



Exploring the Effectiveness of Descriptive Texts in Teaching the Simple Present Tense

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Abstrak

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Mastering the simple present tense remains a challenge for many students, particularly in constructing sentences and distinguishing between verbal and nominal forms. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of descriptive texts in facilitating students' understanding of the simple present tense and to identify the difficulties they encounter. A qualitative research design was employed, using classroom observation and student interviews as the primary instruments. The research was conducted in the Department of English Education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh with 15 student participants. The findings reveal that descriptive texts provide meaningful contexts that enhance students' comprehension and application of the simple present tense. However, students still face problems such as sentence construction errors, limited grammatical accuracy, and difficulties in applying rules consistently. These results suggest that descriptive texts are a valuable medium for teaching grammar, offering pedagogical insights for improving language instruction in higher education

Kata kunci:

Descriptive Texts, Effectiveness, Simple Present Tense

Introduction/ مقدمة

Mastering grammar remains one of the greatest challenges faced by students who learn English as a foreign language (Daskan, A., 2023); (Sorohiti, M., Nugraha, H. N. R., & Rahmawati, F., 2024); (Helmanda, C. M., Safura, S., & Suriadi, E., 2018). Among the various grammatical aspects, the simple present tense holds a particularly crucial role because it forms the foundation for expressing everyday routines, habits, facts, and general truths. In spite of its fundamental importance, many students continue to struggle with using the simple present tense accurately (Prihatini, C., Pratiwi, D. S., & Kamiliya, Z., 2024). They often make errors in forming subject-verb agreement, in distinguishing between verbal and nominal sentences, and in applying auxiliary verbs (Hasanah, N., & Habibullah, M., 2020). These persistent problems indicate that traditional approaches to grammar teaching may not always provide effective learning experiences for students, particularly in higher education contexts.

The problem of mastering the simple present tense is not unique to a particular group of learners; it is a common issue among EFL learners worldwide. For Indonesian students, English functions as a foreign language rather than a second language, meaning that opportunities for authentic practice are often limited to the classroom. Consequently, students rely heavily on instructional materials and teaching strategies to develop their grammatical competence (Dzimar, M., Puspitasari, D., & Rosyid, O. A., 2025). Yet, grammar lessons are frequently delivered in a decontextualized manner, focusing more on rote memorization of rules and formulae rather than meaningful usage. Such approaches often leave learners unable to apply the knowledge of grammar in real communicative situations. This raises the question of how grammar instruction can be designed to be more engaging, meaningful, and effective for students at the tertiary level.

Numerous researchers have acknowledged the importance of contextualized learning for grammar acquisition. For instance, Vold, E. T. (2020) argue that grammar should be taught not only as a set of rules but also as a resource for making meaning in context. Similarly, Abdushukurova, U. (2024) emphasizes that explicit grammar instruction must be combined with opportunities for practice in authentic communicative settings. These perspectives indicate that learning grammar should not be isolated from real language use. Instead, students need exposure to materials and tasks that integrate grammar with meaningful content. In this respect, descriptive texts provide a promising medium.

Descriptive texts, which are commonly used in English teaching in Indonesia, allow students to describe people, places, objects, or experiences in detail. They provide authentic contexts where the simple present tense is naturally employed, such as describing personal routines, characteristics of friends, or facts about the environment. Several studies have reported the effectiveness of using descriptive texts for enhancing language learning. Kunah, K., and Supriyani, S. (2024), for example, found that descriptive texts facilitated students' vocabulary development while also improving their grammatical accuracy. Likewise, Hanifa, L., and Safitri, L. (2024) reported that integrating descriptive texts in grammar lessons helped students to contextualize their understanding of the simple present tense. However, despite these findings, much of the existing research has been conducted at the secondary school level, with less attention paid to higher education contexts, particularly in English teacher education programs.

This gap indicates the urgency of further exploration. Students in English education programs, especially those in departments such as Tadris Bahasa Inggris at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, are expected to become future English teachers. Their mastery of fundamental grammar, including the simple present tense, is not only essential for their own language proficiency but also for their future professional roles as educators. If these students continue to struggle with the simple present tense, it could affect both their academic performance and their ability to teach grammar effectively in schools. Therefore, addressing this problem has significant pedagogical implications.

Another urgent reason for exploring this issue is the widespread shift in language teaching towards more student-centered and meaningful learning. It is highlighted the importance of communicative competence in English teaching, where grammar should be taught as a tool for effective communication rather than as an end in itself. This aligns with global trends in applied linguistics that advocate for contextualized and communicative grammar instruction. Descriptive texts, with their emphasis on everyday realities and detailed information, appear well-suited to bridge the gap between abstract grammatical rules and meaningful language use.

