

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SMART FINGERS TECHNIQUE IN  
IMPROVING STUDENTS' TENSES MASTERY AT 1<sup>ST</sup> SEMESTER  
STUDENTS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF MATHLA'UL ANWAR  
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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the implementation of Smart Fingers technique in improving students' tenses mastery at 1<sup>st</sup> semester students of English department of Mathla'ul Anwar University, Banten. The research employs the qualitative research design with the characteristics of action research. It uses a triangulation of data collection methods involving questionnaire, observation, and interview. The findings reveal that the implementation of Smart Fingers technique is helpful and easy to conduct. In addition, this technique can improve students' tenses mastery. In relation to the students' responses on the technique, it is found that the students respond the technique positively. Moreover, they feel happy and enthusiastic to practice this technique in learning and mastering English tenses. Based on the findings of this research, it is significant for the teachers to choose the appropriate technique for improving students' tenses mastery, particularly Smart Fingers technique as mentioned above. It is also wise for the teachers to identify the students' responses on the technique used to determine which technique is appropriate for them. The findings are also expected to encourage other researchers to investigate the effects of this technique on other students' ability in grammar mastery.

*Key words: Smart Fingers technique, tenses, grammar.*

**INTRODUCTION**

English mastery is a life-skill which people must master if those people have big dreamstowork in this era of globalization, because English is an international language. By getting a good English language teaching, the people are expected to use English as the language for communication when interacting.

To do interacting in English well, the people should know some components which are useful, for instance, vocabulary and grammar. Vocabulary and grammar as language components must be studied well. Vocabulary mastery has an important role in English practice. By having more vocabularies, the students may be able to express their idea in different ways. Therefore, the partners do not feel bored, because the words used are in various contexts. Meanwhile, grammar mastery is also an important thing to be studied and mastered by the students who want to have ability in English.

Grammar itself is an area of knowledge which is very important to be learned and mastered, because it can help people to mean many different things and tidy those meanings up, and then it has a close relationship with four English fundamental skills that must be studied by students in English lesson.

In grammar lesson, there are so many materials which are studied, one of them is tense. A tense itself has an important role in studying English. Knowing and understanding about the 16 English tenses can be used as a "basic lesson" in learning and mastering English, so the students have self-confidence in using English to communicate with the people.

In fact, most students still have low competence in tenses mastery although every lesson or mastery in English has relationship with tenses. The students think that studying tenses is boring and hard. When they study tenses, some teachers like to start the lesson by giving the formulas of tenses, then the students are asked to memorize just a form not definition. They must memorize the names of tenses and their formulas which make them bored; moreover, the students are still confused to differentiate between verbal and nominal sentences. Because each sentence has different formula and rule. Some teachers do not give an explanation about those sentences, so the students get confused and do not understand the theory fast. This problem can be seen in students' works of four fundamental English skills, especially in speaking and writing works as product skills. They cannot speak and write in English by using the appropriate tenses, so that the listener or reader cannot catch the meaning of idea of expressing.

One technique assumed to be effective and joyful in teaching grammar is Smart Fingers technique. It is a new technique in teaching grammar related with tenses. It may help the teachers to teach tenses quickly, because it is very simple and easy to conduct. On the other hand, by using this Smart Fingers technique, the students may learn and understand tenses more comprehensively since the technique is easy to follow.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In learning English, there are two aspects that people must master, they are vocabulary and grammar. Wilkins as cited in Thornbury (2002:13) states, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." It means grammar will help people to convey their idea to the others supported by vocabulary. So both grammar and vocabulary have important role in communication. However, in this research, researcher focuses on grammar only.

Harmer (1999) states that there are several definitions of grammar, first, grammar is partly the study of what forms (or structures) are possible in a language. Second, grammar is a description of the rules that govern how a language's sentences are formed. And the last, grammar is conventionally seen as the study of the syntax and morphology of the sentences. Meanwhile, syntax is the system of rules that cover the order of the words in a sentence, and morphology is the system of rules that cover the formation of the words.

Furthermore, Ur (1996) argues, "Grammar is sometimes defined as the way words are put together to make correct sentences." Moreover, Purpura (2004) states that grammar is defined in terms of grammatical form and meaning, which

are available to be accessed in language use. In addition, Douglas (2007: 420) says, "Grammar is the system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence."

In short, it is concluded that grammar is an area of knowledge which has a description of the rules of forming sentences that uses syntax and morphology to make chains of words which are available to be accessed in language use, so the sentences can be accepted and understood naturally.

