

The Recognition of English Tenses by Thai EFL Learners

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This study addresses the challenges encountered by Thai learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) due to the absence of a tense-aspect system in their native language. Emphasizing the prevalent reliance on classroom instruction for English tense acquisition, the primary research objective is to examine the proficiency of Thai EFL learners, stratified by varying levels of English grammar competency, in discerning English tenses and aspects. Through the administration of two evaluative instruments, encompassing 12 distinct English tenses and verb phrase structures, the findings reveal that initial recognition is centered on the present simple and past simple tenses. Proficiency levels significantly influence tense recognition, with the initial phase comprising the present simple, past simple, present continuous, and past continuous tenses, aligning with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These insights hold pedagogical implications, suggesting practical applications for English instructors catering to Thai EFL learners, thereby enhancing overall classroom efficacy.

Keywords: Thai EFL learners, English tense recognition, English tense and aspect, teaching English tense

INTRODUCTION

The English tense–aspect system is a unique and distinctive language property that does not exist in Thai. Isarankura (2011) stated that time and aspect in Thai language are recognized through lexical items such as nouns and adverbs, or a specific context mentioned while the message is being delivered. Bardovi-Harlig (1992; 2000) stated that English tenses involve the expression of a tense and aspect system. Not only are some specific time markers, e.g., *yesterday*, *next month*, *so far*, frequently used in tenses, but aspects also correlate with times to form an individual tense in English, e.g., *I was playing football at school yesterday*. A tense, in general, is associated with an action, whereas speech is delivered in relation to present, past, and future times (Comrie, 2000, p. 36; Gabriele, 2009; Reichenbach, 1947 cited in Derlerck, 1986). Furthermore, aspects regarding simple, continuous or progressive, perfect, and perfect continuous refer to the speaker’s point of view as defined by grammatical structure and lexical meaning (Smith, 1991). According to non-native speakers of English context, Thai learners of English and who live in a country where English is a foreign language, have limited environmental support to learn and acquire English tense and systems skills. It can be found in such a circumstance of EFL that Thai EFL learners generally learn and initialize English language in their classroom and are provided coursebooks where English is required to be learned as a foreign language in their compulsory education from primary to secondary levels

(Ministry of Thai Education, 2008). As mentioned, to observe the recognition of the English tense–aspect system by Thai EFL learners, it is necessary to assess their explicit knowledge, which can be reported by their comprehension on reading tasks and their responses through multiple-choice selection regarding the English tense–aspect system and its meaning. Iamsirirak & Imsa-ard (2022) conducted the study on Thai EFL student teachers’ grammar knowledge, which is the basis of the present study (Iamsirirak & Imsa-ard, 2022), the findings showed a relationship between English grammar knowledge and English tense–aspect knowledge.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To examine the relationship between Thai EFL learners’ English grammar proficiency and English tense understanding.
- 2) To investigate the recognition of English tense and aspect system by Thai EFL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore English tenses, the three terms—form, meaning, and use—of each tense–aspect system are investigated. Klammer, Schulz, and Volpe (2004, p. 178) stated that *form* refers to the physical shape of a grammatical unit and *function*, such as “is,” “am,” “are” + {-ing} shows the form of a grammatical unit. Form leads to function, illustrating the activity in progress of present progressive tense. The combination of form and function indicates its role in a larger grammatical structure and can be assumed to use the tense–aspect system, which plays an important role in the application at the suprasentential, or discourse level (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016, p. 106). Isarankura (2011, p. 1) said that the meaning of tenses can be reflected through the ability to recognize the tense–aspect marking of a verb and meaning. That is, the meaning of the tense refers to the relation between its form and use in context.

Isarankura (2011) defined tense as a grammatical category of a verb when it appears in a predicate of a sentence. A main verb plays an important role in the predicate by using tense markers added to the verb to identify a time reference of a particular event. Klammer, Schulz, and Volpe (2004) illustrated that main verb phrases are comprised of tense morphemes, signifying the time of the action in a particular event. There are two tense morphemes: present and past. Tense, in terms of defining the time, can be divided into three times: present, past, and future. Furthermore, aspect is defined as a grammatical category that shows the information of how a speaker sees that state of the mentioned event (Isarankura, 2011). There are four aspects, namely, simple, perfect, continuous or progressive, and perfect progressive, which are marked by a specific marker to the main verb (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016).

Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p. 106) pointed out that the tense–aspect system has become blurred because tense and aspect are the combination of times and aspects. That is, present, past, and future can be combined with four aspects, resulting in 12 tenses in English as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1) Simple present | e.g., <i>It breaks.</i> |
| 2) Simple past | e.g., <i>It broke.</i> |
| 3) Simple Future | e.g., <i>It will break.</i> |
| 4) Present perfect | e.g., <i>It has broken.</i> |
| 5) Past perfect | e.g., <i>It had broken.</i> |
| 6) Future perfect | e.g., <i>It will have broken.</i> |
| 7) Present progressive | e.g., <i>It is breaking.</i> |
| 8) Past progressive | e.g., <i>It was breaking.</i> |
| 9) Future progressive | e.g., <i>It will be breaking.</i> |
| 10) Present perfect progressive | e.g., <i>It has been breaking.</i> |
| 11) Past perfect progressive | e.g., <i>It had been breaking.</i> |
| 12) Future perfect progressive | e.g., <i>It will have been breaking.</i> |

In order to discuss the actual tenses in English, we can start with the tense–aspect system and tense–aspect combinations. According to Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016), tense relates to time and aspect affects the internal structure of the action occurring at a given time. The congruence of this concept relates to previous scholarly discussions (Huddleston, 1984; Isarakura, 2011; Klammer, Schulz, & Volpe,

2004; Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 1999; Quirk *et al.*, 1992; and Yule, 1998). Researchers have agreed that in English there are only two tenses, present and past, based on the tense–aspect system by the verb morpheme attached to the main verb, resulting in the verb phrase of each tense–aspect system. Meanwhile, the future tense is formed by the modal *will* in order to identify the time, meaning, and event without any verb inflection as found in present and past tenses. However, in order to create a clearer picture of the tense–aspect combinations in English, Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p. 107) created the list presented as Table 1.

Iamsirirak (2021) investigated the English grammar proficiency of 144 student teachers majoring in English in a public university in Bangkok, Thailand, using the Test of English Grammar for Teachers (T-EGT). The findings were displayed in three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The results showed that most of the student teachers attained intermediate proficiency. However, the proficiency levels were similar: 33.33, 34.03, and 32.04 for beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, respectively. Then, Iamsirirak and Imsa-ard (2022) developed a T-EGT test to classify Thai EFL student teachers into six proficiency bands from very poor to advanced.

In accordance with the related English tense–aspect conceptualized by many scholars mentioned above as well as the previous studies of T-EGT test, the overall information could display the conceptual framework in order to utilize this study to investigate the relationship between Thai EFL learners' English tense–aspect system recognition and their English grammar proficiency levels.

METHODS

The study was conducted with student teachers majoring in English in a public university located in a Northern province of Thailand. There are two major research instruments used in this study.

First, the Test of English Grammar for Teachers (T-EGT), composed by Iamsirirak (2021), was utilized to investigate student teachers' grammar proficiency levels. The T-EGT comprises two sections: Part 1: general information of the participants, and Part 2: 110 items of English grammar tests, including 21 questions on English grammar topics. In this initial step, T-EGT could divide the participants into three groups: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Subsequently, Iamsirirak and Imsa-ard (2022) applied T-EGT to a larger group of 144 student teachers. These data were analyzed to identify student teachers' English grammar at six proficiency levels: Band 1 Very Poor; Band 2 Poor; Band 3 Lower Intermediate; Band 4 Intermediate; Band 5 Upper Intermediate; and Band 6 Advanced.

In this study, 149 out of 154 participants volunteered to participate. However, there were five participants whom the researchers could not contact because of the limitation of the connection during the COVID-19 disruption. Their English grammar proficiency was assessed using T-EGT and the results are displayed in Table 1.

