The Centrality of the Verb in English Tense Instruction: A Practice-Based Approach for Libyan EFL Beginners

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مركزية الفعل في تعليم الأزمنة الإنجليزية: مقاربة تطبيقية للمتعلمين الليبيين المبتدئين

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Abstract:
Teaching English tenses remains a persistent challenge for many Libyan EFL learners, particularly when classroom instruction focuses heavily on memorisation rather than understanding. This study explores the effectiveness of a verb-centred approach that I have developed and refined through several years of classroom practice. The approach positions the verb at the centre of tense instruction and uses simple visual cues to reduce ambiguity and guide students' attention. A quasi-experimental design was adopted with 20 first-semester students, using pre- and post-tests alongside open-ended feedback. The results showed clear gains in students' ability to recognise verb types and construct accurate tense forms, with noticeable narrowing of performance differences within the group. Students' feedback also pointed to noticeable increase in confidence and a stronger sense of control over sentence construction. Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that anchoring instruction around the verb can make tense learning more manageable for learners, particularly in contexts where clarity and structure are essential.

Keywords: : EFL instruction; English tenses; Libyan learners; verb-centred approach; verb types; visual cues..

الملخص
يظلّ تعليم الأزمنة الإنجليزية تحدّيًا مستمرًا للكثير من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا، خاصة عندما يعتمد التدريس داخل الصف اعتمادًا كبيرًا على الحفظ بدلاً من الفهم. تستكشف هذه الدراسة فعالية منهج قائم على "مركزية الفعل"، وهو منهج طوّرته وصقلته عبر سنوات من الخبرة العملية في التدريس. يضع هذا المنهج الفعل في موقع العنصر الأساسي عند شرح الأزمنة، ويستخدم إشارات بصرية بسيطة لتقليل الغموض وتوجيه انتباه الطلاب. اعتمدت الدراسة تصميمًا شبه تجريبي مع 20 طالبًا من طلبة الفصل الدراسي الأول، مستخدمة اختبارًا قبليًا وبعديًا إلى جانب أسئلة مفتوحة لجمع الانطباعات. وقد أظهرت النتائج تحسنًا واضحًا في قدرة الطلاب على التعرف على أنواع الأفعال وبناء صيغ الأزمنة بدقة، مع انخفاض ملحوظ في تباين مستويات الأداء داخل المجموعة. كما أشارت تعليقات الطلاب إلى زيادة في الثقة، وإحساس أكبر بالسيطرة على بناء الجملة الإنجليزية. وبشكل عام، تشير النتائج إلى أن تركيز التدريس حول الفعل يمكن أن يجعل تعلم الأزمنة أكثر سهولة بالنسبة للمتعلمين، خصوصًا في السياقات التعليمية التي تتطلب وضوحًا وبنية تنظيمية في تقديم القواعد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الأزمنة الإنجليزية، المتعلمون الليبيون، النهج المرتكز على الفعل، أنواع الأفعال، الوسائل البصرية، الإشارات البصرية.

Introduction

Learning English grammar continues to be a challenge for many EFL learners, particularly when it comes to understanding tense forms and their appropriate usage. Despite years of instruction, students often struggle to internalise grammatical structures and apply them accurately in context. Traditional grammar instruction often treats the verb as a secondary element, without differentiating between its types or centralising it in the explanation of tenses. This verb-type-based approach, however, reframes the verb as the organising principle of sentence structure and temporal meaning.

This ongoing difficulty places pressure on educators to explore alternative instructional strategies that are both effective and engaging. One such strategy is the integration of visual and symbolic representations to highlight core grammatical features, most notably, the verb.

Tenses in language serve an essential communicative function, enabling speakers and writers to express actions, events, and states across different points in time (Stephens & Sanderson, 2022). The practical expression of tense is realised through the sentence, which must be structured within a grammatically accurate framework in order to convey clear and meaningful content (Comrie, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Within this framework, the verb naturally assumes a central position. It is the element that encodes tense, signals temporal relations, and ultimately shapes the grammatical identity of the sentence. When instruction foregrounds the verb—not as one component among many, but as the primary indicator of tense—students gain a clearer and more predictable entry point into understanding how English sentences function.

Other sentence elements contribute important layers of meaning, of course, but they do not determine tense. The verb does. This distinction gives learners a stable anchor from which they can analyse, generate, and adjust grammatical structures with greater confidence.

For these reasons, placing the verb at the core of instruction is not only pedagogically sound but also practically beneficial, particularly for learners who struggle with tense recognition. This rationale informs the instructional approach adopted in the present study.

In recent years, the incorporation of visual elements into grammar instruction has gained increasing attention, as studies have shown their potential to support learners' grammatical awareness and sentence construction skills (Qadha & Al-Wasy, 2022; Chin et al., 2023; Syafryadin, 2021; Kiziltan & Kayacan, 2018). While much of this research has explored the role of visual tools in general grammar instruction, the present study builds on this foundation by proposing a verb-focused, symbol-based method of teaching English tenses to Libyan EFL students. This approach integrates targeted visual prompts—such as a crown symbol, an underline, and a 'V' shape placed above the verb—to draw students' attention to the grammatical function of the verb within meaningful sentence contexts. These cues are deliberately used to help learners identify verb types, recognise patterns of tense formation, and internalise sentence structure. In doing so, this strategy aims to simplify complex rules, enhance visual memory, and support student engagement, all while reinforcing the verb as the anchor of tense in English.

Building on these principles, this study introduces a pedagogical technique that positions the verb as the central gateway to understanding English tenses. By using consistent symbolic cues to highlight the verb and its grammatical role, the approach aims to develop learners' awareness of sentence structure and simplify the process of tense acquisition. The technique has been implemented with Libyan EFL students, many of whom encounter English in formal settings only, and often face challenges with tense differentiation despite years of study.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of a verb-type-based instructional approach in helping Libyan EFL learners accurately understand and use English tenses. Accordingly, the following research question is posed:

How effective is a verb-type based approach in helping Libyan EFL students understand and use English tenses accurately?

Building on the rationale outlined above, this study is significant for one key reason: it recentres tense instruction around the verb. Traditional approaches mention the verb as just one element in the sentence. This method does the opposite. It places the verb at the core. In this model, the verb is not just a marker of grammatical time, it becomes the foundation for classifying tenses, forming questions and negatives, using pronouns correctly, and improving students' writing accuracy. By foregrounding the verb as the grammatical engine of the sentence, the method offers a clearer and more intuitive framework for EFL learners, particularly those whose first language lacks a comparable verb-tense system. In doing so, the approach responds to persistent gaps in common teaching practices and offers a practical alternative that has been refined and tested in real classroom settings

The insights presented in this paper are grounded in direct classroom experience with university-level Libyan learners, aged 18 and above, in groups typically not exceeding 20 students. This day-to-day interaction with students has not only shaped how the approach developed but also offered genuine insight into how learners actually react to a verb-centred model in real classrooms. Their responses, hesitations, and the small moments of clarity have all played a part in revealing the practical value of this way of teaching.

2. Literature Review
2.1.1 Overview of the Literature
This section provides a comprehensive review of literature related to grammar instruction for EFL learners, with a particular focus on the teaching of tenses. It begins by comparing traditional and communicative approaches to grammar, highlighting their respective strengths and limitations. It then explores the role of visual and symbolic strategies in enhancing learners' grammatical awareness, particularly in tense instruction. The discussion also addresses the Libyan EFL context, identifying key challenges in classroom implementation. Finally, the section reviews relevant theoretical perspectives that support the rationale for the proposed verb-centred instructional approach.

2.1.2 Contextual Background (Libyan EFL Teaching Centex
In Libyan secondary and tertiary education, classrooms frequently accommodate over 40 students, which poses challenges for personalised instruction and meaningful student-teacher interaction (Elremali, 2017; UNESCO, 2020). Teacher professional development opportunities remain limited and often emphasise traditional, form-focused teaching methods rather than communicative or innovative approaches (Alrashidi & Phan, 2021). Educational resources, including authentic materials and technology—are inconsistently available across schools and universities, limiting exposure to real-life language use (UNESCO, 2020). The national curriculum strongly prioritises grammar memorisation and exam performance, with little emphasis on developing communicative competence (Elremali, 2017; Elhaj et al., 2019; Algwil, 2023). These contextual factors necessitate instructional methods that are clear, scalable, and adaptable to local constraints. Such a need for clarity aligns with recent arguments in instructed SLA, where explicit grammar instruction is shown to promote more stable acquisition, particularly in contexts with limited exposure (Loewen, 2020).

2.1.3 Approaches to Grammar Instruction
The teaching of grammar to EFL learners has long been shaped by two dominant approaches: the traditional form-focused approach and the communicative meaning-oriented approach. The former centres on explicit instruction, rule memorisation, and grammatical accuracy (Swan, 2005), while the latter prioritises fluency, learner autonomy, and implicit acquisition through meaningful communication (Ellis, 2006; Nunan, 2003). Both approaches have their merits, and in recent years, scholars have increasingly argued for integrative models that blend form and meaning. For example, Widodo (2006) proposes embedding grammar instruction within communicative contexts to maintain linguistic accuracy while promoting authentic use. However, teaching specific grammatical aspects such as English tenses poses unique challenges that require methods tailored to address both form and function, especially in contexts like Libya where classroom realities affect instructional choices.

2.1.4 Review of Research on Tense Instruction
While grammar instruction has received considerable attention in EFL research, the teaching of verb tenses remains one of the most persistent challenges for both learners and teachers. Several studies have documented the cognitive and linguistic difficulties that learners face when attempting to grasp tense and aspect, particularly those whose first languages—such as Arabic—lack direct equivalents to English tense systems (Huan, 2011; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000). Learners often struggle to internalise the temporal logic of English tenses, misapplying forms due to limited understanding of verb function and sequence (Yule, 2006).

Common instructional approaches to teaching tenses typically rely on timelines, rules, and substitution drills. While these methods can raise grammatical awareness, they often fail to promote deeper functional understanding, particularly in contexts where learners have limited opportunities to encounter the language in authentic use (Fotos & Nassaji, 2011). For example, Rutherford (1987) notes that tense teaching tends to focus on surface-level accuracy rather than fostering awareness of how tense reflects meaning in context.

Moreover, research evaluating such methods reveals mixed or inconclusive outcomes. Ellis (2006) found that while explicit instruction improved short-term performance, it did not necessarily result in long-term retention or appropriate usage in communicative contexts. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) argue that without meaningful input and guided discovery, tense forms remain abstract and disconnected from learners' communicative needs. In Libyan classrooms in particular, as highlighted by Elabbar (2011), tense instruction is often rule-driven and decontextualised, which may limit learners' ability to transfer grammatical knowledge into practice.

These findings suggest a need for more pedagogically grounded methods that integrate both conceptual clarity and communicative relevance—an area this study seeks to contribute to by placing the verb at the core of tense instruction and supporting it through structured visual and kinaesthetic scaffolds.

Visual and symbolic strategies have also emerged as tools to support grammar instruction. Several studies highlight the potential of visual cues and technological tools in aiding learners' grammatical awareness and

retention (Antonova et al., 2021; Forrest, 2017; Latham, 2021). These tools are particularly useful when teaching abstract concepts like tense, as they provide learners with concrete references that make grammatical forms more accessible. However, the focus in much of this literature remains on general grammar instruction, with limited attention given to the explicit teaching of tenses.

In the Libyan context, research shows that while communicative language teaching (CLT) is often promoted in theory, its actual implementation faces considerable challenges. Large class sizes, rigid curricula, and limited teacher training hinder the effective adoption of CLT principles. For instance, Elremali (2017) describes an activity involving group work and authentic materials, yet the strong emphasis on vocabulary analysis and syntactic structure suggests a more traditional orientation. This example reflects a broader pattern in Libyan EFL classrooms, where communicative methods are selectively applied or reduced to surface-level interaction.

2.1.5 Gap in Literature

Although multimodal strategies have gained some attention in global grammar pedagogy, little research has investigated the development or application of a verb-as-core approach—one that explicitly distinguishes between verb types and uses the verb as a structural anchor—in Libyan EFL settings. Most traditional grammar materials, such as *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy, 2019), introduce tenses as discrete units through form–use structures, but often neglect to highlight the verb's central grammatical and conceptual role. This creates a gap in learners' ability to connect tense with sentence construction in a meaningful way.

Despite developments in the field, few studies have proposed a systematic and accessible method specifically for teaching tenses, especially to learners whose first language has different structural properties from English (Huan, 2011). In most mainstream methods, tenses are introduced via standard rules and timelines, often assuming that learners possess sufficient grammatical awareness to decode abstract patterns. As a result, these methods may fail to address foundational gaps in learners' understanding of verbs as the grammatical centre of the sentence. No existing literature has systematically explored a practice-based method that trains learners to identify and interpret verbs as the foundation of sentence construction.