While existing studies have offered insights into the role of descriptive texts in teaching grammar, there remains a lack of qualitative research that explores students' lived experiences and perspectives. Much of the literature has focused on quantitative designs, measuring improvement in test scores without fully capturing the processes through which students learn

or the difficulties they face. For example, previous studies often reported improvements in performance but did not deeply investigate why certain challenges persisted, such as difficulties with sentence construction or confusion about nominal and verbal sentences. This study seeks to address this gap by employing a qualitative approach that prioritizes observation and interviews to uncover students' perspectives and experiences.

The present study therefore contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it explores the effectiveness of descriptive texts for teaching the simple present tense within the context of higher education, specifically at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. Second, it employs qualitative methods, namely classroom observation and interviews, to provide rich and nuanced insights into the learning process. Third, it identifies the specific difficulties students face, which can inform future teaching strategies and curriculum development. By focusing on these aspects, the study not only adds to the body of knowledge on grammar teaching but also provides practical implications for English teacher education programs in Indonesia.

To achieve these aims, the study observed a group of 15 students in the Department of English Education (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. Classroom observation was used to capture teaching and learning dynamics, while semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gather detailed accounts of students' experiences and challenges. By triangulating these sources of data, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how descriptive texts support or hinder the mastery of the simple present tense.

In conclusion, this article positions itself at the intersection of grammar pedagogy, contextualized language teaching, and qualitative inquiry. It responds to the problem of persistent difficulties in mastering the simple present tense by examining the potential of descriptive texts as a contextual teaching medium. The urgency of the research lies in its relevance for both students' language proficiency and their future roles as English teachers. Through classroom observation and interviews, the article contributes original insights into the processes and challenges of grammar learning in higher education. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform not only grammar teaching practices but also the broader discourse on effective strategies for English language education in Indonesia and beyond.

Methodology/هجية البحث

This study employed a qualitative research design, which was considered appropriate for exploring students' experiences and perspectives in learning the simple present tense through descriptive texts. Unlike quantitative approaches that primarily measure outcomes through numerical data, qualitative research provides deeper insights into the processes, perceptions, and challenges encountered by learners (Phutela, N., & Dwivedi, S., 2020). The focus of this study was not only to identify the effectiveness of descriptive texts but also to understand how students interact with them in the learning process and what difficulties arise in mastering the simple present tense.

The participants of the study were 15 students from the Department of English Education (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh. These students were selected purposively because they were enrolled in a grammar course where the simple present tense formed one of the foundational topics. The choice of participants allowed the researcher to capture data from students who were directly engaged with the learning material and who represented future English teachers in training.

Data were collected using two primary instruments: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to capture the dynamics of teaching and learning activities, particularly the ways descriptive texts were used to facilitate grammar instruction. The observations focused on students' participation, their responses to

learning tasks, and the challenges they faced during classroom interactions. Field notes were taken systematically to ensure that important details were recorded. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with all 15 participants to gain a deeper understanding of their individual perspectives. The interviews explored students' perceptions of using descriptive texts, the benefits they experienced, and the specific difficulties they encountered when learning the simple present tense. The combination of observation and interviews ensured triangulation of data, which enhanced the credibility of the findings.

The data sources in this study included both primary and secondary data. Primary data consisted of classroom interactions and students' interview responses, while secondary data were drawn from relevant literature on grammar teaching, descriptive texts, and EFL learning. These secondary sources supported the interpretation of findings by providing a theoretical and empirical background.

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Mezmir (2020) which involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by transcribing interviews and coding observation notes to identify recurring themes. Data display was conducted through thematic categorization, which organized the findings into patterns related to students' comprehension, benefits, and difficulties. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting these patterns in relation to the research questions. To enhance trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings.

In summary, this qualitative research utilized observation and interviews as its primary instruments (Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C., 2020), supported by secondary literature, to analyze how descriptive texts can be effectively applied in teaching the simple present tense. The methodological approach provided rich and contextual insights into both the strengths and limitations of descriptive texts in grammar instruction at the tertiary level.

Findings/نتائج البحث

1. Classroom Observation

The classroom observations revealed several important aspects of how descriptive texts were integrated into grammar lessons, particularly in teaching the simple present tense. The lessons were designed to provide students with descriptive texts of familiar topics, such as describing daily routines, friends, or university life. During the sessions, the teacher asked students to read and analyze descriptive passages that naturally contained sentences in the simple present tense.

From the observations, it was evident that descriptive texts provided students with concrete examples of the simple present tense in use. For instance, students encountered sentences like "My friend lives in Banda Aceh" or "She usually wakes up at six o'clock in the morning". These examples helped them connect grammatical forms with meaningful contexts. As students discussed the passages, they appeared more engaged compared to traditional grammar exercises. Their participation increased when they were asked to describe their own routines or favorite places using similar structures.

