

ORDER OF DIFFICULTIES ON SIMPLE PAST TENSE MASTERY BY EIGHTH GRADERS OF SMPN 29 SAMARINDA

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Abstract: This study is aimed at seeing the order of difficulties on simple past tense based on the level of difficulties of the test items made by the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda. This study used descriptive design, the researcher took 100 students as a sample of this study. The research instrument was 40 items test in simple past tense mastery. The study discovered two findings. First, the mastery based on the mean score is 61,75. The score is indicated as a fair level or C score. It means that from 100 students, 35 or 35% failed and 65 or 65% were successful on simple past tense. Second, the order of difficulties on simple past tense was negative sentences is the first order (59.4%), irregular (42.7%), the verb be (37.1%) and regular (14.8%).

Keywords: order of difficulty, Krashen, simple past tense.

TO STUDY the simple past tense is not easy to the students, some of them often get confused to understand it. Consequently, they make or write the form incorrectly. They do not use the determined verbs and omit the auxiliary “did” in the negative form that it should be used in the sentences, and put the past be incorrectly to the sentences that ought to use “to be”

Order is the stage or arrangement for example, stage of rank in class. Commonly order uses to differ something like order of score from the highest to the lowest or the arrangement of the exercise from difficult category to easy category etc.

According to Hornby (2000) in Oxford advanced learners’ dictionary, order “is the way in which people or things are placed or arranged in relation to each other; names written in alphabetical order.” According to the Grolier international dictionary (1984) states order “is condition of logical comprehensible arrangement among the separate element of group.” Furthermore Longman (1998) states that order is the special way in which a group of people, objects, something etc, are listed or arranged in condition with each other.

Clarence (1985) states that order are (i) the way one thing follows another; in order of size; in alphabetical order, (ii) the condition in which every part of piece is in its right place. The statements above imply that order is the stage of something that wants to arrange, related to this study order here is the arrangement of simple past tense test consist of 4 topic namely; irregular, regular, negative sentences and verb be.

According to Hornby (1998) in Oxford advanced learners' dictionary, states that difficulty is requiring effort or skill to solve, understand, etc. not easy. According to Barnhart and Banhart (1987:585) difficulty means, 1) the fact or condition of being difficult, degree to which something is difficult, 2) thing that is hard to do or understanding; obstacle. Another definition drawn by Morris (1981:368) mention that difficulty means 1) something not easily comprehended, done, accomplished, or solved, 2) The condition, fact, or quality of being difficult. Then Guralnik (1984:384) gives definition of difficulty as 1) the condition or fact of being difficult, 2) something that is difficult, as hard problem or obstacles or objection, 3) is applied to anything hard to content with, without restriction as to nature intensity.

Based on the statement above difficulties refer to condition of methodical or prescribe arrangement among component part of being difficult which related to this study difficulties is the four kinds of topics namely; irregular, regular, negative sentences, and verb be.

Based on the statement above order of difficulty means condition of methodical or prescribe arrangement among component part of being difficult. In this study, order of difficulty refers to the proportion of correct answers of test items that cover four kinds of topics namely; irregular, regular, negative sentences, and verb be.

The past tense indicate definite time terminating in the past, whether a time word given or not, it is said by Frank (1972), in the book titled modern English a practical reference guide. Hall (1993:173) states that the simple past indicates a past action that occurred at a definite time in the past, whether that time is taken or not. Indeed the speaker chooses the past tense indicates that a definite past time is being discussed.

Doty and Ross (1981:74) state that the simple past tense is used to indicate the occurrence of action or existence at a definite time in the past. While Ford (1975:95) states that past time can be expressed in number of different ways, for event that started and ended before the moment of speaking, for events occurring over in the past relative to point of time, and the time span for both form can be repeated. Hornby (1995:721) states that mastery is complete knowledge; great skill; achieve or attain mastery of several languages, show complete mastery in ones' handling of a difficult situation. As a result, mastery refers to a control through knowledge or skill in specific field Watson (1968:687). In addition, Finochiaro (1969:74) states that mastery means power, knowledge or skill to control the understanding and the use of words. In other words, mastery covers on possession of consummate skill and full command of a subject of the study. Mastery refers to comprehensive knowledge or use of subject or instrument. The mastery includes possession of consummate skill and full command of some subject of study, skill and expertise the power of command.

