



The Drill and Practice Method for Teaching the Simple Past Tense to Non-English Major Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to improve the understanding of the simple past tense among non-English major students using the drill and practice method. The study employed a one-group pre-test-post-test design. The sample consisted of 62 first-semester theology students enrolled in the General English course at Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Indonesia. The pre-test was conducted by testing ten items on the simple past tense, covering affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms. Subsequently, students participated in DP sessions, which included material introduction, modeling, guided practice, immediate feedback, repetition practice, individual assessment, discussion and clarification, independent practice, reinforcement, and closing. Following the intervention, a post-test was conducted to measure improvements in understanding. The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. Results indicated a significant improvement in students' understanding of simple past tense, with a Wilcoxon value of -4.936 and asymptotic significance below 0.001. Additionally, accuracy rates and response times improved, while the number of unanswered questions decreased. The study concludes that the DP method, combined with targeted feedback, is effective in enhancing grammar skills for non-English major students, although some learners may require further instructional adjustments. While the study reports positive outcomes, it lacks a discussion of limitations, including its single group design, limited generalizability due to the specific institution, and the absence of a control group. Future research should address these limitations by investigating long-term effects and involving larger sample sizes.

Keywords: DP Method, Simple Past Tense, Non-English Major Students

INTRODUCTION

English language learning among non-English major students often faces various difficulties including a lack of understanding, self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes (Rahmaniah & Asbah, 2019; Suryanto & Sari, 2021; Kurniawan & Sai'in, 2019). One of those issues in English language learning is the sentence structure (Ajaj, 2022; Burton, 2020; Fitria, 2023; Irfan et al., 2023; Richards &

Schamidt, 2002; Widianingsih & Gulö, 2016; Yunus et al., 2020) including the simple past tense (Fadilah, 2019; Sari et al., 2023). The simple past tense is used to express actions or events (Brown, 2016; Woods, 2018) that have been completed in the past and requires a deep understanding of verb changes and subject-verb rules, which are often inconsistent (Amla & Faudi, 2022; Chan, 2016; Rusdin, 2022). This becomes more challenging for students without

a strong language background as they are less familiar with the grammatical concepts needed to comprehend this past form them (Spišiaková et al., 2023; Turakulova & Marupova, 2021).

Many studies have been conducted to address the difficulties in English grammar learning, especially among students who are not from language majors. Methods such as the deductive approach of Presentation, Practice, Production (Nahorna, 2019), task-based learning (Pratiwi et al., 2022), suggestopedia method (Supraba, 2021), utilization of technology (Najib et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2023) communicative approach, deductive and inductive (Effendi et al., 2017), and contextual teaching and learning (CTL) (Winaya et al., 2021) are often used to enhance grammar comprehension. However, despite these approaches showing varied results, there remains a need for more effective and easily implemented methods for non-English major students facing challenges in understanding the simple past tense.

The drill and practice (DP) method has been limitedly used in language learning as an effective strategy to reinforce grammar understanding through repeated exercises and feedback that can come from teachers, educational software, or other evaluation tools (Fahmina et al., 2023; Gunawan et al., 2020; Heryani et al., 2024; Nasution & Prastowo, 2021; Rathakrishnan et al., 2018; Rohman et al., 2023). This method focuses on repetition and structured practice (Asrofin & Efi Kristiana, 2023; Gunawan et al., 2020; Nasution (Asrofin & Efi

Kristiana, 2023; Nasution & Prastowo, 2021; Rohman et al., 2023) to help develop fundamental skills and knowledge (Aidoo et al., 2016; Lehtinen et al., 2017; Lestari & Sapri, 2021; Najib et al., 2023). In the context of English grammar learning, especially for concepts that require precision like the simple past tense, the DP method can be a very useful tool. Several studies show that repeated and targeted exercises can help improve grammar skills by strengthening students' long-term memory of language rules (Fivy Andries, 2019; Lutfiyah et al., 2022; Sekelj & Rigo, 2011; Zumrah & Manurung, 2022).

However, despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of the DP method in English learning, such as improvements in English learning outcomes (Handayani & Kurniah, 2021; Vinarahmah, 2022) speaking, and vocabulary (Hastenti, 2021), as well as English learning integrated with technology (Rohman et al., 2023), few studies have specifically explored its application among non-English major students struggling to understand the simple past tense. Many existing studies have focused more on beginner language learners or students from language education programs aimed at improving English skills (Handayani & Kurniah, 2021; Vinarahmah, 2022), leaving a knowledge gap regarding the effectiveness of this method in non-language contexts. This creates a need to evaluate whether the DP method can be effectively adapted for this group and to what

extent it can enhance their understanding of the simple past tense.

Assessing the effectiveness of the DP method among non-English major students is not only relevant for addressing the challenges of grammar learning but also for improving overall learning outcomes. By strengthening their understanding of the simple past tense, the DP method has the potential to help non-English major students become more confident in using English in both academic and professional contexts. Moreover, this approach can be adapted to facilitate collaborative and independent learning, thereby increasing student engagement and motivation.

In the context of grammar teaching, the Drill and Practice (DP) method stands out as a unique approach; however, it is essential to explore alternative grammar teaching methods to appreciate its adaptability and effectiveness within broader pedagogical frameworks. Task-based learning (TBL), suggestopedia, and contextual teaching and learning (CTL) are notable methods that have gained traction for their capacity to address diverse learner needs and environments. These methods emphasize active engagement, contextual relevance, and learner autonomy, which are crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of grammar among students, particularly those who are non-English majors. Task-based learning encourages students to use language as a tool to accomplish specific tasks, thereby promoting practical

application and contextual understanding of grammatical structures. Research indicates that TBL enhances grammatical competence and improves overall communicative skills by situating language use in real-life contexts (Pawlak, 2021). This aligns with findings from Liu and Dou, who emphasize the importance of contextualization in grammar instruction, suggesting that grammar teaching should be integrated with meaningful tasks to enhance learning outcomes (Liu & Dou, 2017).

Similarly, the suggestopedia approach, which utilizes a relaxed and immersive environment, has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase motivation among learners. This method can be particularly beneficial for non-English major students who may feel intimidated by traditional grammar instruction. Studies have demonstrated that suggestopedia can lead to significant improvements in language acquisition by creating a positive emotional atmosphere conducive to learning (Nurbait et al., 2023). Furthermore, contextual teaching and learning (CTL) emphasizes the relevance of educational content to students' lives, thereby enhancing engagement and retention. Research has shown that CTL strategies, such as authentic assessments and cooperative learning, significantly improve students' understanding of grammatical concepts (Nanyinza & Eclose Munsaka, 2023). Integrating these diverse methods into curriculum development not only enriches the pedagogical landscape but also

addresses the varied learning challenges faced by students. This suggests that a multifaceted approach to grammar teaching can lead to more effective learning experiences, as it accommodates different learning styles and preferences (Richards & Reppen, 2014; Walker, 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to improve the understanding of the simple past tense among non-English major students. The study uses a pre-experimental approach with a one-group pre-test-post-test design, involving 62 theology students at Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana. Therefore, the research question is how does the drill and practice method affect the understanding of the simple past tense among non-English major students? With the hypothesis is the implementation of the drill and practice method will significantly improve non-English major students' understanding of the simple past tense compared to their understanding prior to the intervention. By identifying the strengths and limitations of this method in a specific context, this research is expected to provide practical insights for educators and English instructors in selecting and designing the most appropriate teaching methods for their students' needs.

METHODS

This research used quantitative approach. Since only one class of first-semester students was available, this study employed a one-group pre-test-post-test design. To minimize bias, the pre-test and post-test utilized different sets of

questions with equivalent difficulty levels, and the study was conducted over a short period (13 sessions) to reduce maturation effects. All students in the class were included to ensure that the results represented the entire group. Samples were 62 first-semester students from the Faculty of Theology at Universitas Kristen Artha Wacana, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. These students participated in the study by completing tasks related to the simple past tense.

The *drill and practice* method were implemented through structured steps, including an introduction to the material, providing examples, guided exercises, immediate feedback, repetition practice, individual assessment, discussion and clarification, independent practice, reinforcement and closing. Students were trained to understand affirmative, negative, and interrogative forms of the simple past tense through repeated exercises designed to gradually enhance their grammar comprehension. The Quizizz app helped provide automated feedback and multiple attempts, fostering confidence and reinforcing material comprehension.

