

Investigating Arab Young Learners' Usage of Inflectional Suffixes and Its Influencing Factors

Majidah D. Neeni^{1&2} & Farhana D. Deris¹

¹ Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Skudai Johor, Malaysia

² English Language Department, Faculty of Arts, Zawia University, Zawia, Libya

Correspondence: Majidah D Mohammed Neeni, Language Academy, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Skudai Johor, Malaysia, English Language Department, Faculty of Arts, Zawia University, Zawia, Libya.

Received: December 18, 2024

Accepted: February 23, 2025

Online Published: March 16, 2025

doi:10.5539/ijel.v15n2p97

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v15n2p97>

Abstract

Proficiency in inflectional suffixes, such as “-ed,” is fundamental for mastering English grammar, yet it remains a persistent challenge for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly among Arab students. This study investigates the difficulties faced by 100 Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia in using the “-ed” suffix for past tense and past participle forms. Grounded in Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (1978) and employing a mixed-method approach, the research identifies the types, frequency, and causes of errors. Quantitative analysis reveals a low proficiency level, while qualitative findings highlight frequent errors linked to overgeneralization and a limited understanding of specific grammatical rules. These challenges are attributed to ineffective teaching strategies prevalent in Libyan schools in Malaysia. The findings emphasize the need for targeted instructional interventions and the integration of communicative language teaching (CLT) practices to address these deficiencies. By shedding light on these issues, the study offers valuable insights for designing pedagogical approaches that enhance learners’ mastery of “-ed” inflectional suffixes and overall grammatical proficiency.

Keywords: challenges, EFL young learners, inflectional suffixes, past participle, past tense

1. Introduction

Language is systematic and includes sounds, words, and sentences, all of which are studied in various disciplines (Adha & Nishrina, 2021). Libyan schools in Malaysia follow the curriculum of the Libyan Ministry of Education and introduce English early. Every school used the Libyan Ministry of Education’s “English for Libya” curriculum. However, the limited exposure to grammar may hinder students’ proficiency in verb inflections (Omar, 2014; Hamed & Fadhil, 2019; Abbas, Younus, & Khalil, 2019). In the context of language acquisition, (Aprianti & Parmawati, 2020) argue that learning a language requires mastering its complicated elements, while (Yusnitasari & Suwartono, 2020) emphasize that it extends beyond theory to encompass social communication. (Sunandar, 2022; Halawa, 2017) claim that language is the most significant part of social life since it enables people to communicate with each other. According to (Al-Khasawneh, 2023), language can be described as a method of expressing thoughts and ideas using words, symbols, sounds, and gestures.

English is one of the most used languages globally. However, for some students, like Libyans, it is still considered a foreign language. Consequently, people often make mistakes when using English, particularly in terms of word structure and morphology. Morphology plays a crucial role in word formation, with inflectional suffixes being central to this process. The English language has various word forms, with the most common being derivational and inflectional affixes. The latter is the focus of this investigation. The acquisition of verb tenses, particularly the past tense and past participle, poses significant challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia. The current study aims to identify the root causes of errors in the use of the -ed suffix and the factors influencing students’ mastery of these forms. It analyzes the types of mistakes students make and the linguistic challenges they encounter, intending to provide insights into improving EFL instruction for Libyan learners (Hamed & Fadhil, 2019; Abbas, Younus, & Khalil, 2019). To achieve these objectives, answers were sought to the following questions:

- 1) How well do Libyan students understand and use -ed inflectional suffixes?
- 2) What are the types of errors they make when applying these suffixes?
- 3) What are the factors that influence their use of -ed inflections?

This paper is organized into three parts. The first provides a brief overview of the theoretical framework surrounding language learning and use. The second part clarifies the terminology related to the topic of this study, while the third subsection examines the factors that influence language learning difficulties.

2. Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), developed by Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in cognitive development. It posits that language and cultural tools shape mental abilities, with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlighting learning through guided interaction. For Libyan elementary students struggling with English morphology, traditional methods like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) hinder language acquisition. These approaches, relying heavily on Arabic, neglect communicative practices that could aid understanding. Moreover, low motivation, limited parental involvement, and a lack of bilingual exposure further impede progress. Addressing these sociocultural factors requires adopting more interactive, context-based teaching methods to improve English morphology skills (Aloreibi & Carey, 2017; Hussein, 2018; Fitori, 2019; Alshamsi & Alsheikh, 2020; Abdelaty, 2023).

