

Present Tense Forms and Imperative Functions of English Verb Tense in Malaysian Primary Schools CEFR-Aligned English Textbooks: ESL Learning Context

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Abstract

The English present tense plays a foundational role in enabling learners to express current actions, states, routines, and general truths, making it a critical component of English as a Second Language (ESL) development at the primary school level. However, despite its central role in early grammar instruction, limited research has systematically examined how present tense forms and their instructional functions are represented in CEFR-aligned English textbooks used in Malaysian primary schools. Addressing this gap is important because textbooks serve as primary instructional resources that directly influence classroom teaching practices and learner outcomes. This qualitative study analysed the English present tense forms used in four CEFR-aligned English Textbooks for Malaysian Primary Schools. Using document analysis, the researchers identified seven essential forms of the present tense, including their contextual variations and instances of combined usage within sentences. The findings provide practical insight for teachers, curriculum designers, and material developers by clarifying how present tense forms are structured and contextualised in instructional materials. Furthermore, the study identifies four imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning, highlighting their instructional utility for improving grammatical accuracy, clarity of expression, and communicative effectiveness. The study contributes a structured reference framework to support more effective present tense instruction and textbook-informed pedagogical planning in ESL classrooms.

Keywords: CEFR-Aligned English Textbooks, Present Tense Forms, ESL Learners, Imperative Functions, Malaysian Primary Schools

Introduction

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has taken a strategic initiative by incorporating English verb tenses in CEFR-aligned English textbooks for Malaysian primary schools to enhance the language proficiency of ESL learners. In Malaysia's education system, English is a second language, and the curriculum actively develops proficiency in all four

language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It also reinforces grammar and vocabulary. Research by Wang (2010) demonstrated that a comprehensive understanding of grammar substantially enhances ESL learners' writing skills and supports their reading and listening comprehension. Mastery of verb tenses allows learners to express actions, events and states precisely, improving clarity and precision in their communication. This foundational knowledge facilitates effective expression and contributes to overall language proficiency. Nijat et al. (2020) further substantiated this assertion by emphasising that mastery of verb tenses is crucial for effective language use. To accommodate the varied learning abilities of Malaysian ESL learners, it is imperative to instruct the grammatical rules governing verb tenses in a manner that is both comprehensible and engaging. This approach promotes understanding and encourages active involvement, thus improving the overall learning experience. Acknowledging the pivotal functions of language across various domains, the textbooks are crafted with more organised content and activities that promote essential language proficiency and grammatical accuracy. A primary emphasis is placed on enhancing grammar instruction, particularly regarding verb tenses. This is achieved through the incorporation of updated grammar sections within textbook modules. This initiative enhances Malaysian ESL learners' grammar learning experiences and promotes their effective communication abilities.

The keystone of ESL instruction, the English verb tenses, frequently presents a challenge for learners in Malaysian primary schools. Past, present, and future tenses and their corresponding simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous aspects are indispensable for conveying time, duration, and completion of actions (Bukit, 2020). Achieving proficiency in these tenses enables ESL learners to convey precise information and comply with grammatical rules (Declerck et al., 2006; Javed & Ahmad, 2013). On the contrary, the complex interaction between tense and aspect can be intimidating for ESL learners (Lista & Febriyanti, 2020), which requires effective instructional strategies.

Despite the recognised importance of verb tense mastery, present tense instruction at the primary school level often receives limited focused analytical attention compared to broader grammar instruction. Many classroom practices rely heavily on textbook sequencing and presentation, yet there is insufficient empirical examination of how present tense forms are systematically introduced, contextualised, and functionally positioned within CEFR-aligned materials. This creates a pedagogical concern because textbooks function not only as content sources but also as instructional guides that shape teaching approaches, task design, and learners' exposure to grammatical structures.

A focused investigation of present tense forms is therefore necessary to determine whether instructional materials adequately support learners' grammatical development and communicative needs. Understanding how present tense structures are represented and functionally applied in textbooks can help teachers make more informed instructional decisions, improve grammar scaffolding strategies, and enhance classroom effectiveness. Such analysis is particularly beneficial for primary ESL learners, as it supports more targeted grammar instruction and more effective classroom implementation.