From the definition above, the researcher concludes that mastery stresses on power of command or control or expert skill of knowledge. With regard to learning, mastery is performed I terms of score of a certain subject. Students are considered to master a simple past tense they achieve as a minimum score given to the understanding of past tense.

Maisaroh (2001) conducted a descriptive study on the simple past tense achievement of the second year students of SLTPN I Longkali, Pasir relevancy in academic year 2000-2001. The study used 50 samples. The result of that study showed that the simple past tense achievement of the students of SLTP N I Longkali was fair with the mean score 56,85 of 50 students, score distribution showed that 7 students or 14 % got A (very good), 13 students or 24 % got B (good), 13 students or 26% got C (fair), 8 students or 16% got D (poor) and 10 students or 20% got E (fail).

Martinus (2003) conducted a descriptive of SMU Kesatuan 2 Loa Janan in the 2002/2003 academic. The study used 36 students. The result of that study showed that the mean score of the achievement on passive voice in present and past tense was 65. This value was in fair criteria. The variation of the percentage, there are 7 or 19.43% of the students who gain excellent scores, in the second column there 11 or 30.56 % of students who gain good scores, in the third column there 11 or 30.56 % students who gain fair scores and the forth column there are 5 or 13.89 % of students who gain poor scores and finally there is 3.56 % students who research fail score.

Maisaroh's study showed that in the area of teaching SLTP students were confused to use determined verbs, auxiliary verb 'did' and linking verb of past 'be' incorrectly. Conversely, in the area of SMU in Martinus's thesis (2003) students have achieved average mastery on passive voice.

METHOD

The design of this study was a descriptive study from which the researcher finds out and explains the data in terms of scores and rate percentage. Ary et.al (1985:322), state that descriptive study is designed to obtain current status or phenomenon such as, score that use descriptive quantitative for the basic of data analysis. In addition, a descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test, to answer question concerning the current status of the subject of the study (Gay: 1992). The variable of this study was mastery on simple past tense. The variable was measured by using objective test on simple past tense. The instrument of the study was a test on simple past tense and the subject of the study was the second year student of SMPN 29 Samarinda. As the descriptive study, the data analyzed scores by using descriptive quantitative, such as mean score and rate percentage. The components of the simple past tense test were irregular, regular, negative sentences and verb be.

The population of this study was the second year students of SLTPN 29 Samarinda. The students were in three classes namely: 2-A, 2-B, and 2-C. The total numbers of the students were 120 and the researcher took 100 students as research sample and 20 students as try out sample. In descriptive study, it is better to use a big number of samples in descriptive study to make more accurate data," Concerning with the 100 samples used in the study, the researcher has two reasons. First, in a descriptive study, the more sample to take is better for the researcher (Ary, et. al, 1985:63). Second, the analysis of this study used the rate percentage. It is more convincing if

the study uses more percentage and more number of subjects. The data of this study were scores obtained from test on simple past tense with 40 items. The researcher gave to 100 samples of the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda. The students were asked to fill in the blank using the past form and choose the appropriate answer. The test was finished in one and a half hour. To analyze the data, the researcher used descriptive quantitative design. The analysis was done in two categories. First, to answer the description of mastery, the scores were identified into A, B, C, D and E. This analysis was used to answer research problem number 1. Following the scores, frequency of occurrence was taken and the rate percentage was identified.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of Raw Scores

Findings of raw scores found out from the test of the mastery on simple past tense was summarized in table 1. The summary presents the raw scores and the frequency. Data on table 1 indicated that the total number of the students as sample are 100 students and the mean score is 61.75.