3. Literature Review

3.1 Language Learning and Use

An exhaustive and critical appraisal of the existing literature reveals several significant insights and gaps in the study of language learning, particularly in the realm of morphology and sociocultural influences. Aprianti and Parmawati (2020) highlight that mastering challenging aspects of language is essential for successful learning, while Halawa (2017) and Sunandar (2022) emphasize the pivotal role of language as a tool for communication in social life. These foundational ideas frame language not only as a skill but as a means of connection and interaction within a sociocultural context, aligning with the principles of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) developed by Vygotsky (1978).

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) provides a valuable framework for understanding how social context, cultural practices, and interaction influence language learning, especially through concepts like the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and mediation. Within the ZPD, learners gain competence through guided interaction with teachers or peers (Morgan & Skaggs, 2016). Lantolf and Poehner (2023) highlight the distinction between everyday and scientific concepts, emphasizing the need for structured learning experiences to grasp language rules. SCT also stresses the importance of collaborative learning, involving family and community, especially in early language acquisition (Zhou, 2024). This framework has been applied to second language acquisition, bridging theory and practice (Poehner & Lu, 2023).

However, gaps remain in applying SCT specifically to morphological challenges in second language acquisition. While SCT explores interaction and scaffolding, there is limited research on how these principles address issues like morphological errors, particularly with English affixation (Meinawati et al., 2020; Haspelmath, 2002). Studies (e.g., Yusnitasari & Suwartono, 2020) note that word formation is a complex aspect of language learning, but few directly connect morphological acquisition with SCT principles such as scaffolding or the ZPD.

Moreover, while studies by Al-Khasawneh (2023) and Giyatmi (2019) emphasized the structural and functional aspects of morphology, but do not adequately explore the pedagogical implications for addressing morphological errors. For example, overgeneralization of grammatical rules, omission of necessary morphemes, and misformation of word structures are common issues for language learners, but their sociocultural underpinnings, such as the impact of instructional methods like the GTM versus Communicative Teaching Method (CTM), require further investigation.

3.2 Suffixes

A critical appraisal of the existing literature on morphological knowledge, particularly inflectional suffixes, highlights its vital role in English language learning while revealing gaps that warrant further investigation. Jemadi, Handayani and Halum (2023) underscore the importance of teaching morphemes, including derivational and inflectional affixes, to enhance English vocabulary acquisition. However, Libyan EFL learners and other students often find English morphology challenging, particularly in mastering word structures and applying inflectional suffixes correctly (Journal & Javidi, 2017). While many studies focus on derivational affixes that alter a word's part of speech, this study narrows its focus to inflectional suffixes, which signal grammatical functions such as

tenses and numbers (Rizky et al., 2017). Despite their importance, inflectional suffixes continue to pose difficulties for learners, particularly irregular forms like “go” (went/gone) or vowel-altering verbs such as “write” (wrote/written) (Tariq et al., 2020; Lee, 2022).

Several studies emphasize the value of early exposure to inflectional suffixes. Yurtbasi (2015) argues that understanding inflectional categories at a young age is critical for building strong language skills, while Fitria (2020) and Ninsiana and Hakim (2018) suggest that mastering inflectional and derivational suffixes enhances grammatical accuracy and vocabulary retention. Furthermore, Fitria (2021) notes that inflectional suffixes such as “-ed” (past tense) and “-en” (past participle) provide learners with predictable grammatical patterns for regular verbs like “walked.” However, irregular verbs, which require more sophisticated morphological changes (e.g., vowel shifts like “write/wrote/written”), remain a significant source of errors, as evidenced by Salih, Abdalla, Ali, and Awadallah (2023). Libyan EFL learners encounter persistent challenges in applying morphological rules to irregular forms, leading to frequent grammatical errors in tenses (Al Jawad & Mansour, 2021; Omar, 2019), suggesting that while predictable patterns in regular verbs offer learning opportunities, the complexity of irregular verbs demands targeted instruction and practice.