Current CEFR-aligned textbooks intend to resolve these difficulties by introducing verb tenses in appropriate and meaningful contexts. Nonetheless, research on the effectiveness of

these materials in teaching present tense forms, an imperative element of the ESL curriculum, remains limited. This study aims to analyse the English present tense forms employed in four CEFR-Aligned English Textbooks for Malaysian Primary Schools: Get Smart Plus 3 Student's Book (MOE, 2018), Get Smart Plus 4 Student's Book (MOE, 2019b), English Plus 1 Second Edition Year 5 Student's Book (MOE, 2021b), and Academy Stars 5 Year 6 Pupil's Book (MOE, 2021a). Furthermore, it intends to identify the imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning. Comprehending how these tenses are taught and their significance to ESL learners' proficiency can improve pedagogical approaches and facilitate productive language learning.

This study is significant because it provides a systematic and evidence-based examination of present tense representation in nationally used CEFR-aligned textbooks, offering practical value to multiple stakeholders. For teachers, the findings support more precise lesson planning and grammar instruction. For curriculum developers and textbook writers, the results offer structured insight into tense presentation patterns and functional coverage. For researchers, the study contributes to textbook-based grammar analysis within the Malaysian ESL context, an area that remains underexplored. By clarifying both the structural forms and instructional functions of present tense usage, this study strengthens the pedagogical understanding of how grammar knowledge is operationalised in classroom materials. Accordingly, the following research objectives (RO) have guided this study.

1. RO1: To analyse the English present tense forms used in CEFR-Aligned English Textbooks for Malaysian Primary Schools.
2. RO2: To identify the imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning at Malaysian Primary Schools.

Literature Review

English Language Learning

Malaysia's Education System formally acknowledges English as a second language (Gill, 2002; Sidhu et al., 2018; Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014) alongside Bahasa Melayu, the national language. Beginning the foundational years of primary school (Year 1), English language instruction encompasses the entire primary education phase. The curriculum is designed to follow an incremental advancement, beginning with fundamental grammar and vocabulary ideas and progressing to more complex constructions (MOE, 2015; MOE, 2019a). English verb tenses, which are regarded as foundational aspects of English grammar, are crucial for ESL learners to accurately articulate actions, events, or states in both written and spoken English. Wang (2010) contended that proficiency in grammar enhances ESL learners' writing and comprehension skills, while Nijat et al. (2020) underscored the importance of precise and effective language use.

English Language Textbooks

Textbooks have served as essential educational resources for primary education since the 19th century (Kovac & Alenka, 2022), functioning as the primary sources of subject knowledge (Lawyer, 2024). They provide a comprehensive compilation of information on particular academic subjects, thereby enhancing the learning experience and making it more dynamic and stimulating. They were developed for teaching and learning (Lappalainen, 2011), to gauge learners' learning in a self-directed manner (Cunningsworth, 1995), and function as teaching sources in the classrooms and references for learners (Bakir & Aziz, 2022). In the

English learning context, it is important to source the right English textbooks because well-chosen textbooks enhance learners' English proficiency, positively influence their learning outcomes, and elevate the overall quality of the English curriculum (Zulkipli & Nasri, 2024).

The revised Malaysian English Language Curriculum, known as the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) after adopting the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) (Shak et al., 2021). This alignment serves as the foundational framework for the review and enhancement of the curriculum (Shak et al., 2021). The integration was implemented into the existing curriculum (MOE, 2015) utilising descriptors identified in the CEFR-related materials (Shak et al., 2021), to fulfil the global criteria for the English language (Jerald & Shah, 2018) without changing Malaysia's current curriculum for language teaching, learning and assessments (MOE, 2015) and to improve the outcomes of English language education in Malaysia (Bayuon & Hashim, 2023). The contents of the imported textbooks were contextualised (Shak et al., 2021) for the Malaysian educational setting to ensure the development of quality CEFR-aligned resources or textbooks that cater to ESL learners in Malaysia. This adaptation aligns with the guidelines set forth by the English Language Standards and Quality Council of Malaysia (ELSQC) (Aziz, 2017). The newly designed textbooks align with and adhere to the CEFR standards and facilitate learners' language mastery (MOE, 2019c), function to empower learners' English proficiency (Zulkipli & Nasri, 2024), and their global content is consistent with the latest curriculum development.

English Verb Tenses

Verb tenses constitute fundamental grammatical structures of sentence construction (Bukit, 2020). Accordingly, the primary ESL curriculum typically emphasises verb conjugation, introducing ESL learners to regular and irregular verb forms across various tenses and aspects. Effective instruction necessitates a clear differentiation between tense and time (Declerck et al., 2006). Although interconnected tense is a grammatical construct indicating when an action occurs relative to a specific point (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002), whereas time refers to the actual moment of the action (Javed & Ahmad, 2013; Rahman & Ali, 2015). Tense is intricately associated with time, for it is conveyed using tense, which is the verb form (Windy et al., 2022), and the terminology utilised can vary across different languages (Cook, 2012). Therefore, comprehending tenses involves more than just merely grasping the concept of time; it also requires awareness of verbs, for variations in time can influence the verbs employed (Windy et al., 2022).