The data was elicited using pre-test and post-test methods. The pre-test was administered at the first meeting to establish a baseline of students' understanding of the simple past tense. After applying the drill and practice method in 13 meetings, a post-test was conducted in the 14th meeting to assess student

knowledge and skills improvement. The instruments used for data collection were exercises on simple past tense. The exercises included 10 sentences: five affirmative sentences (fill in the blank and true/false questions), three negative sentences (true/false questions), and two interrogative sentences (fill in the blank and true/false questions) (see Table 1). The exercises were based on Murphy's (2015) and Sargeant (2027) materials. They were administered using the Quizizz app, facilitating both the pre-test and post-test and the drill and practice activities.

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed descriptively to evaluate the students' time spent on tasks, accuracy of responses, type of responses (correct or incorrect), and the number of attempts made (through Quizizz app). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was employed to determine the difference in performance

between the pre-test and post-test because the data from the two paired groups were not normally distributed (sig. = 0.001 <0.05). A significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores would be indicated if the significance value (Sig.) was less than 0.05, demonstrating that the drill and practice method significantly improved students' learning outcomes regarding the past tense. Conversely, if the value were greater than 0.05, it would suggest no significant impact.

FINDINGS

Pre-test and Post-test Result

The analysis of the pre-test and post-test results revealed significant improvements in students' accuracy and response times, as well as a decrease in incorrect and unattempted responses. These results suggest that the drill and practice method effectively enhanced students' understanding and use of the simple past tense (see Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive analysis

Question	Time	Accuracy	Responses			
			Correct	Incorrect	Unattempted	
Item 1	Pre-test	19 secs	21%	15	53	2
	Post-test	15 secs	29%	20	48	0
Item 2	Pre-test	16 secs	27%	19	49	2
	Post-test	12 secs	31%	21	47	0
Item 3	Pre-test	19 secs	23%	16	51	3
	Post-test	21 secs	40%	27	41	0
Item 4	Pre-test	18 secs	43%	30	37	3
	Post-test	15 secs	59%	40	28	0
Item 5	Pre-test	16 secs	23%	16	51	3
	Post-test	14 secs	31%	21	47	0
Item 6	Pre-test	25 secs	34%	24	43	3
	Post-test	22 secs	29%	20	48	0
Item 7	Pre-test	60 secs	27%	19	48	3
	Post-test	38 secs	35%	24	44	0
Item 8	Pre-test	62 secs	3%	2	65	3
	Post-test	35 secs	21%	14	54	0
Item 9	Pre-test	58 secs	1%	1	66	3
	Post-test	31 secs	6%	4	64	0

	Question	Time	Accuracy	Responses		
				Correct	Incorrect	Unattempted
Item 10	Pre-test	45 secs	6%	4	63	3
	Post-test	38 secs	18%	18	50	0

The question that received the highest number of "Correct" responses was item ten, "Harry didn't (watch) a movie about animals," with an increase of 14 (from 4 to 18), followed by item eight, "Sue (wake up) late yesterday," with an increase of 12 (from 2 to 14). On the other hand, the question with the lowest increase was item two, "Sally (go) to her grandma's house," with only a 2-point increase (from 19 to 21).

The average change in the pre-test and post-test results shows a decrease of 9.7 in the

"Time" indicator, an increase of 9 in the "Accuracy" indicator, an increase of 6.3 in the "Correct" indicator, a decrease of 5.5 in the "Incorrect" indicator, and a decrease of 2.8 in the "Unattempted" indicator, bringing it down to 0 (see Figure 1). Thus, the drill and practice method have a positive effect on students' learning outcomes in the simple past tense by improving the time taken, accuracy, and correct answers, while also reducing incorrect answers and unattempted questions.