The data from T-EGT were used to reflect the overall English grammar knowledge of the participants. According to the obtained data, most of the participants' English grammar proficiencies were "Meet standard" with 48.99%, Lower intermediate, and 24.16% in Intermediate levels in Bands 3 and 4, respectively.

TABLE 1
ENGLISH GRAMMAR PROFICIENCY LEVELS BY T-EGT (N = 149)

	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6
Students' grammar proficiency level	Academic warning	Below standard	Meet standard		Above standard	
	Very poor	Poor	Lower intermediate	Intermediate	Upper intermediate	Advanced
Score range	24 or below	25–42	43–59	60–77	78–94	95 or above
Number of students	1	24	73	36	12	3
Percent in each band	0.67%	16.11%	48.99%	24.16%	8.05%	2.01%

Second, the other major research instrument in this study was the Test of English Tense–Aspect System (T-ETAS), which was designed and used to investigate participants' background knowledge of English tenses by examining both the recognition of English grammar structure (names and grammar structures of English tenses) and the meaning of English grammar tenses. There are two parts: Part 1: general information and Part 2: knowledge of English tenses. Part 2 contains four sections: 2.1) general knowledge of English tenses; 2.2) knowledge of English tenses in single verb or verb phrase levels; and 2.3) and 2.4) knowledge of English tenses in sentence and paragraph level. The test in Part 2.1 was designed to investigate the recognition of English grammar tense names, including all general 12 tenses—the combination of 3 times (present, past, future) with 4 aspects (simple, continuous/progressive, perfect, perfect continuous). However, this article focuses on Part 2.1 and Part 2.2, which were designed to investigate the recognition of English tenses.

Part 2.1: General Knowledge of English Tenses displayed six open-ended questions and one yes/no question as follows:

- 2.1.1) What are time references in English tenses?
- 2.1.2) How many time references are there in English tenses?
- 2.1.3) What are aspects in English tenses?
- 2.1.4) How many aspects are there in English tenses?
- 2.1.5) What are the combinations of English tenses?
- 2.1.6) How many tense–aspect combinations are there in English?
- 2.1.7) Is there any other alternative name for the “continuous” aspect?
..... Yes. (Please identify.) No.

Part 2.2: Knowledge of English Tenses in Single Verb or Verb Phrase Levels was composed of 12 tenses with 12 multiple-choice items. In each item, the choices were categorized into two groups. The first group (1) was the selection of time references using three choices: a) present, b) past, or c) future. The second group (2) was the selection of aspectual properties, namely, a) simple, b) continuous, c) perfect, or d) perfect continuous. The reason why *continuous* was presented but *progressive* was not arose from the reflection of the three experts validating the questionnaire's item congruency. One of the three consulted experts was a lecturer who had taught in that university (the research site) for about 10 years at the time of data collection.

There was only one simple sentence with the same context, but with the only different unit in the sentence being a verb phrase; those were changed by the focus tenses of each question. The sentence in

each question was shown with the underlined part conveying the focus verb phrase that was a cue for the response selection as shown in the following example.

- 2.2.1) He wrote an essay.
- | | | | |
|-----|------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| (1) | a. present | b. past | c. future |
| (2) | a. simple | b. continuous | |
| | c. perfect | d. perfect continuous | |

As seen the example above, the verb phrase was changed relevant to different tenses for each question; for example, 2.2.2) He writes an essay. 2.2.3) He will be writing an essay.

The data were then analyzed to show the participants' English tense and aspect knowledge. The findings from this study will be used to illustrate the relationship between Thai EFL learners' English grammar proficiency and English tense understanding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study were 149 student teacher English majors. Some of them had completed a 5-year program in accordance with the teacher education curriculum requirement. Table 2 lists the number of participants together with their score range.

