

Examining Iranian EFL Students' Correct Use of Tense: Connecting the Past to the Present

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ABSTRACT

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This study aimed to examine the ability of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to accurately recognize and use past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. A mixed-method approach was employed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The study involved 65 EFL students majoring in English language at a university in Iran, all of whom had previously taken grammar courses. The findings revealed that most students struggled to distinguish between the past tense and the present perfect or present perfect progressive tenses. In both the production and recognition tests, there were frequent instances of the past tense being incorrectly used instead of the present perfect. The analysis also highlighted errors stemming from mismatches in tense usage, particularly in reflecting the relationship between event time and speech time. Students often failed to accurately translate events that began in the past but continued to affect the present. These difficulties can be attributed to differences between the tense systems of English and Persian. Persian lacks the ability to express the continuum of time, especially the relationship between speech time and reference points that are inherent in English non-past perfect verb forms. Furthermore, students' reliance on their native language in the early stages of language acquisition led to erroneous tense transfers from Persian to English. The findings contribute to EFL programs by emphasizing the importance of addressing tense-related challenges and incorporating a deeper understanding of the differences between English and Persian tense structures.

Keywords: *Iranian EFL students; past tense; present perfect tense; present perfect progressive; tense recognition.*

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding and mastering tense is a crucial phase in the process of teaching and learning English verbs. It is also well acknowledged that the acquisition and mastery of English present perfect pose significant challenges for second or foreign language students, particularly due to grammatical construction (Wijaya & Hidarto, 2018). According to Kearns (2011), among English verb forms, present perfect is one of the most semantically complex. It and simple past tenses often compete with each other, while present perfect morphologically competes with both simple present and simple past (Schaden, 2009; Grønn & Von Stechow, 2017).

Learning the tense-aspect system of English verbs is challenging as languages often lack direct correspondence (Larsen - Freeman et al., 2002). English perfect tense presents difficulties for both elementary and advanced students (Çakır, 2011). The difficulties with English present perfect lie in the tense patterns and meanings. Tense is a verb form that shows the time of an action, event, or state through a change in the verb's form and/or the use of an auxiliary verb such as *be*, *have*, or *do* (Kwan & Wong, 2016; Yoshimura et al., 2014). Furthermore, Huddleston (1984) explained that "aspect" relates to how the speaker views a situation, such as completed, ongoing, or planned.

Previous research had focused on the cross-linguistic variation of present perfect (Schaden, 2009). Harmer (2001) proposed that adopting a comparative

method is an effective strategy for learning foreign language. The absence of temporal adverbs makes present perfect and simple past tenses sound the same (Bussman, 1996). Sholeha et al. (2020) and (Hazzaa, 2021), the absence of present perfect in languages, such as Arabic, complicates its acquisition for foreign language students.

Research across various countries has highlighted common challenges that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face in using English tenses, often attributed to interference from their native languages and ineffective teaching methods. Indonesian students face challenges in mastering English tenses, particularly the present perfect and simple past, due to interference from their native language (L1). Research has consistently shown that L1 interference contributes to difficulties in differentiating between these tenses, as well as confusion with time expressions. Studies conducted at various educational levels in Indonesia (Dini et al., 2021; Rizka, 2017; Maisari, 2011), including at Universitas Muhammadiyah Palu and Junior High School Puspita Bangsa Ciputa, highlight these issues, with students often making errors in recognizing the correct tense based on the context. In some cases, such as among Indonesian students in a Language Education Program, difficulties extend to other tenses like past perfect and future perfect continuous, attributed to insufficient practice and L1 influence.

Similarly, studies involving EFL students in other countries, such as Albania and Arab regions, show that L1 interference

remains a common issue in mastering English tenses (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020). For instance, Albanian students experienced challenges due to a lack of solid grammatical rules in their native language, while Arab students struggled more with the present perfect tense (Neziri, 2017). Furthermore, research involving 216 EFL students revealed that both Arab and Indonesian students made errors due to their mother tongues' lack of equivalent structures, affecting their use of English grammatical rules (Listyani & Abdu, 2022; Setiawan, 2008). These findings underscore the pervasive influence of L1 interference in learning English tenses across diverse educational contexts.