While communicative language teaching is widely advocated, its practical application in Libyan classrooms remains limited. For example, Elremali (2017) describes a group activity using authentic materials; however, the strong emphasis on lexical and syntactic analysis reflects a more form-focused orientation. This gap between theoretical endorsement and classroom reality highlights the need for practical, adaptable methods that preserve communicative principles while addressing contextual constraints. The present study responds to this need by introducing and evaluating a verb-centric method grounded in real classroom application.

2.1.6 Rationale for a Verb-Centered Instructional Approach

Traditional grammar resources—such as English Grammar in Use (Murphy, 2019)—typically present verb tenses through isolated templates, offering clear rules and examples supported by timelines. These materials often follow a linear progression from form to use but treat verb forms as static entities rather than dynamic carriers of meaning. Notably, they do not distinguish between types of verbs (e.g., be vs. do) or offer learners strategies for identifying verb function within sentence structure—an omission that can hinder deeper grammatical understanding.

A similar limitation is found in Swan's (2005) Practical English Usage, which prioritises rule-based accuracy but lacks a conceptual framework centred on the verb as the core grammatical element. Both sources contribute valuable insights, yet they fail to position the verb as the structural and semantic nucleus of tense instruction.

In contrast, the present study adopts a verb-centred instructional approach, grounded in the linguistic principle that tense and aspect are obligatory categories in English, and that these grammatical features are encoded exclusively through the verb (Comrie, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). By foregrounding the verb, this method offers learners a direct and coherent pathway into understanding how time and meaning are constructed in English. Rather than treating tenses as isolated rules to be memorised, this approach encourages learners to view the verb as a conceptual anchor—one that reveals how grammatical time, sentence structure, and communicative intent interact in real usage.

In response to these limitations, and building on the identified gap in literature, this study proposes a verb-centred instructional model grounded in cognitive salience and scaffolded grammar instruction. While it shares the attentional focus advocated in Focus on Form approaches (Long & Robinson, 1998), the current method differs by employing explicit and multimodal strategies, including visual, kinaesthetic, and conceptual scaffolding—to make verbs perceptually prominent and structurally central. This approach ensures that learners not only recognise verb types but also understand how tense structures operate within meaningful sentences.

2.1.7 How This Method Differs from Existing Literature

Existing literature offers a wide spectrum of approaches to grammar instruction, ranging from traditional rule-based models to more recent communicative and inductive frameworks. While such approaches have contributed significantly to understanding how grammar can be taught more effectively, they tend to treat the verb as one component among many—rather than as the grammatical core around which tense and sentence structure revolve. In contrast, the method proposed in this study places the verb at the centre of instruction, both conceptually and visually. The use of a crown symbol, the letter "v", and underlining techniques, along with a magnifying-glass hand gesture, serves to make the verb consistently visible and memorable to learners. This approach organises instruction around verb types (be vs. do) from the earliest stages, allowing learners to identify, manipulate, and produce grammatically sound sentences with greater confidence.

Unlike textbooks such as *English Grammar in Use* (Murphy, 2019) or reference works like *Practical English Usage* (Swan, 2005), which tend to introduce tenses as discrete topics without sustained attention to verb logic across contexts, this method presents grammar as a verb-driven system. It offers a coherent internal structure that builds cumulatively, empowering learners to approach tense not as a memorised rule, but as a function revealed by the verb itself.

Moreover, in contrast to current communicative and inductive methods that favour incidental grammar exposure, this method embraces explicit instruction paired with consistent visual scaffolding, making it particularly well-suited to EFL contexts where structural clarity is essential. It therefore constitutes a distinct and original contribution to the field of grammar pedagogy.

2.1.8 Pedagogical Foundations of the Proposed Method

The instructional approach adopted in this study is grounded in pedagogical principles drawn from research in second language acquisition, educational psychology, and grammar pedagogy. Central to this method is the belief that grammar, especially tense recognition and sentence construction, becomes more accessible when taught through consistent and meaningful visual and kinaesthetic cues. The method positions the verb as the grammatical nucleus, offering learners a coherent entry point into the tense system.

The use of visual scaffolding—such as underlining the verb, placing a crown symbol above it, and writing the letter "V"—is inspired by multimodal strategies advocated by Widodo (2006), who emphasises that visual representations can make grammatical structures more concrete and comprehensible for EFL learners. Similarly, Schmitt (2008) and Nassaji and Fotos (2011) affirm that visual input enhancement facilitates learners' noticing of grammatical features, promoting better retention and application. This emphasis on visual clarity is particularly valuable in contexts where syntactic roles are not always intuitively grasped by learners.

This symbolic labelling of the verb aligns with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994; Mayer, 2002), which highlights the need to reduce extraneous cognitive burden in learning. By establishing a fixed and recognisable label for verbs, the method streamlines students' focus and aids in sentence parsing. Cook (2006) further demonstrates that aligning visual cues with prior linguistic knowledge can enhance both comprehension and retention, especially in rule-governed learning such as grammar.

The method also embraces kinaesthetic strategies to anchor grammatical awareness. A notable example is the use of a magnifying-glass hand gesture during verb identification, serving as an embodied learning tool. This technique draws from Total Physical Response (TPR), first introduced by Asher (1969, 1977), which supports the notion that physical engagement reinforces cognitive processing of language input. Additional support comes from studies like Morita and Tani (2009), who found that gesture-based instruction improves learners' grammatical recall, particularly in distinguishing verb forms.

Further theoretical grounding is provided by Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001), who argue that perceptual salience significantly influences the acquisition of grammatical morphemes. By repeatedly drawing visual and kinaesthetic attention to the verb, this method enhances learners' sensitivity to its role in structuring tense and meaning.

Ellis (2006) also underscores the importance of integrating pedagogical practice with theory, advocating for classroom methods that are both research-informed and practically applicable.

Additional support for this structured, verb-focused approach can be seen in Sherin's (2023) review of grammar instruction within Swedish secondary classrooms. In her overview, Sherin highlights how explicit grammar teaching consistently led to stronger and more lasting improvements, especially when it came to complex structures. Interestingly, she also points out that explicit methods helped students not only understand grammar when reading or listening but also use it more accurately when speaking or writing. By contrast, the benefits of

implicit instruction seemed more limited to receptive skills and often faded unless backed up by regular communicative practice.

This framework strengthens the rationale for incorporating consistent visual scaffolds, verb categorisation, and physical enactment into one unified instructional strategy.

Finally, this approach echoes broader constructivist efforts to simplify grammar instruction. Rather than overwhelming learners with discrete rules for each tense, the method guides them to view English grammar as a verb-driven system. By helping students distinguish between verb types (be vs. do) and linking each to its grammatical function, the approach fosters deeper structural awareness and facilitates accurate sentence production.

In sum, this verb-focused method draws on visual salience, symbolic consistency, kinaesthetic engagement, and conceptual simplification to form a coherent strategy for grammar instruction. Each component is firmly rooted in credible, research-based practices, offering a pedagogical model that is both theoretically sound and practically effective, particularly in EFL contexts where learners benefit from clarity, repetition, and structure.

The pedagogical principles outlined above—particularly the emphasis on discovery, visualisation, and meaning-making—are conceptually aligned with two interrelated theoretical perspectives: constructivist learning theory and functional grammar. While the former foregrounds active learner involvement and guided exploration (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), the latter highlights the central role of verbs in encoding tense, aspect, and communicative intent (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Together, these perspectives provide a robust theoretical lens through which the present method can be understood, implemented, and evaluated.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in a dual theoretical foundation that draws on constructivist learning theory and functional grammar. These complementary perspectives provide both a pedagogical and linguistic rationale for the proposed verb-centered approach to teaching English tenses to Libyan EFL learners. Together, they underpin the method's focus on guiding learners to actively engage with language structures—particularly verbs—as the core determinants of tense and sentence meaning.

2.2.1 Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism views learning as an active, learner-driven process in which individuals build understanding through interaction, reflection, and contextual experience (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than presenting grammatical rules as fixed knowledge to be memorised, this perspective promotes discovery, guided exploration, and meaning making. In grammar instruction, constructivist approaches encourage learners to analyse language forms, hypothesise rules, and internalise patterns through meaningful use (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The verb-focused method employed in this study reflects these principles by prompting learners to observe, identify, and reconstruct grammatical structures through examples, classroom discussion, and visual aids. By symbolically highlighting the verb in each sentence—using cues such as an underline, a crown symbol, or the letter "V"—students are supported in noticing key patterns and forming connections between form and function. These visual tools act as scaffolds that enhance cognitive processing and promote long-term retention of tense-related knowledge.

2.2.2 Functional Grammar Theory

Rooted in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), functional grammar conceptualises language as a resource for constructing meaning in context, rather than a static system of rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Within this model, the verb plays a central grammatical role, encoding time, aspect, modality, and shaping how messages are constructed and interpreted. Tense, from this perspective, is not treated as an isolated grammar point but as an expression of communicative intent embedded in sentence structure (Eggins, 2004).

This theoretical view aligns closely with the instructional design of the current method, which positions the verb as the grammatical nucleus. Students are trained to distinguish between two verb types—*type be* and *type do*—and to manipulate them in order to form questions, negatives, and other structures that reflect different tenses. By consistently returning to the verb as the anchor of sentence construction, the method reinforces a meaning-oriented understanding of grammar.

2.2.3 Integrative Rationale

By integrating constructivist and functionalist principles, the proposed instructional approach addresses key pedagogical challenges faced in Libyan EFL classrooms—most notably, the difficulty of grasping abstract rules and the lack of real-life exposure to English. The combination of visual scaffolding (constructivism) and functional awareness of verb use (functional grammar) provides a structured yet flexible framework that promotes both grammatical accuracy and communicative competence. This theoretical grounding supports a method that is not only cognitively accessible, but also contextually responsive to learners' needs and realities.

2.2.4 Linking Theoretical Framework to Methodology

Building on the theoretical foundations of constructivist learning and functional grammar, the present study adopts a verb-centred instructional approach to support Libyan EFL learners in understanding and accurately using English tenses. This method is grounded in the belief that learners construct knowledge through active engagement, pattern recognition, and guided interaction with language input. Drawing from constructivist principles, the approach incorporates visual scaffolding techniques—such as underlining the verb, placing a crown symbol above it, or marking it with the letter "V"—to emphasise the verb as the central grammatical unit in each sentence. These visual cues act as cognitive anchors that guide students in identifying verb types, understanding their role, and making connections between verb form and tense structure.

At the same time, the method reflects the principles of functional grammar by positioning the verb not merely as a structural element, but as a carrier of meaning that encodes tense, aspect, and communicative intent. Classroom activities are designed to reinforce this function, with students learning to distinguish between type *be* and type *do* verbs, and to apply them in constructing affirmative, interrogative, and negative forms. This process allows learners to understand how tense is realised through verb form and sentence function, rather than through abstract memorisation.

The pedagogical rationale is further supported by empirical research. Widodo (2006) emphasises the role of multimodal grammar instruction, advocating for visual aids as cognitive supports in EFL classrooms. This is echoed by Lestari and Misdi (2016), whose study revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension when visual scaffolds were used with junior high school learners. Similarly, Qadha and Al-Wasy (2022) found that visual grammar cues enhance both recognition and production of complex grammatical forms. In addition, kinaesthetic strategies grounded in Total Physical Response (Asher, 1977) have been shown to reinforce cognitive engagement. Song and Lee (2007), for example, developed a verb tense teaching method using physical actions, which resulted in higher grammatical accuracy and retention. The use of a hand gesture mimicking a magnifying glass in the present study aligns with these findings, offering an embodied way to reinforce the verb's function.

Moreover, Levinli and Pranoto (2023) advocate for simplifying the English tense system by focusing on two core tenses and addressing aspect and mood separately. While their model does not centre the verb symbolically, it aligns with the current study's objective of enhancing learners' conceptual clarity.

Thus, this study extends the work of scholars such as Widodo (2006) and Levinli and Pranoto (2023) by integrating visual scaffolding and kinaesthetic strategies, including symbolic cues and physical gestures—within a unified, verb-focused instructional method tailored to EFL learners.

In sum, existing literature offers valuable insights into grammar instruction through both traditional and communicative paradigms, with increasing emphasis on integrating visual aids and learner-centred techniques. However, most approaches either treat verbs as one of many grammatical elements or rely on learners' implicit awareness of tense patterns. Particularly in the Libyan context, implementation challenges and pedagogical constraints further limit the effectiveness of these models. What remains largely unexplored is a practical, classroom-based method that explicitly centres the verb as the grammatical anchor in tense instruction. Such challenges are consistent with findings from recent research in Libya, where teachers report persistent difficulties in teaching grammar due to limited exposure, heavy reliance on memorisation, and insufficiently clear instructional models (Al-Werfalli, 2022).