On the contrary, verb aspects provide different viewpoints on the action itself (Cowan, 2008; Klein, 1994; Listia & Febriyanti, 2020; Rahman & Ali, 2015), enriching learners' understanding of English grammar. In addition to action verbs, ESL learners are introduced to the use of verbs "to be", "to have", and "to do" as main, auxiliary, and linking verbs. Modal verbs are also incorporated into the curriculum to articulate modalities such as ability, permission, or obligation. Unlike action verbs, which conjugate, modal verbs maintain a fixed form and often combine with other verbs to convey various meanings. Likewise, ESL learners must understand the principle of Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) to construct grammatically correct sentences. This principle requires concordance between the subject and verb in terms of number and person (Salleh et al., 2020). An ungrammatical or disagreement can disrupt the coherence and clarity of a sentence, potentially contributing to misunderstanding. As

highlighted by Salleh et al. (2020), a sentence is ungrammatical if its components do not align appropriately.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using document analysis to examine the representation and functions of English present tense forms in CEFR-aligned English textbooks for Malaysian primary schools. Document analysis is appropriate for studies that systematically evaluate written instructional materials to identify patterns, themes, and instructional features (Bowen, 2009). The documents analysed comprised four nationally adopted CEFR-aligned textbooks: Get Smart Plus 3 Student's Book, Get Smart Plus 4 Student's Book, English Plus 1 Second Edition Year 5 Student's Book, and Academy Stars 5 Year 6 Pupil's Book.

The selection of these textbooks was guided by established document selection criteria, namely authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Bowen, 2009). These textbooks are officially endorsed instructional materials used in Malaysian primary schools, making them appropriate and representative sources for analysing present tense instruction in the ESL classroom context.

A thematic analysis procedure was conducted to identify recurring patterns in the use and presentation of English present tense forms and their imperative functions. Relevant textual data, including example sentences, grammar sections, instructional notes, and learning activities, were systematically reviewed and coded. The analysis followed a structured coding process involving repeated reading, category development, and theme refinement to ensure consistent pattern identification (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Coding was conducted manually to enable close and iterative engagement with the data. Codes were grouped into categories and subsequently synthesised into broader themes and subthemes related to present tense forms and their imperative functions. This analytic procedure provided a systematic framework for interpreting how present tense structures are presented and functionally positioned within the textbooks, thereby supporting the study's research objectives.

Findings and Discussion

English Present Tense Forms Used in CEFR-Aligned English Textbooks for Malaysian Primary Schools

The results are presented in this subsection in response to RO1. Through a comprehensive analysis of textbooks, the study identified seven English present tense forms, including contextual variations and the simultaneous use of forms within sentences. The results are organised and discussed according to themes (forms) derived from the data analysis, as shown in Table 1. Each theme is accompanied by examples (sentences) extracted from the textbooks, facilitating an enhanced insight into the respective form.

Table 1:

Themes on English Present Tense Forms

Themes	
F1	The Simple Present Tense
F2	The Present Continuous Tense
F3	The Present Perfect Tense
F4	The Present Perfect Continuous Tense
F5	The Simple Present Tense and Present Perfect Tense
F6	The Present Continuous Tense and Simple Present Tense
F7	The Present Perfect Continuous Tense and Present Perfect Tense

Legend: F - Form

F1: The Simple Present Tense

Facilitating learners' mastery of grammar in the simple present tense is crucial (Sholihin et al., 2023). This tense is frequently employed to convey habitual or daily activities, including events (Azizah & Purwanti, 2023), and general facts or truths that consistently hold relevance. To exemplify, the sentence *"She can sing and dance"* (MOE, 2018) employed the modal auxiliary verb "can", preceding the main verbs "sing" and "dance" in their verb root to convey ability affirmatively. Moreover, the sentence *"There isn't any milk but there's a cartoon of orange juice"* (MOE, 2019b) utilised the verb "to be" in the form of "is" as the linking verb, functioning negatively and affirmatively in the first and second clauses, respectively. This structure linked the existential "There" or subject "There" to the subject complement "any milk" and "a cartoon of orange juice". The sentence *"He eats fish in the Amazon and at home, but he doesn't catch fish at home"* (MOE, 2021a) employed an affirmative verb tense in the first clause to express a habitual action or regular occurrence, and a negative in the second to indicate the absence of an action. The main verb "eats" functioned in agreement with the third-person singular pronoun "He", and the auxiliary verb "doesn't" preceded the main verb "catch", which appeared in its base form. Likewise, the sentence *"They use sticks to play the game"* (MOE, 2019b) expressed a habitual action through the affirmative verb tense, with the main verb "use" aligning with the third-person plural pronoun "They".

