

Exploring the Linguistic Obstacles in Mastering English Tenses: A Study of Non-English Major University Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

In the Indonesian higher education context, non-English major students often encounter difficulties in mastering English tenses. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral challenges they experience when learning English tenses. A quantitative descriptive design was employed, and data were collected through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to 65 non-English major students at Universitas Klabat (UNKLAB), representing various faculties such as Computer Science, Business, and Nursing. The findings reveal a complex interaction between linguistic and psychological factors. From a cognitive perspective, 40% of the students identified the absence of a tense system in the Indonesian language as a major obstacle, indicating L1 interference. Affectively, 63% of the participants perceived English tenses as the most difficult aspect of learning English, while 49% reported reduced confidence in speaking due to fear of making grammatical errors. Behaviorally, 65% of the students demonstrated an avoidance strategy by frequently using the simple present tense to minimize mistakes. Despite these challenges, 77% of the students recognized the importance of mastering tenses for their future professional needs. These findings highlight the need for contextualized and communicative grammar instruction that addresses both linguistic difficulties and learners' emotional barriers in non-English major EFL classrooms.

Keywords: English Tenses; Student Perception; Linguistic Obstacles; Non-English Majors

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant lingua franca for international communication, academic exchange, and professional advancement. Its role is particularly significant in higher education, where access to scientific knowledge, research publications, and global collaboration is largely mediated through English. As a result, higher education institutions in Indonesia require students from various disciplines, such as Engineering, Business, Nursing, and Social Sciences, to study English as part of their academic curriculum. This requirement aims to equip graduates with the linguistic competence necessary to engage with global knowledge and compete in an increasingly international job

market. However, despite its importance, achieving English proficiency remains a considerable challenge, especially for students who are not majoring in English.

One of the most challenging aspects of learning English for non-English major students is grammatical competence, particularly in the use of verb tenses. English tenses play a crucial role in expressing time, sequence, and aspect in communication. However, they are often perceived as complex due to their structural and functional differences from learners' first language. Schramper (2016) explains that tense and aspect require learners not only to identify when an action occurs but also to understand the nature and duration of that action. This complexity increases the cognitive load for learners and often leads to confusion in both spoken and written communication. Recent studies continue to confirm that tense usage remains one of the most problematic areas in English grammar learning, especially among EFL learners (Mufida, 2025; Abbas, 2026).

Several interrelated factors contribute to these difficulties. One key factor is grammatical anxiety. Many learners perceive grammar as rigid and rule-bound, which creates fear of making mistakes. This anxiety can hinder students' willingness to participate in communication and reduce their confidence. A recent study found that a significant number of students experience anxiety, insecurity, and low motivation when using English grammar, which negatively affects their learning outcomes (Aminah et al., 2024). In line with this, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2021) argue that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in academic performance; students who lack confidence in their abilities are more likely to avoid challenging linguistic structures, including complex tenses.

Another important factor is the influence of the first language (L1). Indonesian, as a non-inflected language, does not rely on verb conjugation to indicate tense. Instead, it uses time markers such as *sudah*, *sedang*, and *akan*. This structural difference often leads to negative transfer, where learners apply Indonesian grammatical patterns to English sentences (Ellis, 1997). As a result, students frequently produce incorrect tense forms, particularly in expressing past or completed actions. Empirical studies have shown that L1 interference remains a dominant source of difficulty, especially when learners are required to distinguish between similar tense forms such as past tense and present perfect (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020; Amalina, 2024).

In addition to cognitive and linguistic challenges, motivational factors also play a significant role. Many non-English major students perceive English grammar, particularly complex tense systems, as irrelevant to their primary academic field. This perception reduces their engagement and willingness to invest effort in learning grammar. Recent research indicates that students are more motivated when grammar is taught in a contextualized and meaningful way, rather than through isolated rules (Helmanda, 2025). Similarly, Nurhaliza et al. (2025) found that interactive and contextual teaching approaches can significantly improve students' understanding and enthusiasm in learning tenses. These findings highlight the

importance of aligning grammar instruction with students' needs and real-life applications.