Generally, there are two kinds of grammar. They are prescriptive and descriptive grammars. Both of them have different definitions. Decapua (2008: 10) argues, "Prescriptive grammar is the grammar taught in school, discussed in newspaper and magazine columns on language, or mandated by language academies such as those found in Spain or France." It attempts to tell people how they should use appropriate languages like what, how, and why they should say something.

In contrast, Decapua (2008:13) says, ". . . descriptive grammar means saying that everything is right and nothing is wrong. What we must consider is the purpose for which a speaker is using language." Commonly it can be found when adult native speakers actually use their language in their daily activities. In this research, the researcher focuses on prescriptive grammar, because its grammar is taught in school.

One of the lessons that taught in grammar is tense. Tense has an important role in mastering English. By knowing and understanding kinds, formulas and functions of tenses, it can help students to use English well. According to Kreidler (1998), "Tense is a system of contrast that locates the general meaning of the proposition in the past, present, or future, from the time-perspective of the speaker." Downing and Locke (2006:352) state, "Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of the events in time." In short, it can be concluded that tense is the grammatical expression of the location of the event in time, such as past, present or future.

The techniques of teaching grammar are varies, and they have possibility to develop, so that the goal of teaching and learning process can be reached easily. In consequence, the researcher will try to develop teaching techniques of grammar by using fingers named Smart Fingers technique.

Smart Fingers technique is a technique which is used for teaching English tenses by using fingers. It is a new technique that will help teachers in teaching tenses, so the students are able to understand and master English tenses fast. The implementation of this technique is very simple, because it only uses fingers. In addition, the functions of this technique are helping the students to memorize and understand 16 English tenses fast and easily. In this technique, there are two terms that used to point right and left hands. The terms are "Center" for right hand, and "Branch" for left hand. Besides, each finger has its name based on the types of Smart Fingers themselves.

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted at Class I.A, the first semester of English department of Mathla'ul Anwar University, Banten. It is located at Jalan K.H.

Mas Abdurrahman, Cikaliung, Saketi - Pandeglang regency, Banten province. There were several reasons for considering this campus being research settings of this research. The first, the most of students found difficulty in mastering English tenses, especially when they studied *Structure 1* course, as one of the courses at the first semester. The last one, its course contained tenses that were appropriate to investigate by using smart fingers as a teaching technique. This research was held for three months, from October 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2013. It had twelve meetings in three cycles.

Since this research attempted to explore the implementation of Smart Fingers technique to learn English tenses, it employed the qualitative research design with the characteristics of action research. Action research was chosen because this research aimed to identify a situation or issue that subjects considered worth looking into more deeply and systematically.

In this research, the researcher used a triangulation of data collection methods. Mathinson in Sugiyono (2012:329) says, "The value of triangulation lies in providing evidence-whether convergent, inconsistent, or contradictory." It means that the researcher used more than one method of data collection involving questionnaire, observation, and interview with the students. Through triangulation, it would improve the strength of the data collection.

All data were analyzed qualitatively. The data analysis did soon after questionnaire, classroom observation, and interview conducted. Some techniques were used for analyzing the data.

## RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The implementation of Smart Fingers technique is simple and easy because it only uses fingers. In addition, the functions of this technique are helping the students to memorize and understand 16 English tenses usage fast and easily. In this technique, there are two terms used to point right and left hands. The terms are "Center" for right hand and "Branch" for left hand. Besides, each finger has its name based on the types of Smart Fingers themselves.

The students followed the steps of Smart Fingers technique showed by researcher, so that they could practice all tricks of Smart Fingers technique well and understand their functions in learning grammar, especially in tenses.

### a. The Implementation of Tricks of Smart Fingers Technique

#### 1) Smart Fingers, "Memorizing Tenses"

In this trick 1, the students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by researcher. Here was the instruction of it:

Index finger (C) combined with index finger (B), middle finger (B), ring finger (B) and little finger (B), so gained four names of tenses, they are *Simple Present Tense*, *Present Continuous Tense*, *Present Perfect Tense*, and *Present Perfect Continuous Tense*.

