
Problems in Writing Passive Voice: A Case Study in the EFL Classes

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Abstract: This study addresses EFL students' challenges at a state university in Mataram, Indonesia, in constructing passive voices in the present and past tense. This study was focused on verb tense changes, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, and appropriate use of "by" in passive voice constructions. It also aims to explore the causes of these issues and offers insights into potential solutions. With a descriptive qualitative approach, the data were collected using a set of written grammatical tests of passive voices and open interviews. The adopted validated test was completed by thirty students as the participants of this study. The data were analyzed descriptively using an in-depth reading analysis method on the test results and participant responses. The results reveal a need for fundamental grammatical knowledge, limited exposure to passive voice, inadequate practice opportunities, and unclear explanations as contributing factors to the challenges. Language transfer from native languages and a lack of feedback compound the problem. To address these issues, the study recommends basic tense understanding, increased practice, targeted feedback, and exposure to authentic materials to enhance students' proficiency in constructing accurate passive voice sentences.

Keywords: passive voices, students' problems, simple present, simple past.

INTRODUCTION

Mastering passive voice is an essential aspect of writing in a second language. However, many students need help to use passive voice correctly in their writing. A lack of proficiency in passive voice can lead to confusion and unclear meaning, making it difficult for readers to understand the message the writer is trying to convey. Moreover, students who struggle with passive voice may need help to produce sophisticated writing, which can affect their academic and professional success. In the field of English education, the ability to write effectively is of utmost importance for students to express their thoughts, communicate ideas, and demonstrate their understanding of various topics (Mulyasin, et.al, 2023). Several studies have highlighted the problems students face when writing passive-voice sentences. One common problem is the incorrect use of auxiliary verbs and tense forms (Azar, 2002). Students often struggle with choosing the auxiliary verb ('be' or 'get') and conjugating it correctly according to the tense of the sentence (Murcia & Freeman, 2010). This often results in mistakes, such as using 'is' instead of 'was' in the past tense or 'are' instead of 'be' in the present continuous tense.

Another area that students need to improve is the formation of past participles (Thornbury, 2006). Many students need help remembering the irregular past participles of certain verbs, leading to errors in passive voice construction. For example, they may use 'broken' instead of 'broke' or 'went' instead of 'gone' (Swan, 2005). A lack of vocabulary can exacerbate this problem, as students with limited lexical resources may need to learn the correct past participle forms of less common verbs (Nation, 2001). Furthermore, having around 98% coverage of the vocabulary used in the texts provided more opportunity for the readers to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words and more flexibility for incidental vocabulary learning to take place during reading (Melani et.al, 2021). Additionally, unfamiliar vocabulary can pose a significant challenge. Learning a language is often associated with whether a language learned is a second or a foreign language for the language learners (Tohir, 2017). Many students struggle with word meanings, which can make it difficult for them to differentiate between the active and passive voice. To face those challenge each teacher had their own reason why they chosen a certain strategy in teaching-learning vocabulary process. The researcher conclude that they chose the strategies in order to make the students more

interested, enjoy, easy to understand the words, and happy in learning English vocabulary (Setiawan, 2018). Students often struggle with the correct word order in passive-voice sentences (Yule, 2010). They may place the agent of the action (introduced by 'by') in the wrong position or omit it entirely, resulting in unclear or ambiguous sentences. Moreover, students may also need help identifying when to use passive voice, as they may not recognize the need to emphasize the action or the receiver rather than the doer (Hinkel, 2004).

In the Indonesian language, the passive voice is a fundamental grammatical structure used to shift the focus of a sentence from the doer of the action to the receiver of the action. This shift in focus is achieved by incorporating the prefixes "*di-*" and "*me-*" before the verb. When the actor of the action is unspecified or less relevant, the "*di-*" prefix is utilized. For example, the active sentence "*Dia membersihkan rumah*" (He/She cleans the house) can be transformed into a passive voice as "*Rumah dibersihkan olehnya*" (The house is cleaned by him/her). Here, the "*di-*" prefix is added to the verb "*bersihkan*," indicating that the house receives the cleaning action. On the other hand, when the actor of the action is specific and known, the "*me-*" prefix is employed. Consider the active sentence "*Mereka membangun jembatan baru*" (They build a new bridge). In passive voice, this becomes "*Jembatan baru dibangun oleh mereka*" (They build a new bridge), where the "*me-*" prefix is added to the verb "*bangun*." Mastering the usage of these prefixes is crucial for constructing clear and compelling sentences in Indonesian, allowing speakers and writers to convey nuanced meanings by emphasizing either the action or its recipient.