Although morphology is acknowledged as a cornerstone of language learning (Fitria, 2020; Ninsiana & Hakim, 2018; Wulandari & Indriani, 2021; Saragih, Ambarita, & Sijinjak, 2022; Kunci, 2021; Sari & Nufus, 2022), gaps in the literature remain. Existing studies largely focus on descriptive aspects of morphological errors but lack detailed investigations into pedagogical strategies for teaching complex morphological patterns, particularly irregular verbs. For example, while studies like Saragih, Ambarita and Sijinjak (2022) explore students’ struggles with past tense rules, they fail to provide actionable guidance on how to scaffold learning within sociocultural contexts. Similarly, while scholars like Tariq et al. (2020) identify specific challenges with vowel-altering verbs, they do not address how teaching methods, such as scaffolded practice or communicative approaches, might mitigate these difficulties. Another gap lies in the insufficient exploration of the role of first language (L1) interference in learning inflectional suffixes. Research has shown that L1 morphology often influences learners’ application of L2 rules, yet few studies address how explicit instruction might counteract such interference.

While existing literature highlights the importance of morphological knowledge, particularly inflectional suffixes, it fails to fully address how instructional approaches, and sociocultural factors influence learners’ success. Future research should focus on actionable strategies to teach complex verb forms, explore the role of L1 interference, and evaluate the impact of scaffolded, communicative approaches in fostering language development. This would provide a more comprehensive framework for addressing learners’ challenges in mastering inflectional morphology.

As it was stated previously, Fitria (2020), like other scholars, recognized eight inflectional suffixes, two of which are shown here. Both inflectional suffixes indicate verb language. Therefore, the topic is limited to the following inflectional suffixes that make the past tense of a verb, such as “talk”—”talked” or “take”—”took,” and the past participle, such as “deleted” or “done”.

3.3 Factors Influencing Language Learning Difficulties

The existing literature highlights significant challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly in mastering the -ed inflectional suffix, a key aspect of English morphology. Studies confirm that overgeneralization of morphological rules, such as the erroneous use of “bayed” instead of “bought,” is widespread among EFL learners (Muhammad & Abdullahi, 2023). These errors often stem from a lack of exposure and practice (Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019), as students fail to internalize the proper application of tense markers, leading to common mistakes like “runned” for “ran” or “walk” instead of “walked” (Fitria, 2020; Syafi’i, 2021). Despite recommendations for mnemonic devices and repetition to enhance retention (Akib & Ohorella, 2019; Giyatmi, 2019), the problem persists, indicating that more comprehensive pedagogical strategies are necessary. The overgeneralization errors and the deletion of tense markers suggest that the students’ cognitive and linguistic processes are not being adequately addressed, with traditional teaching methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method, identified as a significant barrier to effective language acquisition (Alloreibi & Carey, 2017; Hussein, 2018). These methods, which often involve a heavy reliance on the first language (Arabic), fail to incorporate communicative practices and the rich context needed to facilitate the understanding of English morphology.

Further compounding these difficulties is the socio-cultural context in which these students learn. According to Sociocultural Theory (SCT), cognitive development is deeply influenced by social interactions and cultural tools, yet research shows that many Libyan students lack exposure to bilingual environments that could enhance their language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The limited scope for such interactions within the school system, alongside a lack of parental involvement (Alshamsi & Alsheikh, 2020), results in a stunted learning environment, one that does

not foster the cognitive growth necessary for mastering complex grammatical rules. Additionally, students' low motivation and engagement, as identified by Fitori (2019), play a crucial role in impeding their understanding of English morphology. These motivational issues may stem from broader cultural and societal attitudes toward language learning, as well as the methods employed by teachers who may not be equipped with the tools to engage students in a meaningful way. Thus, addressing these sociocultural factors is crucial for improving English morphology skills among Libyan students, necessitating a shift towards more interactive and contextually relevant teaching methodologies (Abdelaty, 2023).

3.4 The Current Study

A critical review of the literature reveals that while many studies address verb morphology in EFL acquisition, there is limited focus on how young learners, particularly those in elementary school, process past tense and past participle forms. Most research has concentrated on adult or adolescent learners, leaving a gap in understanding how children internalize these forms. Errors like overgeneralizing regular past-tense forms (e.g., "goed" instead of "went") reflect struggles with English verb irregularities. Additionally, the role of cognitive development, especially in relation to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), remains underexplored. More research is needed to understand how guided instruction, social interaction, and corrective feedback can help young learners move from overgeneralization to correct usage.

4. Method

A rigorous quantitative and qualitative approach is utilized to investigate the challenges Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia face when acquiring inflectional suffixes, notably the past tense and past participle. This mixed-method approach helps learners understand their challenges, according to Creswell and Clark (2017). By combining these methods, the study leverages SCT principles to examine not only students' internalization of language concepts but also the social and instructional factors influencing their learning.