The methodology employed in this study is practice-based and descriptive, involving structured grammar-focused tasks embedded in meaningful sentence examples. These activities are implemented in real classroom settings, where students interact with teacher-led explanations, sentence transformations, and reflective questioning. The design takes into account key challenges of the Libyan EFL context—such as large class sizes, limited access to authentic language, and difficulties in applying abstract grammatical rules—and offers a scaffolded approach that remains sensitive to learners' needs.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this method, the study adopts mixed-methods, classroom-based design, integrating quantitative (pre- and post-tests) and qualitative (learner reflections) tools to assess learners' grammatical awareness, accuracy, and confidence. The pre- and post-tests measure students' ability to identify verbs, distinguish between verb types, and form correct tense structures. Learner feedback provides insight into the perceived clarity, memorability, and usefulness of the method's visual and kinaesthetic elements.

To this end, the following section outlines the methodological framework used to implement and assess this instructional approach in real classroom conditions.

3. Methodology
3.1 Research Design

This section describes the research design and the steps taken to collect the data. A quasi-experimental design was used, combining quantitative and qualitative sources. Mixed-method research refers to an approach in which the researcher brings together both quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence and examines them side by side. As Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) note, this combination allows a single study—or a set of related studies—to explore a central issue from different angles, offering a more rounded and insightful understanding of the topic.

This mixed approach offered a clearer picture of how the verb-type based instruction influenced Libyan EFL students' understanding and use of English tenses. This study adopts an approach rather than a fixed method, as the teaching process was adapted in real time to students' needs and classroom dynamics, while still being grounded in clear pedagogical principles. The research is practice-based and classroom-embedded, drawing on real teaching contexts to evaluate the effectiveness of the method.

Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-tests to measure changes in grammatical performance, while qualitative insights were derived from open-ended feedback questions providing insights into students' engagement and perceptions of the approach.

3.2 Study Hypothesis

In line with the quasi-experimental design adopted in this study, a research hypothesis was formulated to guide the data analysis and assess the potential instructional impact. While the teaching approach itself is grounded in classroom practice and qualitative observation, the incorporation of pre- and post-tests introduces a quantitative element that allows for measuring learning gains systematically.

The study hypothesises that Libyan EFL students who are taught through the verb-centred approach will make noticeable progress. In particular, they are expected to improve in identifying verb types and in constructing accurate tense forms. This improvement is measured by comparing their performance after the instruction with their own results before the intervention. This hypothesis is tested through a comparison of students' results in pre- and post-tests designed to measure verb recognition, sentence transformation, and tense accuracy.

3.3 Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in the Translation Department of Misrata University, a public institution in Libya. The participants were 20 first-semester undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory grammar course. The number of participants in this study (n = 20) reflects the fixed enrolment size assigned to each classroom group by the faculty. Consequently, the sample size was determined by institutional grouping rather than researcher selection.

All of them were native Arabic speakers with similar educational backgrounds and limited exposure to English outside the classroom. The class formed a naturally occurring intact group, receiving instruction as part of their regular timetable.

The classroom setting itself was fairly traditional, with the teacher leading the instruction. However, student engagement was encouraged through frequent questioning and short discussions, which kept the lessons interactive.

The intervention spanned 12 weeks, with two 90-minute sessions per week. All sessions were delivered by the researcher, who was also the regular course instructor, ensuring consistent implementation of the verb-centred method for teaching English tenses.

3.4 Teacher Background and Instructional Familiarity

The researcher has implemented this verb-centred approach in first-year grammar courses for more than six years. Through these cohorts, students have consistently demonstrated clearer understanding of tense formation and accuracy in tense use across structured grammar tasks. Informal feedback collected at the end of each semester has likewise indicated that learners find the verb-focused explanations, symbolic markings, and step-by-step questioning particularly helpful. This long-term classroom experience helped shape the design of the intervention and supported stable, confident implementation during the study.

3.5 Teaching Procedures of the Proposed Approach

The implementation of this verb-centred approach followed a structured and sequenced plan delivered over multiple classroom sessions. The teaching began with foundational concepts designed to build students' awareness of core grammatical elements before introducing individual tenses. The following subsection outlines the initial instructional steps that prepared learners for understanding English tense systems.

Initial Steps in the Teaching Sequence: Clarifying the Sentence-Phrase Distinction and Verb Necessity

The instructional sequence begins with a foundational session that frames how learners will approach the entire system of English tenses. Before addressing any specific tense, students are guided to understand that the verb is the core grammatical element in any English sentence. Before diving into any tense, I also explain a key concept: understanding tenses must occur within full sentences. To construct a sentence that is both meaningful and grammatically correct, a verb must be present and must appropriately match the other elements of the sentence (subject, adjective, adverb, preposition, etc.). In short:

Correct tense representation = grammatically correct sentence.

A grammatically correct sentence must have a verb that agrees with its other components. I highlight to students that this is not the case in every language. For instance, in Arabic, a sentence like فاطمة معلمة (Fatima teacher) is considered grammatically correct. But in English, *Fatima is a teacher* must include the verb *is* for the sentence to be grammatically valid. I give a further example to illustrate how only the verb is indispensable in determining both the grammatical correctness and the tense of a sentence in English:

Ali drinks coffee in the blue café.

This sentence remains grammatically correct even if we remove the adjective (blue) or the prepositional phrase (in the café) or even the proper noun (Ali), as long as the verb remains:

- *He drinks coffee.*
- *Drink coffee in the blue café.* (imperative)

But if we remove the verb:

Ali coffee in the blue café. (grammatically incorrect)

Summary of Key Points Presented to Students:
1. A verb is essential in any grammatically correct English sentence.
2. The verb is the element that determines the tense of the sentence.
3. The absence of other components (noun, adjective, adverb, preposition) does not necessarily render a sentence ungrammatical, but the absence of a verb does. I also make a critical clarification for students who may confuse phrases with sentences. For example, a phrase like *the brown bag* is grammatically acceptable but not a sentence and it does not represent a tense because it lacks a verb. It only becomes a sentence once a verb is added:

- I like the brown bag.
- The brown bag was on the table.

This distinction deepens students' understanding of why the verb is essential, and why it must always be present and appropriate to the subject. This helps them not only in grammar, but also in improving their writing and speaking accuracy.

Finally, based on my teaching experience, I noticed that many students either omit the verb entirely in their writing/speaking or use it incorrectly. This often stems from interference from their native language (Arabic), where the presence of a verb is not always grammatically necessary. For example:

- Arabic: "أحمد في المتجر"
- English: *Ahmed is in the shop*
  Here, the verb (is) is essential in English, unlike in Arabic.

By making this distinction explicit early on, I help students overcome a common source of confusion and lay the groundwork for all future lessons. The verb is not an optional element, it is the grammatical core around which sentence meaning and tense are constructed. This realisation becomes the conceptual anchor of the entire instructional approach.

To help students visualise this centrality, I consistently use a symbolic system: the verb is crowned as *the king of the sentence* with a small crown drawn above it and marked with the letter *V*. These symbols become cognitive anchors throughout all grammar lessons, supporting students in quickly identifying verbs and understanding their role in determining tense.

At this stage, I introduce two fundamental verb types—type *be* and type *do*—which form the organisational basis for how tenses are taught in this method. I explain that each type behaves differently in affirmatives, negatives, and questions, and that mastering this classification is key to building a logical framework for all tenses.

To reduce confusion between verbs and pronouns—a common issue among beginners, I begin every grammar-focused session by writing all subject pronouns on the side of the board (*I, you, he, she, it, we, they*). I also help students relate these to common noun referents to reinforce understanding. For example,

- *She = Fatima, sister, Sarah, mother, girl, woman*
- *He = Ahmed, brother, father, John, boy, man*
- *We = me and my sister, me and my friends, my family and I*
- *It = the air, the bag, the evidence, the idea, the news, happiness, war, meeting*
- *They = my cousins, the students, the books, the dogs, all students*

I stress that *it* is the correct pronoun for many non-human or abstract subjects, which students often overlook. For instance:

- The air is fresh. → The air = it
- The evidence is already clear. → Evidence = it

This association is essential, especially when students begin constructing their own sentences. Knowing that *evidence* and *air* are treated as *it* helps them correctly select the verb form (e.g., is, does, or -s endings for simple present tense).

By building this habit of identifying what each subject represents, students gain confidence in selecting the appropriate verb form. This clarity becomes even more crucial as we delve into tense structures, where subject-verb agreement is a key component of grammatical accuracy.

These associations are written down in students' grammar notebooks, which serve as personal reference tools throughout the course.

In addition, I clarify that this instructional method does not follow a set textbook, but is the result of sustained classroom experimentation and reflection. It has been developed specifically for the Libyan EFL context, aiming to simplify abstract rules and connect grammar to real usage.

Once these foundations are laid—verb centrality, verb types, and pronoun-noun links—I introduce the two main types of English questions:

- Yes/No questions, which follow an auxiliary-first structure.
- Wh- questions, which begin with interrogative words (e.g., *what*, *where*, *why*) and require more specific answers.

I show how these question forms differ in both structure and communicative function and prepare students for the transformations they will soon apply to each tense. At this point, they are ready to begin learning the first tense: the Simple Present.

To provide a concrete example of how this teaching method is applied in practice, the Simple Present Tense is presented here in detail. Other tenses (such as the Present Continuous, Simple Past, etc.) were introduced and practised using the same logic, sequence, and pedagogical techniques throughout the course, and are therefore not repeated in this section.

Introducing the First Tense: The Simple Present Tense

After establishing the foundational concepts of sentence structure and the central role of the verb, I begin the first grammar unit by introducing the Simple Present Tense. As always, the lesson starts with writing the subject pronouns clearly on the side of the board. The title *Simple Present Tense* is written at the top in bold letters to centre the focus of the session.

I then guide the students through two essential components of the tense:

1. Function (Usage):

I explain that the Simple Present Tense is used to express actions or situations that are:

- Habitual or regular, such as daily, monthly, or yearly routines.

e.g., Ahmed *wakes* up at 7 a.m. He *goes* to school.

- Scheduled or cyclic events, like:

The World Cup *happens* every four years.

- Scientific or universal facts, such as:

Water boils at 100°C.
One plus one equals two.

I explicitly highlight that this tense is widely used in academic and scientific writing, which makes its proper understanding especially relevant to university students. Emphasising its application in formal contexts encourages students to take it seriously and internalise its rules.

2. Form (Structure):

After clarifying the function, I move on to the structure of the tense. This is where I reintroduce the division of verbs into two key categories: Type *be* and Type *do*, which was already explained in the introductory sessions. This division continues to guide how we construct and analyse sentences.

To ensure students focus on the core elements of sentence construction, I start with very simple and clear examples, often limited to three or four words. For instance:

- *Fatima is a student.*

This sentence is ideal for initial practice because it is short, easy to understand, and clearly illustrates the presence of a subject, a verb, and a complement—all within the Simple Present framework. It also helps reinforce the role of *is* as a verb of Type *be* and its connection to the subject *Fatima* (which equates to *she*).

This approach builds a strong grammatical foundation before moving into more complex sentence forms, variations, or verb manipulations. It allows students to internalise the pattern gradually and recognise how verb types affect structure and usage.

Highlighting the Verb Visually and Encouraging Active Note-Taking

After presenting the first example sentence (Fatima is a student), I engage the class by asking:

Where is the verb in this sentence?

Typically, students respond *is*.

At this point, I visually emphasise the verb's role by placing a crown symbol above it, representing its status as the *King of the sentence*. Above the crown, I write the letter V, standing for verb, and draw a line underneath the

verb itself. This consistent visual cue throughout the course reinforces the verb's central role in sentence construction and tense identification.

From the very first session, I instruct students to handwrite every single detail I present on the board into a dedicated grammar notebook. This includes example sentences, diagrams, and annotations such as the crown and V symbol.

I strongly believe that writing by hand, especially in the students' own words and structure, plays a vital role in helping them internalise grammatical patterns. I often explain that these notes will act as a personal reference and practice guide for self-study outside the classroom, far more effective than simply viewing ready-made slides or textbook examples. The physical act of writing fosters deeper cognitive engagement and promotes long-term retention.

Identifying the Tense Through the Verb

Immediately after marking the verb symbolically (with a crown and the letter V), I prompt the students with a follow-up question:

What tense is this sentence? Students usually respond: *Simple present.* I then ask them: *How do you know?*

This stage serves as a reinforcement check of what has been covered during the preparatory session. If students are able to explain that the sentence is in the simple present because it contains only one verb *is*, and that this verb is in the present form, I proceed to the next instructional step.