Several researchers have studied students' problems in writing passive-voice sentences. These studies have employed various methodologies to identify the problems faced by students and understand the underlying causes of these difficulties. The researchers employed a descriptive-qualitative method, examining students' written work and conducting interviews to gather data. Their study identified common errors in using auxiliary verbs, forming past participles, and maintaining appropriate word order. The findings suggested that students' limited exposure to passive voice structures and the influence of their first language contributed to

their difficulties in writing passive voice sentences.

By focusing on the specific difficulties these students encounter, this research aims to describe the problems and potential factors contributing to the problems in constructing passive voices in present and past tenses. This study contributes to the existing knowledge of students' struggles with passive voice writing. It offers valuable insights for educators and learners alike in improving their passive voice writing skills.

METHODS

This study utilized a case study approach by Merriam, (1988) to examine students' challenges using the passive voice in simple present and past tenses. This research design was chosen based on its ability to provide a detailed understanding of students' difficulties in this specific grammatical area. This study involved thirty students as participants in one of the state universities in Lombok. The research gathers responses through exercise questions to assess students' grasp of passive voice constructions, covering various usage aspects and transformations.

The research gathered responses from participants using exercises to assess their passive voice understanding. The data provided insights into their competence, aiding the analysis of grammatical comprehension and usage. The study aimed to understand students' challenges in this area. Participants received a printed test on passive voice, allowing standardized measurement of their abilities. Test results were analyzed, and errors were identified. Data was then analyzed using Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen's technique in 2010, describing difficulties faced by third-semester English Department students.

The data underwent qualitative analysis involving organizing, coding, and reduction steps. Responses were categorized, irrelevant details were excluded, and errors were grouped for concise understanding. In this research, a thorough examination of grouped data was conducted to understand its relevance to the research question, focusing on common errors students make when using the passive voice. The analysis aimed to draw informed conclusions and uncover underlying reasons for these mistakes.

Following data interpretation, the findings were presented coherently, either through a written report or visual representations like tables and graphs, to effectively communicate the results. This approach ensured a systematic analysis of the challenges students face in mastering the passive voice in simple present and past tenses, ultimately providing valuable insights and potential solutions for language education and pedagogy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study addresses the challenges EFL Classes face in constructing passive voice sentences in the simple present and past tense. The study aims to identify the causes of these issues and offers insights into potential solutions. The findings are presented based on the purposes of this research. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes, an analysis of students' performance in writing passive voice structures

has been presented. The data offers faced by students in mastering this grammatical construction. In correct passive voice and Incorrect passive voice displayed a range of results, with Question 2 being a notable.

Highlight where 60% of the students successfully used the passive voice. In verb tense error revealed diverse outcomes, from a lack of correct answers in Question 1 to an impressive 53.33% correctness rate in Question 9. Conversely, in sentence structure error exposed a considerable struggle among students, with no correct passive voice constructions evident in any questions and illustrated a moderate performance, with Questions 2 and 4 exhibiting a 13.33% correct rate.