Table 1 Raw Scores in Simple Past Tense Mastery

No.	Score	Frequency	Score x frequency
1	95	1	95
2	90	1	90
3	87.5	1	87.5
4	82.5	1	82.5
5	80	2	160
6	77.5	5	77.5
7	75	6	450
8	72.5	4	290
9	70	7	490
10	67.5	11	742.5
11	65	11	715
12	62.5	8	500
13	60	11	660
14	57.5	6	345
15	55	8	440
16	52.5	4	210
17	50	5	250
18	47.5	1	47.5
19	45	5	225

20	40	2	80
21	37.5	1	37.5
22	35	2	70
23	30	1	30
	Total	100	6175

Based on the raw scores above, mean score is obtained as follow:

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

$$M = \frac{6175}{100} = 61.75$$

The students received the mean score 61.75. It means that the students' mastery on simple past tense is in the fair level. From the mean score 61.75, we can see that the data showed that the students are found in the fair level. The fair level means that most of the students are successful in simple past tense. For simple presentation, the result of test on the mastery in simple past tense is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 The Summary of Mean Score

No	N	Mean Score	Highest score	Lowest Score
1	100	61.75	95	30

Table 2 above indicated the result of test on the mastery in simple past tense. The scores are distributed into the mean score, highest score and lowest score. The mean score 61.75 is categorized as C or a fair level. The highest 95 indicated that students mastered A level or very good. The lowest score 30 means that the students failed to answer the test. The score is categorized as E or failed.

Based on the analysis of the summary, the first research question of this study can be answered that "The simple past tense mastery of the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda is fair with mean score 61.75 or C level.

Findings of the Score Distribution

Findings of score distribution on simple past tense mastery can be seen from the scoring criteria used in this study. The score is classified into the rate percentage. The result of analysis appeared on table 3.

Table 3 Mastery Level Distributions on Simple Past Tense

No	Grade	Score	Criteria	Frequency	%
1	A	80 – 100	Very Good	6	6
2	B	70 – 79	Good	18	18
3	C	60 – 69	Fair	41	41
4	D	50 – 59	Poor	23	23
5	E	00 – 49	Fail	12	12
				100	100

Data on table 3 above showed the score distribution of 100 students that indicated the mastery of simple past tense. Findings of the result of the simple past tense mastery were presented scores on distribution.

The data showed that 100 students, (1) 6 or 6% got A or very good level, (2) 18 or 18% got B or good level, (3) 41 or 41% got C or fair level, (4) 23 or 23% got D or poor level, and (5) 12 or 12% got E or failed level. It means from 100 students, 35 or 35% failed and 65% were successful on simple past tense test.

This evidence showed that the material of simple past tense is appropriate material for the second year students of junior high school under study. Based on the data above, 65 or 65% students were successful and 35 or 35% students were failed. The average score of 100 students on simple past tense mastery 61.75 indicate the fair level. In addition, of 100 students 65 or 65% were successful and 35 or 35% failed.

Findings on the Order of Difficulties on Simple Past Tense

Findings on the order of difficulties on simple past tense based on the level of difficulties of the test items can be seen from the criteria of order of difficulties based on the rate percentage. The results of analysis are presented on Table 4. Findings on the order of difficulties on simple past tense are used to answer the second research question that read as “How is the order of difficulties on simple past tense mastery based on the level of difficulties of the test item made by the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda?.”

The Analysis of Correct Answer of Each Topic

The analysis of each topic being answered identified and rated. Table 4 shows order of difficulties on simple past tense mastery from four topics: regular, irregular negative sentences and verb be.

Table 4 The Analysis of Each Topic

No	Kinds of Topics	Rate Percentage		The Order
		Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	
1	Irregular	$\frac{573}{1000} \times 100\% = 57.3\%$	$\frac{427}{1000} \times 100\% = 42.7\%$	Second
2	Regular	$\frac{852}{1000} \times 100\% = 85.2\%$	$\frac{148}{1000} \times 100\% = 14.8\%$	Forth
3	Negative sentences	$\frac{406}{1000} \times 100\% = 40.6\%$	$\frac{594}{1000} \times 100\% = 59.4\%$	First
4	Verb be	$\frac{629}{1000} \times 100\% = 62.9\%$	$\frac{371}{1000} \times 100\% = 37.1\%$	Third