However, if students hesitate or seem uncertain, I take the opportunity to review the concept in a clear, step-by-step manner. I explain that in order to identify the tense of any English sentence, one must examine the entire sentence—from start to finish—and search for the verb. Here, I use a theatrical classroom gesture: I mimic using a magnifying glass, moving my hand over each word as if *zooming in* to investigate.

We analyse the sentence together:

- *Fatima — Is this a verb? No.*
- *is — Is this a verb? Yes! (Students respond enthusiastically.)*
- *a — Verb? No.*
- *student — Verb? No, it's a noun.*

At this point, I confirm: *Great! So, we have only one verb in this sentence — is. That's why this sentence belongs to the simple group.* Then I guide them to the final distinction:

But which kind of simple tense is it? Simple present or simple past?

If students are able to answer correctly based on their understanding of the verb form, we continue. Otherwise, I clarify:

The verb (is) is in the present form, not the past (was). Therefore, the tense of the sentence is simple present.

This scaffolded exchange not only helps students internalise the form and function of the verb but also builds their confidence in determining tense independently.

Introducing Interrogative Sentence Types: Yes/No Questions and Wh-Questions

Following the foundational explanation of converting affirmative statements into questions, I explicitly introduce students to the two main types of interrogative structures in English. I write the following on the board in clear handwriting to ensure it is properly recorded by the students:

Types of Questions in English: Yes/No Questions   Wh-Questions

I make sure students copy this classification into their notes, as it lays the groundwork for their understanding of how different questions function structurally and semantically.

Before diving into examples, I revisit the core idea we just explored: (Why is it important to learn how to turn an affirmative sentence into a question?)

I encourage brief classroom discussion to reinforce that mastering this transformation is essential for fluency, comprehension, and grammatical control—especially in academic and real-world communication contexts.

To begin applying this concept in practice, I suggest we start with affirmative sentences that use *type be* verbs, as they are generally more straightforward and a logical entry point for building confidence. I clearly state to the students:

Let's start with forming yes/no questions using type be verbs.

From here, we proceed to practice converting simple sentences with *is, am, and are* into corresponding yes/no questions, maintaining the pedagogical scaffolding established earlier.

Applying Yes/No Questions with Type Be Verbs. Introducing the Verb (is) in the Simple Present Tense

After introducing the classification of interrogative sentence types, I write a simple affirmative sentence on the board using a type be verb in the present simple tense, such as:

Ali is a student.

As per my usual approach, I guide students through a structured questioning sequence:

- *Where is the verb in this sentence?*

- *How many verbs do we have?*
- *What tense is this verb in?*
- *What type of verb is it?*

Students respond step by step, applying the knowledge they have acquired from previous lessons. Once the answers are confirmed, I proceed to draw the full symbolic representation beneath the sentence (including the crown, letter V, and underline under the verb), reinforcing the grammatical role of the verb.

Next, I demonstrate how to form *a yes/no question* from this affirmative sentence. Since the main and only verb is *a type be* verb *is*, I tell the students:

We are going to use the X-shape strategy to transform this sentence into a yes/no question.

I draw an X shape to visually guide them through the rearrangement:

- The verb *is* moves to the beginning of the sentence (top-left to bottom-right).
- The subject *Ali* follows (top-right to bottom-left).

The question becomes: *Is Ali a student?* This visual aid (the X-shape) helps students internalise the structure of English interrogative syntax, particularly with *be* verbs. I stress the importance of this transformation and require them to write both the diagram and the sentence in their notebooks by hand, reinforcing their memory and understanding through active note-taking.

Clarifying the Conditions for the X-Shape Strategy and Practising Yes/No Answers

Once the yes/no question has been formed (e.g., Is Ali a student?), I highlight for the students the specific conditions under which the X-shape strategy applies. I clearly write and explain the following three points on the board:

1. The sentence must be in the simple tense (both present simple and past simple).
2. The verb must be of type be.
3. The question type must be yes/no.

Students are required to summarise these conditions in their notebooks in a concise form. This helps them retain the circumstances in which they can confidently apply the X-shape strategy.

Following that, I ask the class to answer the newly formed yes/no question. I invite responses for both affirmative and negative answers, but importantly, I emphasise that students should not answer with just *yes* or *no.* Instead, I guide them to give full responses, such as:

Yes, he is. No, he isn't.

If students struggle with this, I provide clear scaffolding. I explain that:

- *he* refers to *Ali*, which is why we say *he is*.
- This reinforces the importance of the earlier step where we list pronouns on the side of the board and align them with example nouns (e.g., Ali = he, the air = it).

I also allow students to choose between the short answer *Yes, he is* or the full sentence (*Yes, Ali is a student),* but I recommend the short version to reduce complexity and help consolidate grammar patterns, especially across multiple tenses.

This stage also introduces the contracted negative form (e.g., isn't = is + not), giving learners an early look at how contraction works in English. Overall, this practice supports their developing ability to:

- Recognise subjects and corresponding pronouns,
- Select appropriate auxiliary verbs,
- Construct grammatically correct and meaningful responses.

Introducing the Verb (am) in the Simple Present Tense

Next, I introduce an example that features the verb *am*, which is one of the *type be* verbs in the present simple tense. I take this opportunity to emphasise that *am* is exclusively used with the first-person singular pronoun *I*. I write the example clearly on the board:

I am a teacher.

I then proceed with the same step-by-step questioning routine that students have already practised:

- *Where is the verb?*
- *How many verbs are there in the sentence?*
- *What is its tense?*
- *What type is the verb?*

Once the students identify *am* as the main and only verb, and correctly classify the sentence as being in the present simple tense with a type be verb, I draw the crown symbol above the verb, label it with V, and underline it — just as I did with previous examples.

Following this, I guide students to form a *yes/no question* from the sentence, using the X-shape strategy, with *am* moving to the beginning of the question:

Am I a teacher?

I then ask students to answer both affirmatively and negatively:

- *Yes, I am.*
- *No, I am not.*

I highlight the unique nature of this construction, particularly the fact that in this case, the pronoun in both the question and the answer remains *I*, making the structure slightly different from previous examples where the subject noun changed to a pronoun (e.g., Ali → he).

This exercise serves to:

- Reinforce the exclusive use of *am* with *I*,
- Practise the yes/no question formation with all forms of type be verbs,
- Encourage accurate use of subject-verb agreement in both statements and responses,
- And help students internalise grammatical patterns by active participation and written practice.

Using the Verb (are) and Independent Student Practice

Following the introduction of *am*, I move on to the verb *are*, another present simple *type be* verb. I explain that *are* is used with the pronouns they, you, we, or any plural subject that these pronouns can represent. I refer the students to the list of pronouns displayed on the side of the board — a reference that has been maintained since the first lesson. I then present a simple sentence for analysis:

They are here.

Following the same approach as in previous examples, I guide students through:

- Identifying the verb,
- Verifying that it is the only verb in the sentence,
- Recognising its form (present),
- Confirming that it is a type be verb,
- Determining that the sentence is in the simple present tense.

As before, I draw the crown symbol above the verb, label it with V, and underline the verb. I then demonstrate how to form a yes/no question using the X-shape technique, moving the verb "are" to the front:

Are they here?

Students are then asked to respond using both affirmative and negative short answers:

- Yes, they are.
- No, they aren't.

Once students show familiarity with the transformation process using *are*, I test their ability to apply the full process independently with a more complex sentence:

My dog and I are in the garden.

I instruct students to:

1.   Identify the verb and its type,
2.   Use the X-shape strategy to form a yes/no question,
3.   Answer the question affirmatively and negatively using proper subject-verb agreement and appropriate pronoun substitution.

A correct transformation would be:

Are my dog and I in the garden?

With corresponding answers:

- Yes, we are.
- No, we aren't.

At this point, I evaluate students' understanding of how plural noun phrases (like my dog and I) correspond to plural pronouns (such as we). Successful completion of this task — both in question formation and pronoun-accurate responses — signals significant progress in their grammatical reasoning, and affirms the effectiveness of the instructional methods used.

Other examples of *type be* verbs with their matching pronouns were approached using the same steps outlined above.

Transitioning from Yes/No to WH-Questions Using Type Be in the Simple Present

After ensuring that students are confident in transforming affirmative sentences with *type-be* verbs into yes/no questions, I introduce the next step: forming *Wh-questions* in the present simple tense. I begin this section with a short theoretical overview to clarify how *Wh-questions* differ from yes/no questions across three dimensions:

1. Form: The X-shape strategy does not apply when forming *Wh-questions*.

2. Function: These questions require detailed responses — not simply *yes* or *no*. They invite elaboration and encourage students to express themselves more meaningfully.

3. Question words: *Wh-questions* begin with specific interrogative words such as:

- What – used to ask about non-human objects or, when used with people, about profession or role (e.g., What is he? – He is a doctor).
- Where – to ask about place.
- When – to ask about time.
- Why – to ask about reason.
- Who – to ask about a person or people.
- Whose – to ask about ownership or possession.
- Which – to ask about choices.
- How – though it begins with h and not *Wh,* it is still considered part of this family due to its function. It includes:
- How many / how much – for quantity.
- How often / how long – for frequency or duration, etc.

I also take a moment to clarify that many of these words may appear in other grammatical roles, such as relative pronouns (e.g., the man who came yesterday). However, our focus is on their function as question words — distinguished by their position at the beginning of the sentence and the inversion or change in structure that follows. This segment helps prepare students to:

- Recognise different question types,
- Understand the purpose of Wh-questions,
- Learn how to structure them properly,
- And eventually, practice transforming affirmative *type be* sentences into effective *wh-questions* using these tools.

Guided Practice: Building WH-Questions Using Type Be in the Simple Present

To consolidate students' understanding of how to form *Wh-questions* using type be verbs in the simple present, I begin by writing a list of *WH-question Words* clearly in the margin of the board. This list remains visible throughout the lesson for reference and includes:

What – Where – When – Why – Who – Whose – Which – How (how many / how much / etc.

I then write a simple affirmative sentence on the board and, immediately after the full stop, add a *Wh-word* in brackets. For example:

My cat is black and white. (*What*)

I ask students to pause and reflect silently for a few moments: *Can anyone try to form a question using 'what' based on this sentence?*

If a student volunteers, I write their spoken answer word by word on the board, encouraging collaborative verification with the rest of the class.

- If the sentence is grammatically correct, I affirm their effort and proceed to analyse it with the class.
- If no student attempts, I guide them step-by-step, beginning with questions that recall prior learning:
- *Where is the verb? – is*
- *How many verbs do we have? – one*
- *What tense is it? – simple present*
- *What type of verb is it? – type be*

Next, I highlight the rules specific to *WH-question* formation:

1.   The *Wh-word* comes first in the question.
2.   The main verb *type be* comes next.
3.   The subject of the original sentence, if it is what we are asking about, is omitted from the question — since it is already the focus of inquiry.

Using this case:

- The question word is *What*
- The verb is *is.*
- The part of the sentence being questioned is *My cat.*

Therefore, we do not include *My cat* in the question, as it is what we are asking about. Instead, the question becomes:

What is black and white? I emphasise this structural logic as a critical concept:

If we are asking about the subject, we do not include it in the question — the rest of the sentence becomes the answer.

This approach, repeated with various *Wh-words* and examples, helps students internalise the structure and function of *WH-questions*, and deepens their grammatical reasoning through consistent, scaffolded reflection.

Applying the Same Steps Using (Where) with Type Be in the Simple Present

Following the previous example with what, I proceed with another affirmative sentence and a new WH-question word to reinforce the same structure. This time I choose:

My friends are in the kitchen. (Where)

As with the earlier example, I ask students to reflect for a few moments:

Can anyone try to form a question using 'where' based on this sentence?

If a student volunteers an answer, I write it on the board exactly as they say it, and we analyse the structure together:

- If correct, I praise their effort and ask other students to explain why the structure is appropriate.
- If incorrect or no one responds, I model the process once again, engaging them with guiding questions:
1. *Where is the verb? → are*
2. *How many verbs are in the sentence? → One*
3. *What tense is the verb? → Simple Present*
4. *What type is it? → Type be*

From there, I highlight the logic:

- The sentence is in the simple present and contains *a type be* verb.
- We're using a Wh-question, so the x-shape rule does not apply.
- The question begins with the Wh-word *Where*, followed by the verb *are*.
- Since the part we're asking about is the location (*in the kitchen*), we retain the subject *My friends* in the question, because we are not asking about the subject this time — we're asking about where they are.

   Where are my friends?

This example helps students see the contrast with the earlier case (*What is black and white?*) where we were asking about the subject. Now, we're asking about another element, so the subject must remain in the sentence.

I then underline and annotate this distinction on the board to help students clearly grasp:

- When to omit the subject (when it is being questioned).
- When to keep it (when questioning another part of the sentence).