Intermediate to advanced Chinese ESL students struggle with the present perfect and simple past tenses, as well as L2 syntactic issues due to differences between their L1 and English (Lim, 2007; Kwan & Wong, 2016). Malay students also experience errors in using the present perfect, often confusing it with other tenses (Ramli, 2020; Fatima & Hashmi, 2021). The present perfect indicates that an event occurred before the speech time, similar to the simple past. Non-native German-speaking students face challenges with the present perfect due to its semantic nuances (Fuchs et al., 2016). In a study of Spanish-speaking students in Chile, difficulties with English tenses and aspects were noted, largely due to mismatching tenses with contexts (Garrido & Rosado Romero, 2012). Turkish, which lacks a present perfect form, uses the past suffix *-DI* instead. Turkish

EFL students often use the simple past instead of the present perfect, especially without time adverbs, showing negative transfer from their L1 (Bulut, 2011). The U-perfect is used more accurately than other perfect types in Turkish interlanguage.

The acquisition of the preterit vis-à-vis present perfect is problematic for Moroccan schoolchildren learning both Catalan and Spanish languages through story-retelling and oral narrative tasks. The difference between perfective and imperfective tenses in Romance languages was the most difficult functional feature for L2 students, compared to making the right lexical or morphological choices, particularly in terms of accurate functional verb use with form preceding function (Canals, 2007). In diachronic research of the preterit/present perfect alternation, present perfect tends to subjugate to the preterit (Elsness, 2014; Hundt & Smith, 2009); Werner & Fuchs, 2017). Franco & Tagliamonte (2022), studying vernacular speech from a large archive of multiple Canadian communities with different generations, found mostly stable alternation.

Pakistani students struggled with tense application, particularly between future indefinite and simple present, due to lack of classroom interaction and mother tongue interference (Ali et al., 2021). Palestinian students found the present perfect tense challenging due to its absence in Arabic, while Lebanese and Iraqi students faced similar issues due to Arabic verb system influence (Abu Jarad, 2017;

Faeq, 2023). Iranian students also experienced difficulties, particularly with the present perfect tense, due to differences in time references between Persian and English, and the absence of certain tenses in Persian. Inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors were common across these regions, highlighting the need for improved teaching methodologies (Solati, 2021).

This current research aimed to investigate the erroneous and unconventional usages of past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses in Iranian EFL university context. This was due to the dearth of investigations on the difficulty of Iranian students in learning and using tenses, particularly those majoring in English, matriculated at college or university. Based on the literature and research reviewed, this current research was built on the assumption that the majority of EFL students could struggle to emulate native grammatical patterns. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1. Do EFL students have difficulties recognizing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses?

Q2. Do EFL students have difficulties producing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses?

METHOD

This research investigated Iranian EFL students' mastery of English past, present perfect, and present progressive tenses. To

achieve this, Iranian students were assigned completion and recognition tests. Two types of test items were designed to compare students' performances on the tenses, and the test consisted of two forms. In the production task, participants were asked to translate three events narrated in Persian into three English sentences. Subsequently, the answer sheets were checked and scored during the analysis and interpretation phase of the data. In the recognition test, participants were required to complete a multiple-choice test. The resulting scores were counted, tabulated and interpreted using quantitative and descriptive methods. The quantitative method included simple statistical tools such as percentages, while the descriptive involved simple interpretation and explanation of the computed data.

Research Design

This research used a mixed-method, incorporating quantitative (descriptive and *t*-test) and qualitative (error analysis) designs. The objective was to determine whether EFL students had difficulties recognizing and producing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. To identify the errors, elicitation and production tests were administered to both male and female undergraduate students. The descriptive design was based on an independent sample *t*-test to analyze students' performance on the two tasks. Students in two different classes were examined on two different assignments, one for the recognition test and the other for

the production test. Furthermore, dictionary use was not allowed for the in-class tasks. Participants were already taught the usage of tenses and were introduced to the verbs along with examples. The analyses were based on descriptive and inferential statistics after importing the data into SPSS 22 program. Before the hypotheses testing, demographic data, including frequency, distribution, mean scores, and standard deviations, were computed. Subsequently, inferential statistics were conducted using the *t*-test.

Participants

This research involved a total of 65 sophomore EFL students enrolled at a university in Iran. Participants were students majoring in English language who had already taken grammar courses as part of the obligatory program. Students also studied grammar during pre-university education. All participants had completed two-credit English grammar courses, including the teaching and learning of past, present perfect, present perfect progressive tenses. Moreover, a standardized Quick Oxford Placement Test (QOPT) was administered, classifying all participants as intermediate in language proficiency.

Procedure

Students were tasked with completing a recognition test and a grammar production test focusing on simple past, present perfect, and present progressive tenses, with each test paper containing three sentences. The sentences used in

constructing the test were composed based on English grammar textbook. A total of 65 university students participated in this research and were examined individually on the recognition and production tests.

