simple past tense berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keterampilan menulis siswa (Sig. = 0.005 < 0.05; t = 3.226), (2) penguasaan kosakata berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keterampilan menulis siswa (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05; t = 4.565), dan (3) kedua variabel secara simultan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap keterampilan menulis siswa (Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05; F = 21.370). Hasil ini menegaskan pentingnya penguasaan tata bahasa dan kosakata dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa, khususnya dalam teks recount.

Kata kunci: Simple Past Tense; Penguasaan Kosakata; Keterampilan Menulis; Teks Recount

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized era, education plays a crucial role in preparing individuals to compete internationally, and one of the most important competencies is the ability



to communicate effectively in English, the world's most widely used international language. English is applied in diverse fields such as science, technology, business, tourism, and education (Rao, 2019). Its global significance is highlighted by Crystal (2003), who noted that more than 70 countries use English either as a first or official second language. Similarly, Graddol (2006) emphasized that English has shifted from being a foreign language to becoming an essential economic and technological asset that provides access to global networks. In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language from elementary to higher education, aiming to equip students with the competencies needed for international communication. This aligns with Nunan (2003), who stressed that communicative competence should be the primary focus of English teaching to ensure relevance in global interactions.

Among the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing is often considered the most complex, as it requires not only mastery of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to organize ideas logically and coherently. Harmer (2007) explains that writing serves as a vital tool for communication, learning, and self-expression. Despite its importance, Indonesian students still face considerable challenges in developing their English writing proficiency. This is evident in the EF English Proficiency Index (2023), where Indonesia ranked 79th out of 113 countries, reflecting a low level of English proficiency. Locally, the Education Office of Bekasi reported that the average English score in the 2019/2020 National Examination was 56.0, below the expected target of 61.54.

Aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes literacy and communication skills, students are encouraged to engage with various text types, including recount texts, as a means to strengthen their writing ability. Knapp and Watkins (2005) describe recount texts as a genre that reconstructs past events for the purpose of informing or entertaining the reader. Similarly, Anderson and Anderson (1997) state that recount texts enable learners to structure their experiences chronologically, thereby supporting narrative development.

Furthermore, mastery of grammar particularly the simple past tense remains a persistent challenge for Indonesian students in writing recount texts. Since recounts primarily describe past events, the accurate use of verb forms is fundamental for clarity and coherence. Brown (2001) highlights that the simple past tense is the key grammatical feature in narrating completed actions, yet many students continue to misuse irregular verbs, resulting in frequent errors that disrupt the flow and accuracy of their writing. These difficulties suggest that inadequate mastery of tense usage can significantly hinder students' ability to construct meaningful and well-structured texts.

In addition to grammar, vocabulary plays an equally critical role in shaping the quality of student writing. Limited lexical resources often lead to repetitive expressions and vague descriptions, making students' texts less engaging and underdeveloped. As Wilkins (1972) aptly states, "without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Similarly, Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge, particularly the ability to select words appropriate to context, is essential for achieving fluency and precision in writing. In recount texts, effective use of action verbs, temporal connectors, and

descriptive adjectives can enrich narrative detail and enhance readability. However, observations in the classroom and assessment results reveal that many students still lack sufficient vocabulary, further compounding their difficulties in producing accurate, coherent, and meaningful recount texts.

Given these challenges, it is crucial to investigate the specific factors that may affect students' ability to write recount texts. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the effects of mastery of the simple past tense and vocabulary on students' writing proficiency in recount texts, particularly in producing compositions that are accurate, coherent, and meaningful.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the effects of students' mastery of simple past tense verbs and vocabulary on their writing skills in recount texts. The quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to test hypotheses and measure the strength of relationships among variables in an objective and statistical manner. As Creswell (2014) explains, quantitative research is particularly suitable for examining the influence of independent variables on a dependent variable, which aligns with the purpose of this study.

The population of the research consisted of eighth-grade students from state junior high schools in Bekasi City during the 2022/2023 academic year. From this population, a total of 87 students were selected using proportional random sampling from two different schools. This sampling technique was applied to give each student an equal opportunity to be included, thereby improving the representativeness of the sample and ensuring that the findings could be generalized to the broader population (Sugiyono, 2018). The sample size was also considered sufficient to provide reliable statistical analysis and reflect the diversity of student abilities.