Furthermore, previous studies on English tense learning have predominantly focused on error analysis, identifying the types and frequency of grammatical mistakes made by learners (Rahman & Ali, 2015; Ali et al., 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights into learners' performance, they often fail to explore the underlying reasons behind these errors. More recent research emphasizes the need to examine students' perceptions, including their beliefs, emotions, and learning strategies. For instance, studies have shown that students recognize the importance of mastering tenses for improving their writing and communication skills, even though they struggle to apply them correctly (Sihotang et al., 2022).

Understanding students' perceptions is essential because language learning is not only a cognitive process but also an affective and behavioral one. Robbins et al. (2025) define perception as a subjective interpretation shaped by individuals' experiences, attitudes, and motivations. These perceptions influence how students approach learning tasks, respond to challenges, and develop strategies to cope with difficulties. This perspective is supported by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982/2022), which suggests that emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can either facilitate or hinder language acquisition. When the affective filter is high, learners are less likely to process linguistic input effectively, resulting in slower progress.

Moreover, recent studies highlight that students often adopt coping strategies to deal with grammatical difficulties. These strategies include simplifying sentence structures, relying on translation tools, or avoiding complex tenses altogether (Mufida, 2025; Abbas, 2026). While such strategies may help students communicate effectively in the short term, they can limit long-term language development and grammatical accuracy.

Given these considerations, it is important to move beyond traditional error analysis and focus on learners' perspectives to develop more effective and learner-centered teaching strategies. By examining how students think (cognitive dimension), feel (affective dimension), and act (behavioral dimension), educators can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by non-English major students. This approach allows for the identification of hidden barriers that are not captured through conventional assessment methods.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how non-English major university students perceive the challenges of learning English tenses, focusing on cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for improving English language teaching, particularly in designing more contextualized, communicative, and supportive learning environments in higher education. Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive

and effective EFL pedagogy that addresses both linguistic and psychological aspects of language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks relevant to the acquisition of English tenses among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. To understand the linguistic obstacles faced by non-English major students, it is essential to examine the interplay between cognitive perception, affective barriers, and the structural differences between the students' native language and the target language.

Previous Related Studies

Research by (Rahman & Ali, 2015), stated that even though tenses are a major part of English lessons, many students still make mistakes, even at advanced levels. Mastering the 'formula' of a tense alone does not guarantee accurate English usage. A comprehensive understanding of aspect, which pertains to the inherent qualities of the action, is also essential for selecting the appropriate expression. Regrettably, numerous grammar resources prioritize formulaic structures while neglecting the semantic nuances of verbs. Consequently, students frequently encounter difficulties in both spoken and written communication. This research underscores the necessity for educators to incorporate both the 'form' (rules) and the 'meaning' into their instruction, thereby enabling students to employ English tenses with greater fluency.

A previous study by (Damis et al., 2024) found that many students struggle with English tenses because the rules are very different from their native language. The research showed that students often get confused by verb changes and do not know when to use the right tense in real-life situations. Furthermore, boring or less interactive teaching methods make learning even harder. To fix this, the study suggests that teachers should use more interactive activities and connect tenses to daily life so students can understand the meaning, not just the formulas

Another study by explained (Hasibuan et al., 2024) that English is a very important international language, but many Indonesian students are still afraid to learn it. Tenses are the most important basic skill because they show when an action happens. However, many students find tenses boring because of how they are taught in class. This research suggests that peer discussions (talking with friends) are a more efficient way to learn. When students discuss tenses with their peers, they feel more comfortable and can understand the difficult lessons that they did not understand from the teacher

A study in Pakistan by (Ali et al., 2021) found that even though tenses are very important, many students still struggle to use them correctly. The study showed that students often use the wrong verb tenses, like using the future tense when they

should use the simple present. These mistakes are often caused by teaching methods that focus too much on memorizing rules instead of practicing speaking. The research suggests that English language teaching should focus on using the language for real communication. Also, teachers need better training to help students understand verb tenses.

A study by (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020) at ULM found that many English major students still feel confused about which tenses to use when speaking or writing. The investigation revealed that the most significant challenges pertain to intricate verb tenses, specifically the Past Perfect and Future Perfect Continuous forms. These difficulties arise from students' struggles to comprehend the contextual meanings of these tenses, the influence of their native languages, and insufficient practical application. Consequently, the research recommends that educators prioritize the communicative aspects of tense usage, emphasizing meaning and function, over rote memorization of grammatical rules.