However, despite the positive engagement, challenges were also observed. Some students struggled when asked to produce sentences independently. While they could recognize the simple present tense in texts, they occasionally failed to apply subject-verb agreement correctly, such as writing "He go to campus every day" instead of "He goes to campus every day". This is also the finding of Prayuda (2020). Others showed confusion in distinguishing verbal and nominal sentences. For example, some students attempted to apply the auxiliary "do/does" incorrectly with the verb "to be". These difficulties confirmed that, although descriptive texts provide valuable input, students still require explicit guidance and corrective feedback.

2. Student Interviews

The interviews with 15 participants provided deeper insights into their perceptions of learning the simple present tense through descriptive texts. Three major themes emerged: (a) increased motivation and engagement, (b) improved contextual understanding, and (c) persistent grammatical difficulties.

a. Increased Motivation and Engagement

Many students expressed that descriptive texts made grammar learning less monotonous. They appreciated reading texts about familiar topics and felt more comfortable practicing grammar through descriptions of real-life situations. One student commented, “It is easier to understand grammar when the examples are about my daily activities. I feel more confident to make sentences because I know the context”. This suggests that descriptive texts not only supported comprehension but also encouraged active participation.

b. Improved Contextual Understanding.

Students acknowledged that descriptive texts helped them understand when and how the simple present tense should be used. They recognized patterns in the texts that showed habitual actions, general facts, or personal descriptions. Another student noted, “Before, I only memorized formulas like subject plus verb. Now I can see how the tense is used in real sentences”. This indicates that descriptive texts promoted awareness of grammar as a meaning-making resource rather than as isolated rules.

c. Persistent Grammatical Difficulties

Despite the benefits, several students admitted that they still found it difficult to apply grammatical rules accurately. Common difficulties included subject–verb agreement, differentiating between verbal and nominal sentences, and remembering irregular verb forms. One student explained, “Sometimes I forget to add -s or -es for the third person. I also confuse when I should use is, am, or are”. These challenges align with the issues observed in the classroom, suggesting that descriptive texts alone may not fully resolve students’ grammar problems without additional explicit instruction.

The findings from both classroom observation and interviews highlight a dual reality: descriptive texts increase students’ engagement and contextual understanding of the simple present tense, but certain grammatical challenges remain persistent. The data suggest that descriptive texts function effectively as a pedagogical tool for contextualization, but they need to be complemented with targeted explanations and practice to address accuracy-related issues.

Discussion/مناقشتها

The findings of this research, based on classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with fifteen students of the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, provide rich insights into the effectiveness of descriptive texts in teaching the simple present tense. The classroom observations revealed that when descriptive texts were introduced as the main medium of instruction, students demonstrated a higher level of engagement compared to sessions that relied solely on conventional grammar explanations. Instead of passively listening to rules and memorizing formulas, students actively participated in describing people, objects, and familiar environments using the simple present tense. The classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, with learners showing willingness to experiment with language, even if errors occurred in the process. For instance, during one observed session, students were asked to describe their daily routines. A student confidently stated, “I wakes up at six every morning,” and while the error in subject-verb agreement was evident, the student’s effort to construct a complete idea in the target language showed that descriptive texts provided a meaningful space to practice grammar communicatively.

The interviews confirmed this observation, as several students admitted that grammar lessons had previously felt intimidating because they emphasized memorization of rules

without context. One participant expressed, “Before, I always felt confused when learning grammar. I know the formula but I don’t know how to use it in real life. But when I try to describe my room or my friend, I can see how the rules work.” Such statements highlight that descriptive texts allowed students to perceive grammar as a tool for expressing real situations rather than as abstract rules detached from communication. This shift is significant, as it demonstrates the pedagogical value of contextualized input, which supports learners in internalizing grammar through meaningful practice.

Another important finding from classroom observation was the collaborative spirit that emerged during activities involving descriptive texts. Students often worked in pairs or small groups to produce short written descriptions or oral presentations. These group dynamics encouraged peer correction and peer support. In one observed group activity, a student initially wrote, “My father go to office every day.” Another student quickly intervened, saying, “It should be goes, because father is he.” This type of peer scaffolding reflects the collaborative interactions were less common in sessions dominated by traditional grammar exercises, suggesting that descriptive texts foster a more interactive and cooperative learning environment.

The interviews further revealed that students felt more motivated when dealing with descriptive texts because the topics were closely related to their lives and experiences. Many students appreciated being able to describe their family members, friends, or favorite places, as these subjects were familiar and personally meaningful. One student explained, “When I write about my mother, it is easier because I know what she does every day. I just need to put it into English. It helps me to practice the tense naturally.” Another added, “Descriptive text makes me less nervous. I feel like I am telling a story about my life, not just answering a test.” These reflections emphasize that relevance and personalization of learning materials play a crucial role in reducing anxiety and enhancing student engagement in grammar learning.

