TEACHING ENGLISH TENSES TO BEGINNERS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL AND TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED METHODS

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Abstract

Teaching English tenses to beginners is a core component of early language instruction, yet educators continue to debate whether explicit grammar-focused instruction or technology-enhanced contextual teaching is more effective. This study compares the effectiveness of two methods — traditional grammar rule explanation and technology-enhanced contextual teaching — in improving beginner learners' mastery of the Present Perfect Simple tense. A total of 24 beginner-level learners were randomly assigned to two groups. Group A was taught using traditional grammar-focused instruction, while Group B received instruction via multimedia resources and contextual examples. Both groups completed a pre-test and post-test assessing grammar accuracy and communicative fluency. As a result both methods led to measurable improvements in accuracy and fluency. Group A demonstrated higher gains in grammar accuracy (16% increase), while Group B achieved greater improvement in communicative fluency (13%% increase). Findings suggest that while traditional instruction is more effective for explicit grammar accuracy, technology-enhanced contextual teaching is more effective for promoting fluency. A blended approach that incorporates both methods may offer the most balanced learning outcomes for beginner English learners.

Keywords: English tense teaching, present perfect simple, traditional instruction, technology-enhanced teaching, beginner learners, grammar accuracy, communicative fluency.

Introduction

Gaining brief knowledge of English tenses is crucial for beginner students as they are a core part of grammar and communication. Even to make a very simple sentence for a daily conversation it is required to know how to use tenses correctly. That is why, they are taught both in primary schools and also at the beginning part of language courses for English-as-a-second-language students. However, there is a matter that which way of teaching tenses is more effective because, many teachers struggle to decide whether to focus on explicit grammar rules or to rely on contextual, technology-based learning. Each method has its strengths and weak points in different aspects of language. For example, it is hypothesized that beginner students taught with technology-enhanced contextual methods will demonstrate higher communicative

competence, while those taught with traditional grammar-focused methods will score higher on accuracy-based tests.

Methodology

For this study we observed the acceptance of the same tense – Present perfect simple tense – in two beginner groups chosen randomly.

The study involved 24 beginner-level English learners, aged 14-16, from Fayz Talim academic centre. All participants had studied English for less than two years and had no prior formal instruction in the Present perfect simple tense. Participants were randomly assigned into two equal groups:

Group A (Traditional Method) — taught using explicit grammar rule explanations on the whiteboard.

Group B (Technology-Enhanced Method) — taught using multimedia resources without direct rule presentation.

Two parallel lesson plans were designed to teach the present perfect simple tense, ensuring both groups covered the same learning objectives and examples but used different instructional methods.

Procedure:

1. Pre-test: Before the intervention, all students completed a diagnostic test measuring their ability to recognize and produce present perfect simple sentences in both written and spoken forms.

2. Instruction:

Group A:

Method		Traditional grammar-focused approach
1. Objective		Students will understand and be able to use the present perfect simple to describe experiences and results connected to the present.
2. Materials		Whiteboard, markers, printed exercises
3. Steps	1. Warm-up (5 min)	The question: "Have you ever eaten sushi?" (Elicit answers but not explanation yet)
	2. Rule Explanation (10 min)	Form: have/has + past participle Use: actions at an unspecified time in the past with present relevance.
	3. Examples (5 min)	"I have visited Paris twice." "She has never played basketball."
	4. Controlled Practice (10 min)	Students fill in blanks or transform sentences
	5. Production (10 min)	Pair work — ask each other questions ("Have you ever…?") and record answers.
	6. Homework	Write 5 sentences about experiences using the present perfect.

Group B:

	Method	Technology-enhanced contextual approach
1.	Objective	Students will understand and be able to use the present perfect simple to describe experiences and results connected to the present.
2.	Materials	Projector/TV, short video clips, presentation slides, pictures.
3. Steps	1. Warm-up (5 min)	A short video of a traveler describing life experiences ("I've visited 10 countries in my life. I've never tried skydiving…")
	2. Noticing Stage (10 min)	Students work in pairs to find patterns in what the speaker says (underline have/has + past participle)
	3. Contextual Explanation (5 min)	Teacher confirms their observations and summarizes usage.
	4. Interactive Practice (10 min)	Photo prompts (Eiffel Tower, sushi, marathon) → Students make Present Perfect sentences in pairs.
	5. Creative Task (10 min)	Students create a short video (on phone or in class) talking about their own experiences.
	6. Homework	Make a 1-minute video talking about 3 life experiences using the present perfect.