Students were informed of grammar accuracy evaluation before administering the tasks. In the recognition test, a multiple-choice test was administered, with 34 students participating. The task necessitated the translation of three sentences into English, with the task sheets providing three items for each task.

A total of 31 students were given production test to assess competency in using present perfect and present perfect continuous tenses. Meanwhile, the second task was the recognition test, involving 34 participants. The scores from the tasks were analyzed for mean and standard deviations to evaluate the collected data.

Data Collection

This research used two primary tools for data collection, namely a paper-and-pen multiple-choice test and a production test. Both the multiple-choice and completion tests consisted of three items. The grammar tests were administered in a classroom setting under the supervision of the research expert, who also collected the answer sheets. To accurately gather data on students' difficulties in identifying simple past and present perfect tenses, a writing test was provided in the form of completion task, where students translated Persian sentences into English. Furthermore, data for the production test were gathered

through written responses on the answer sheets for Persian sentences written on the whiteboard. Five minutes were allocated for the production of English equivalents for the three sentences on the board.

Recognition Test

A multiple-choice format was used for the recognition test. Students were required to fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verb tense provided in the brackets. The test comprised 3 items namely, one question for present continuous, three for present perfect (PPT), and two for present perfect progressive. Meanwhile, for the completion test, participants were asked to convert three sentences written in Persian on the whiteboard into English. Adverbial clues were removed to prevent influencing the responses. Students were explained, in the mother tongue, how the event unfolded in relation to the items.

Production Task

Participants were asked to translate three sentences written on the board in the mother tongue into English using the correct tense. The test included 3 items, divided into two parts.

Data Analysis

Data analysis focused on identifying and extracting the wrong tenses EFL students selected and produced. A descriptive analysis method was used to provide detailed descriptions of wrong use of English tenses in both the multiple-choice and production tests, in the form of

frequencies and percentages. Consequently, the frequencies and percentages of the responses were computed to show students' levels of competency and proficiency for each question and item in the test.

Scoring of Tests

The answer sheets were reviewed and rated based on the erroneous tense choices made by students in the assigned tasks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This research aimed to determine whether EFL students made mistakes in recognizing and producing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. The statistical methods included both descriptive and inferential analyses. In addition, *t*-test was computed to relate responses on the recognition and production tests. The test was also used to validate the hypothesized model for identifying the difficulties faced in recognizing and producing the tenses.

All scores from the assignments were processed using SPSS software for both descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics were computed to understand scores on the recognition and production tests. In addition, error analysis showed that students made mistakes of mis-selection, addition, and omission, with frequencies confirming a prevalence of partial learning.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The biographical data regarding the distribution of subjects in the form of percentages are presented as follows.

Table 1. Overall percentage of participants

	Number	Percentage
Recognition	34	52.30
Production	31	47.69
Total	65	100.00

The Table shows a total of 34 (37.6%) and 31 (62.4%) students participated in this research.

Scoring Results

Regarding the percentages of the correct and wrong answers to the recognition test questions, detailed percentage distribution is presented as follows.

Table 2. Recognition test

	Correct Answers	Percentage
Q1	26	76.47
Q2	17	50.00
Q3	33	97.05
Total	34	74.50

The number of correct answers for recognition test included questions 3 (33 correct), 1 (26 correct), and 2 (17 correct). The highest percentage of correct answers was recorded for question 3 at 43.42%. Meanwhile, question 1 had the second-highest percentage of correct answers at 34.21%, and question 2 at 22.36%. As for the

percentages of the correct and wrong answers to the questions on the production test, detailed the percentage distribution is presented as follows.

Table 3. Production Test

	correct answers	percentage
Q1	10	32.25
Q2	14	45.16
Q3	1	3.2
Total	31	26.87

Table 3 presents the percentage of success and failure of students in the production test, as well as the percentages of correct and wrong answers for each question. The highest percentage of correct answers was for question 3 in the recognition test. The success rate for question 1 was 32.25%, while for question 2 was 45.16%. The percentage of correct answers for question 3, focusing on present perfect progressive, was 3.2%, in relation to past constructions. Meanwhile, the percentage of wrong answers for question 3 was the highest, at 91.80%.