This repetition across different *Wh-words* gradually strengthens students' command of question formation and improves their awareness of sentence structure and meaning.

Introducing WH-Questions with (Why) Using Type Be in the Simple Present

After practising how to form *yes/no questions* using the be verb in the simple present tense, I move on to teaching *WH-questions*—starting with *Why.*

I begin this section by writing a simple sentence on the board:

Fatima is tired. (Why)

Then I ask the class:

Can anyone try to turn this sentence into a Wh-question using Why?

If a student attempts an answer, I write their response word for word on the board and we examine it together. If no one responds, I guide them through the familiar scaffolded approach we've established: Step-by-step scaffolding:

1. *Where is the verb in the sentence? → is*
2. *How many verbs are there? → One*
3. *Which tense is this verb in? → Simple present*
4. *What type of verb is it? → Type be*
5. *Do we use the x-shape strategy here? → No. The x-shape is used only for yes/no questions with type be verbs.*

 I then explain:

Since the question begins with Why, we place the word Why at the start of the sentence. This is followed by the be verb (is), then the subject (Fatima), and finally the rest of the predicate.

I make sure students understand a critical point:

 The part of the sentence we are asking about (the reason) is not included in the question. In this example, we are asking: Why is Fatima tired? Not about Fatima herself, but about the cause of her tiredness.

Correct question:

Why is Fatima tired?

I write both the original sentence and the *WH-question* side by side on the board for visual comparison. I highlight that Why questions do not accept yes/no answers and require more detailed responses that explain the cause or reason.

This stage reinforces both syntactic awareness and the importance of meaning in WH-question formation.

Introducing WH-Questions with (When) Using Type Be in the Simple Present

Following the introduction of *Why questions*, I move on to teaching how to form *Wh-questions* using When, still within the scope of the simple present tense and focusing on type be verbs.

I begin by writing a clear sentence on the board:

The meeting is at 8 a.m. (When)

Before jumping into the transformation, I ask the class the guiding question:

Can anyone try to turn this sentence into a Wh-question using When?

If a student attempts an answer, I write their version on the board and guide the class in analysing its structure. If no one responds, I initiate the familiar step-by-step strategy we've used throughout the course: Step-by-step scaffolding:

1. *Where is the verb? → is*
2. *How many verbs are there in this sentence? → One*
3. *What tense is it in? → Simple present*
4. *What type of verb is it? → Type be*
5. *Do we use the x-shape strategy here? → No, because we are dealing with a WH-question, not a yes/no question.*

Next, I highlight that we are asking about time. I explain that *When* is the appropriate *Wh-word* to elicit information about time, dates, or schedules.

Then, I guide the transformation as follows:

- Start with the *Wh-word: When*
- Follow with the verb *is*
- Then the subject: *the meeting*
- The part we are asking about *at 8 a.m.* is excluded from the question

Final question:

When is the meeting?

I clearly write both the original sentence and the question side by side:

The meeting is at 8 a.m.

When is the meeting?

Then, I ask students to answer the question in a full sentence. For example:

>*The meeting is at 8 a.m.*
>*It's at 8 o'clock.*

This reinforces the understanding that *When questions* seek time-related details and that such questions—unlike *yes/no questions*—require specific answers, not simply affirmation or negation.

I also take a moment to connect this back to the earlier list of *Wh-words* written on the board and review the function of *When,* noting that it is always associated with expressions of time. This systematic repetition of structure across *Wh-words* helps consolidate students' syntactic awareness and boosts their confidence in applying the pattern across varied examples.

After constructing the question *When is the meeting?*, I pause to emphasise a key point related to subject-verb agreement and pronoun substitution.

I inform the students that the subject *the meeting* can be replaced by the pronoun *it*, since it is the appropriate singular pronoun for non-human, inanimate subjects or abstract nouns. I point to the list of subject pronouns already written on the side of the board and highlight *it* specifically. I explain that understanding this equivalence is essential for:

- Choosing the correct *be verb* form (e.g. is for it),
- Forming correct short answers (e.g. It is at 10 o'clock.),
- Avoiding repetition in writing and speaking.

I might add:

So, when we answer the question (When is the meeting?), instead of repeating (The meeting is at 8 o'clock), we can simply say: (It is at 10 o'clock). That's because (the meeting = it) just like we've seen before with other examples.

This reinforces students' understanding of subject-verb agreement, pronoun reference, and coherence in response formulation—all essential elements in mastering English sentence structure. Next, I move to another example:

Our classes are on Mondays. (When)

I invite students to build the question themselves. If they provide the correct structure, I write it word by word on the board:

When are your classes?

Then I explain:

- The subject *our classes* becomes *your classes* in the question.
- The part we're asking about — *on Mondays* — is left out of the question.
- The verb *are* follows the *Wh-word.*

This process reinforces not only sentence structure, but also the logic of omitting the element being asked about, which is a key skill in question formation.

At this stage, as we work through each example sentence intended for transformation into a WH-question, I guide the students step by step as previously outlined: identifying the verb, determining the number of verbs, the verb type, and the tense. Once we reach the step of formulating the question, and we have identified what the Wh-word is targeting — that is, the specific element of the sentence being asked about — I introduce a visual reinforcement technique. I tell the students:

To help you stay focused and avoid including unnecessary parts of the sentence in your question, I will now circle the part of the sentence that the Wh-word is referring to — the part we are asking about. For example, in the sentence:

The cat is black and white. (What). I circle *(The cat).*

and explain:

Since we're asking What is black and white? the answer is The cat. So, we do not include 'the cat' in the question itself — and that's why I've circled it. This circle tells us: Don't include this part when forming the question.

I then ask students to adopt this habit in their own work:

Whenever you practise converting a statement into a WH-question, take a pencil and circle the word or phrase being questioned. This will help you organise your thinking and write grammatically correct questions.

This strategy not only improves accuracy but also trains learners to think analytically about sentence structure, supporting their development of independent editing and error-detection skills.

Applying the Same Steps Using (Which) with Type Be in the Simple Present

To continue building students' mastery of *WH-questions* with type be verbs, I introduce the word *which*, often used to ask about choices or selections from a known set. This example reinforces structural consistency while introducing a more nuanced communicative function. I write the following affirmative sentence on the board:

 The red pen is mine. (Which)

Then I prompt the class:

Can anyone try to form a question using (which) based on this sentence?

As with previous *WH-question* types:

- If a student attempts to respond, I transcribe their suggestion on the board exactly.
- If correct, I affirm the answer and facilitate class discussion on the accuracy of the structure.
- If no answer is offered—or the structure is flawed—I proceed with the same structured analysis we've consistently applied:

1. *Where is the verb? → is*
2. *How many verbs are there? → One*
3. *What tense is the verb? → Simple Present*
4. *What type is it? → Type be*

We then focus on what we are trying to question: here, it is the specific object *The red pen*—chosen from among other pens or items. I explain that *which* is used when the question implies a limited or defined set of options, unlike *what*, which is broader. I remind students that:

- *We do not use the x-shape with Wh-questions.*
- *The questioned element the red pen is removed from the question form.*
- *The Wh-word which is immediately followed by the noun it modifies (pen).*
 Which pen is yours?

I explicitly draw attention to the following:

- We keep the subject *yours* or (*mine* in the original sentence) in the question.
- The verb *is* remains after the *WH-phrase*, consistent with the structure of *WH-questions* with type be.
- *The red pen* is circled in the original sentence to mark it as the part being questioned, and students are asked to do the same in their notes to visually reinforce the rule: Do not include the element being questioned in the question itself.

Additionally, I explain:

- *Which* can function as either a determiner (e.g., Which pen…) or a pronoun (e.g., Which is yours?).
- In this example, it is a determiner modifying *pen*, which is useful for clarity.

To reinforce pronoun comprehension, I remind that *mine* refers to me, and show its place in the pronoun reference list on the sidebar. This helps maintain a cohesive understanding of ownership and subject equivalency in English.

Through structured repetition, varied examples, and consistent visual cues, students become adept at identifying what is being asked, structuring *WH-questions* accurately, and recognising patterns in English question formation.

Applying the Same Steps Using (How) with Type Be in the Simple Present

After establishing a strong foundation with more common *Wh-words* such as *when, where*, *which* and *why*, I introduce *how* to expand students' questioning range. Although *how* does not begin with *wh*, it is traditionally grouped with *WH-questions* due to its interrogative function and structure. To illustrate its use, I write the following affirmative sentence on the board:

Your brother is tired. (How)

Then, I ask the class:

Can anyone try to form a question using (how) based on this sentence?

If a student attempts an answer, I write it out word for word and analyse it with the class. Otherwise, I guide them through the standard sequence of scaffolding questions, as done in previous examples:

1. *Where is the verb? → is*
2. *How many verbs are there? → One*
3. *What tense is the verb? → Simple Present*
4. *What type is it? → Type be*

I explain that in this case, we are asking about the condition or state of the subject *your brother,* which is described by the adjective tired. I highlight that *how* is used to inquire about manner, condition, or degree, and that *the x-shape* is not used for *WH-questions.* I also remind them:

- *The part we're asking about (the adjective tired) must be excluded from the question.*
- *(How) comes first, followed by the verb (is), and then the subject.*

How is your brother?

To reinforce this structure, I circle the word tired in the original affirmative sentence, and remind students that it is the target of the question—hence, it should not appear in the question itself. We pause to annotate and reflect:

- The verb *is* remains in its correct position following the *Wh-word*.
- The subject *your brother* stays intact in the question.
- The structure closely mirrors previous *Wh-questions* formed with type be in simple present.

This example strengthens students' ability to:

- Recognise how different *Wh-words* relate to different sentence elements (condition, location, identity, possession, etc.).
- Maintain grammatical accuracy while varying the communicative purpose of each question.
- Apply the same logical process across all examples—identifying the verb, its tense, type, and whether the subject remains in the question or is the focus of the inquiry.

I conclude the session by encouraging students to generate their own affirmative sentences using type be and practice forming *WH-questions* with *how*, further enhancing both accuracy and confidence in spoken and written production.

Further examples of *WH-questions*, including *how many*, *how much*, *how long*, *how often*, and others such as *what*, *who*, and *whose*, were introduced and practised through the same step-by-step instructional approach previously described.

Transition to Type (Do) Verbs in the Simple Present

After completing all instructional steps related to the simple present tense with *type be* verbs, I move on to introducing *type do* verbs within the same tense. To begin, I write a clear, simple affirmative sentence on the board:

Fatima eats apples.

As always, I ensure that the full list of pronouns is already written on the side of the board, as this serves as a key reference throughout the session. I then pose a question to the class:

Where is the verb in this sentence?

If students answer *eats*, I praise their response. If they seem unsure or hesitate, I invite them to search for the verb word by word, as if using a magnifying glass — a metaphor previously introduced to build their attention to detail. Once the verb is identified, I underline it, draw a crown above it, and write the letter V for verb. I ask all students to write the full sentence and the annotations in their hand-written grammar notebooks, as part of our established practice for retention and clarity. Next, I ask:

What type of verb is this?

Students typically reply *type do,* based on our foundational introduction in the first lecture, where we differentiated between *type be* and *type do* verbs. I confirm their understanding and explain that *eats* is the main and only verb in the sentence. It carries the action and is conjugated according to the subject. I then draw attention to the subject *Fatima* and ask:

Which pronoun does Fatima correspond to?

They reply *she*, and I point to the pronoun *she* on the board.

This allows me to introduce the use of auxiliary verbs in questions. I explain the subject–auxiliary verb agreement in the simple present tense as follows:

Subject/Pronoun	Auxiliary Verb
she/he/it	does
they/we/you/I	do

For the sentence that is already introduced *Ftima eats apples,* I explicitly write the word *does* above the verb *eats* (alongside the *crown* and the *V*) and explain:
When the subject is (he, she, or it) or any noun equivalent (like Fatima) and the verb is type (do) in the simple present, we write (does) above the main verb.
When the subject is (you, we, they, or I), or (any noun equivalent), and the verb is type (do) in the simple present, we write (do) above the main verb.
I ask students to copy this rule clearly in their notes. This explanation also reinforces a central pedagogical element in my method: Transforming affirmative sentences into questions is a key learning strategy. It trains students to recognise auxiliary verb use, subject–verb agreement, and verb types logically and contextually — rather than through rote memorisation. The structure of English grammar begins to make sense through these applied examples, which helps learners build long-term grammatical awareness.