These findings highlight specific areas where students face challenges comprehending and applying passive voice structures. For a comprehensive overview of the students' findings, a detailed presentation is available in Table 1 below :

Table 1. The Grammatical Knowledge of the Students in Constructing Passive Voices

Categories	Some examples from the Findings of students answering in passive voice	Description
Correct passive voice	Students correct answers in passive voice Vegetables and fruits are sold by my family at the market. My name was not asked by the receptionist. A lot of advice was given to me by him.	Those are some examples of students' correct answers about passive voice, some students can understand the concept of passive voice correctly, and students can use their understanding of verb changes in passive voice, changes in pronouns, and the use of by as a preposition in sentence
Incorrect passive voice	"the villa in Village don't use this Main Road often" - This sentence doesn't use passive voice correctly. It should be something like "This main road is not often used by the villa in the village." Students answer: Vegetables and fruit are seling by the family. Correction: Inappropriate: "are seling" should be "are sold by" to use the correct passive construction.	That is an example of students' answers that is wrong in the preparation of passive voice sentence structures, many students still do not understand and cannot arrange active sentences to passive voice or passive to active voice correctly, and students cannot understand how verb changes when active sentences are changed to passive voice, changes in pronouns and the use of by that students did not put "by" in a sentence are always done by students, the average student cannot change like from he to him or she to her in changing active and passive sentences.
Verb tense error	Students answer: Someone snatches it from my bag. Correction: Inappropriate: "Snatch" should be "snatched" to use the correct past tense verb. Students answer: She was crashed by two cars.	-The student's initial sentence is in active voice ("Someone snatch"), but they incorrectly used the base form of the verb "snatch" instead of the past tense "snatched" in passive voice construction. This indicates a difficulty in recognizing the need for verb tense changes when switching from active to passive voice.

	<p>Correction: Inappropriate: "was crash" should be "was crashed" to use the correct past tense verb. Also, it should be "two cars."</p> <p>Student's incorrect answer: He was murder by someone in the neighborhood.</p> <p>Correction: Inappropriate: "murder" should be "murdered" to use the correct past tense verb.</p> <p>Student's incorrect answer: Someone puts it there without him knowing.</p> <p>Correction: Inappropriate: "puts" should be "put" to use the correct past tense verb.</p>	<p>- The student's sentence attempts to construct a passive voice sentence but fails to use the correct past tense form of the verb "crash" ("was crash" instead of "was crashed"). Additionally, there's an error in subject-verb agreement; it should be "two cars" instead of "two car." This highlights challenges with verb tense and subject-verb agreement in passive voice construction.</p> <p>- The student's initial sentence is in active voice ("He was murder"), but they incorrectly used the base form of the verb "murder" instead of the past tense "murdered" in passive voice construction. This indicates a difficulty in recognizing the need for verb tense changes when switching from active to passive voice.</p> <p>- The student's sentence attempts to construct a passive voice sentence but fails to use the correct past tense form of the verb "put" ("puts" instead of "put"). This highlights challenges with verb tense in passive voice construction.</p> <p>it's crucial for the student to understand the appropriate use of past tense forms when constructing passive voice sentences. Additionally, attention to verb tense consistency is important to ensure grammatical accuracy.</p>
<p>Sentence structure error</p>	<p>Students answer: She didn't would damage her book</p> <p>Correction: She didn't damage her book. Error: "would" should be removed for the correct verb tense.</p> <p>Student answer: He didn't will bring drug in his bag</p> <p>Correction: He didn't bring drugs in his bag. Error: "will" should be removed for correct verb tense, and "drug" should be "drugs" for proper pluralization.</p>	<p>-the students' errors in these sentences demonstrate a common challenge in understanding and forming passive and active sentence structures. They tend to struggle with verb tense changes, usage of auxiliary verbs (like "will" and "didn't"), and pluralization. Addressing these challenges through focused grammar instruction and practice exercises can help improve their sentence structure skills.</p>

Further analysis for all the findings above:

1. Verb Tense Challenges:

Students often struggle with verb tense changes when converting active sentences to passive voice. In English, the passive voice is typically formed by using a form of the verb "to be" (e.g., is, was, were) combined with the past participle of the main verb. This shift in tense can be tricky for students because they need to recognize the correct auxiliary verb and adjust the main verb accordingly. For example, in the sentence "She didn't would damage her book," the student attempted to use "didn't" as a negative auxiliary verb but incorrectly included "would," leading to a tense conflict. The correction, "She didn't damage her book," rectifies this issue by using the correct past simple tense for a negative statement.