The sentence *"I like playing video games, but I also like going out"* (MOE, 2021b) expressed the verb tense affirmatively in both clauses, highlighting a preference through the main verb "like" which concurred with the first-person singular pronoun "I". The present participle verbs "playing" and "going out" after the main verb "like" illustrated that both pastimes are enjoyable, making time pass pleasantly. On the contrary, the passive voice construction *"Lulu's dress is made from plastic bag"* (MOE, 2021a) used the verb "to be" in the form of "is" to correspond with the singular subject "Lulu's dress", and the past participle verb "made" to describe the condition of the dress. This provided information on the material used and its environmental significance. Lastly, the sentence *"I often listen to pop music or rap, and I like some classical music, too"* (MOE, 2021a) employed the main verbs "listen" and "like" affirmatively, demonstrating their agreement with the first-person singular pronoun "I". In this instance, the adverb of frequency "often" modified the main verb "listen", and quantifies the subject's engagement with the routine "listen to pop music or rap", suggesting that it is a regular activity.

F2: The Present Continuous Tense

Mastering the present continuous tense provides ESL learners with essential language knowledge and skills for describing actions happening in the present accurately. Aryadi et al. (2023) highlighted that the present continuous tense describes actions or events that are current and ongoing. Furthermore, this tense indicates a progressing action during speaking (Azar, 1989; Darni et al., 2014; Werner, 1990). The present continuous tense serves multiple purposes in English, particularly in illustrating ongoing actions. To illustrate, the affirmative sentence *"We're picking up rubbish"* (MOE, 2019b) demonstrated the correspondence between the auxiliary verb "are" with the first-person plural pronoun "We". Employing the present participle verb "picking up" emphasised an occurrence of a single ongoing action. This construction effectively indicated an action that is currently in progress, showing how the present continuous tense captures the fluidity of an action as it unfolds in real-time. The affirmative sentence *"They're having a break from their maths class and they're doing eye exercises"* (MOE, 2021b) effectively used two present participle verbs, showcasing multiple ongoing actions happening simultaneously at some point in the present. In this construction, the auxiliary verb "are" in both clauses is aligned with the third-person plural pronoun "they", underscoring the subject's identity. The sentence conveyed that the subjects "they" are doing eye exercises concurrently with the break they are having from the maths class. This dual action accentuated the seamlessness of the subject's current activities, addressing how the present continuous tense encapsulates contemporaneous events

F3: The Present Perfect Tense

The present perfect tense is frequently employed to convey experiences or actions that have taken place at an unspecified time in the past, underscoring their continuous relevance to the present moment. It is most often described as denoting an action or event that began in the past and continues to the present (Chareonkul & Wijitsopon, 2020; Eastwood, 1995; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Kearns, 2011). The verb phrase "have got" is often used to indicate possession or ownership in affirmative and negative forms, in the present perfect tense. In particular, the construct *"You haven't got a shell"* (MOE, 2018) expressed the verb tense in the negative form, highlighting the agreement between the auxiliary verb "haven't" with the second-person pronoun "You", while indicating that the subject lacks a particular object "a shell". In this construct, using the auxiliary verb does not pertain to a past action but rather to a current state stemming from the past. In Year 6, learning becomes more challenging as the learners begin using the auxiliary verb "to have" in the form of "have" together with the past participle verbs, besides the verb "got". In comparison, the sentence *"I've flown to lots of different countries and I've written about most of them in my blog"* (MOE, 2021a) employed verb tense in the affirmative form. It spotlighted the agreement between the auxiliary verb "have" with the first-person singular pronoun "I", marking that the subject "I" has completed both actions in the past. Nonetheless, the completion is tied to the present context, not just a past event, and underscores the experience and writings are still relevant to the present. In this construct, the main verbs "flown" and "written" are in the past participle forms, following the verb structures in the present perfect tense.