Data for this study were collected through three main instruments designed to capture different aspects of language proficiency. The first instrument was a grammar test that measured students' mastery of simple past tense verbs, including both regular and irregular forms. The second instrument was a vocabulary mastery test aimed at assessing students' lexical knowledge relevant to recount text production. The third instrument was a writing test in which students were required to compose a recount text based on a guided prompt. The writing products were scored analytically using a rubric that covered content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. As Hughes (2003) notes, valid and reliable tests of language components such as grammar and vocabulary are essential for evaluating writing competence, since writing integrates multiple linguistic skills.

The procedures of data collection began with the administration of the grammar and vocabulary tests under standardized classroom conditions to ensure fairness and consistency. Afterward, students were asked to complete the writing task within a limited time frame. Prior to their use, the instruments were reviewed for content validity by English language experts and tested for reliability. The

reliability of the instruments was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, and the results confirmed that the instruments met acceptable standards. Following Brown (2004), both validity and reliability are crucial to ensure that the data accurately reflect the constructs being measured.

The data gathered from the three instruments were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis. This technique was selected because it allows the researcher to examine both the partial and simultaneous influence of the independent variables simple past tense mastery and vocabulary mastery on the dependent variable, namely students' writing skills in recount texts. Field (2013) highlights that multiple regression is an appropriate method when the aim is to predict an outcome from more than one predictor variable and to determine the extent of each variable's contribution. In addition to regression, descriptive statistics were used to provide an overview of students' performance across the grammar, vocabulary, and writing tests.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were strictly observed. The researcher obtained formal permission from the participating schools and informed the students about the purpose and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. In line with Creswell (2012), maintaining ethical responsibility is a key element of educational research to protect participants' rights, dignity, and integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of data analysis are presented in this part, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions. Multiple linear regression was employed to examine the simultaneous and partial effects of simple past tense mastery and vocabulary mastery on students' writing skills in recount text. Prior to the regression test, normality and linearity tests confirmed that the data met the required assumptions. The findings are reported in three main tables: the model summary, the ANOVA result, and the coefficients

Table 1 Model Summary

Source: Output SPSS

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.581 ^a	.337	.321	5.590	1.912

Table 1 presents the model summary of the regression analysis. The results show that the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.590, with $R^2 = 0.348$ and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.333$. This means that 34.8% of the variance in students' writing skills in recount

text can be explained by their mastery of simple past tense and vocabulary. The remaining 65.2% is influenced by other factors outside this study.

Table 2 ANOVA Result of Regression Analysis

Source: SPSS Output

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.581 ^a	.337	.321	5.590	1.912

Table 2 presents the ANOVA result, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant with $F(2,84) = 21.370, p < 0.001$. This confirms that the combination of simple past tense mastery and vocabulary mastery simultaneously has a significant effect on students' writing skills in recount text.

Table 3 Coefficients Analysis

Source: Output SPSS

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1335.742	2	667.871	21.370	.000 ^b
	Residual	2625.177	84	31.252		
	Total	3960.920	86			

Table 3 presents the coefficients of the regression analysis. The results reveal that both independent variables have significant partial effects. Mastery of simple past tense verbs significantly contributes to students' writing skills ($\beta = 0.321, t = 3.226, p = 0.005$). Similarly, vocabulary mastery has a stronger significant effect ($\beta = 0.456, t = 4.565, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that both grammar and vocabulary are essential in improving students' ability to write recount texts, with vocabulary mastery providing a slightly higher contribution than grammar.

The findings of this study demonstrate that both simple past tense verbs mastery and

vocabulary mastery significantly affect students' writing skills in recount text. These results are in line with Harmer (2007), who emphasized that writing is the most complex of the four language skills, requiring accuracy in grammar and sufficient vocabulary to produce coherent and meaningful texts. The significant effect of simple past tense mastery supports Knapp and Watkins (2005), who highlighted that recount texts require a clear use of past tense forms to represent events chronologically and accurately.