The Concept of Perception in Language Learning

Perception is a fundamental psychological process that involves the organization and interpretation of sensory information to create a meaningful understanding of one's environment. According to (Robbins et al., 2025), an individual's perception is not always an objective reflection of reality; rather, it is a subjective interpretation shaped by personal experiences, attitudes, and motives. In the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language), student perception refers to how learners view the difficulty, importance, and complexity of a language component, such as grammar. This study analyzes perception through three distinct lenses: the cognitive (knowledge and understanding), the affective (feelings and anxiety), and the behavioral (actions and coping strategies). Understanding these perceptions is crucial because, as noted by (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021), a student's belief about their ability to master a task (self-efficacy) directly influences their actual academic performance.

The Complexity of the English Tense and Aspect System

The primary linguistic variable in this study is the English tense system. Unlike the Indonesian language, which is "non-inflected" and relies on temporal markers (e.g., *sudah*, *sedang*, *akan*), English utilizes a sophisticated system of morphological changes in verbs to indicate time. As defined by (Schramper, 2016), tenses refer to the time an action occurs, while "aspect" refers to the duration or completion of that action. The difficulty for non-English majors often arises from the aspectual meanings, such as the distinction between the *Simple Past* (a finished action) and the *Present Perfect* (an action with present relevance). This structural complexity often leads to cognitive overload for learners whose native language lacks similar grammatical categories.

L1 Interference and Contrastive Analysis

A major theoretical framework for understanding linguistic obstacles is the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Ellis, 1997). This theory posits that the structural differences between a learner's native language (L1) and the target language (L2) are the primary source of difficulty. Since Indonesian does not use verb conjugation to express time, students often experience "negative transfer," where they subconsciously apply Indonesian grammatical logic to English sentences. For instance, a student might say "*I go to Bandung yesterday*" instead of "*I went,*" because the Indonesian verb "*pergi*" does not change regardless of when the action happened. This interference creates a persistent cognitive hurdle that shapes the student's perception of tenses as being "illogical" or "unnecessarily complicated."

The Role of the Affective Filter

The final theoretical component is Krashen's (1982/2022) Affective Filter Hypothesis. This theory suggests that psychological factors such as high anxiety, low self-confidence, and a lack of motivation can act as a "filter" that blocks linguistic input from being processed by the brain. In the case of non-English majors, the rigid rules of tenses often trigger high levels of "grammatical anxiety." When the affective filter is high, students become overly cautious, leading to the "avoidance strategies" observed in their behavior such as preferring to use only simple sentences or avoiding speaking altogether to prevent making mistakes.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to systematically examine and describe non-English major students' perceptions of difficulties in mastering English verb tenses. A quantitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to obtain measurable data on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral perceptions without manipulating any variables. The research was conducted at Universitas Klabat (UNKLAB). The participants were undergraduate students who were not enrolled in English Education or English Literature programs but were taking English as a compulsory general education course. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants due to accessibility and the availability of students within the researcher's teaching context. This approach allowed for efficient data collection while still capturing a range of perspectives from non-English major students.

A total of 65 students participated in the study. They were drawn from various academic disciplines, including Business, Computer Science, Nursing, Philosophy, and Education. This diversity of academic backgrounds was intended to provide a broader representation of non-English major students' experiences in learning English tenses. All participants had relatively similar exposure to English

instruction within the university setting, ensuring a consistent context for data collection.

Instrument and Procedures

Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire designed to measure three dimensions of student perception: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The instrument consisted of 12 items distributed across these three dimensions. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The cognitive dimension assessed students’ understanding of tense concepts and grammatical structures. The affective dimension focused on students’ feelings, such as anxiety and confidence when using English tenses. The behavioral dimension examined students’ strategies and actions in dealing with difficulties related to tense usage.