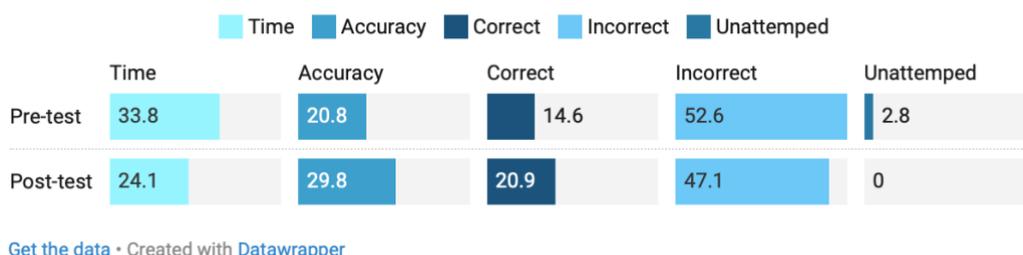


Figure 1. The average change in the simple past tense scores

Wilcoxon Ranks Test

The Shapiro-Wilk normality test shows that the data is not normally distributed (0.05), with pre-test values = 0.001 and post-test values = 0.001. Therefore, non-parametric statistical testing was used.

Table 2. Wilcoxon signed ranks test

Test statistics ^a	
Z	Post-test – Pre-test -4.936 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on negative ranks.

The analysis compares the means of two data sets, likely from a pre-test and post-test

scenario, based on 62 observations. The pre-test has a mean score of 21.94 with a standard deviation of 18.18, while the post-test shows a higher mean score of 33.39 with a standard deviation of 24.96. The difference between the two means is 11.45. The post-test scores are higher than the pre-test for 39 participants (62.9%), 16 participants have the same scores for both tests (25.8%), and the pre-test scores are higher for 7 participants (11.3%). Furthermore, the Wilcoxon signed ranks test results show a Sig value of <0.001 (<0.05),

indicating a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal significant improvements in students' understanding of the simple past tense following the application of the drill and practice (DP) method. The paired sample t-test demonstrated a substantial increase in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test, with a mean difference of -11.45 and a t-value of -5.835, both of which indicate a statistically significant improvement ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that the DP method had a notable positive impact on students' understanding in the simple past tense.

The Impact of Direct Practice on Simple Past Tense Mastery

The pre-test results indicated that students faced significant challenges in both accuracy and response time when answering questions related to the simple past tense. A notable observation was the low accuracy rates, particularly with irregular verbs, which are often difficult for learners due to their inconsistent patterns in English. This aligns with findings that suggest learners struggle with irregular forms as they lack predictable rules, leading to a higher incidence of incorrect and unattempted responses (Han, 2023; Nassaji, 2016). Furthermore, students with limited exposure to structured grammar lessons exhibited pronounced difficulties, underscoring the necessity for targeted instructional strategies to

enhance their grammatical competence (Han, 2023; Papi et al., 2019).

In contrast, the post-test results demonstrated substantial improvements across all metrics. Students not only answered more questions correctly but also did so in a reduced time frame. The significant increase in accuracy for questions involving regular verbs suggests that the repetitive practice and feedback provided by the Direct Practice (DP) method effectively reinforced their understanding of verb conjugations in the past tense. This finding is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of feedback in language learning. For instance, studies have shown that feedback can significantly enhance learning trajectories, particularly when it is timely and specific (Gan, 2020; Monaghan et al., 2021). Moreover, the role of corrective feedback in second language acquisition has been well-documented, indicating that such feedback is crucial for error correction and skill acquisition (Liu, 2023; Zhao & Ellis, 2022). The improvements observed in the students' performance can thus be attributed to the structured feedback mechanisms employed during the intervention, which align with established theories on the efficacy of corrective feedback in language learning contexts (Han, 2023; Komorowska, 2018).

The study's findings highlighted a significant reduction in unattempted responses, which is a crucial observation. In the pre-test,

many students left questions unanswered, indicating uncertainty or a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the simple past tense. This aligns with research that underscores the relationship between confidence and language learning; students who lack confidence are often hesitant to engage with tasks, which can impede their learning progress (Wong et al., 2012). The post-test results, where students attempted nearly all questions, suggest that the Direct Practice (DP) method not only improved their grammatical knowledge but also enhanced their confidence in using the simple past tense (Turakulova & Marupova, 2021).