#### 2) Smart Fingers, "Naming Tenses"

In this trick 2, the students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by researcher. Here is the instruction of it:

Combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, thumb finger (C) and thumb finger (B), it means that, if in the sentence there

is *Verb 1* (positive form), it is indicated that the name of the sentence is *Simple Present tense*, the word “Simple” here added because the sentence just has one verb. Here is the explanation of the use of Smart Fingers, “Naming Tenses”:

- a) If the sentence has one verb, its tense name must be begun by “Simple” word.
  - b) If the sentence has two or three verbs, its tense name must be adjusted with the verbs sequence.
  - c) If the sentence has ‘Modal Verbs’ (will, would, shall, should etc.), its tense name must be begun by “Future” or “Past Future”.
- 3) Smart Fingers, “Auxiliary Verbs”  
Trick 3 here is almost the same with trick 2. The center’s terms are same, but the branch’s terms are different. The students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by researcher. Here is the instruction of it:  
Combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. For example, index finger (C) is paired with index finger (B). This means that if there is “Did” or “To Be 2 (was,were)” indicated the tense name of the sentence is *Simple Past tense*.
- 4) Smart Fingers, “Verbs VS To Be”  
The use of this trick is same with the previous one that is just combining the fingers which have same names in each hand. The students were asked to follow instruction demonstrated by researcher. Here is the instruction of it:  
Combining the terms of Center and terms of Branch. For example, middle finger (C) is paired with middle finger (B). It means that if there is *Verb-3*, the students can change it into *been*. So the formula is changing but the name of tense is not.
- 5) Smart Fingers, “Smart Short Tenses”  
The use of this trick is same with the previous ones, namely just combining the fingers that have same names in each hand. For example, ring finger (C) is paired with ring finger (B). It means that if there is *Have/Has*, the students can change it into *had*. So the formula and name of tenses are changing. By mastering this type, students are hoped to know 16 English tenses and have ability to make their formulas by one step.

#### **b. Smart Fingers Technique can be Applied to Improve Students’ Grammar Mastery, especially in English Tenses Mastery**

Most of Students had difficulty in mastering grammar, especially in English tenses. Based on the result of interview with the lecturers, the difficulty is caused by several reasons namely students’ Basic English is low, lack of vocabularies and students did not study tenses hard and seriously, did not understand how to make a right sentence in verbal or nominal forms, felt hard in sentence patterns and their time signals, and students got difficulty in implementation of Verb, linking-verbs, and Non Verbs into a right sentence.

In line with those problems, Smart Fingers technique could be a problem solver to help students to solve them and improve their grammar

mastery, especially in English tenses. Firstly, the students had problems in memorizing tenses names and functioning them in determining the names of tenses used in a sentence, forming auxiliary verbs, differentiating between verbal and nominal sentences, forming tenses formulas and negative and interrogative sentences, and using Modality in appropriate sentence. Finally, by using Smart Fingers technique, students did not have those problems again. Then, they could improve their grammar mastery, and tenses get interested lesson for them.

It gained data that students who could memorize 16 English tenses names fast increased gradually from cycle 1 to cycle 3 (86%, 96%, and 100%). Meanwhile, the ability of students in determining the names of tenses used in a sentence by one sight inclined (75%, 84%, and 88%). Also, both the progress of Students' understanding Auxiliary verbs functions and the using of modality in appropriate sentence increased in each cycle (75%, 80%, and 92%). Too. The ability of students to differentiate between *Verbal and Nominal sentences* and, they could form English tenses formulas without using an English dictionary progressed gradually from cycle 1 to cycle 3 (72%, 82%, and 90%). Moreover, the students who had capable in changing *present forms* into *past forms* through one step inclined (89%, 90%, and 96%). It could be seen that all those results of students' achievement indicators passed the passing score (56%). In short, Smart fingers technique can improve students' grammar mastery, especially in English tenses mastery.

### **c. The Students' Responses on the Smart Fingers Technique in Improving Students' Grammar Mastery, especially in English Tenses Mastery**

During the observation, the researcher taught the students about tenses using Smart Fingers technique. At the beginning of cycle I, the students seemed curious and motivated to learn English tenses as soon as the observer told the use of Smart Fingers technique in mastering tenses, because they thought it was a new technique and had not ever used or heard before. At the first time, it was common to see if the students got difficulty and confused to conduct the technique. More and more, they felt familiar with the technique which used their fingers, it could be seen at the following cycles. At cycle II and cycle III, the students tried to practice all tricks of Smart Fingers technique in peer partner. They showed their skills to their friends alternately. Finally, at the end each meeting the observer asked them to practice the tricks of Smart Fingers technique. It was done to know whether they had understood or not. To make sure their skills, observer gave questions that dealt with tenses. During the teaching and learning process, the students seemed joyful and enthusiastic to follow and practice all those steps because the researchers who had role as a teacher was positioning himself as a subject observer.

Students told that the technique was easy and simple to conduct. Besides, they felt surprise with the implementing and functions of the technique which could help them to master English tenses easily and fun. So they were interested in



implementation of Smart Fingers technique in improving their grammar mastery, especially in English tenses.

## DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Questionnaire

The findings showed that all students or 100% of the total number of the students could memorize the tenses names, decide the tenses names of a sentence by once sight, mention the name of auxiliary verbs, form a negative and interrogative sentences quickly, mention the function of Verbs and To Be, and could change the present forms into past forms.

It is proven by data showing the implementation of Smart Fingers, "Memorizing Tenses" inclined from cycle I to cycle III (70%, 80%, and 100%). Also the use of Smart Fingers, "Naming Tenses" increased gradually (70%, 80%, and 100%). In addition, the implementation of Smart Fingers, "Auxiliary Verbs" grew up gradually in each cycle (80%, 100%, and 100%). Moreover, the use of Smart Fingers, "Verb VS To Be" increased well (90%, 100%, and 100%). And the last trick of Smart Fingers technique namely Smart Fingers, "Smart Short Tenses" also proven useful and easy to conduct (100%, 100%, and 100%). Indeed, the students felt that the implementation of Smart Fingers technique helped them to master grammar, especially English tenses (100%, 100%, and 100%).

### 2. Observation

Students had practiced all tricks of Smart Fingers technique to answer the test forms related to English tenses, and they gradually inclined cycle I to cycle III (79%, 86%, and 93%).

In common, the tests progress of implementing Smart Fingers technique from cycle to cycle was positive. Students were able to memorize 16 tenses names without a pen in ten minutes (86%, 96%, and 100%). Also, they could determine the names of tenses used in a sentence by once sight (75%, 84%, and 88%). Moreover, they were able to understand the functions of auxiliary verbs and the using of modality in appropriate sentence (75%, 80%, and 92%). Besides, they could differentiate between *Verbal and Nominal sentences* and form English tenses formulas without using an English dictionary (72%, 82%, and 90%). In addition, the students could change *present forms* into *past forms* through one step (89%, 90%, and 96%). Based on those data, it can be concluded that Smart fingers technique can improve students' grammar mastery, especially in English tenses mastery.

### 3. Interview

Students felt that all tricks of Smart Fingers technique were helpful to master English tenses. It is proven from some statements here:

*"I think it is very helpful to master tenses."*

*"Make me so easy to understand."*

*"It is easy to remember, so we know what verbs that used in the sentence."*

*"So easy, it just combines between Center and Branch."*

*“This technique helps us to memorize and make a sentence well.”*

*“Wow, it is easy, change from verb-1 into verb-2.”*

*“I think, implementation of smart finger “Memorizing tenses” helps me to understand tenses.”*

Based on the results of interview above, it can be stated that the students respond and accept the implementation of Smart Fingers technique in improving students' grammar mastery, especially English tenses well. In addition, they think that the technique is very easy and helpful in learning English tenses.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is found that all the students feel easy to implement the technique, and they think that Smart Fingers technique is helpful to learn grammar, especially English tenses. They can practice all the tricks (Smart Fingers, “Memorizing Tenses”, “Naming Tenses”, “Auxiliary Verbs”, “Verbs VS To Be” and Smart Fingers, “Smart Short Tenses”) because of their simplicity.

Too, it is gotten that the technique can help students to improve their grammar mastery, especially in English tenses. It is in line with the indicators of students' achievement results relate with the tricks of Smart Fingers technique. All the students can fulfil all indicators. It means that this technique is able to improve students' grammar mastery, especially tenses.

In addition, it is found that all students respond on the Smart Fingers technique positively and enthusiastic to practice all tricks of Smart Fingers technique in learning and mastering English tenses.

## IMPLICATIONS

Based on the previous explanation, it can be stated some implications, they are by applying the Smart Fingers technique, the students are encouraged to be better in understanding the concept of tenses, able to memorize and decide easily the names of 16 English tenses, able to form negative and interrogative forms in both verbal and nominal correctly, able to state the formulas better, and able to change tenses forms from present into past easily.

## SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this research, it is advisable for the teachers to use Smart Fingers technique in their teaching grammar, especially in English tenses besides other technique to increase the students' grammar mastery, identify the students' responses on the technique used by the teachers in teaching and learning process of grammar, and to use appropriate techniques for the students.

In addition, these findings are useful for the students. Therefore, it is advisable for students to practice the Smart Fingers technique more, do more tests dealing with grammar mastery, especially English tenses, and to share this technique to other people to help them in understanding English tenses.

As this research is limited to the investigation of the implementation of Smart Fingers technique in improving students' grammar mastery, especially in English tenses mastery, it is important for other researchers to investigate the effect of this technique on other students' ability in grammar mastery.



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