Table 4 above shows the result of order of difficulty. The evidence show that negative sentences is the first order with 59.4%, the second order is irregular with 42.7% the third order is verb be with 37.1% and the last order is regular with 14.8%

From the explanation above, the researcher answered research question. The answer is the order of difficulties on simple past tense based on the level of difficulties of the test items made by the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda is of four levels. The order of difficulties is; negative sentences 59.4%, irregular 42.7%, verb be 37.1% and regular 14.8%. It showed that students have difficult in constructing the negative form. The summary of the order of difficulties of simple past tense of each topic is appeared on Table 5.

Table 5 The Summary Percentages of Each Topic

No	Kinds of Topics	Rate Percentage	The Order
1	Negative sentences	59.4%	1 st
2	Irregular	42.7%	2 nd
3	Verb be	37.1%	3 rd
4	Regular	14.8%	4 th

The Percentage on Simple Past Tense of Each Item

The percentage of test result on simple past tense of each item based on the correct and incorrect answer was identified and rated. Table 6 showed the distribution of percentage of each item. The correct and incorrect answer of each item being answer were identified and rated. Data on Table 6 indicate that items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10 was in Irregular sentences, items 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27 28, 29, 30 was in negative sentences and item 32 was in verb be. From 40 items, 25 items

(1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40) were comprehended by the students well.

Irregular

In irregular, 5 items (1, 2, 4, 7, 9) were mastered by 100 students, for item 1=81 or 81% students did correct answer, item 2=77 or 77% students did correct answer, item 4=81 or 81% students did correct answer, item 7=71 or 71% students did correct answer and item 9=70 or 70% students did correct answer.

Regular

In regular, all item (11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20) were mastered by the students, for item 11=93 or 93% students did correct answer, item 12=92 or 92% students did correct answer, item 13=77 or 77% students did correct answer, item 14=94 or 94% students did correct answer, item 15=85 or 85% students did correct answer, item 16=88 or 88% students did correct answer, item 17=73 or 73% students did correct answer, item 18=74 or 74% students did correct answer, item 19=85 or 85% students did correct answer, item 20=91 or 91% students did correct answer.

Negative Sentences

In negative sentences, only one item (25) was mastered by the students. For item 25=64 or 64% students did correct answer.

Table 6 The Accomplishment of Individual Item

Topics	Item of Test	Incorrect Answer		Correct Answer	
		Frequency of students	%	Frequency of Students	%
Irregular	1	19	19	81	81
	2	23	23	77	77
	3	59	59	41	41
	4	22	22	78	78
	5	61	61	39	39
	6	62	62	38	38
	7	29	29	71	71
	8	68	68	32	32
	9	30	30	70	70
	10	54	54	46	46
		427		573	
Regular	11	7	7	93	93
	12	8	8	92	92
	13	23	23	77	77
	14	6	6	94	94
	15	15	15	85	85

	16	12	12	88	88
	17	27	27	73	73
	18	26	26	74	74
	19	15	15	85	85
	20	9	9	91	91
		148		852	
Negative	21	60	60	40	40
	22	52	52	48	48
	23	62	62	38	38
	24	63	63	37	37
	25	36	36	64	64
	26	64	64	36	36
	27	71	71	29	29
	28	70	70	30	30
	29	51	51	49	49
	30	65	65	35	35
		594		406	
Verb be	31	21	21	79	79
	32	52	52	48	48
	33	22	22	78	78
	34	38	38	62	62
	35	30	30	70	70
	36	33	33	67	67
	37	40	40	60	60
	38	42	42	58	58
	39	48	48	52	52
	40	45	45	55	55
		371		629	

Verb Be

In verb be, 9 item (31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40) were mastered by the students, for item 31=79 or 81% students did correct answer, item 33=78 or 78% students did correct answer, item 34=62 or 62% students did correct answer, item 35=70 or 70% students did correct answer, item 36=67 or 67% students did correct answer, item 37=60 or 60% students did correct answer, item 38=58 or 58% students did correct answer, item 39=52 or 52% students did correct answer and item 40=55 or 55% students did correct answer.