F4: The Present Perfect Continuous Tense

The present perfect continuous tense is used to convey an action or event that started in the past and extends to the present, to point out an activity or event that has just concluded

and has current relevance, to highlight the action rather than its completion, and to detail actions or events that are impermanent or lasting only for a short time (Taylor, 2024). Other uses include detailing an activity that has recently ended or just concluded (Murphy, 2004), communicating the notion of an activity, task, or work that was in progress until a recent point in time or the present moment of communication (Hewings, 2005) and depicting an ongoing activity that has not yet been completed (Windy et al., 2022). The diverse applications of the present perfect continuous tense underscore its importance in expressing ongoing actions and their relevance to the present.

To exemplify, the sentence *“I’ve been a dentist for 50 years”* (MOE, 2021a) utilised the verb phrase “have been” where “have” is the verb “to have” and it agreed with the first-person singular pronoun “I”. Additionally, the verb “be” in its past participle verb “been” is applied to evince an ongoing action in the present perfect continuous tense. The verb phrase “have been” is employed in this construct to convey the present perfect continuous, indicating that the subject commenced his or her career as a dentist 50 years ago, and has continued to the present. The duration “50 years” informs the length of time the action has been occurring. Nevertheless, this construct did not include a present participle verb, which should follow the past participle “been”. Therefore, the construct can be improved to *“I have been practising as a dentist for 50 years”* to convey the ongoing nature of the action that began in the past and continues to the present, accurately, concisely and impactfully. The present participle verb “practising” followed the verb phrase “have been” effectively communicating the duration of the action and its ongoing relevance. This construct addressed the subject’s career as a dentist is not only a past achievement but also a current occupation.

F5: The Simple Present Tense and Present Perfect Tense

Whereas the simple present tense is applied to express routines, habitual actions and universal truths (British Council, n.d.; Langeek, 2020; Learning English Free, n.d.; Woodward Education, 2024), the present perfect tense emphasises past experiences that remain relevant to the present (Chareonkul & Wijitsopon, 2020; Eastwood, 1995; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Kearns, 2011). It accentuates that actions may persist over time or form habits while linking their relevance to the current context. Mastering the use of the simple present tense and present perfect tense in a single sentence allows ESL learners to convey regular habits while linking past experiences to the present, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and comprehension.

The sentences *“We’ve got some cans of lemonade, but we need some water”* (MOE, 2019b) and *“Musa needs to travel to the city soon and he hasn’t got a horse”* (MOE, 2021a) exemplified the utilisation of the simple present tense and present perfect tense. The combination of these two tenses in a single sentence elevated the semantic and contextual significance of the sentence, informing urgency and present circumstances, and highlighting states that commenced in the past and persist to the present. The clause “We’ve got some cans of lemonade” used the present perfect tense, signified by the verb phrase “have got”. This denoted a state of possession that commenced at an indeterminate point in the past and persists to the present. The clause “...but we need some water” utilised the simple present tense to express a present need for water, contrasting it with the current state of having cans of lemonade. The main verb “needs” in the clause “Musa needs to travel to the city soon” employed the simple present tense, conveying Musa’s imperative necessity to travel. On the

contrary, the auxiliary verb “hasn’t” and the past participle verb “got” in the clause “... and he hasn’t got a horse” utilised the present perfect tense. This expressed a state of non-possession of a horse, a condition that commenced in the past and persists to the present. In both sentences, the verbs concurred with the subjects, demonstrating their adherence to the SVA in both tenses.

F6: The Present Continuous Tense and Simple Present Tense

The textbooks provide examples of sentences that demonstrate the simultaneous use of the present continuous tense and the simple present tense within a single sentence to convey specific meanings and nuances. In particular, the affirmative sentence “*It’s snowing and it’s cold*” (MOE, 2018) exemplified the utilisation of the verb “to be” in the form of “is” as both the auxiliary verb and linking verb, conveying concordance with the third-person singular pronoun “It”. Additionally, this construct employed the present continuous tense in the first clause “It’s snowing” by using the present participle verb “snowing” to communicate an action that is currently in progress. Whereas, the second clause “... and it’s cold” employed the simple present tense with the adjective “cold” to further describe the current weather conditions. Likewise, the present continuous tense and simple present tense were applied in the affirmative sentence “*The children are leaving the park when they see something*” (MOE, 2019b) This construct used the present continuous tense in the first clause “The children are leaving the park” by utilising an auxiliary verb “are” preceding the present participle verb “leaving” to imply a progressing action. The subsequent clause “... when they see something” applied the simple present tense to describe an instantaneous action that interrupts an ongoing action.