To ensure the appropriateness of the instrument, the questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies on EFL learners’ perceptions and grammar difficulties. Content validity was established through expert judgment by two lecturers in English education, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and alignment of the items with the research objectives. Minor revisions were made based on their feedback. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of students ($n = 15$) to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach’s Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

The data collection procedure began with converting the questionnaire into an online format using Google Forms. The link was distributed to participants through classroom communication channels. Prior to completing the questionnaire, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous. They were also informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. Participants then completed the questionnaire independently within the given time.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to provide a clear numerical representation of students’ perceptions. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 26). The analytical procedure consisted of several steps. First, data cleaning and coding were performed to ensure the completeness and accuracy of responses. Incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the dataset. Second, frequencies and percentages were calculated to describe the distribution of responses for each questionnaire item. Third, mean scores were computed to identify the overall tendency of students’ perceptions across the three dimensions. The results were then organized into cognitive, affective, and behavioral categories to facilitate systematic interpretation. The findings were presented in the form of tables to enhance clarity and readability.

These descriptive results served as the basis for identifying the most prominent linguistic obstacles faced by non-English major students in learning English tenses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the data collection process, focusing on the three primary dimensions of student perception: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The data, gathered from 65 non-English major students, provides a detailed overview of the linguistic obstacles encountered in mastering English tenses.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants by Faculty

Faculty	Number of Participants
Economic and Business	32.3% (21 students)
Nursing	7.7% (5 students)
Philosophy	10.8% (7 students)
Computer Science	46.2% (30 students)
Education	3.1% (2 students)
Total	65 Students

The distribution of research participants across various faculties is presented in the table above. A total of 65 students from non-English departments participated in this study, representing five distinct academic disciplines. The data shows that the largest group of respondents came from the Faculty of Computer Science, accounting for 46.2% (30 students) of the total sample. This was followed by the Faculty of Economic and Business, which contributed 32.3% (21 students).

Other participants were distributed among the Faculty of Philosophy (10.8% / 7 students), the Faculty of Nursing (7.7% / 5 students), and a small representative group from the Faculty of Education (3.1% / 2 students). The diversity in academic backgrounds among the participants is crucial for this study, as it ensures that the findings on perceived challenges in learning English tenses are not limited to a single field of study, but rather reflect a broader perspective of non-English major students in the university environment.

Table 2. Cognitive Perception of English Tense Learning

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
A	COGNITIVE PERCEPTION					
1	I understand the difference in function between the Simple Present and the Present Perfect Tense	0%	0%	27.7%	61.5%	10.8%

2	I find the English verb tenses very difficult to memorize.	1.5%	21.5%	53.8%	20%	3.1%
3	I often have trouble deciding when to use the past tense or the past participle.	1.5%	18.5%	41.5%	29.2%	9.2%
4	The lack of a tense system in Indonesian makes it difficult for me to understand the concept of time in English.	1.5%	15.4%	43.1%	33.8%	6.2%

The findings for the cognitive perception dimension indicate a complex relationship between students' theoretical understanding and their practical difficulties in using English tenses. A substantial proportion of students (72.3%) reported that they understand the difference between the Simple Present and Present Perfect tenses. However, this perceived understanding does not fully translate into confidence in actual usage. More than half of the respondents (53.8%) expressed uncertainty regarding the memorization of verb tenses, and 23.1% still found them difficult. This suggests that students possess a basic conceptual understanding of tenses but lack procedural mastery when applying them in real contexts.

In addition, students experience considerable difficulty in distinguishing between verb forms, particularly the past tense and past participle. The data show that 41.5% of students remained neutral, while 38.4% admitted having difficulty in deciding which form to use. This indicates that the distinction between V2 and V3 forms remains a significant cognitive challenge for non-English major students, as they struggle with verb inflection patterns that are not present in their native language. Furthermore, the influence of the first language (L1) is evident in students' perceptions. A total of 40% of respondents agreed that the absence of a tense system in Indonesian makes it difficult to understand English tenses, while 43.1% expressed uncertainty. Only a small proportion (16.9%) disagreed with this statement. These findings confirm that negative transfer from Indonesian plays a crucial role in shaping students' difficulties, as the structural differences between the two languages create confusion in understanding and applying tense concepts.