4.1 Participants

The study included seventh- to ninth graders from six Libyan schools in Malaysia. These six schools are in three different areas in Malaysia. From 127 students, the researcher chose 100 to participate in the study. Choosing 100 students with similar language, educational, and social backgrounds was purposive. Their ages are between 13 and 15 years. This study chose elementary pupils because they have been studying English for years and are nearing the end of the preparatory level, where they should have a good understanding. Only 30 participants will be interviewed. The random selection technique chose 5 students from each of the 6 Libyan schools to participate in semi-structured interviews. Likewise, the curricula were unified in all Libyan schools worldwide. English is considered a foreign language for Libyan students in Libyan schools in Malaysia, as all students are residents for only two to five years. Also, the approved language in Libyan schools is Arabic, the native language of Libya.

4.2 Instruments

The research primarily adopted a mixed-method approach. It included tests, interviews, and classroom observations.

4.2.1 The Test

An exam was given to 100 Libyan 7th-9th graders in six Libyan schools in Malaysia on -ed inflectional suffixes. Since the test tested students' inflectional suffix use, it can help identify spelling problems, especially for regular and irregular verbs. The researcher has formulated the test herself (see Appendix A). The researcher assessed the study test's validity using expert feedback, which informed the final test formulation. For discriminant validity, an independent samples t-test compared the highest and lowest scoring groups, with a significance value of < 0.001 for all test dimensions, indicating strong discriminatory ability. To evaluate internal consistency reliability, the researcher analyzed the correlation between individual items and the total scale score.

The first question is considered a production-type question. Students are required to give the appropriate form of the verb in both past tense and past participle. This production-type question is directed to investigate the students' understanding of inflectional suffixes. In addition, the causes behind the students' difficulties in learning and using these two types of inflectional suffixes. It focuses on the extent to which students understand the vocabulary composition more than it is in sentences, with more focus on spelling rules.

The second question is a recognition in nature. Students are asked to recognize the correct answer. This type of question is chosen to determine the difficulties and the extent of students' knowledge of inflectional suffixes. It will also confirm the variables that cause such problems. However, the researcher's goal for these kinds of questions is to focus on the shape of words and how words are constructed. In general, both questions are directed

to investigate some possible types and sources of difficulties by Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia in foreign language using -ed inflectional suffixes, namely overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, or incomplete application of rules.

4.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Moreover, a semi-structured interview by Florianus and Syamsi (2021) has been adopted in the present study. They were conducted through face-to-face conversations. 30 students were interviewed to determine past tense and past participle errors and their causes. 5 students from each school. A semi-structured interview was used because it is flexible in that it enables the researcher to follow up on the interviewee's responses and ask for clarification if necessary. The difficulties encountered were probed in the conversation. The interview duration for each participant ranged from 7 to 10 minutes and was conducted in a classroom, which is a comfortable place that encourages the participants to express their perceptions freely. It was employed directly when students received their answer sheets for the written test to measure the difficulties students encountered when they made the test, overgeneralization, or ignorance of grammatical rules. The interview was also utilized in this study to establish the validity of the content of the test questions. Additionally, the interviews were conducted sequentially, one after another. Prior to the interview, all participants were explained the interview's purposes. After obtaining the participants' consent, the entire session was recorded. During the process of organizing the interview content and materials, participants were assigned numbers, and their conversations were documented. Interviews align with SCT because they allow researchers to investigate how students interact with and internalize language, uncovering insights about their learning processes and use of cultural tools, such as language rules or strategies. This can reveal why students make certain errors (e.g., overgeneralization) and what cultural or instructional influences contribute to their difficulties.

Furthermore, the researcher aims to identify the factors influencing students' primary difficulties when learning -ed inflections. The study will also provide alternative options, such as challenging students to understand different rules, memorizing when to use -ed endings, completing exercises or tasks, and others if they encounter difficulties. Other factors will also be taken into consideration. The researcher intends to investigate the factors that influence students to make these errors, whether the problem lies with the teachers or the students themselves. Therefore, she plans to attend classes with a diverse group of teachers. The following section gives more clarification.

4.2.3 Classroom Observation

Lastly, to explore what influences students' use of the -ed past tense and past participle, six classroom observations were done, one per school. Additionally, observations delivered valuable insights into student engagement and teaching methodologies. The researcher will observe the level of interaction and the language used during the activities, among other factors.