A thorough understanding of these two tenses assists ESL learners in mitigating common challenges they encounter in their learning. Learners often struggle to distinguish between the present continuous tense and the simple present tense, as evidenced by the research of Aryadi et al. (2023). This underscores the imperative need, particularly for learners, for a strong focus on the foundational understanding of English language tenses. Moreover, the learners often reported struggles and confusion in constructing grammatically correct sentences using the present continuous tense and the simple present tense, particularly when dealing with irregular verb forms (Aryadi et al., 2023). The findings of the current study – the present tense forms in educational textbooks – can potentially assist English language teachers in providing insights and more targeted instruction when addressing specific struggles and confusion regarding these two tenses to their learners.

F7: The Present Perfect Continuous Tense and Present Perfect Tense

The textbooks’ strategic approach of including the present perfect continuous tense and the present perfect tense concurrently within a single sentence deepened ESL learners’ comprehension of verb tense distinctions, particularly between actions in progress and completed actions. The sentence “*I’ve been sailing, but I’ve never tried kayaking*” (MOE, 2021a) exemplified the use of the present perfect continuous tense, affirmatively by utilising “have been sailing” in its first clause “I’ve been sailing”. This is to convey that the sailing activity was initiated in the past and persists to the present. On the contrary, the subsequent clause “... but I’ve never tried kayaking” employed the present perfect tense in the negative form by utilising the auxiliary verb “have” that preceded an adverb of frequency “never”, together with the past participle verb “tried”. This indicated that the subject “I” had not

engaged in kayaking at any time up to the present. The auxiliary verb “have” is correctly conjugated with the first-person singular pronoun “I”, adhering to the grammatical rules of both the present perfect continuous tense and present perfect tense.

The Imperative Functions of English Verb Tenses in ESL Learning at Malaysian Primary Schools

The results are presented in this subsection in response to RO2. Table 2 presents four key imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning at Malaysian Primary Schools. These functions are particularly significant to the present tense forms and are discussed in detail in this subsection.

Table 2

Themes on key imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning at Malaysian Primary Schools.

Themes	
IF1	Communication Precision
IF2	Expressive Clarity
IF3	Precision in Writing
IF4	Grammatical Accuracy

Legend: IF – Imperative Function

IF1: Communicative Precision

The study highlighted that a strong command of English verb tenses imperatively ensures ESL learners’ communicative clarity and precision when they convey thoughts and ideas. This function is crucial for effective verbal interactions while empowering learners’ ability to articulate time-related nuances and contextual meanings. Bukit (2020) contended that tenses are vital in facilitating precise communication by delineating distinct timeframes. A strong mastery of verb tenses is crucial for effective English communication. The effective use or proficiency in the English language necessitates the application of language in contextualised communicative events (Taylor, 2016).

Acquiring proficiency in English verb tenses empowers ESL learners to communicate with clarity and precision. This enables them to express actions, states, and events across various timeframes (tenses). As an example, ESL learners use the present continuous tense to communicate ongoing single actions that are occurring at the present. They employ both the auxiliary and present participle verbs, as exemplified in the sentence “*We’re picking up rubbish*” (MOE, 2019b). Conversely, the sentence “*They use sticks to play the game*” (MOE, 2019b) illustrated a habitual action “use” expressed in the simple present tense. This construct addressed that the action of using sticks to play the game is a regular occurrence, as opposed to the ongoing action of “picking up rubbish”.

IF2: Expressive Clarity

English verb tenses facilitate ESL learners to be able to convey thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively. In the language learning context, expressive clarity means learners can express themselves precisely without ambiguity. They can use correct verb tenses in both written and verbal communication to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Moreover, verb tenses are essential for conveying a diverse range of meanings, including ability, existence, affirmation, denial, intention, obligation, preference and possibility. To exemplify, the simple

present tense is employed to express habitual actions, general truths and timeless facts (Sartika, 2020).

An example from the textbook *"I've flown to lots of different countries and I've written about most of them in my blog"* (MOE, 2021a) affirmatively employed the present perfect tense to express past experiences that have a lasting impact on the present. Both verbs "flown" and "written" are completed actions. The construct also expressed clearly that the subject "I" has extensive travel experience and blogs about his or her travel experience. On the other hand, the sentence *"There isn't any milk but there's a carton of orange juice"* (MOE, 2019b) expressed both the non-existence and existence of items in the present by utilising the simple present tense. It is clearly expressed from the construct that milk is not available at present, but a carton of orange juice does. Moreover, the sentence *"I like playing video games, but I also like going out"* (MOE, 2021b) used the simple present tense to express the meaning of one's personal preferences towards video games and enjoyment of social activity. In addition, this construct also expressed that the subject "I" has multifaceted preferences or interests. The sentence *"She can sing and dance"* (MOE, 2018) expressed one's ability or capability. It utilised the simple present tense to indicate a general truth or skill that the subject "she" possesses.