Table 3. Affective Perception of English Tense Learning

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
AFFECTIVE PERCEPTION						
5	I feel less confident when speaking English because I'm afraid of using the wrong tense	7.7%	10.8%	32.2%	32.2%	16.9%
6	I get frustrated when I have to correct tense mistakes in my assignments.	6.2%	35.4%	32.3%	21.5%	4.6%
7	I consider mastering tenses to be the most challenging part of learning English	0%	3.1%	33.8%	44.6%	18.5%
8	I'm worried that my tense mistakes might make my sentences mean something different.	0%	13.8%	32.3%	46.2%	7.7%

The findings from the affective perception dimension indicate that English tenses are not only a cognitive challenge but also a significant source of anxiety and reduced confidence among non-English major students. Nearly half of the participants (49.1%) reported feeling less confident when speaking English due to fear of using incorrect tenses, suggesting a strong connection between grammatical accuracy and speaking anxiety. Although students may understand the rules, the pressure to apply them correctly in real-time communication creates a psychological barrier that limits their willingness to speak.

In contrast, students appear to be more comfortable dealing with tense-related errors in written tasks. Only 26.1% of respondents reported feeling frustrated when correcting mistakes, while a larger proportion (41.6%) indicated that they did not find it frustrating. This suggests that written activities are perceived as less threatening because they allow more time for reflection and correction, unlike spontaneous speaking, which requires immediate language processing.

Furthermore, a majority of students (63.1%) identified mastering tenses as the most challenging aspect of learning English, indicating a strong consensus on the perceived difficulty of this grammatical area. Notably, none of the respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, reinforcing the idea that tenses are viewed as the most complex component in their learning experience. Additionally, more than half of the students (53.9%) expressed concern that incorrect tense usage could lead to misunderstandings or alter the meaning of their sentences. This reflects students' awareness of the functional importance of tenses, but at the same time, it contributes to their cautiousness and anxiety when using English in communication.

Table 3. Behavioral Perception of English Tense Learning

No	Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
C	BEHAVIORAL PERCEPTION					
9	I tend to use the simple present tense to avoid the risk of using the wrong tense.	0%	3.1%	32.3%	55.4%	9.2%
10	I believe that mastering tenses is essential for professional communication in the future.	1.5%	0%	21.5%	38.5%	38.5%
11	I often rely on translation apps to make sure my verb tenses are correct.	0%	10.8%	36.9%	36.9%	15.4%
12	I prefer writing to speaking so I have more time to check the tenses.	3.1%	23.1%	35.4%	30.8%	7.7%

The findings from the behavioral perception dimension reveal the practical strategies and attitudes that students adopt to cope with the complexities of English tenses in their academic activities. A significant majority of participants (64.6%) reported that they tend to use the Simple Present Tense to avoid making mistakes with more complex tense forms. This indicates the use of an avoidance strategy, where students prioritize linguistic safety and clarity over grammatical variety. Such behavior suggests that students are more concerned with being understood than with producing structurally complex sentences.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding the importance of mastering English tenses. A large proportion of respondents (77%) agreed that tense mastery is essential for their future professional communication. This finding indicates that students are motivated and recognize the practical value of grammar, even though they encounter difficulties in learning it. Therefore, their limited mastery is not due to a lack of interest, but rather to cognitive and psychological barriers. In addition, the data show a considerable reliance on technology as a learning support tool. More than half of the students (52.3%) reported using translation applications to check their verb tenses. This reliance suggests that students depend on digital tools as a form of assistance to compensate for their uncertainty in applying grammatical rules independently.

Furthermore, students tend to prefer writing over speaking, as it allows them more time to monitor and correct their language use. About 38.5% of respondents expressed this preference, while 35.4% remained neutral. This pattern reinforces the findings from the affective dimension, indicating that time pressure in speaking situations contributes to students' hesitation. Overall, these behaviors reflect students' efforts to manage their limitations while maintaining communicative effectiveness, although such strategies may also restrict their grammatical development in the long term.

The findings of this study reveal that the difficulties experienced by non-English major students in mastering English tenses are multidimensional, involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors. These dimensions are closely interconnected and collectively shape students' learning experiences. From a cognitive perspective, the results indicate a gap between students' conceptual understanding and their ability to apply grammatical rules accurately. Although many students reported understanding basic tense distinctions, they struggled with verb forms and contextual usage. This finding supports previous research showing that EFL learners often possess declarative knowledge of grammar but face difficulties in procedural application, particularly in real-time language use (Barner, 2024). The confusion between past tense and past participle forms further suggests that learners encounter challenges with morphological changes that are not present in their first language.