3. Post-test: At the end of the instruction period, students completed a test identical in structure to the pre-test, measuring both grammar accuracy (written) and communicative fluency (speaking).

Data Collection

Two separate scoring criteria were used:

1. Accuracy Score: based on correct sentence formation in written exercises (maximum score: 10 points).

2. Fluency Score: based on a one-minute speaking task describing personal experiences, graded using a 5-point rubric for fluency, vocabulary, and grammatical correctness.

Both pre-test and post-test scores were recorded for statistical comparison.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical method to determine:

1. Whether there was a significant improvement within each group from pre-test to post-test.

2. Whether there were significant differences between the groups in accuracy and fluency improvement.

Results

This section presents the findings from the pre-test and post-test conducted with Group A (Traditional Method) and Group B (Technology-Enhanced Method). Scores were analyzed to measure changes in grammar accuracy and communicative fluency.

Pre-test and post-test results

Before the instructional intervention, both groups demonstrated similar performance levels in grammar accuracy and fluency.

Groups		Group A (traditional method)	Group B (Technology-enhanced method)
Pre-test results	Accuracy score	23/100	21/100
	Fluency score	19/100	22/100
Post-test results	Accuracy score	88/100	70/100
	Fluency score	70/100	86/100

Following the instructional intervention, both groups showed improvement in grammar accuracy and fluency scores.

Group A:
Accuracy improved from 23 to 88 scores (increase of 65%).
Fluency improved from 19 to 70 scores (increase of 51%).
Group B:
Accuracy improved from 21 to 70 scores (increase of 49%).
Fluency improved from 22 to 86 scores (increase of 64%).
When comparing the improvement between the two groups:
Group A achieved higher gains in accuracy by 16%.
Group B achieved higher gains in fluency by 13%.
These findings suggest that the traditional method may be more effective for improving explicit grammar knowledge, while the technology-enhanced method appears to foster greater gains in spoken fluency.

Visual Representation

To illustrate these results, the chart below shows the average improvement in accuracy and fluency for both groups.
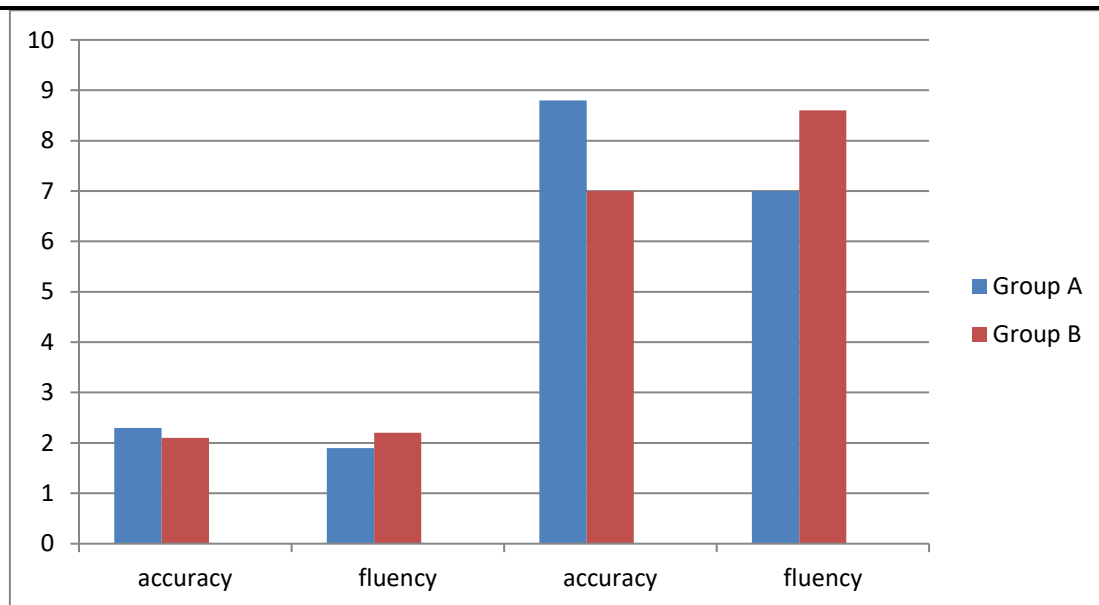
Summary of Findings