DISCUSSION

This section is focused to give comments on the findings of the study that show the results of the simple past tense mastery: finding of score of raw scores on simple past tense mastery and finding on the order of difficulties on simple past tense.

From the findings of raw scores and score distribution, it can be seen that the simple past tense mastery was fair with mean score 61.75. From 100 students, 65 students or 65 % were successful and 35 or 35 % were failed.

The simple past tense mastery test was proved appropriate and understandably for junior high school students under study. Evidence that show the students' understanding was indicated from mean score and the score distribution. The mean score 61.75 was categorized as fair level and it is on C level. The score distributions supported the mean score. The order of difficulties on simple past tense was; (1) negative sentences 59.4%, (2) irregular 42.7%, (3) verb be 37.1% and (4) regular sentences 14.8%.

The evidence that the topic of simple past tense mastery is fair or understandably is supported by the result of some relevant studies. For example, Maisaroh (2001) who conducted a study on "descriptive study on the simple past tense achievement of the second year students of SLTP N I Longkali, Pasir in academic year 2000-2001", found the mean score 56.85. This means that mastery of simple past tense material of the second year students is fair. The study confirms the result of the researcher's study.

To convince the evidence that simple past tense mastery is appropriate, we can see Martinus (2003) who conducted "The achieve on passive voice on present and past tense of the second year students of SMA Kesatuan 2 Loa Janan in Academic year 2002/2003". This study discovered that the mean score of the achievement on passive voice in present tense and past tense was 65. This value was fair criteria. Both studies have the same result. Again the results support the researcher's study that simple past tense mastery is necessary.

Related to order of difficulties on simple past tense, this study discovered that students have difficulty in negative sentence. It could be seen from the rate percentage of difficulties (59.4%). They cannot differentiate the use of "to be" or auxiliary "did" in negative form.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study and the purposes of the study, the following conclusions were presented.

- 1) The students' mastery on simple past tense is fair. The mean score 61.75 indicated that students were in the fair level or C level based on the criteria issued by Department of National Education. The score distribution showed that of 100 students, (1) 6 or 6% got A or very good level, (2) 18 or 18% got B or good level, (3) 41 or 41% got C or fair level, (4) 23 or 23% got D or poor level and (5) 12 or 12% got E or fail level. It means from 100 students, 35 or 35% were failed and 65 or 65% were successful on simple past tense.
- 2) The order of difficulties on simple past tense mastery on four topics are; (1) negative sentences (59.4%), (2) irregular 42.7%, (3) verb be (37.1%) and (4) regular (14.8%). The evidences were clarified by the answer of the test items. (1) Of 10 items of negative sentences, 9 items were wrongly answered; (2) Of 10 items of irregular verbs, 6 items were wrongly answered, (3) Of 10 items of verb be all were successful to answer, and (4) Of 10 items of regular verb all were fully successful to answer.

SUGGESTIONS

The suggestions were developed based on the scope and limitation of the study and the significance of the study. Suggestions were addressed to people involved in teaching learning English at junior high school, such as English teacher and students of junior high school.

- 1) The simple past tense mastery of the second year students of SMPN 29 Samarinda was fair. English teacher at SMPN 29 Samarinda and other junior high school in general are suggested to encourage students and improve their teaching in simple past tense. Various of exercises are required to avoid the students' confuse and help understand the patterns and the verbs.
- 2) In teaching simple past tense, the role of verbs, both regular and irregular as well as the different usage of verb used in the sentences patterns or other related materials in this form are obvious. It is suggested teacher explain when "did" and "to be" be used in negative form, teaching irregular on simple past tense, teacher should give various exercise in irregular form, and for students, they need to make list of irregular verb and try to memorize the word changing. It is necessary to the curriculum designer and not neglect the language elements in particular the structure and vocabulary so that the students so that the students are able to master the language skill well.
- 3) This study still has weakness in terms of its instruments and its analysis. It is better for future researcher improve the instruments and have qualitative design for further study.

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