This outcome is particularly important, as confidence in language use is critical for ongoing learning and application (Misyak, 2010). Despite the overall improvement in performance, the variance in post-test scores, indicated by a larger standard deviation, suggests that individual differences in learning outcomes persisted. Some students demonstrated more substantial gains than others, which may be attributed to factors such as prior knowledge, learning styles, or engagement levels during the practice sessions (Hatmanto & Rahmawati, 2023; Ortega et al., 2018). This variability highlights the necessity for further research into how the DP method can be adapted to meet diverse learner needs. Specifically, it points to the importance of personalized or differentiated instruction to support students who may require additional assistance or tailored approaches to maximize their learning potential (Pawlak, 2021).

Another important aspect to consider is the nature of the drill and practice method itself. While repetition and feedback are essential for internalizing grammar rules, the method may need to be supplemented with other instructional strategies to address more complex grammatical structures or to maintain student engagement over longer periods (Sakina, 2023). For instance, incorporating communicative or contextual learning activities alongside the DP method could provide students with opportunities to apply their grammatical knowledge in more meaningful and practical contexts (Chen, 2022). The results of this study also point to the potential for using the DP method in non-EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. The students involved in this research were not majoring in English, and many had limited exposure to formal language instruction (Mallisa & Mbato, 2023). Yet, the significant improvements observed suggest that the DP method can be effective even for learners with little background in the target language. This opens up possibilities for broader applications of the DP method in various educational contexts, particularly for learners who struggle with fundamental grammatical concepts (Pushpalatha, 2022).

Factors Influencing Variability in Student Improvement

While the overall results of the study indicate a significant enhancement in students' understanding of the simple past tense through the drill and practice (DP) method, it is essential

to acknowledge the variability in individual student performance. Some students exhibited less improvement than their peers, and several factors may contribute to this discrepancy. Prior knowledge and language exposure is one of the most significant factors influencing student performance is their prior knowledge of English grammar and exposure to the language. Students with a stronger foundation in English may have found it easier to grasp the concepts presented during the DP sessions. Conversely, those with limited exposure to English or who had not previously engaged with the simple past tense may have struggled more with the material.

Research indicates that students' existing knowledge can significantly impact their ability to learn new concepts, as they often rely on previously acquired skills and understanding to make sense of new information (Gonçalves et al., 2024; Valizadeh, 2021; van Kesteren et al., 2018). Therefore, students with less background knowledge may require additional support or differentiated instruction to bridge the gap in their understanding.

Learning Styles and Preferences: Individual learning styles also play a crucial role in how effectively students engage with the DP method. Some students may thrive in environments that emphasize repetition and structured practice, while others may benefit more from interactive or contextual learning approaches. For instance, students who prefer kinaesthetic learning might

find it challenging to engage with a method that relies heavily on written exercises and quizzes. This aligns with the theory of multiple intelligences, which posits that learners have different strengths and preferences that influence their learning processes (Abdullah et al., 2024; Demelash et al., 2024; Oviawe, 2020; Rahaman & Pattnaik, 2024). To address this variability, it may be beneficial to incorporate a range of instructional strategies that cater to diverse learning styles, thereby enhancing engagement and comprehension for all students.

Motivation and Attitude Towards Learning: Motivation is another critical factor that can influence student performance (Duchatelet & Donche, 2019; Shala et al., 2024). Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn may engage more deeply with the material and, as a result, show greater improvement. In contrast, those who lack motivation or have a negative attitude towards learning English may not fully participate in the DP sessions, leading to less significant gains. Research has shown that students' attitudes towards language learning can significantly affect their engagement and success (Amrullah et al., 2024; Zhang & Hasim, 2023). Therefore, fostering a positive learning environment and encouraging a growth mindset could help enhance motivation and, subsequently, learning outcomes. While the DP method has proven effective in improving students' understanding of the simple past

tense, it is crucial to recognize the individual differences that influence learning outcomes. By considering factors such as prior knowledge, learning styles, and motivation, educators can better tailor their instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.

The cognitive load theory suggests that learners are limited to processing new information (Skulmowski & Xu, 2022; Sweller et al., 2019). For some students, the demands of learning the simple past tense—especially with its irregular verbs—may have exceeded their cognitive capacity, leading to frustration and disengagement. Students who struggle with working memory may find it challenging to retain and apply new grammatical rules, resulting in less improvement. To mitigate this, instructional strategies that break down complex concepts into smaller, more manageable parts could be beneficial. This approach allows students to build their understanding gradually, reducing cognitive overload and enhancing retention.