IF3: Precision in Writing

Acquiring proficiency in verb tenses empowers ESL learners to comprehend and apply grammatical rules with precision. It enables them to write grammatically correct sentences and convey their idea accurately to eliminate misinterpretations. Precision ensures that the sentence is constructed with attention to detail, and the intended message is conveyed without ambiguity. Therefore, precision in writing is fundamental because it involves a careful selection of words and the structuring of sentences to convey the intended message clearly and accurately.

To illustrate, the sentence *"He eats fish in the Amazon and at home, but he doesn't catch fish at home"* (MOE, 2021a) used precise vocabulary and clear sentence structure to express ideas about the activities performed by the subject "He" concerning fish at different locations. The vocabulary or words are specific and accurate, expressing the intended meaning clearly. Additionally, the structure of the construct is simple and direct, and the utilisation of the coordinating conjunction "but" highlighted a contrast between the two actions "eat" and "catch", further enhancing precision. Other than being precise in writing sentences, ESL learners must adhere to English SVA. Thus, a robust understanding of English SVA is essential for accurate writing at the sentence level (Bayuong & Arip, 2023), adding to the precision of the sentence. To address this, English language teachers must prioritise cultivating their learners' awareness of English SVA (Tafida & Okunade, 2016), and employ effective pedagogical approaches to develop their understanding of English SVA (Chong & Yunus, 2019). This is important to help their learners overcome English SVA challenges. Likewise, the sentence *"We're picking up rubbish"* (MOE, 2019b) is precise because it used specific vocabulary to convey the action being performed accurately. In addition, this construct is direct and avoids unnecessary words to indicate a progressing single action in the present. However, the construct can be further revised to enhance its precision by adding the location where the action is being performed. This will make the construct more meaningful, providing readers with additional information.

IF4: Grammatical Accuracy

The fourth imperative function of English verb tenses in ESL learning is grammatical accuracy. The determination of grammar teaching must be based on the learners' needs (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Accuracy is fundamental in language production (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Richards & Renandya, 2002). In the context of this study, grammatical accuracy refers to the correct application of the present tense verbs in language use in sentence construction. The elements covered include sentence structure, agreement and tense usage. Most importantly, grammatical accuracy is essential for the clarity and understanding of the sentences. Properly structured sentences and accurate use of verb tenses convey the intended ideas precisely, reducing the risk of misinterpretation.

The simple sentences *"English is my favourite subject"* (MOE, 2019b) and *"They aren't my friends"* (MOE, 2021b) employed the verbs "to be" in the form of "is" and contraction "aren't" that agreed with the respective subject in the simple present tense, respectively affirmatively and negatively. Both sentences demonstrated accurate English SVA in the simple present tense. The simple sentence *"There is some chocolate, some ice-cream, some bananas and some pineapples"* (MOE, 2018) remains the use of the singular verb "to be" in the form of "is". Although there are multiple items listed in the sentence, including bananas and pineapples, which are plural and countable nouns in context, this is a common construction in English, particularly when listing items. The simple sentence *"Anna has got a box of cereal"* (MOE, 2019b) utilised the present perfect tense by using the verb "to have" in the form of "has" with the past participle verb "got" affirmatively which agreed with the singular subject "Anna", indicating possession.

The complex sentence *"The children are leaving the park when they see something"* (MOE, 2019b) correctly used the verb "to be" in the form of "are" and the verb root "see" in their respective clauses to match the plural subjects "The children" and "they". Both clauses demonstrated accurate English SVA in the present continuous and simple present tense. The first clause, "The children are leaving the park", indicated a progressing single action in the present by employing the plural verb "to be" that preceded the present participle verb "leaving". The present participle verb "leaving" is formed by applying the grammar rule of the regular verb in the present continuous tense "For a verb root that ends with the vowel 'e', omit 'e', and then add 'ing'". In contrast, the second clause "... when they see something" demonstrated a single action that occurred intermittently with the progression of another action in the present. The subordinate conjunction "when" is employed to indicate time and to modify the first or main clause.