The researcher better understands the issue based on the test results and information collected through student interviews. So, classroom observation was carried out to see how teachers integrate their methods into their lessons, interact with students, students interact with their teachers, their participation, describe the classroom setting, and provide feedback by using an observation checklist devised by the researcher. The researcher uses the template to create a comprehensive report, offering insights and suggestions to enhance teaching methods and student comprehension of past tense and past participle usage.

When the researcher observes the classes, she considers various concerns or issues. For example, the researcher will concentrate on what teaching strategies and activities teachers employ in their lessons, how students engage in the lesson, and the amount of student participation and interaction. In addition, any materials, textbooks, worksheets, or other resources used during the lesson will be documented. In addition, the researcher will note whether there are opportunities for students to collaborate with their teachers and one another in their learning. The researchers try to know the factors that influence the level of students' proficiency.

4.3 Procedure

Data was obtained in three phases. A quantitative test analyzed students' inflectional suffix use in phase one. The study also tested students' -ed inflectional proficiency. In the second phase, interviews determine mistake causes. At least 30 Libyan elementary school students from six Libyan schools in Malaysia (five students per school) participated. The interview qualitatively recognized the need to determine overgeneralization and grammatical intralingual misunderstanding and guided the assessment shortly after students got their written exam response sheets. Interviews further confirmed the test question content in this study. In planning, English interviews were expected. After the pilot trial, the researcher and participants interacted in Arabic since students appreciated it. In addition, a classroom observation assessed teaching and student participation in the final session. Teachers were

observed using a researcher-designed checklist to assess their approaches, student engagement, classroom climate, GTM concerns, and feedback. Following the pattern, a complete report containing past tense and past participle instruction suggestions was generated.

Table 1. Mixed Method as Research Design.

Data collection	Participants	Research questions	Data instrumentation	
			Collection	Analysis
Phase 1	100 LESSM	1 & 2	test	Statistical Analysis SPSS
Phase 2	30 LESSM, (5 per school)	1, 2 & 3	Interview	Qualitative/ Thematic Analysis
Phase 3	6, LECM (1 class per school)	3	CR observation	Qualitative/ Thematic Analysis

Note. CR = classroom, LECM = Libyan elementary classes in Malaysia, LESSM = Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia.

4.4 Data Analysis

To enhance the data clarity, visual aids like tables are utilized. The findings are analyzed and connected to the research topics. A combined approach offers thorough insights that could be both described and demonstrated. For quantitative analysis, the researcher will use statistical analysis methods to test the relationship between variables. The study will involve the use of statistical modelling, such as t-tests, mean, and standard deviations. Finally, the researcher discusses how integrating the data enhances the understanding of the research questions.

Table 2. Statal Analyses for Quantitative Data

Type	Objective
Error Classification	To investigate the types of errors students make and better understand the difficulties they face, we provide targeted support for omission, addition, and misformation. This classification can help us determine whether students struggle more with overgeneralizing -ed inflectional suffixes for all regular and irregular verbs or if they lack sufficient knowledge of the rules. These errors can be systematically analyzed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges that students face and to provide more targeted support.
Descriptive Analysis	To assess the students' proficiency and challenges, the research calculates the mean scores, standard deviations, and the reliability of the scale.
Regression analysis	To offer insights into the factors that influence students' learning.

Regression analysis is a statistical technique used to determine the strength and direction of relationships between a dependent variable, in this case, proficiency (with -ed endings difficulties), and independent variables (such as teaching methods, memorization, and less practice). This analysis is crucial for identifying which factors play more significant roles in influencing the proficiency of Libyan elementary school students in using -ed inflectional endings, past tense, and past participle.

At the same time, other objectives focus on qualitatively analyzing the factors influencing student learning. For this investigation, a descriptive technique was employed for qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis of classroom observation and semi-structured interview transcripts uncovered significant themes, including motivation factors, effective memorization strategies, and perceptions of teaching methods. The narrative explanations of these themes provide qualitative insights, such as how interactive teaching approaches enhance students' motivation. As noted by Creswell and Clark (2017), this qualitative depth enriches our understanding by adding nuance and depth to the quantitative findings.

The study used Miles and Hubberman's (1994) data analysis approaches for qualitative data. According to Miles and Hubberman, qualitative data analysis is done interactively and constantly until the data is saturated. Data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification are all activities in data analysis.