TABLE 2
PARTICIPANTS' PROFICIENCY LEVELS AND T-EGT SCORES BY YEARS OF STUDY

Years of Study	Number of Students	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
2	25	19	67	48.88	10.95
3	32	32	89	48.31	12.13
4	43	32	86	53.63	12.34
5	49	29	99	66.20	16.64
Overall score	149	19	99	55.83	15.51

As seen in Table 2, the scores of 149 participants were categorized based on their years of study, with maximum, minimum, and mean scores, and SD. The data reflect the second- and third-year students' English grammar proficiency to be similar, with the average score of 48.88 and 48.31, respectively. The fourth-year students received the average score of 53.63, which places them in the middle among these four years of study. Reasonably, students in the fifth-year perform the highest, with an average score of 66.20%. Moreover, the SD of each year of study from the second to the fifth year is 10.95, 12.13, 12.34, and 16.64, respectively. The SD implies that the higher year they have studied the larger the range of their scores, which can signify that some students might have improved their English grammar proficiency more than other students while some of them still retain their English grammar knowledge as students in the second and third years. Furthermore, the overall average score of 149 participants is 55.83 with SD of 15.51 while the maximum score of 99 belongs to a fifth-year student (the highest year) and the minimum score of 19 to a second-year student (the lowest-year student in this study).

Part 2.1: General Knowledge of English Tenses in T-ETAS was designed to test participants' recognition of English tenses regarding two terms: times and aspects. The questions requested the participants to write their knowledge of times and aspects in English tenses, including 12 tenses with 3 times (past, present, future) and 4 aspects (simple, continuous/progressive, perfect, perfect continuous/perfect progressive). Besides, this part elicited knowledge of the interchangeable terms of *continuous* and *progressive*. The term *continuous* is more commonly used for Thai EFL students; i.e., it is used to ask the other term, *progressive*, to determine whether the participants recognize the existence of these terms or not. The obtained data from Part 2.1 are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3
RECOGNITION OF NUMBER OF TIMES IN ENGLISH TENSES

Time in English	Frequency	Average (%)
2 times	4	2.68
3 times	128	85.91
4 times	8	5.37
5 times	9	6.04
Total	149	100

In Part 2.1, five multiple-choice questions were asked to elicit the number of tenses. The findings revealed that 85.91% of participants accurately recognized three times for English tenses while 2.68%, 5.37%, and 6.04% identified two, four, and five times for English tenses, respectively. The result identifies that a majority of participants could recognize three times in English tenses, which are commonly known as 12 tenses in English.

TABLE 4
RECOGNITION OF TIMES IN ENGLISH TENSES

Time in English	Frequency	Average (%)
Present	124	83.22
Past	128	85.91
Future	128	85.91
Total	149	100

In Table 4, the data show that three times in English tense system were similarly recognized by participants through the written response, with the similar percentages of 83.22, 85.91, and 85.91 for present, past, and future, respectively. The result reflected that times in English tenses were generally known among Thai EFL learners.

TABLE 5
RECOGNITION OF NUMBER OF ASPECTS IN ENGLISH TENSES

Aspect in English	Frequency	Average (%)
1 Aspect	2	1.34
2 Aspects	13	8.72
3 Aspects	36	24.16
4 Aspects	85	57.05
5 Aspects	13	8.72
Total	149	100

The data shown in Table 5 identify that the majority of participants (57.06%) could recognize all four aspects existing in the English tense–aspect system. However, the secondary majority of them defined three aspects. This might imply that they might not be sure whether the combination of continuous and perfect would be counted as an aspect in the English tense and aspect system. Apart from three and four aspects, several of them informed that there were one, two, and five aspects in English (1.34%, 8.72%, and 8.72%, respectively).

TABLE 6
RECOGNITION OF ASPECTS IN ENGLISH TENSES

Time in English	Frequency	Average (%)
Simple	93	62.42
Continuous/Progressive	103	69.13
Perfect	99	66.44
Perfect continuous/Perfect progressive	81	54.36
Total	149	100

As can be seen in Table 6, the participants could recognize continuous, perfect, simple, and perfect continuous aspects with the percentages of 69.13, 66.44, 62.42, and 54.36, respectively. Interestingly, *continuous* or *progressive* as well as *perfect* took an important role for Thai EFL learners while *simple* was recognized with a slightly lower percentage than the first two aspects. This might be because they get used to the name of tenses *present*, *simple*, and *past*, which they thought that they had already mentioned in times of English tense system.