Forming Yes/No Questions with (Type Do) in the Simple Present
Once the students understand which auxiliary verb to use based on the subject pronoun (do vs. does), I proceed to demonstrate how to form *yes/no questions* using *type do* verbs in the simple present. I ask the class:
Now that we've identified the verb and its type, how do we turn this affirmative sentence into a yes/no question?
Using the sentence:
Fatima eats apples.
I explain that since *Fatima* is equivalent to *she*, we must use the auxiliary *does*, and that the main verb *eats* must drop the *-s* ending in the question form. To this point, I draw students' attention to a crucial rule I always highlight:
The auxiliary (does) and the (-s) ending on the main verb never appear together in the same sentence — only one of them can stay.
This rule helps students remember that the *-s* marking present simple for third-person singular is transferred to the auxiliary verb *does*, and therefore must be removed from the main verb. I rewrite the sentence as a question on the board:
 Does Fatima eat apples?
I underline the subject and highlight that *eat* appears in its base form. At this point, I explicitly clarify a structural distinction:
We do not use the x-shape method when forming yes/no questions with (type do) verbs.This visual strategy is exclusive to type be verbs in the simple present (and also applies similarly to the simple past tense with be).
This distinction helps prevent confusion and reinforces the idea that question formation rules vary depending on the verb type. Next, I ask students to answer the question both affirmatively and negatively:
 Yes, she does.
 No, she doesn't.
I use this moment to reinforce the logic of the transformation:
The auxiliary does replaces the present simple *-s* in the main verb.
In negative answers, we contract *does + not* into *doesn't.*
The subject *Fatima* maps to *she*, and this guides the selection of the correct auxiliary.
I also remind them to write the full transformation process in their grammar notebooks, as it will serve as an essential reference for future tenses.

Applying the Same Steps Using (Do) with Plural Subjects in the Simple Present
To reinforce the application of present simple *type do* verbs with plural subjects, I proceed with a new example:
My friends play football.
Following the exact same analytical steps as with the previous example (*Fatima eats apples*), I guide students through identifying the verb and auxiliary requirements, but this time I focus on a key grammatical distinction:
I ask: Where is the verb? → play
How many verbs are in the sentence? → One
What tense is the verb? → Simple Present
What type is the verb? → Type do

Once the verb is identified and annotated (crown symbol, *V*, underline), I draw attention to the subject *My friends*, and ask students:

Which pronoun (does) my friends correspond to? They respond: *they.*

I then refer back to the pronoun chart on the board, pointing to *they*, and remind them that *they* takes the auxiliary *do*, not *does*. This explains why the main verb *play* appears without an *-s* ending in the original sentence. I highlight that:

Because do does not carry an -s, the main verb in these constructions also stays in its base form.

At this point, I pause to reiterate an important pedagogical point I emphasised in the very first lesson: Understanding subject–verb agreement and knowing which nouns correspond to which pronouns is essential for choosing the correct auxiliary verb. This moment serves as both reinforcement and retrieval practice for foundational knowledge.

Next, I invite students to form *a yes/no question* based on this sentence — giving them space to think and apply the previous logic independently:

 Do my friends play football?

Once the question is successfully formed, I prompt them to respond both affirmatively and negatively using the short answer format:

 Yes, they do.

 No, they don't.

We review why *do* is used (based on the subject *my friends = they*), and how this determines the absence of *-s* in both the auxiliary and the main verb.

All annotations are again transcribed by students into their handwritten notebooks, maintaining consistency in structure and ensuring long-term retention.

Applying the Same Steps Using WH-Questions with (Type Do) Verbs in the Simple Present

After ensuring students have understood how to transform affirmative sentences with *type do* verbs into *yes/no questions*, I proceed to introduce the next step: forming *WH-questions* in the simple present tense with *type do* verbs.

To maintain continuity and build on their prior knowledge, I write a simple affirmative sentence on the board:

Fatima eats apples. (What)

As with previous examples involving type be verbs, I begin by asking the class:

Can anyone try to form a WH-question using 'what' based on this sentence?

If a student volunteers, I write their response on the board and evaluate it collectively with the class. If the structure is incorrect or no one attempts, I revisit the structured questioning approach:

Where is the verb? → eats

How many verbs are there? → One

What tense is the verb? → Simple Present

What type is the verb? → Type do

What is the subject? → Fatima

What does Fatima equal? → She

    1. *Which auxiliary verb does she take?* → *does*

I underline the main verb *eats*, draw the crown and the letter *V* above it, and ask students to note the rule again:

The (-s) ending of the main verb is dropped in questions because the auxiliary (does) already carries the tense marker.

At this point, I remind students of a key rule I highlight verbally and write on the board:

(-s) and (does) never appear together in the same sentence — only one can stay.

We then formulate the question:

 What does Fatima eat?

Here, I pause to explain the structure:

The *Wh-word* (what) comes first.

It is followed by the correct auxiliary (does) for the subject (Fatima / she).

Then comes the base form of the main verb (eat).

The subject (Fatima) remains in the question, as we are not asking about her — we are asking about the object (apples), which is removed from the question.

I circle *apples* in the original sentence and remind students of this consistent rule:

The part we are asking about should be excluded from the question.

I explicitly state that:

The x-shape method used in *yes/no questions* with *type be* is not applicable here.

The structure of *WH-questions* with type do verbs relies on:

 [Wh-word] + do/does + subject + base verb

Each time, I guide students through identifying:

The verb and its type
The subject and its pronoun equivalent
The correct auxiliary *do* or *does*
The element being questioned (which we circle and exclude from the question)
The correct question form
Through this repetition, students internalise the grammatical structure and develop a practical understanding of *WH-question* formation with *type do* verbs in the simple present tense.

Applying the Same Steps Using (Where) with Type Do Verbs in the Simple Present
To reinforce students' command of *WH-question* formation using *type do* verbs, I provide a new example involving a different *Wh-word*. This time, we focus on *where*, which asks about location. I write the following affirmative sentence on the board:
My friends play football in the park. (Where)
I ask the students:
Can anyone try to form a WH-question using (where) based on this sentence?
If a student volunteers an answer, I transcribe it on the board and evaluate it with the class. If no answer is offered or the structure is incorrect, I guide them through the same set of scaffolded questions:
Where is the verb? → play
How many verbs are there? → One
What tense is the verb? → Simple Present
What type is it? → Type do
What is the subject? → My friends
What does (my friends) correspond to? → they
Which auxiliary does (they) take? → do
I underline play, draw a crown and the letter V above it, and emphasise that do is used here, not does, because the subject is plural. We then identify the part being questioned — the location *in the park.* I circle it and remind students:
The part we are asking about must be removed from the question.
We then formulate the question:
 Where do my friends play football?
Key points I highlight:
The Wh-word *where* comes first.
It is followed by the auxiliary *do* because the subject is plural.
The base verb *play* follows the subject.
  • The element being questioned *in the park* is excluded from the question form.
I remind students that *the x-shape* method does not apply to *WH-questions* with *type do* verbs. Instead, they follow a consistent structure:
Wh-word + do/does + subject + base verb (+ complement if needed)
Students are asked to:
Circle the questioned element in the original sentence.
Copy the final question structure into their notebooks with all markings.
Practise forming similar questions using different Wh-words and subjects.
This example adds another layer to students' grammatical awareness by demonstrating how *Wh-words* relate to various sentence components and how different auxiliaries affect the question structure.

Applying the Same Steps Using (When) with Type Do Verbs in the Simple Present
To continue strengthening students' skills in forming *WH-questions* with *type do* verbs, I present an example with the *Wh-word why*, which introduces questions related to reasons or causes.
On the board, I write:
Ali drinks coffee every morning. (When)
I ask:
Can anyone try to form a question using 'when' based on this sentence?
If a student attempts a response, I write their version on the board and we assess it together. Otherwise, I guide them through the same logical analysis:
Where is the verb? → drinks
How many verbs are there? → One
What tense is the verb? → Simple Present
What type is the verb? → Type do
Who is the subject? → Ali
What pronoun replaces Ali? → he

Which auxiliary do we use with (he)? → does
I underline *drinks*, draw a crown above it, and write V. Then, I explain:
Since we're asking about time, we remove the part of the sentence that gives that time (every morning) and we start the question with when. When does Ali drink coffee?
I highlight:
The Wh-word *when* is placed first.
The auxiliary *does* follows because the subject is third person singular *he*.
The main verb returns to its base form *drink*, with no *-s*.
The subject *Ali* remains because he is not the focus of the question.

- The time phrase *every morning* is removed because it answers the *when*.

As always, I remind them:
The *x-shape* technique is not used for *WH-questions* with *type do* verbs.

- The questioned element should be circled in the original sentence to help visualise what is being asked about.
- *Does* and *-s* never appear together.

This example helps students see how the *Wh-word* shifts the function of the question while the grammatical structure remains consistent:
WH + do/does + subject + base verb
We repeat this process with multiple examples and gradually more complex sentences throughout the session, using different subjects and Wh-words, such as:
Me and my sister visit our granny on Fridays. (Who) → Who do we visit on Fridays?
My friends like tomato sauce pizza. (Which) → Which kind of pizza do they like?
The cat drinks 2 litres of milk every day. (How) → How much milk does the cat drink every day?
Through repeated use of this process, students gain mastery of both syntax and the communicative function of different Wh-words within the context of type do verbs in the simple present.
 As the target audience of this study is expected to be familiar with basic English grammar, further illustrative examples have been omitted for conciseness; accordingly, the step-by-step procedures for the remaining tenses have not been included.

3.6 Data Collection Tools
The full versions of the pre-test and post-test are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. These instruments were designed to evaluate students' mastery of tense-related skills before and after the instructional intervention. Additionally, qualitative insights from learners were gathered through open-ended written reflections, which are included in Appendix C and are further discussed below.
a. Pre- and Post-Test Performance
Students completed a pre-test before the instructional intervention to assess their baseline knowledge of verbs, verb types, and tense usage. The pre-test comprised 20 items, each worth one point, and targeted students' understanding of verb types, sentence structure, and question formation.
 After the instructional period, a post-test was administered, containing similar tasks to measure progress in grammatical accuracy and verb identification. While the tests did not share identical wording, they were carefully balanced in difficulty and structure to ensure a fair comparison (Brown, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007)
b. Learner Reflections
At the end of the intervention, students were invited to write brief feedback on their learning experience. Many highlighted the helpfulness of visual cues (e.g., the crown symbol, the letter "V"), the magnifying-glass hand gesture, and the classification of verbs into "be" and "do" types. Learners expressed increased confidence in identifying verbs and constructing grammatically accurate sentences. These reflections, compiled in Appendix C, offer supplementary insight into learner engagement and perceptions of the method's clarity and effectiveness.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures
Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to examine overall performance trends. To determine the statistical significance of changes in students' grammatical accuracy following the intervention, a paired-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS version 28.
In addition to quantitative findings, qualitative data from students' written reflections were reviewed to identify recurring themes and representative comments. Although a full thematic coding procedure was not employed, the responses were used to triangulate the test results and to offer insight into learners' perceptions of the instructional approach. While the study did not include a control group, the within-group comparison provided an adequate basis for evaluating the preliminary effectiveness of the intervention
To ensure replicability, the methodological steps have been described in sufficient detail so that other researchers can follow the same procedures. The inclusion of illustrative classroom moments, explicit teacher strategies, and

examples of student responses was intended to provide a clear account of the instructional process, making it possible for similar studies to be conducted in comparable contexts.

3.8 Limitations

Despite the care taken in designing the methodology, several limitations need to be acknowledged. To start with, the study did not include a control group, which naturally limits how far the results can be generalised; without a comparative condition, it is difficult to determine whether the observed gains would hold against another teaching method. In addition, the work was carried out with a single group of Libyan EFL learners, most of whom were female (17 females and only 3 males). This imbalance may have subtly shaped classroom interaction patterns and could influence the extent to which the findings can be applied to more diverse learner populations.

The size of the class also meant that individual learners may not have received the same level of focused attention throughout, and the approach itself relied heavily on teacher-led explanations and students' handwritten note-taking. These features, while central to the spirit of the method, may have made the results sensitive to classroom dynamics and learners' personal learning preferences. Finally, although students' reflections provided helpful insights, the qualitative component was not analysed systematically, which naturally limits the depth of interpretation that could be drawn.

Even with these constraints, the limitations offer useful starting points for future research, particularly studies that test the approach across different groups, balance gender representation, or incorporate richer qualitative data to capture learners' experiences more fully.

### 4. Findings and Discussion
4.1 Quantitative Findings

For full versions of the pre- and post-tests used in this analysis, see Appendices A and B.

4.1.1 T-test Findings

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare students' pre-test and post-test scores. Results showed a statistically significant improvement following the intervention, $t(19) = 7.93$, $p < .001$. The mean score increased from 5.73 (SD = 4.06) on the pre-test to 14.38 (SD = 2.41) on the post-test, indicating a substantial enhancement in students' grammatical accuracy after applying the verb-type based instructional approach.