Regarding the production task, question 3 had 14 correct answers, question 2 had 10, and question 1 had only 1. In terms of tense use, present perfect progressive, present perfect, present perfect were often replaced with the past. The similarity between present perfect and past was the most confusing aspect for students. The highest percentage of correct answers was recorded for question 3 of the production test, involving present progressive, with 56% correct answers. Meanwhile, question 2 had the second-highest percentage (40%) of correct answers, involving present perfect. Only

4% of the correct answers were for question 1, focusing on present perfect progressive.

Results of Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

The initial data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including range, mean, standard deviation, and variance. Descriptive statistics, including the number and percentage of correct answers, mean, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum values, regarding the subjects' scores on the recognition and production tests, are presented as follows.

Descriptive Statistics

The following Tables present descriptive statistics, including the mean, Std. deviation, and variance of students' scores on the recognition and production tests.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Recall	34	3.00	2.23	.88	.79
Product	31	2.00	.35	.55	.30
N (listwise)	31 Valid				

The results of the statistics showed production test had a mean of score 2.23. Meanwhile, the recognition task (2.23) had a higher mean score than the production test, confirming that students performed better. The standard deviation for the recognition test was also higher, confirming the scores as widely varied.

The recognition test had a mean value of 2.23, while the mean score for the production test was .35. A significant

variance was also recorded, confirming that students scored highest on the recognition test.

Based on the descriptive statistics, the mean value of recognition test (2.23) was significantly higher than production test (.35), confirming the better performance of students. Moreover, the recognition scores had a higher standard deviation, confirming the scores as more widely varied.

Inferential Results

This research aimed to investigate whether EFL students had difficulties recognizing and producing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. To achieve this, a *t*-test was conducted for the statistical analysis of the data. The results of the inferential analysis, applied in the form of *t*-test, are presented as follows.

Testing Out Hypothesis

Independent sample *t*-test was conducted to determine differences in the scores of students on the recognition and production tests.

Table 5. One-Sample Test

		Test Value = 0		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	t	df	Sig.	Mean	Lower	Upper
Recall	14.65	33	.00	2.23	1.92	2.54
Product	3.58	30	.00	.35	.15	
	.55					

Table 5 presents the means, standard deviations, and variance for the groups on the recognition and production tests. A

significant mean difference (.000) was observed for the scores on both tests ($t = 14.65, p < .233$). However, there was no mean difference between male and female students regarding attitudes toward teachers, efficacy, writing, meta-cognitive, and motivational strategies.

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate whether Iranian EFL students had difficulties recognizing and producing past, present perfect, and present perfect progressive tenses. Two research questions were formulated to assess the extent students had command of English in recognizing and producing these tenses. Consequently, students were examined for the correct use and substitution of present perfect and present perfect progressive with other tenses, such as past simple and present simple. The recognition and production tests were specifically conducted on a representative sample of Iranian EFL students. Moreover, the samples from students' conversion and multiple-choice tasks were analyzed for errors in using present perfect and present perfect progressive. The results showed students found it difficult to differentiate between the tenses, often struggling to produce the correct tense to reflect an event that had happened in the past and continued in the present. Literal translation, focusing on form and ignoring the tense, was also observed in the answer sheets.

The test items covering both recognition and production levels reflected students' competency in using tenses. The wrong use of simple past for present perfect and past progressive for present perfect continuous was documented. Tables 2 and 3 show the total percentages of correct responses on the recognition and production tests were 74.50% and 26.87%, respectively. This was supported by (Majeed, 2019), where Iraqi EFL students could easily recognize present perfect but struggled with using it at the production level. For these students, 4 years of studying English were not enough to gain mastery over the use of present perfect (Majeed, 2019).

Regarding the first hypothesis, the results of the independent sample *t*-test showed EFL students had difficulties recognizing English present perfect (84% non-target production), and tended to use past simple instead of present perfect. The use of simple past can be attributed to transfer from Persian, as the first language. Addressing the first research question, Iranian EFL students had difficulties recognizing past, present perfect, and present progressive tenses. Furthermore, regarding the second research question addressed, students in the recognition test showed difficulties producing these tenses. Descriptive analysis showed that Iranian EFL college students used more planning-ahead tactics but fewer peer learning tactics. Iraqi EFL students had no difficulties recognizing present perfect tense but had significant challenges at the

production level (Majeed, 2019). For question 1 of the recognition task, 8 erroneous options were observed. For question 2, where students' competency in identifying present perfect was assessed, 17 erroneous sentences were observed. Lastly, for question 3, which tested present perfect progressive, the majority of students, except 1, selected the wrong options.