Peer influence and collaborative learning: The social dynamics within the classroom can also impact individual learning outcomes. Students who engage in collaborative learning with peers may benefit from shared knowledge and support, leading to improved understanding. Conversely, those who work in isolation may miss out on valuable interactions that could enhance their learning experience. Research indicates collaborative learning can foster a more profound understanding and

retention of material (Du et al., 2022; Jiang & Kalyuga, 2022; Vázquez-García, 2018). Therefore, incorporating group activities or peer feedback sessions into the DP method could provide additional support for students struggling with independent practice. While the DP method has proven effective in improving students' understanding of the simple past tense, it is crucial to recognize the individual differences that influence learning outcomes. By considering factors such as prior knowledge, learning styles, motivation, cognitive load, and peer interactions, educators can better tailor their instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students. Future research should explore these variables further to develop more nuanced strategies that enhance the effectiveness of grammar instruction for all learners.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research was conducted with a relatively small sample size of 62 students, and the intervention period was limited to three sessions. While the results are promising, future studies should explore the long-term effects of the DP method on grammar learning, as well as its effectiveness with larger and more diverse groups of students. Additionally, qualitative data, such as student feedback or observations of classroom interactions, could provide deeper insights into how students engage with the DP method and how it influences their learning process. This study provides strong evidence that the drill and

practice method is an effective tool for improving students' understanding of the simple past tense. The significant gains in accuracy, response time, and confidence observed in the post-test indicate that structured, repetitive practice, coupled with immediate feedback, can enhance grammatical competence. However, to maximize the potential of this method, it may be beneficial to combine it with other instructional strategies that promote deeper learning and long-term retention.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Practical Implications

The study highlights the effectiveness of the Direct Practice (DP) method in improving students' mastery of the simple past tense. Significant accuracy and response time improvements suggest that structured, repetitive practice with immediate feedback strengthens grammatical competence. A key implication is the need for targeted support for learners struggling with irregular verbs. Since these forms pose major difficulties, supplementary exercises, and corrective feedback can help reinforce learning and reduce errors.

Additionally, DP enhances students' confidence in grammar, reducing unattempted responses. It suggests that structured practice can be valuable in language programs that build self-efficacy. Educators should also consider individual learning differences. Integrating DP with interactive and contextual activities may

improve engagement and accommodate diverse learning styles. Future research should examine DP's long-term effects and explore its combination with other teaching strategies for enhanced language acquisition.

Implications for Future Research

While this study supports the effectiveness of Direct Practice (DP), further research is needed. A key limitation was the small sample size (62 students) and short intervention period (three sessions). Future studies should use larger samples to enhance generalizability and assess DP's impact across diverse learners. This research focused on short-term outcomes. Future studies should examine long-term retention by conducting follow-up assessments to determine whether improvements persist. Understanding DP's sustained effectiveness could provide insights into its role in grammar development.

Further research should also explore how DP interacts with other teaching methods. Combining DP with communicative or task-based approaches may improve practical language application. A hybrid model could enhance learning outcomes. Finally, qualitative research, such as student interviews and classroom observations, could offer deeper insights into engagement and cognitive load. Addressing these aspects will help refine DP for broader educational applications.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on effective grammar teaching methods, particularly for non-English major students. The success of the DP method in this context highlights its value in addressing common language learning challenges, such as mastering irregular verb forms and applying grammatical rules in varied contexts. These results underscore the method's potential as a reliable tool for improving grammar instruction, especially for students with limited exposure to English. Beyond individual classroom applications, these findings have implications for educational policy and curriculum planning. The DP method's structured and systematic approach could be integrated into language programs as a foundational technique for grammar instruction, ensuring consistency across different levels of education. Although the study presents positive results, it does not address its limitations, such as the use of a single group design, restricted generalizability due to the specific institution, and the lack of a control group. Future research should focus on overcoming these limitations by exploring long-term effects and utilizing larger sample sizes.

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