2. Subject-Verb Agreement:

In passive voice constructions, subject-verb agreement is crucial. The subject of the passive sentence should agree in number with the agent acting. This aspect can be challenging for students, as they must recognize whether the agent is singular or plural and adjust the subject accordingly. For instance, if the sentence involves multiple agents (e.g., "They didn't bring drugs in their bags"), the issue should be plural to match the plural agent "They." The correction, "They didn't bring drugs in their bags," maintains proper subject-verb agreement.

3. Pronoun Usage:

While not directly evident in the provided examples, students often need help with pronoun usage when switching between active and passive voice. They may use incorrect pronouns or struggle with pronoun cases (e.g., "he" vs. "him")

or "she" vs. "her"). These issues can lead to sentences that sound awkward or grammatically incorrect. Addressing pronoun usage in the context of passive voice transformations can help students achieve more natural and grammatically sound sentences.

4. Use of "by" as a preposition:

The incorrect mention of "by" as a preposition in the analysis refers to the need for students to correctly use "by" to introduce the performer of the action in passive voice sentences. For example, in the sentence "The villas in Village don't use this Main Road often,". This sentence doesn't use passive voice correctly. Students omit "by" do not put by in sentences that have been converted to passive voice or misuse it, which can result in unclear or incorrect passive sentences. Reinforcing the proper use of "by" as a preposition.

The challenges students face in mastering passive voice writing, as highlighted in the analysis, can be attributed to various aspects of English grammar and language learning. As discussed in the study, the theory of verb tense challenges corresponds to the findings related to students struggling with tense changes when converting active sentences to passive voice.

The discussion about subject-verb agreement in the analysis resonates with the need for students to recognize and adjust the subject in passive sentences to match the agent's number. These findings collectively emphasize the multifaceted nature of challenges in passive voice writing and highlight the interconnectedness of various grammatical aspects that students must navigate.

In conclusion, the integration of analysis underscores the complexity of teaching and learning passive voice writing. To address these challenges effectively, teachers should consider the interconnected nature of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, and the proper use of "by" as a preposition. By providing explicit instruction, opportunities for practice, and tailored support based on students' proficiency levels, educators can empower students to overcome these difficulties and improve their overall language proficiency, especially in constructing grammatically correct and coherent passive voice sentences. This holistic approach aligns with the theories and findings presented, enhancing the effectiveness of teaching passive voice in the classroom.

Writing passive voice in the simple present and simple past

The study on passive voice constructions in the context of English language learning has unearthed significant challenges faced by EFL Classes. This discussion delves into the various issues identified during the study, shedding light on learners' complexities when working with passive voice. The problems identified in the study align with some of the challenges commonly encountered by learners when working with passive voice constructions. These issues can relate to the theoretical insights and findings from previous studies.

Firstly, the difficulties related to verb tense challenges align with the observations. Made by Parrot (2000) and Choomthong (2011) pointed out that students often struggle. It is selecting the appropriate tense forms of auxiliary verbs (e.g., "is," "was") when converting active sentences to passive voice. This challenge is essential to understand the correct structure of the passive voice, as highlighted by Decapua (2008).

Secondly, the subject-verb agreement issues echo the observations made by Wang Song-hui (2023) regarding the importance of maintaining agreement between the subject and the verb when constructing passive sentences. This issue underscores the need for students to grasp that the subject in passive voice corresponds to the receiver of the action, as explained by Azar (2002). Proper pronoun usage is crucial to maintaining clarity and coherence in passive voice sentences, as indicated by the insights from Swam (1980).

The challenge of using "by" as a preposition corresponds to the observations made by Wang Song-hui (2023) and Azar (2002) regarding the role of "by" in introducing the agent of the action in passive voice sentences. Students' difficulty with "by" usage is also in line with the findings of Nurhillah (2008), who emphasized the need for learners to understand the agent's role in passive voice constructions. The issues related to past tense conversion resonate with the difficulties Hajizadehrivandi, Masturina, Razali, & Husin (2012) highlighted in transforming verbs into the past participle form when constructing passive sentences. This challenge is closely tied to adequately using the past tense form of the verb "to be," as mentioned (Decapua, 2008).