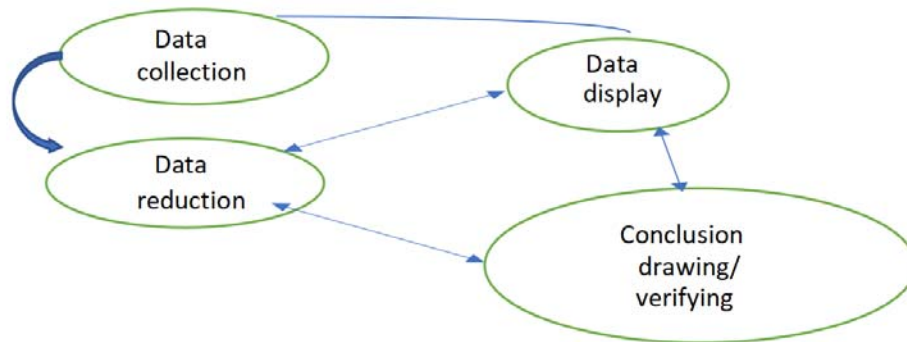


Figure 1. Qualitative Data Analysis: Interactive model (Adha & Nishrina, 2021)

5. Results

5.1 Quantitative Data Findings

The test showed that many students scored “Low,” “Poor,” or “Very Poor” on past tense and past participle forms. Many students scored “Low” or “Very Poor” on the test, indicating a lack of past tense and past participle proficiency. These concepts are poorly understood and applied by low-performing students. They struggle to identify past tense and past participle forms, resulting in spelling, grammatical, and overgeneralization mistakes. The study’s first question was answered by testing Libyan students’ “-ed” inflectional suffix problems. The researcher thoroughly evaluated each response to gain insights. Using student replies, Table 3 ranks students’ competence from best to lowest.

Table 3. Summary of Students’ Proficiency in The -ED Inflectional Suffixes

Class number	Level	Score	Frequency (%)
First	High	41-60	6
Second	Intermediate	21-40	50
Third	Low	0-20	44
Total			100

5.2 Qualitative Data Findings

Further, follow-up interviews were arranged to determine errors in past tense and past participle after the test. As mentioned earlier, in addition to the quantitative analysis, the study employed qualitative analysis to interpret the findings from the semi-structured interviews and observations. The initial step in preparing the data was to immerse oneself in the entire dataset to gain a comprehensive understanding. Therefore, the researcher began by listening to all the interviews and taking detailed field notes. By periodically pausing to listen to the full talk, I was able to take notes and acquire a general perspective of the situation. Category of errors committed by students were identified. Majority of the students consistently used the -ed suffix to create the past tense and past participle of irregular verbs, demonstrating their overgeneralization of the rules. Conversely, several pupils misinterpreted the use of normal verbs and failed to implement the requisite modifications prior to appending the -ed inflectional endings.

The next step in the coding process was to create a list of all the topics discussed and to designate a column for each data transcript. After completing this for all the interview, related topics were highlighted with the same colours. For example, all data related to overgeneralization, such as addition or misformation, were highlighted in blue, while limited knowledge of grammatical rules were in red. The data was then translated and transcribed as summarized in the Table 4.

Table 4. A sample of the Initial Coding of the Semi-Structured Interview Data

Overgeneralization	Yes, it is correct because it ends in ed/ I am not sure, just added ed for the past tense and en for past participle.
Students’ weak levels in forming past tense and past participle forms	even if it ends in e, we have to add ed because this is the rule of making the past tense.

Students' errors were caused by overgeneralization and verb norm ignorance, according to the interviews. Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982) error classification theory defined errors as omission, addition, or misformation. There were 3523 total errors, with addition being the most common (48.39% for past tense and 50.14% for past participle), followed by misformation and omission. Mistakes like "goed" instead of "went" showed verb form confusion.

Table 5. Common Types and Frequency of Past Tense and Past Participle Errors Among the Students

Common error type	Past Tense		Past Participle		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Misformation	500/1802 = 0.27	27.74%	493/1721 = 0.28	28.64%	993
Addition	872/1802 = 0.48	48.39%	863/1721 = 0.50	50.14%	1735
Omission	430/1802 = 0.23	23.86%	365/1721 = 0.21	21.20%	795
Total	1802	99.99	1721	99.98	3523

This study identified three main types of errors in the use of past tense and past participle forms: omission, addition, and misformation errors. Omission errors involved the absence of the necessary -ed inflectional suffix or other required changes. For example, students used "run" instead of "ran" or "close" instead of "closed." These errors indicate a lack of understanding of the rules governing regular and irregular verbs, as well as insufficient practice in applying these rules in context.