TABLE 7
AWARENESS OF INTERCHANGEABLE TERMS BETWEEN CONTINUOUS AND PROGRESSIVE ASPECTS

Is there any other name for continuous aspect?	Frequency	Average (%)
Yes	80	53.69
No	69	46.31
Total	149	100

The data in Table 7 derive from the question “*Is there any other alternative name of continuous aspect*” and reveals that a greater percentage (53.69) of participants recognized that the *continuous* aspect can be interchangeably called *progressive*; however, 46.31% reflected that they did not know or lacked concern for the alternative name of *continuous*, i.e., is *progressive*.

TABLE 8
RANK OF RECOGNITION OF THE TENSE-ASPECT COMBINATIONS IN ENGLISH BY WRITTEN RESPONSE

N = 149			
Rank	Tense	Frequency	Average (%)
1st	Present continuous	130	87.25
2nd	Present simple	129	86.58
3rd	Past simple	127	85.23
4th	Present perfect	123	82.55
5th	Past continuous	123	82.55
6th	Past perfect	123	82.55
7th	Future simple	116	77.85
8th	Future perfect	116	77.85
9th	Future continuous	110	73.83
10th	Past Perfect continuous	109	73.15
11th	Present Perfect continuous	107	71.81
12th	Future Perfect continuous	105	70.47

The data in Table 8 rank the combination of English tense and aspect systems by 149 participants based on their recognition through writing. Eighty percent recognition of English tense–aspect combinations is achieved for present continuous, present simple, past simple tenses, present perfect, past continuous, and past perfect.

TABLE 9
NUMBER OF ANSWERS OF TIMES AND ASPECTS BY WRITTEN RESPONSE

Number of Answers of Times	Number of Answers of Aspects					Total
	0	1	2	3	4	
0	14	1	0	0	3	18
1	2	0	0	0	0	2
2	2	1	1	0	5	9
3	22	11	14	3	70	120
Total	40	13	15	3	78	149

Table 9 illustrates the recognition of 149 participants regarding the number of answers that they wrote on the test. They were requested to write the names of times and aspects in English tenses in the separate sections of questions. According to the results, there were 70 participants that could identify the expected number of three times (past, present, future) and four aspects (simple, continuous/progressive, perfect, perfect continuous/perfect progressive).

Remarkably, 18 students out of 149 did not write any word relating to times in English tenses and 40 of them did not write any word relating to aspects in English tenses. Twenty-two participants could mention all three times but they did not write any word of aspects in English tense.

Interestingly, 22 participants could write three times, but they could not write any aspects in English tenses. However, three participants recognized four aspects but they could not write any times in English tenses.

According to the findings described above, it can be assumed that the knowledge of time precedes the knowledge of aspects because the name of time could be mentioned with a greater number than the name of aspects. This might confirm that time in English is first recognized as Thai language consists of times as does English. On the other hand, Thai language is not comprised of aspects as is English. That is, the knowledge of aspect in English can cause difficulty for Thai EFL learners' comprehension.

TABLE 10
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WITH COMPLETE RECOGNITION FOR THE NUMBER OF TIMES AND ASPECTS COMPARED TO THEIR WRITTEN RESPONSES

Number of Answers of Times	Number of Answers of Aspects					Total of Participants Completing 12 Tenses in Written Responses
	0	1	2	3	4	
0	2	0	0	0	1	3
1	1	0	0	0	0	1
2	0	0	0	0	1	1
3	11	3	4	1	56	75
Total	14	3	4	1	58	80

Table 10 shows the relationship between tenses and aspects reported by the participants. According to the data, it is found that there were 80 participants who could name the twelve tenses in English, e.g., present simple, present continuous/present progressive, present perfect, *etc.* To narrow the focus on the performance on either time or aspect responded by their written answers. The data show 75 participants recognized three times in English tenses while 58 participants recognized four English aspects. Fifty-six

participants could recognize the 12 combinations of tenses in terms of the expected answers. That is to say, there were 56 participants who could name all times and all aspects in the separate questions, and they could also identify all combinations of the English tense–aspect system in terms of the name of each English tense. This group can be identified as a group with complete recognition of English tenses including times and aspects.