Both teaching methods improved students' skills:

The traditional method yielded slightly higher gains in grammar accuracy.

The technology-enhanced method yielded greater gains in communicative fluency.

Summary of patterns:

Pros and cons of both teaching methods

Aspect	Traditional grammar-focused	Technology-enhanced contextual
Clarity of rules	Very explicit, rules clearly stated	Rules discovered by learners through context
Engagement	May be low if only lecture-based	Usually high due to visuals and interaction
Accessibility	Requires minimal resources	Needs devices, internet, multimedia tools
Retention	Relies on memorization	Context helps memory retention
Student autonomy	Teacher-led	Encourages learner independence
Real-life application	Limited to exercises	Strong connection to real-life use
Preparation time	Low	Higher (preparing materials)
Suitability for Exams	Good for form-focused tests	Good for communication-based assessments

Discussion

The comparison of the two approaches — traditional grammar-focused teaching and technology-enhanced contextual teaching — reveals that both have valuable contributions to make in the teaching of English tenses to beginners. The traditional method provides explicit, structured rules that can help learners quickly understand the grammatical form of a tense. For example, in teaching the present perfect simple, the whiteboard explanation of have/has + past participle offers clarity for learners who prefer direct instruction and who may later face form-

focused examinations. Such explicit instruction also reduces ambiguity for students with limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

However, technology-enhanced contextual teaching offers a more immersive experience, allowing learners to encounter the target tense in authentic or semi-authentic contexts. By watching videos, viewing presentations, or engaging in multimedia tasks, learners are exposed to real-life usage patterns that aid retention and foster communicative competence. In the present perfect simple example, students see and hear how the tense is naturally used ("I've visited 10 countries" or "She has never tried sushi") rather than memorizing abstract rules. This inductive approach encourages learners to form their own grammatical understanding, which can improve long-term mastery.

The key insight from this comparison is that neither method is universally superior; rather, their effectiveness depends on the learning objectives, the context, and the resources available. For purely accuracy-focused goals, the traditional method may yield faster results. For communicative fluency and motivation, technology-based teaching can be more effective. As Isti'anah (2017) demonstrated, blended learning improves grammar understanding when complemented with traditional accuracy-focused instruction. However, Teng and Zeng found that blended learning significantly enhanced learners' oral fluency compared to conventional methods. For beginner learners in particular, a blended approach can combine the strengths of both: technology can introduce the tense in a meaningful, engaging way, while traditional methods can consolidate understanding through explicit explanation and controlled practice. Integrated model supports both accuracy and fluency, meeting the diverse needs of a beginner-level classroom.

Conclusion

The teaching of English tenses to beginners can be effectively approached through both traditional grammar-focused instruction and technology-enhanced contextual methods. The traditional approach offers clarity and structure, enabling learners to grasp the grammatical form and rules quickly, which is particularly useful for formal assessments. In contrast, technology-enhanced methods promote engagement, contextual understanding, and communicative competence, which are essential for real-life language use.

While each method has its own strengths and limitations, this comparison highlights that neither is inherently superior. Instead, an integrated teaching model that blends the explicitness of traditional instruction with the immersion and motivation of technology-based methods can provide the most balanced and effective learning experience for beginners. By leveraging the advantages of both, educators can address a range of learner needs, foster both accuracy and fluency, and ultimately enhance the overall effectiveness of tense instruction in the beginner-level English classroom.

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