Synthesis and Pedagogical Implications

CEFR-aligned textbooks provide valuable opportunities for ESL learners to practice grammatical structures, particularly present tense forms, in meaningful contexts, thereby reinforcing their understanding. However, the distribution of these forms within textbooks varies. For instance, the simple present and present continuous tenses are frequently encountered due to their prevalence in everyday discourse. On the contrary, the present perfect, present perfect continuous tense, and the combinations of present tenses are less commonly used in daily communication. While previous research by Listia & Febriyanti (2020) addressed the grammatical complexity of form combinations, this study underscored that these combinations potentially enhance ESL learners' grammatical understanding and

improve overall language proficiency. However, their inclusion within textbooks at the primary school level facilitates ESL learners' learning of present tense forms, empowering their understanding of English grammar. A wide range of activities, such as writing exercises, reading comprehension and speaking tasks, provide plenty of opportunities for ESL learners to practice using these present tense forms in meaningful contexts.

The analysis of present tense forms in these textbooks also addressed the interrelation of various tenses and their functions in empowering ESL learners' grammatical mastery. Each form functions differently, according to the targeted message or idea to be conveyed or expressed. Mastery of English present tenses enables ESL learners to comprehend how how different forms convey various aspects of time and supports teachers in addressing common learner difficulties, particularly in distinguishing between tenses.

Furthermore, the imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning at Malaysian primary schools include enhancing communication precision, expressive clarity, fostering precision in writing, and grammatical accuracy. This study highlighted that mastering verb tenses enables ESL learners to construct grammatically correct sentences, diminishing misinterpretations and ambiguities. To illustrate, Taylor (2016) asserted that writing accuracy is essential for ESL learners' language mastery. Precision is crucial, and it demands a careful selection of words and sentence structures for effective writing. Additionally, grammatical accuracy also ensures proper application of SVA tense usage, which are critical for clarity in both spoken and written contexts. Consequently, English teachers should prioritise instructional strategies that support learners' mastery of verb tenses, ultimately contributing to improved overall language proficiency.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was confined to four CEFR-aligned English textbooks used in Malaysian primary schools. Although these textbooks are nationally adopted and widely implemented, they may not fully represent the full range of English language learning materials used across different school contexts. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the selected textbooks.

Second, as this study employed qualitative document analysis, the identification and categorisation of present tense forms and their functions involved researcher interpretation. Although a systematic coding and thematic analysis procedure was applied, interpretive judgement may have been influenced by the researchers' analytical perspectives and prior knowledge.

Third, the scope of analysis focused specifically on present tense forms and their imperative functions. Other verb tenses and broader grammatical structures were not examined. Future studies may extend the analysis to additional tense categories and across different educational levels to develop a more comprehensive understanding of verb tense functions in ESL learning and instructional materials.

Conclusion

The findings of this study were consistent with the English present tense forms delineated in the analysed educational resources. These forms are developmentally appropriate for ESL learners and adequately address their communicative requirements, particularly in relation to vocabulary development and grammatical knowledge, within formal language learning settings. The identified subthemes highlight the predominance of present tense forms in textbook sentences, confirming the curriculum's strong emphasis on present tense instruction across Malaysian primary school levels to support learners' linguistic competence in varied contexts. A robust understanding of tense–form relationships enables ESL learners to better comprehend and use the nuances of English more accurately. When combined with practical application, this understanding supports more meaningful and effective communication.

This study also presents a novel analysis and comprehension of the imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning at Malaysian primary schools, particularly in the present tense context, offering new insights into ESL pedagogy in schools. Additionally, the findings evidenced how communication precision, expressive clarity, precision in writing, and grammatical accuracy become the imperative functions of English verb tenses in ESL learning. Moreover, the learners' ability to remember and accurately apply the grammar rules is important for mastering the grammar. The four emerging sub-themes underscore how significant and influential the English present tense and its aspects are for ESL learners to effectively communicate, express ideas, write, and learn grammar.

The findings offer practical guidance for English language teachers in planning and delivering more focused and effective present tense instruction, particularly for primary ESL learners who require structured grammatical support. They also provide useful reference points for textbook evaluators and curriculum planners when reviewing grammar presentation and progression.

Overall, the study demonstrates clear instructional and practical value by showing how present tense forms and their functions are systematically embedded within CEFR-aligned textbooks. The insights generated are directly applicable to classroom teaching, instructional material evaluation, and grammar-focused lesson design. Therefore, the study not only contributes to academic understanding but also supports practical improvements in ESL grammar instruction at the primary school level.

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