In addition, the data still identify some interesting findings. That is, 14 students could not recognize or did not understand the term *aspect*; therefore, they expressed in their responses that there were no aspects in English tenses.

Interestingly, the participants who could recognize three times did not identify all four aspects. That is, there were 11, 3, 4, and 1 of them still identified the unexpected number of answers of aspects with no aspect, 1, 2, and 3 aspects, respectively. However, all participants who recognized all four aspects could better recognize three times in the English tenses with a great number. That is, only two participants (one that names no time and one that names two times) that identified four aspects could not name the number of times. This can be applied in language learning and teaching to encourage Thai ELF students to be aware of the existence of *time* before *aspect* in the English tense system. This might facilitate them to learn by their sequences of English tense and aspect system.

Part 2.2: Knowledge of English Tense in Word and Verb Phrase Levels was constructed to collect participants' knowledge of English tense and aspect by verb phrase structure. In accordance with the discussion of times and aspects in English mentioned in the Literature Review, the test was therefore composed of only two times (past and present) combined with four aspects (simple, continuous/progressive, perfect, perfect continuous/perfect progressive) included in the eight tenses in this study. In this part, the data in Table 1 were applied to categorize the six-band participants in four proficiency groups as shown in the Table 11.

TABLE 11
FOUR GROUPS OF PARTICIPANTS CATEGORIZED BY GRAMMAR
PROFICIENCY LEVEL

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
Number of students in Group	25		73		36	
Percent in each group	16.78		48.99		24.16	
Band	1	2	3	4	5	6
Students' grammar proficiency level	Academic warning	Below Standard	Meet standard		Above standard	
	Very poor	Poor	Lower intermediate	Intermediate	Upper intermediate	Advanced
Score range	24 or below	25–42	43–59	60–77	78–94	95 or above
Number of students in band	1	24	73	36	12	3

According to the attained proficiency of the six bands and the number of participants in each group, the data are classified into four groups. Group 1 consists of 25 participants from Band 1 and Band 2. Group 2 consists of 73 participants from Band 3. Group 3 consists of 36 participants from Band 4. Group 4 consists of 15 participants from Band 5 and Band 6. The percentage of Groups 1–4 is 16.78, 48.99, 24.16, and 10.07, respectively.

Then, the results from the test in Part 2.2 were analyzed to investigate participants' English tense and aspect system recognition. The results displayed in Table 12 are shown as correct or incorrect multiple-choice selection.

TABLE 12
NUMBER OF CORRECT AND INCORRECT ANSWERS FOR ENGLISH TENSE IN A SINGLE VERB OR A VERB PHRASE

Tense	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		Group 4		Overall	
	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)	☐ Freq (%)
Pres Sim	18 (72)	7 (28)	67 (91.78)	6 (8.22)	34 (94.44)	2 (5.56)	15 (100)	0 (0)	134 (89.93)	15 (10.07)
Pres Cont	14 (56)	11 (44)	64 (87.67)	9 (12.33)	35 (97.22)	1 (2.78)	15 (100)	0 (0)	128 (85.91)	21 (14.09)
Pres Perf	6 (24)	19 (76)	36 (49.32)	37 (50.68)	25 (69.44)	11 (30.56)	14 (93.33)	1 (6.67)	81 (54.36)	68 (45.64)
Pres Perf Cont	5 (20)	20 (80)	40 (54.79)	33 (45.21)	26 (72.22)	10 (27.78)	14 (93.33)	1 (6.67)	85 (57.05)	64 (42.95)
Past Sim	14 (56)	11 (44)	65 (89.04)	8 (10.96)	36 (100)	0 (0)	15 (100)	0 (0)	130 (87.25)	19 (12.75)
Past Cont	15 (60)	10 (40)	59 (80.82)	14 (19.18)	34 (94.44)	2 (5.56)	15 (100)	0 (0)	123 (82.55)	26 (17.45)
Past Perf	12 (48)	13 (52)	52 (71.23)	21 (28.77)	31 (86.11)	5 (13.89)	15 (100)	0 (0)	110 (73.83)	39 (26.17)
Past Perf Cont	11 (44)	14 (56)	46 (63.01)	27 (36.99)	31 (86.11)	5 (13.89)	14 (93.33)	1 (6.67)	102 (68.46)	47 (31.54)