Nevertheless, the data also indicate that challenges remain. A number of students continued to struggle with certain aspects of the simple present tense, particularly negative and interrogative forms, which was also stated by Hasyim, Tahang, and Dimara (2023). In several observations, when students attempted to create negative sentences, they often produced forms like “She don’t like coffee” instead of “She doesn’t like coffee.” Similarly, in interviews, some students confessed that while descriptive texts helped them remember when to add –s or –es to verbs, they still found it confusing to form questions such as “Does your father works?” One participant reflected, “I always forget about does and do. I know the rule, but when I speak, I forget to change the verb.” These difficulties illustrate that while descriptive texts can provide effective contexts for learning grammar, they do not automatically eliminate all errors, particularly those involving auxiliary verbs and sentence transformations. Teachers must therefore continue to provide explicit support in these areas, perhaps by combining descriptive texts with focused drills that specifically target problematic structures.

Another dimension emerging from the interviews was the impact of descriptive texts on students’ confidence. Several participants mentioned that using descriptive passages gave them a sense of achievement because they could see immediate results. A student noted, “When I can describe my classroom correctly, I feel proud because I can make a full sentence in English.” Others described how the descriptive activities encouraged them to speak more in class, even though they were still worried about making mistakes. This aligns with the observations where students volunteered to present their descriptions aloud, a behavior less frequently observed in purely rule-based grammar lessons. The use of descriptive texts therefore not only enhanced grammatical accuracy but also contributed to affective outcomes such as self-confidence and reduced speaking anxiety.

From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings suggest that descriptive texts embody the principles of contextualized and communicative grammar teaching. By situating grammar within familiar and meaningful contexts, they bridge the gap between knowing rules and using

them effectively. This echoes the arguments of scholars who have long emphasized the importance of integrating form and meaning in grammar instruction. The originality of this study lies in demonstrating how these principles work specifically within the context of English Education students in an Indonesian university, many of whom are preparing to become future English teachers themselves. The research therefore contributes both to the immediate goal of improving students' grammar learning and to the broader mission of preparing competent English educators who can adopt effective teaching strategies in their own future classrooms.

Despite the positive impacts observed, the findings also caution against over-reliance on descriptive texts as the sole means of teaching grammar. While they were effective for introducing and practicing the simple present tense, more advanced structures may require different genres or more varied approaches. For example, students who attempted to extend their descriptions sometimes shifted into the present continuous, resulting in errors such as "My brother is play football every afternoon." This suggests that while descriptive texts serve as a strong foundation for teaching the simple present tense, teachers should gradually integrate other text types such as narratives or reports to expand students' grammatical repertoire. Additionally, ongoing scaffolding is essential to address persistent errors in negative and interrogative forms.

In conclusion, the findings and discussion of this study highlight that descriptive texts provide an effective and engaging medium for teaching the simple present tense to university students in an EFL context. They increase motivation, foster collaboration, enhance confidence, and improve grammatical accuracy, while still requiring complementary methods to address specific challenges. For the educators, these insights are particularly valuable, as they not only demonstrate the effectiveness of a practical classroom strategy but also model an approach that future teachers can adapt in their own practice. By embedding grammar instruction in meaningful contexts, descriptive texts help to transform grammar from a source of anxiety into a tool for authentic communication, thereby contributing to both linguistic competence and positive learning experiences

Conclusion/ الخلاصة

This study confirms that the use of descriptive texts is an effective strategy for teaching the simple present tense to university students. Through observation and interviews, it was found that descriptive texts not only enhanced students' understanding of grammatical structures but also increased their learning motivation and facilitated the application of the simple present tense in real-life contexts. This approach successfully addressed the challenges often faced by students, who typically perceive grammar as abstract rules disconnected from daily communication.

The logical consequence of these findings is the need for a paradigm shift in grammar instruction at the higher education level. Teaching grammar should not be limited to explaining rules in isolation but should be embedded within meaningful texts and discourse relevant to students' experiences. By adopting this approach, grammar learning becomes more communicative, contextualized, and oriented toward practical use. This aligns with the broader goals of English language education, which emphasize functional language use rather than mere mastery of formal rules.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on text-based grammar instruction, particularly in the context of adult learners in higher education. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for English lecturers in designing more engaging and varied learning materials, using descriptive texts as a medium to integrate both reading comprehension and grammatical practice. With these outcomes, grammar instruction at the university level can become more relevant to students' needs and expectations. Furthermore, this study opens opportunities for future research to explore the effectiveness of

other types of texts in supporting grammar learning, thereby enriching both pedagogical practice and academic discourse in English language teaching.

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