4.1.2 Visual Representation of the Findings

The following figures illustrate the distribution of scores before and after the intervention.
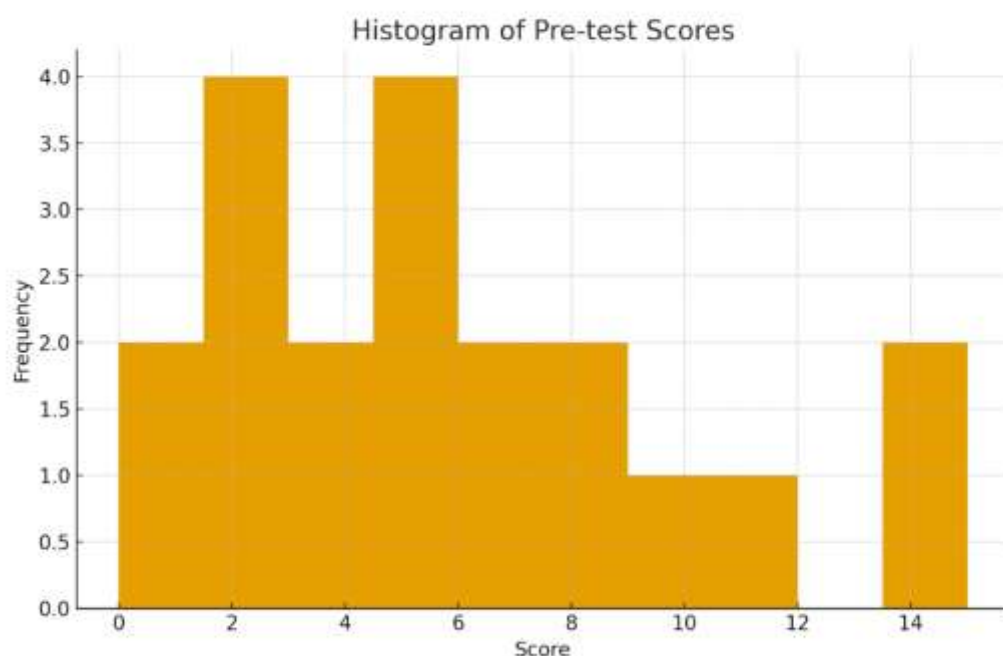
**Figure 1**. Distribution of Students' Pre-test Scores

Figure 1 presents the distribution of students' pre-test scores prior to the intervention. The histogram reveals a wide spread of results and predominantly low achievement levels. From my observation as the instructor, this pattern aligns closely with the difficulties students demonstrated in class, particularly in identifying verb types and forming basic grammatical structures. The variability in scores suggests that learners entered the study with

uneven foundational knowledge, which made the need for a structured, verb-focused instructional approach especially evident.
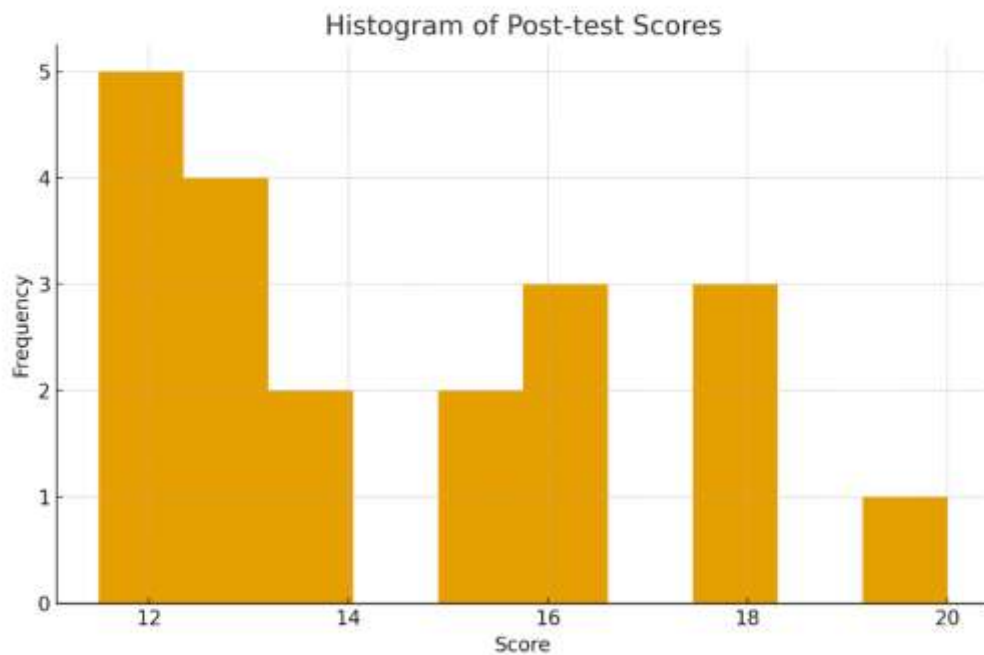
Figure 2. Distribution of Students' Post-test Scores

Figure 2 presents the distribution of students' post-test scores following the intervention. The histogram shows a noticeable shift toward higher achievement, accompanied by a noticeably narrower spread of scores. This pattern reflects what I observed in the classroom: students became more confident in locating the verb, identifying its type, and constructing accurate sentences. The clustering of scores at the upper end suggests that the verb-type based instruction did not only raise overall performance but also helped students reach a more uniform level of understanding, reducing the wide gaps that were evident before the intervention.
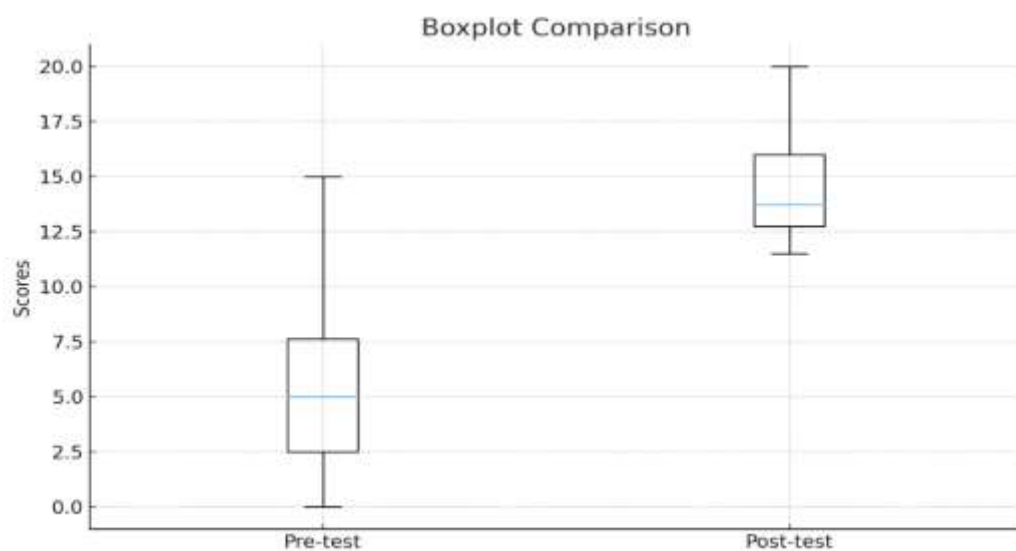
Figure 3. Boxplot of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Figure 3 presents a comparative boxplot of the pre-test and post-test scores, illustrating a clear upward shift in students' overall performance after the intervention. The rise in the median score is particularly evident, reflecting the noticeable improvement I observed in class when students began identifying verb types more confidently and

applying them correctly in sentences. Additionally, the narrower spread of post-test scores suggests that students reached a more comparable level of mastery, with fewer extreme low performers than before. This reduction in variability aligns with my classroom impression that the verb-type based approach helped pull up struggling learners while simultaneously consolidating the progress of stronger ones, leading to a more consistent level of grammatical accuracy across the class.

Table 1. Paired-Sample Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Results

Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Pair
0.91	4.06	20	5.73	Pre-test
0.54	2.41	20	14.38	Post-test

Table 2. Results of the Paired-Samples t-Test Comparing Pre-test and Post-test Scores.

Sig. (2-tailed)	df	t	Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	Pair
000.	19	7.93	1.09	3.06	8.65	Post-test__Pre-test

4.1.3 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents the paired samples statistics for students' pre-test and post-test scores. A total of 20 students participated in the study and completed both the pre-test and post-test measures. Descriptive statistics indicate a clear improvement in performance following the intervention. Prior to instruction, students' scores were relatively low and showed substantial variability, with a mean of 5.73 and a standard deviation of 4.06 on the pre-test. After receiving the verb-type based instruction, their performance increased noticeably, reaching a mean of 14.38 with a standard deviation of 2.41.

Overall, the descriptive data suggest not only an increase in average performance but also a reduction in score dispersion, indicating that more students reached a consistently higher level of grammatical accuracy after the instructional method was implemented.

4.1.4 Discussing the Paired t-test

The paired-samples t-test provides strong statistical evidence that students benefited meaningfully from the verb-type based instructional approach. The difference between the two testing phases was not only statistically significant—t(19) = 7.93, p < .001—but also substantial in practical terms. Students moved from an average pre-test score of 5.73 (SD = 4.06), which reflected both low performance and considerable inconsistency, to a noticeably higher and much more stable post-test mean of 14.38 (SD = 2.41).

From an instructional perspective, this shift suggests that many of the difficulties students initially experienced were rooted in issues of clarity, particularly in recognising the role of the verb and distinguishing between *type be* and *type do*. Once these concepts were made explicit, visually anchored (e.g., the crown and the *V*), and repeatedly explored through questioning techniques, students appeared to engage with grammatical structures more confidently. The tighter clustering of the post-test scores shows an encouraging pattern: students who had struggled earlier were no longer falling behind. Many of them seemed to steady themselves once the method reduced the mental effort usually involved in identifying tenses, which helped them approach the tasks with clearer understanding and more confidence.

Although these findings align with what might be expected from an approach that emphasises explicit categorisation and visual scaffolding, the magnitude of the improvement was somewhat higher than anticipated. This may be due to the simplicity and consistency of the framework presented during instruction, which gave learners a stable reference point whenever they encountered new sentences. In short, the t-test confirms the effectiveness of the method, but the patterns within the scores tell an even richer story—one of clearer understanding, more confident decision-making, and a noticeable levelling of performance across the class.

Taken together, these patterns provide a clear response to the research question. The improvement observed across the post-test, along with the narrowing of score variation, indicates that a verb-type-based approach can meaningfully support Libyan EFL learners in understanding and using English tenses more accurately. The data suggest not only higher performance overall, but a more stable grasp of tense formation, particularly among students who initially struggled.

4.1.5 Discussion with Literature

The results of this study align with a growing body of research highlighting the role of clarity, cognitive reduction, and visual scaffolding in supporting grammar learning. The significant improvement in students' post-test scores echoes findings from Widodo (2006), Arkoudis (2005), and others who argue that explicit, visually supported instruction can help learners navigate complex grammatical structures with greater ease. What stands out in my data, however, is the extent to which the verb-focused approach appeared to stabilise students' performance. This was not merely an improvement in mean scores; it was a visible narrowing of the achievement gap, something I did not fully anticipate at the start (Hattie, 2009; Clark & Mayer, 2016).

Previous studies – particularly those grounded in form-focused instruction—emphasise that learners benefit when key grammatical elements are highlighted or isolated (Belkacem, 2015; Nazari, 2013; Loewen, 2020). The current findings add a small but meaningful extension to this discussion. By giving the verb a visual and conceptual *centre stage*, the method seemed to remove much of the ambiguity students typically face when trying to match tenses with meaning. Several scholars have discussed the value of reducing cognitive load in grammar tasks (e.g., Sweller), and the pattern in my results suggests that this reduction may have played a practical role here. Students were no longer struggling with multiple competing cues, instead, they had one clear and stable point to start from. At the same time, the noticeable levelling of scores resonates with findings from kinaesthetic and visual learning research (Asher, 1977), which show that when grammatical concepts are embodied or illustrated, struggling learners often catch up more quickly. My observations during lessons also support this: students who initially hesitated to identify or manipulate verb forms became more willing to attempt answers once the visual markers were introduced. This behavioural shift adds a human dimension to the numerical trends; it was not just about higher scores but about increased willingness to engage.

In short, the results reinforce the broader argument in the literature that explicit, well-structured grammar instruction can be effective. Yet they also point to something slightly different: when instruction is anchored around the verb itself—as both the conceptual and visual core—learners may find the entire tense system less intimidating. This is a nuance the literature hints at, but my data provide a clearer classroom-level illustration of how it can unfold in practice.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

In addition to the quantitative results, qualitative insights were drawn from students' responses to open-ended feedback questions administered at the end of the intervention. While a full thematic analysis was not conducted, the responses were systematically reviewed to identify general patterns and representative perspectives.