Furthermore, the stronger contribution of vocabulary mastery is consistent with Nation (2001), who argued that vocabulary is a core component of language

proficiency and essential for expressing ideas effectively in writing. This result also resonates with Rumanto et al. (2021), who found that students with richer vocabulary are better able to organize and elaborate their ideas in writing tasks. In other words, while grammar ensures structural accuracy, vocabulary provides the resources for meaningful expression. Taken together, these findings strengthen the view that grammar and vocabulary mastery must be taught in an integrated way to support students' writing development, particularly in recount text.

In addition to these findings, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.348$) indicates that 34.8% of the variance in students' writing skills is explained by their mastery of simple past tense verbs and vocabulary. The remaining 65.2% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study, such as students' motivation, reading habits, exposure to English outside the classroom, and the teaching strategies employed by teachers. This suggests that while grammar and vocabulary are critical linguistic components, successful writing development also requires affective, cognitive, and contextual support.

These results are also consistent with previous studies in the Indonesian context. For instance, Fitriana (2018) found that students with stronger grammar and vocabulary knowledge produced more coherent narrative and recount texts. Similarly, Putri and Sari (2020) reported that vocabulary enrichment activities significantly improved students' fluency and clarity in writing.

These parallels reinforce the current study's findings and confirm the interdependence of grammar and vocabulary in shaping writing proficiency. The practical implication of these findings is that English teachers should integrate grammar instruction and vocabulary development in writing practice, rather than treating them as separate components. For example, when teaching recount texts, teachers can design activities that simultaneously highlight the correct use of past tense verbs while encouraging students to apply varied and context-appropriate vocabulary. This integrated approach not only improves accuracy but also enhances expressiveness and coherence in student writing.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. The sample size was limited to 87 students from two schools in Bekasi City, which may not fully represent the broader population of junior high school students in Indonesia. Moreover, the study focused only on recount text as the writing genre, while other text types such as descriptive, narrative, or argumentative may involve different linguistic demands. Future research could expand the sample and include other genres to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of grammar and vocabulary mastery in writing skills.

Taken together, the results highlight that mastery of simple past tense and vocabulary provides a solid foundation for students to produce accurate, coherent, and meaningful recount texts. At the same time, the findings underscore the need for educators to adopt integrated instructional strategies and for further studies to explore additional factors that influence writing development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that students' mastery of simple past tense verbs and vocabulary significantly influences their ability to write recount texts in English. The results of multiple regression analysis revealed a simultaneous effect with $R = 0.581$ and $R^2 = 0.337$, indicating that both variables together explained 33.7% of the variance in students' writing performance. When examined individually, each factor also exerted a significant partial effect, with vocabulary mastery ($B = 0.452$, $t = 4.565$, $p < 0.001$) showing a slightly greater impact than mastery of simple past tense verbs ($B = 0.351$, $t = 3.226$, $p = 0.002$). These findings suggest that students who possess stronger grammatical competence and a broader lexical repertoire are more likely to produce coherent, accurate, and contextually appropriate recount texts.

The results highlight the critical role of linguistic components, particularly grammar and vocabulary, in the development of writing skills. This supports Thornbury's (1999) assertion that grammatical knowledge provides a foundation for meaningful expression, as well as Nation's (2001) emphasis on the importance of vocabulary breadth and depth in effective communication. Taken together, these findings reinforce Hyland's (2003) perspective that writing is a complex process requiring the integration of multiple linguistic and cognitive skills. Consequently, writing instruction should not only emphasize mechanical accuracy but should also foster vocabulary enrichment and contextualized grammar practice to promote more holistic language development.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. It was conducted among eighthgrade students in one junior high school in Bekasi and focused exclusively on recount text writing. The proportion of explained variance (33.7%) also indicates that other factors such as reading interest, motivation, feedback quality, and exposure to authentic texts remain unexplored. Future research may involve a larger and more diverse population, investigate other genres of writing (e.g., narrative, argumentative, expository), and incorporate additional variables such as learning strategies or digital tools to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what drives successful writing performance in EFL contexts.

Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on EFL writing pedagogy in Indonesia by providing empirical evidence that both grammar and vocabulary mastery matter significantly. It calls for greater pedagogical attention to these two components as key levers for improving students' writing outcomes, both in traditional classrooms and in more innovative, technology-enhanced learning environments.

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