Based on analysis, the first hypothesis was verified as, a significant number of Iranian EFL students at the university level have less difficulties recognizing tenses in questions three, one, and two, respectively. The test results showed 26 students (76.47%) responded wrongly to question 1, only 8 (24.53%) responded wrongly to question 2, and approximately half responded wrongly to question 2 on the recognition test. The most correct answers were given to question 3, with 33 students (97.05%) answering correctly.

Regarding the recognition test, question 1 accounted for 76.47% of correct responses, while about 24% were wrong. Based on the analysis of the questions, students in this test often struggled to analyze the tenses used due to confusion about the differences between the tenses. According to (Klein, 1992), considerable effort is needed in explaining the theoretical usage of present perfect, often replaced with other surface forms, specifically past tense.

Based on the given examples, students cannot differentiate between present perfect and past tense because both are connected to the past. This was answered

wrongly by 8 out of 34 students. The majority failed to produce a correct grammatical sentence with present perfect tense, with about 33.53% of wrong responses. Furthermore, about 50% failed to produce a grammatical sentence for question 2 of the recognition test using present perfect. Question 3 had the highest ranking, with 97.05% correct responses.

Regarding the second hypothesis, focusing on the achievement of using present perfect tense and present perfect progressive constructions, the results showed the second hypothesis was verified. The task assignment given to students showed the erroneous use of verbs. A common error was the use of present perfect in place of past tense. (Hong, 2022) found that students at Seoul National University in Korea produced the least present perfect, compared to native speakers, particularly in essay writing. Moreover, low proficiency students had a high frequency of adverbials but low diversity in usage. Regarding the lexical aspect, Korean students of English had a higher occurrence of atelic predicates in present perfect, while states were often the source of errors (Hong, 2022).

Regarding question 1 in the production test, the majority failed to achieve a successful result in answering question 3, and could not differentiate between the use of present perfect continuous and present perfect. Furthermore, students' achievement in question 3, focusing on present perfect progressive construction, tended to be low.

One out of 31 students answered “has been looking correctly in this question.” Almost were unable to differentiate between present perfect and present perfect continuous. Students selected “was looking for” to describe an action that has no connection to the present situation. The correct form of the auxiliary verb used in this sentence should be “has been looking,” as the action shows evidence of a continuous event.

In response to question 2 of the production test, when asked to reply to the event of arriving home and being questioned by mothers whether they are hungry, sentences were written in past tense instead of present perfect. This question was answered correctly by 10 out of 31 students. The majority wrote “ate” to describe an action that had just finished. The correct form of the second verb used in the sentence should be “eaten,” because the action is still ongoing. To determine the correct answer, the focus should be on the continuity of the activity and its ending, as stated in the question (they have eaten already). The error analysis showed the majority selected past tense instead of present perfect. Moreover, some confused past tense with present perfect due to misunderstanding the timeline of present perfect, starting in the past and continuing to the present. The majority selected “eaten” and “have eaten” for actions that are still ongoing. Based on the test results, 1 out of 19 students answered “eaten” and 9 out of 19 answered “have eaten”. However, the correct form of auxiliary verb should be

“have been eating” because the action is still ongoing. A total of 9 out of 19 students also answered correctly.

Regarding the use of tenses in the production test, present perfect continuous was found to be the most challenging in a real context. In contrast, the easiest tenses were simple present tense and present continuous. (Rezi & Al Hafizh, 2020) also reported that students struggled to apply grammatical formulas when writing or speaking, despite memorizing. Based on the test results, the number and percentage of correct responses for the whole test (304.15%) were higher than the wrong responses (285.85%). When speaking about past events, students did not consider the recency of the action. Therefore, several errors emerged from the responses, primarily concerning the wrong use of present perfect. Similar errors in the use of present perfect have been observed in Jordanian and Yemeni EFL students, where Arabic is the first language (Jubran & Khrais, 2023). However, in case 5, present perfect form was not required, showing a misuse of present perfect, confused with past tense.

Based on the presented percentages, most students failed to produce a correct grammatical sentence with present perfect. Only about 12% provided correct responses, while approximately 88% were wrong. This was supported by (Faeq, 2023), where present perfect tense was a greater source of errors than simple past. Question 2 had 25% correct and 75% wrong responses, while question 3 had 32% correct

and 68% wrong responses. Moreover, question 4 had 12% correct and 88% wrong responses. Question 5 had only 2% correct responses, with about 98% unable to produce a grammatically correct sentence in present perfect. The last 5 questions showed nearly the same percentages, with only about 10% responding correctly. Table 2 shows that the total percentages of correct and wrong responses were 28% and 72%, respectively. Based on these results, the first hypothesis was verified as a significant number of Iranian EFL students at the university level faced more difficulties when using present perfect tense on the production level compared to the recognition level.