Addition errors occurred when students incorrectly applied the -ed suffix to irregular verbs, such as "puted" instead of "put" or "goed" instead of "went." These errors reflect overgeneralization of regular verb conjugation rules, where students incorrectly extend the -ed suffix to verbs that follow different patterns. On the other hand, misformation errors were characterized using incorrect forms of verbs, such as "studyed" instead of "studied" or "cryed" instead of "cried." These errors suggest students are aware of the need to modify the verb but fail to apply the correct grammatical changes, often due to limited understanding of specific rules (e.g., dropping the "y" and adding "-ied" for verbs ending in a consonant + "y").

Interviews revealed that students often overgeneralized grammatical rules or omitted changes because of a lack of awareness and understanding of English morphology. Observations further suggested that the reliance on the GTM, which emphasizes rote memorization, limited opportunities for contextual practice and scaffolding, leaving gaps in students' ability to internalize grammatical rules. These findings highlight the need for more communicative and practice-based approaches to address these difficulties effectively.

5.2.1 Factors Influencing Students' Proficiency

The qualitative analysis, including student interviews and classroom observations, highlights key factors contributing to student errors. Overgeneralization often results from students' reliance on memorized rules, such as applying the "-ed" suffix to all verbs, due to insufficient exposure to irregular forms in meaningful contexts. Classroom observations reveal the predominant use of the GTM, which emphasizes rote memorization and translation over communicative tasks. This lack of scaffolded practice and corrective feedback limits students' ability to internalize exceptions, as explained by Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and mediation within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Misformation errors (e.g., "goed" instead of "went") and addition errors (e.g., "He does can swim") stem from partial knowledge of grammatical rules and limited opportunities to practice language authentically. Similarly, omission errors (e.g., "She going to school" instead of "She was going to school") arise from insufficient understanding of English auxiliary verbs, often influenced by intralingual factors and GTM-based instruction, which neglects communicative and contextualized practice.

These findings underscore the need for practice-oriented approaches like the Communicative Teaching Method (CTM), which prioritizes collaborative and interactive activities, such as role-playing and group discussions, to support learning within the ZPD. CTM provides opportunities for scaffolding, corrective feedback, and authentic language use, helping students internalize complex grammar structures and reducing errors in overgeneralization, misformation, addition, and omission.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of the Findings

When comparing usage rates, it was found that irregular verbs and less common verb patterns make it more difficult for students to use the past tense and past participle forms accurately. Verbs such as "start," "cut," and

“close” had good accuracy percentages, while verbs like “dig,” “clap,” “lie,” and “teach” had significantly lower accuracy rates. This research suggests that the irregularity and infrequency of specific verb patterns may contribute to difficulties in learning and correctly using these forms (Fitria, 2020; Fitria, 2021; Lee, 2022; Tariq et al., 2020). Table 3 shows the types and frequency of simple past tense and past participle errors by Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia. The most common student errors identified by error classification were addition, misinformation, and omission. This helps check whether students are overgeneralizing rules or lacking proficiency in -ed past tense and past participle inflectional suffix rules. Similarly, Kharmilah and Narius, (2019) reported that addition errors were the most common type among students. These errors were mostly caused by improper past tense and past participle forms of irregular verbs, such as “goed” for “went” and “comed” for “came.” In addition, the current study found that students faced difficulties not only with irregular verbs but also with regular verbs, which presented significant challenges for some. Furthermore, students sometimes overlooked the necessary changes that should be made when conjugating certain regular verbs. For instance, verbs such as “study” and “close” must adhere to specific rules. Students form the past tense and past participle of regular verbs by adding “ed” to the end, such as “studyed” or “closeed”, instead of “studied” or “closed.”

Overgeneralization explains high addition error rates, which might confuse students about irregular verb forms (Muhammad & Abdullahi, 2023; Fitria, 2020; Syafi’I, 2021). Simanjuntak and Nasution (2023) who identified a significantly higher frequency of misformation mistakes, this cohort may also rely on overgeneralization. This can cause learners to misinterpret irregular forms using standard verb rules. In the same line, students often add -ed to irregular verbs to make them conventional past tenses and past participles due to insufficient exposure (Omar, 2014; Hamed & Fadhil, 2019; Abbas, Younus, & Khalil, 2019; Yusnitasari & Suwarato, 2023; Aprianti & Parmawati, 2020; Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019; Saragih, Ambarita, & Sitinjak, 2022). Karim and Nassaji (2019) and Al Jawad and Mansour (2021) generally found verb mistakes to be the most common grammatical errors. Thus, many students need extra help to improve in these areas. To remedy low performance, specific instructional tactics, more practice, and remedial interventions are needed.