The influence of L1 interference also plays a significant role in shaping these cognitive difficulties. The findings confirm that the absence of a tense system in Indonesian contributes to learners' confusion when dealing with English verb forms. This is consistent with Ellis (1997), who explains that structural differences between the first language (L1) and the target language (L2) often lead to negative transfer. More recent studies also highlight that mother tongue interference remains a persistent barrier in grammar acquisition, particularly in tense usage (Amalina, 2024; Siregar & Putri, 2025). These findings emphasize the need for contrastive and contextualized teaching approaches to help learners better understand the differences between languages.

From an affective perspective, the findings demonstrate that English tenses are a major source of anxiety and reduced confidence, especially in speaking situations. Nearly half of the students reported feeling less confident due to fear of making grammatical errors. This result aligns with recent studies indicating that language anxiety significantly affects learners' performance and willingness to communicate (Aminah et al., 2024). According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982/2022), high levels of anxiety can prevent learners from effectively processing language input, thereby hindering acquisition.

Interestingly, students reported lower levels of frustration in written tasks compared to speaking activities. This suggests that time pressure plays a crucial role in increasing anxiety. When learners are given more time to think and revise their responses, they feel more confident and in control. This finding is supported by recent research showing that spontaneous communication often increases cognitive load and emotional pressure, leading to avoidance behaviors (Rahmawati, 2025). Therefore, both cognitive and affective factors must be addressed simultaneously in grammar instruction.

From a behavioral perspective, the findings reveal that students adopt various coping strategies to deal with their difficulties. One prominent strategy is the avoidance of complex tenses, as students tend to rely heavily on the Simple Present Tense. This behavior reflects a common tendency among EFL learners to prioritize communicative clarity over grammatical accuracy. However, such avoidance may limit learners' exposure to more complex structures and hinder their long-term grammatical development (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020).

In addition, students' reliance on translation tools indicates a dependency on external support systems. While technology can facilitate learning, excessive reliance may reduce opportunities for independent language processing. Previous studies have shown that learners often use digital tools as compensatory strategies when they lack confidence in their grammatical knowledge (Mufida, 2025). This highlights the importance of guiding students to use technology as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for learning.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding the importance of mastering English tenses for their future professional communication. This finding indicates that their difficulties are not caused by a lack of motivation, but rather by linguistic and psychological barriers. As noted by Helmanda (2025), students are more engaged when grammar instruction is connected to real-life applications and professional contexts. The findings confirm that learning English tenses is not solely a linguistic process but also a psychological and strategic one. Cognitive challenges such as L1 interference and verb form confusion interact with affective factors like anxiety and low confidence, which in turn influence students' behavioral strategies. Therefore, English language teaching should adopt a more holistic approach that integrates contextualized grammar instruction, communicative practice, and supportive learning

environments. Such an approach can help students overcome both linguistic and psychological barriers and improve their mastery of English tenses.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings across the three dimensions of perception, this study concludes that non-English major students at Universitas Klabat (UNKLAB) encounter complex and interrelated challenges in mastering English tenses. From a cognitive perspective, although students demonstrate a basic understanding of tense concepts, they experience difficulties in the accurate application of verb forms, particularly in distinguishing between past tense and past participle (V2 vs. V3). These difficulties are further influenced by the absence of a tense system in the Indonesian language, which contributes to negative transfer. From an affective perspective, English tenses are perceived as one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, resulting in increased speaking anxiety and reduced communicative confidence. Students tend to feel uncertain when using tenses in real-time communication, even when they understand the rules theoretically. This emotional barrier significantly affects their willingness to actively participate in speaking activities.

From a behavioral perspective, students adopt various coping strategies to manage their difficulties. These include relying on simpler grammatical structures, such as overusing the Simple Present Tense, and depending on translation tools to ensure accuracy. While these strategies help maintain communication, they may limit students' opportunities to develop more advanced grammatical competence. Despite these challenges, students demonstrate a strong awareness of the importance of mastering English tenses for their future academic and professional needs. This indicates that their difficulties are not rooted in a lack of motivation, but rather in linguistic and psychological barriers. Therefore, it is essential for educators to implement more contextualized, communicative, and supportive teaching approaches that address not only grammatical understanding but also students' confidence and learning strategies.

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