Remarks: ☐ stands for correct (or expected) answers.
☐ stands for incorrect (or unexpected) answers.
Freq stands for frequency of the participants selecting that answer.
% stands for the percentage of the frequency found.

Table 12 reports the data collected from Part 2.2. Eight tenses shown in separate sentences were provided to the participants together with two groups of multiple-choice questions. The number of participants in each group (1–4) and all participants as a whole data concerning their responses to correct (expected), and incorrect (unexpected) answers is illustrated in frequency and percentage.

Overall, the results showed present simple is the English tense that the participants could best identify. Specifically, present simple is the English tense that Groups 1, 2, and 4 could perform in the greatest percentage of 72, 91.78, and 100, respectively. Group 3 performed the best (100%) in past simple tense, which was better than present continuous (97.22%) and present simple (94.44%); however, when compared the number of participants, it is found that the differences between these three tenses resulted from one participant for each interval: 36 (for past simple), 35 (present continuous), and 34 (for present simple). Furthermore, present perfect is the English tense that 81 out of 149 participants could least identify (54.36%).

It is interesting to display the obtained data in rank form of English tense recognition among the four groups. Table 13 illustrates the sequences of participants' recognition in the English tense and aspect system.

TABLE 13
RANKINGS OF ENGLISH TENSE RECOGNITION OF THAI EFL LEARNERS

Rank	Overall	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
1	Present Simple	Present Simple	Present Simple	Past Simple	Present Simple
2	Past Simple	Past Continuous	Past Simple	Present Continuous	Present Continuous
3	Present Continuous	Present Continuous	Present Continuous	Present Simple	Past Simple
4	Past Continuous	Past Simple	Past Continuous	Past Continuous	Past Continuous
5	Past Perfect	Past Perfect	Past Perfect	Past Perfect	Past Perfect
6	Past Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Continuous	Past Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect
7	Present Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect	Present Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect Continuous
8	Present Perfect	Present Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect	Present Perfect	Past Perfect Continuous

The obtained data were analyzed and synthesized in accordance with the English tense and aspect system recognition and identification from the participants. The results signify that participants could recognize and identify English tense and aspect combinations through verb phrases at sentence level as follows:

- 1) Present simple, past simple, present continuous, and past continuous were the first major groups that participants in every group could recognize and identify. These findings are in line with Paulston and Bruder (1976, pp. 47–53) who stated that BE (present) statements and questions, present continuous, simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense in the same category of present perfect continuous was the recommended sequence for teaching ESL learners. Likewise, the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) for English Grammar Profile (English Profile, online) also classified present simple, present continuous, and past simple tenses in the CEFR levels A1 and A2 for EFL learners while present perfect continuous first appears in the CEFR level B1. Table 5 is the conclusion of English tenses based on the CEFR English Grammar Profile, which could facilitate to depict English tenses in line with the CEFR levels.
- 2) Perfect aspect, including perfect continuous, was recognized and identified as the following set of English tense and aspect combination following the first major group mentioned above.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the recognition of English tense and aspect combinations through a single verb or a verb phrase in a simplified sentence without an adverb of time. The findings reveal an engrossing perspective for the management of learning English tenses for Thai EFL learners. In regard to four groups with English grammar proficiency, the results of their English tense and aspect system recognition were relatively similar as categorized in the first major group of recognition. Present simple, past simple, present continuous, and past continuous should be the first set of their learning lessons, which is also suggested by CEFR levels.

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