The most common errors faced occurred when using present perfect and present perfect progressive. It appears that EFL students confuse past tense, with the failure to produce acceptable utterances with present perfect attributed to the over-generalization of the application of the equivalents of the form of present perfect. This shows difficulties in distinguishing between past simple and present perfect simple. Therefore, to improve understanding of tenses, particularly present perfect continuous, it is important to study and practice more intensively, with support from lecturers/teachers and peers.

Based on inferential analysis, there were significant performance errors between EFL students in the production and recognition tests regarding the use of present perfect, present progressive, and

present perfect progressive tenses. According to (Yao, 2014), the variation in the meaning construction of present perfect is influenced by the interplay of meaning, linguistic environment, and non-linguistic knowledge, alongside factors such as register, space, and time in Modern English. Clausal elements have a significant effect on register variation. Functional shifts also induce the use of simple past tense in context (Yao, 2014).

This research explored the different aspects of the meaning variation of tenses across Persian and English languages. It can be concluded that EFL students perceive past perfect and past perfect continuous as the most challenging tenses. However, more attention should be devoted to teaching the habit-leading-to-the-present (HP) function, which poses more difficulties for students, who tend not to consistently use the contingent function property until much later in their learning. To simplify the teaching of this function to advanced students, (Leech & Svartvik, 1975) emphasized understanding the different meanings attached to a verb (event or state verb). Understanding the differences between event and state verbs can help differentiate between SP and HP functions and the successful usage without confusion. HP function combines aspects of event and state uses, which are similar to the 'state' use of present perfect (SP function), a complex meaning assigned to the function (Leech & Svartvik, 1975).

The pedagogical implications of this research showed EFL students should be

taught not only the form but also the function of tenses. Based on the common errors made, language teachers were recommended to make the teaching of tense and aspect simple and easy to understand. In addition, language teachers should teach the easiest function first and the most frequently. The progression of teaching items when addressing English present perfect functions should also begin with the state-up-to-the-present function, followed by the indefinite past or resultative past function (in no particular order), and finally end with the habit-leading-to-the-present function. Generally, Iranian EFL students had difficulties with English present perfect (84% non-target production) and tended to use past simple instead of present perfect.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research investigated the extent Iranian university students majoring in English performed the recognition and production tests when using simple past, simple present, and present perfect continuous tenses. By computing independent sample *t*-test, the competency of Iranian university students of English as a foreign language when using present perfect and present perfect progressive was assessed. This research concluded with the results derived from the derivative and inferential calculations. Pedagogical applications and implications, as well as insights for the further development of foreign language programs, particularly in writing tasks,

were also provided. This was followed by the limitations and delimitations of the research, as well as recommendations and suggestions for future investigations.

A statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq 0.000$) was observed in the mean scores of students majoring in English on the recognition and production tests. Examination of the error patterns showed that students struggled to differentiate between past and present perfect forms. Ungrammatical patterns were also evident due to mismatches. In both production and recognition tests, there were instances of erroneous use of past tense for present perfect. The observation of assignments emphasized instances of wrong use of present tense. Therefore, students were found to be prone to error mapping from the source to the target language, extrapolating the grammar of the mother tongue.

Future research were recommended to explore students' proficiency levels and gender-based characteristics, such as affective and cognitive factors. It was also hypothesized that the more languages used, the more the interference. However, this current research could not provide data to support this assumption, leaving it for future investigations with appropriate research methods.

There were some limitations to be considered. For instance, the number of participants and data collected hindered the generalization of the results to other contexts. The research was limited to a few examples of EFL students' writing using

present perfect. The focus was on one tense aspect, namely present perfect, while other aspects of the language were dependent. These limitations provided opportunities for further investigations. Despite the limitations, this research laid the foundation for further investigations, using more languages and participants in a variety of contexts. Therefore, future research could involve more participants, use diverse data collection methods, and incorporate additional language aspects. This could be attributed to the need to investigate grammatical issues in “a whole portfolio of writing, including drafts, written feedback, and written reflection, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of developing student writers”.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

HA contributed to the research design, implementation, and reporting of this research. HA was responsible for conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, investigation, draft preparation, writing review, and supervision. HA wrote and reviewed the manuscript, and approved the final version. The author also

read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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