Students commonly expressed that the verb-focused approach clarified the structure of English tenses and helped them differentiate between types of verbs (e.g., *be* vs *do*). Several learners noted that visual and symbolic elements—such as marking the verb with a crown or using hand signals—supported memory and made the grammar more accessible. Others highlighted the value of handwriting and step-by-step sentence construction in reinforcing understanding.

Illustrative excerpts from student comments are included in Appendix C, demonstrating recurring reflections on improved clarity, confidence, and structural awareness.

4.2.1 Overview of student feedback

Many students reported that the method clarified the basic structure of English sentences and made it easier to distinguish between *be*-verbs and *do*-verbs. A large number of learners also highlighted the value of the visual and symbolic cues—such as placing a crown above the verb—which they felt improved recall and made tense identification more intuitive. Additionally, several students expressed that rewriting sentences by hand and following the step-by-step breakdown helped them retain the rules more effectively.

A recurring theme in the feedback was that focusing on the verb allowed students to understand the differences between tenses not only structurally but also in terms of their communicative functions. This contrasted sharply with their earlier experiences in preparatory and secondary school, where tense instruction was described as fragmented and sometimes confusing due to the heavy dependence on the textbook and the lack of a clear organising principle.

Some students also noted an unexpected benefit: the approach helped them read English texts more confidently in their reading course, as they were better able to recognise tense–meaning relationships in context. Others mentioned that writing became less intimidating, as identifying the verb first made it easier to construct sentences accurately. A few learners emphasised the importance of handwriting specifically, stating that it reinforced their understanding far more effectively than copying from slides. Several students further pointed to the usefulness of writing pronouns on the margin of the board, noting that this simple step strengthened their ability to distinguish between pronouns, verbs, and other sentence elements.

Only a small number of students mentioned initial difficulty, particularly when converting affirmative sentences into questions as the tense lessons became more advanced. They explained that this step required extra focus at first, but they also noted that it ultimately helped them understand the structure of each tense more clearly

4.2.2 Representative comments

Below are selected excerpts from students' written feedback and were chosen because they reflect patterns that appeared consistently across the responses. All excerpts are translated from students' original Arabic responses.

"This was the first time I encountered such a method, and it helped me so much that even the writing module became clearer to me. Since writing requires producing correct sentences, I now feel more in control of this. It felt as if I were studying tenses for the first time."

This comment reflects a recurring theme in which students linked the approach to improved clarity in both grammar and academic writing.

"I realised that many of my misunderstandings about English tenses came from the way they were taught to us in school. They were presented in a fragmented and confusing order, but this method finally made the sequence logical for me."

Similar remarks appeared across responses, showing that the structured, verb-based progression corrected long-standing misconceptions shaped by earlier schooling.

"When you placed the crown and underline on the verb and showed us how to 'search' for it step by step, everything in the sentence suddenly became clearer. This approach helped me enormously, and I am truly glad I learned it at this stage, at the very beginning of my translation journey."

Many students expressed comparable appreciation for the visual and step-by-step clarity provided by the method, particularly those in the early stages of their academic programmes.

"For the first time I understood why the verb is the most important part of the sentence. The crown symbol helped me remember it quickly."

This comment represents many students who emphasised how the visual cues strengthened their understanding.

"I used to confuse 'do' and 'be', but the way you explained the two types made it very clear for me."

A common theme was improved ability to differentiate between verb types.

"Writing every step by hand made the rules stay in my mind longer. When I write it myself, I understand it better."

Several students highlighted handwriting as a key support for retention.

"The method made me more confident to answer questions. I was not afraid to make mistakes because I knew where to start—the verb."

This reflects the increased confidence that appeared across many responses.

"The hand movements helped me remember how to check the verb first."

A representative example of comments appreciating the kinaesthetic elements of the approach.

4.2.3 References to Appendices A, B, and C

The test items were carefully designed to assess three key grammatical skills: (1) tense awareness, which refers to the learners' ability to identify and apply appropriate verb tenses in context; (2) verb type recognition, specifically distinguishing between *be* and *do* verb structures in various sentence forms; and (3) sentence transformation, which involves converting affirmative sentences into negative or interrogative forms, and vice versa. These areas directly align with the instructional approach adopted in this study, which foregrounds the verb as the organising principle of tense understanding. The test aimed not only to measure correctness but also to detect whether learners internalised the conceptual distinctions introduced during instruction. Full versions of the pre-test and post-test are provided in Appendices A and B.

Additionally, Appendix C includes the feedback questions used to gather students' qualitative reflections on the instructional approach.

5. Implications

The findings of this study suggest that adopting a verb-type-based instructional approach may significantly improve students' understanding and use of English tenses in EFL contexts. By simplifying the process of tense recognition and sentence construction through visual symbols, kinaesthetic cues, and consistent grammatical classification, learners were better able to internalise tense patterns and apply them accurately. This approach is particularly relevant in contexts like Libya, where large class sizes and limited instructional time often constrain the depth of grammar instruction and make it difficult for learners to develop stable grammatical concepts.

Importantly, most previous studies on English tense acquisition have focused on broader issues such as explicit instruction, corrective feedback, form–meaning mapping, or consciousness-raising tasks; nevertheless, they have rarely addressed the verb itself as the central organising element of tense و especially within the Libyan context. By foregrounding the verb as the grammatical anchor that determines tense, this study offers a perspective that fills a noticeable gap in the existing literature.

Teachers operating in similar EFL environments may therefore benefit from implementing structured and repetitive visual–symbolic methods to support tense acquisition. The approach also encourages active learner engagement, particularly through the use of physical gestures and personalised grammar notebooks, which appeared to enhance memorability and reduce cognitive load. For teacher training programmes, the study highlights the value of equipping pre-service teachers with multimodal instructional strategies grounded in

cognitive and constructivist principles. Curriculum designers may also consider integrating verb-type classification and visual scaffolding into grammar materials to enhance clarity and accessibility for learners at different proficiency levels.

Moreover, the positive learner reflections suggest that such methods not only support grammatical accuracy but also strengthen learner confidence and motivation—affirming the importance of embedding grammar instruction within meaningful and memorable classroom experiences. Future research may explore the scalability of this approach across different levels and in larger learner populations.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether a verb-type based instructional approach could enhance Libyan EFL learners' understanding and use of English tenses. The findings provide clear evidence that re-centring grammar instruction around the verb—supported by visual cues, symbolic markings, and consistent categorisation substantially enables learners to navigate tense structures with noticeable accuracy and confidence. Students not only improved significantly in their post-test scores, but their performance also became more stable, suggesting a deeper and more durable understanding of tense formation.

The value of this approach lies in its simplicity and pedagogical clarity. By treating the verb as the grammatical anchor of the sentence, the method reduces the cognitive load that learners usually expend when trying to recognise tense, form questions, or produce accurate sentences. This proved especially beneficial for students who had previously struggled with tense identification despite years of formal instruction.

In line with broader work on explicit instruction and visual scaffolding, this study reinforces the idea that learners benefit when core grammatical elements are highlighted in direct and memorable ways. Yet, unlike most previous research which has typically focused on issues such as form–meaning mapping, consciousness-raising tasks, or corrective feedback—this study foregrounds the verb itself as the starting point of tense comprehension, an aspect rarely explored in Libyan EFL contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that a verb-type based model can serve as a practical and effective strategy for EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts with large class sizes, limited instructional time, or persistent learner difficulties with tense recognition. While the results are promising, future studies may extend this work by testing the approach across different proficiency levels, using larger samples, or examining its long-term impact on students' writing development.

Compliance with ethical standards
Disclosure of conflict of interest
The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A

Pre-Test: Understanding and Using English Tenses

This pre-test assesses students' awareness and usage of different English tenses in context. It consists of one reading passage followed by 20 questions. The total number of items is 20, and each question is worth 1 mark, making the total score /20.

Reading Passage: Sara's Week

Sara is a university student. She studies English and wants to become a translator. Every day, she wakes up early and takes the bus to class. This week, she has been working hard on her grammar assignments because she has just received feedback on her first essay. She was writing it last weekend when her internet connection failed, so she had to rewrite the whole thing.

Last semester, Sara wasn't confident about tenses. She had learned them before, but she hadn't practised them enough. So this semester, she decided to focus. Since then, her writing has improved a lot.

Right now, she is preparing for her midterm exams. She is studying with her classmates in the library. They have been reviewing the difference between verb types, and they are planning to practise question formation next.

Next week, she will take her midterm test. By the time she finishes it, she will have completed all the tenses in her course. She is going to revise again the night before. At 8 p.m. tomorrow, she will be checking her notes one last time.

Read the text answer the following questions:

A. Tense Awareness

Read the text again. Then, find and write down one sentence from the passage that matches each of the following tenses:

1. Present perfect continuous → _____
2. Future continuous → _____
3. Past perfect → _____
4. Present simple → _____
5. Past simple → _____
6. Present perfect → _____
7. Past continuous → _____
8. Future simple → _____

B. Verb Type Recognition

From the text, find and write down:

1. A sentence that contains a Type Be verb
2. A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the base form
3. A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the past form
4. A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the past participle form

C. Sentence Transformation

Turn into Yes/No questions

1. She wakes up early and takes the bus to class.
2. They are planning to practise question formation.
3. She had learned them before.
4. she will have completed all the tenses in her course.

Turn into WH-questions

1. Sara is studying with her classmates. (who)
  → _____
2. She will take her midterm test next week. (when)
  → _____
3. She will be checking her notes one last time. (what)
  → _____
4. She has been working hard on her grammar assignments. (Why)
  → _____

Appendix B

Post-Test: Understanding and Using English Tenses

This post-test follows the same structure and purpose as the pre-test. It contains one reading passage followed by 20 questions targeting awareness and usage of past, present, and future tenses. The total score is /20.

Reading Passage: Anna's Semester

Anna is an English major in her final year. She usually attends her lectures regularly and takes notes carefully. This month, she has been spending extra hours in the writing lab because she recently got feedback on her research paper. She was editing it all night when her laptop crashed, so she lost her progress.

In previous semesters, Anna had struggled with grammar rules. She had studied tenses before, but she didn't fully understand how to use them in writing. This term, she made a plan to review everything. Since then, she has gained more confidence and her professors have noticed the improvement.

At the moment, Anna is meeting her tutor to discuss her next assignment. They are working on analysing verb forms in academic writing. They have been focusing on the use of auxiliaries in complex sentences.

Next Monday, Anna will present her final project. By the time she submits it, she will have completed all her coursework. She is going to do a final revision on Sunday. At 7 p.m. that day, she will be checking her reference list.

A. Verb Type Recognition

From the text, find and write down:

A sentence that contains a Type Be verb

→ _____

A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the base form

→ _____

A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the past form

→ _____

A sentence that contains a Type Do verb in the past participle form

→ _____

B. Tense Awareness

Read the text again. Then, find and write down one sentence from the passage that matches each of the following tenses:

1. Present perfect continuous → _____—

2. Future continuous → _____

3. Past perfect → _____

4. Present simple → _____

5. Past simple → _____

6. Present perfect → _____

7. Past continuous → _____

8. Future simple → _____

C. Sentence Transformation

Turn into Yes/No questions

1. She usually attends her lectures regularly.

→ _____

2. They are working on analysing verb forms.

→ _____

3. She had studied tenses before.

→ _____

4. Anna had struggled with grammar rules

→ _____

Turn into WH-questions

1. Anna is meeting her tutor. (who)

→ _____

2. Anna will present her project on Monday. (when)

→ _____

3. She will be checking her reference list. (what)

→ _____

4. She has been spending extra hours in the writing lab. (Why)

→ _____

Appendix C

Sample Open-Ended Questions for Student Feedback

The following open-ended questions were used to collect qualitative data on students' perceptions of the teaching approach. The questions aimed to explore their understanding of English tenses, the effectiveness of the strategies used, and the impact of the approach on their learning experience:

How would you describe your understanding of English tenses before and after this course?

What specific aspects of the lessons helped you the most in understanding verb tenses?

Did the focus on the verb as the "core of the sentence" help you think differently about grammar? How?

Can you recall a moment in class when you suddenly understood something that used to confuse you? Please describe it.

How did the visual symbols (such as the verb crown or the letter V above the verb) help you understand the function of verbs in sentences?

Was the practice of turning affirmative sentences into questions useful for you? Why or why not?

Do you feel more confident now when writing in English, especially in using correct tenses? Explain.

What was the most challenging part of learning tenses for you? How did you overcome it?

If you could suggest one improvement to the teaching method, what would it be?

These questions were designed to elicit reflective and descriptive responses from students, enabling the researcher to gather in-depth insights into the effectiveness and impact of the verb-type based approach.