In summary, the problems identified in the study with EFL Classes are consistent with the Moreover the limited practice opportunities provided to students could exacerbate the problem. Passive voice constructions require regular practice for mastery, as indicated by Choomthong (2011) and Hajizadehrivandi, Masturina, Razali, & Husin (2012). If students have not had enough chances to practice converting active sentences into passive voice, their proficiency in this area may remain underdeveloped. Explanation of passive voice concepts within the classroom is another crucial factor. The concepts related to passive voice, such as verb tense changes, subject-verb agreement, and "by," must be explained clearly (Thomson, 2015). Without comprehensive explanations and guidance from instructors, students are likelier to make errors in their passive voice writing. Language transfer from students' native languages can also contribute to the difficulties. Some broader challenges associated with learning and applying passive voice in English. These challenges encompass verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, "by," and past tense conversion. 4 types of grammatical errors made by the students, those are; omission, addition, misforamtion, and misordering. Based on the 4 types of grammatical errors, there were four causes of errors that mostly found in students writing, those are; carelessness, inadequate learning, faulty in teaching, and hypercorrection (Holidazia, 2016). To address these challenges effectively, instructional strategies should emphasize understanding the underlying principles of passive voice construction, provide ample practice opportunities, and offer clear guidance on tense usage and grammatical structures.

The potential causes of problems in writing passive voice

The potential causes of problems in writing passive voice by EFL Classes can be attributed to a combination of factors. One of the foundational causes is a need for a strong foundation in English grammar. As identified by previous studies (Nurhillah, 2008), students may struggle with passive voice due to difficulties in understanding verb tenses and their usage. This lack of fundamental knowledge can hinder their ability to accurately transform active sentences into passive voice. Insufficient exposure to passive voice structures is another contributing

factor. This limited exposure may result from curriculum gaps or insufficient emphasis on passive voice constructions.

Languages have distinct passive voice constructions that differ significantly from English (Hajizadehrivandi, Masturina, Razali, & Husin, 2012). These differences can lead to confusion and incorrect sentence structures when students attempt to use passive voice in English.

Furthermore, the absence of regular feedback and correction in the learning process can perpetuate errors (Nurhillah, 2008). Without feedback, students may make the same mistakes without realizing them. Constructive feedback is essential for identifying and rectifying passive voice-related errors. Limited exposure to authentic English materials and real-world contexts where passive voice is commonly used can also hinder students' understanding and application of passive voice (Parrot, 2000). Authentic exposure reinforces correct usage and demonstrates the practical relevance of passive voice in various contexts. Lastly, some students may find advanced tense forms, such as past participles and past tense forms of "to be," challenging to grasp (Hajizadehrivandi, Masturina, Razali, & Husin, 2012). These tense forms are crucial for constructing passive sentences, and difficulty with them can lead to errors.

To address these causes and enhance students' proficiency in writing passive voice, comprehensive grammar instruction, ample practice opportunities, targeted feedback, and exposure to authentic materials should be incorporated into the curriculum. Instructors should emphasize the importance of understanding and correctly applying verb tense changes, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, and using "by" in passive voice constructions (Thomson, 2015). By addressing these underlying causes, students can develop vital skills in writing passive-voice sentences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, examining students' writing of passive voice in both the simple present and simple past reveals various challenges stemming from difficulties in grasping fundamental grammatical concepts. The identified issues, including struggles with verb tense selection, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, the appropriate use of "by," and past tense

conversion, underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies.

The potential causes of these problems, such as a weak foundation in English grammar, insufficient exposure to passive voice structures, language transfer from native languages, and a lack of feedback, further emphasize the multifaceted nature of students' challenges. A holistic approach is recommended to address these issues effectively, encompassing comprehensive grammar instruction, regular practice opportunities, constructive feedback, and exposure to authentic materials. By addressing these root causes, instructors can foster a more thorough understanding of passive voice constructions and enhance students' proficiency in incorporating them into their writing.

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