Teachers should focus on regular and irregular verb forms and include exercises that contrast regular and irregular verbs to prevent addition errors. Practice these verbs with games or stories to emphasize proper use. The technique’s limited contact and communication chances did not provide learners with enough exposure to varied verb forms in acceptable contexts. The numerous addition errors, such as “replied” instead of “replied,” indicate that students overgeneralized regular verb rules because of the intense emphasis on rote learning and translation exercises. The lack of contextualized experience with verbs makes them more difficult. More communicative and contextualized exercises may help to avoid overgeneralization and increase rule understanding (Muhammad & Abdullahi, 2023; Jones, McGarrah, & Kahn, 2019; Alsied, Ibrahim, & Pathan, 2018; Zaghwan, 2020; Omar, 2014; Omar, 2019). For instance, storytelling, role-playing, and interactive games based on irregular verbs could provide students with more real-world practice.

This passive approach to learning aligns with Al-Jarrah and Ismail’s (2018) critique to the GTM, where the teacher controls the lesson’s flow while students merely absorb information. The focus on memorization rather than active writing skills entails that students do not practice creating sentences or generating new ideas, both of which are essential for achieving fluency in a language. Written exercises confined to translation tasks do little to motivate students to express original thoughts in the target language, ultimately hindering their ability to use grammar independently and flexibly.

Zahra and Abbas (2021) highlighted that while GTM could enhance accuracy, they do not provide students with opportunities for self-correction or independent problem-solving. In the observed lesson, when students made mistakes, the lecturer promptly corrected them without giving the students a chance to reflect on their errors or engage in peer feedback, the absence of which hinders learners’ ability to reflect and fully intensify grammatical structures, thus hindering their language independence.

6.2 Limitations, Implications, and Suggestions

This study provides valuable insights into student errors and the impact of classroom instruction but acknowledges several limitations. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and time constraints restricted further investigation. Additionally, reliance on classroom observations as the sole data collection method may not have fully captured students’ perspectives or teachers’ decision-making processes. Future research encompassing more diverse samples and mixed methods, such as teacher interviews and student surveys, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of classroom dynamics and in-depth background to student errors.

The findings highlight the need to address common errors such as misformation, omission, and overgeneralization through tailored instruction and effective pedagogical strategies. Teachers should shift from reliance on the GTM

to more communicative approaches, such as the CTM. Activities like role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks could scaffold learning within students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), enabling them to internalize grammar rules more effectively through feedback and interactions. Explicit instruction comparing L1 and English grammar structures and regular corrective feedback can further help address errors caused by L1 interference. These strategies can create a more interactive EFL environment, fostering improved accuracy and proficiency.

Another significant gap in the literature is the lack of longitudinal studies that track the effectiveness of various teaching methods over time. While there is consensus that traditional methods hinder language acquisition, there is insufficient evidence to support the efficacy of newer, communicative, or task-based approaches in addressing specific challenges like morphology. Additionally, future research could explore the long-term impact of these alternative methodologies in real-world classrooms. Moreover, while the importance of repetition and mnemonic strategies is acknowledged and well emphasized, there is the need for more research on how these methods can be adapted to the specific cultural and linguistic needs of students in different contexts, particularly in the case of Libyan students.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the proficiency and usage of *-ed* inflectional suffixes, focusing on past tense and past participle forms among Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia. The findings revealed significant difficulties in mastering both regular and irregular verb forms, particularly with less common patterns. While students demonstrated higher accuracy with high-frequency regular verbs, errors such as overgeneralization (e.g., "studyed" instead of "studied") were prevalent. These errors were attributed to an overreliance on rote memorization, a hallmark of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which lacks contextualized practice and fails to provide adequate scaffolding within learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The absence of mediation strategies, such as corrective feedback or interactive learning activities, further impeded students' ability to internalize and apply grammatical rules effectively.

In contrast, the findings underscored the potential of the Communicative Teaching Method (CTM) in addressing these challenges. By emphasizing meaningful interaction, collaborative tasks, and contextualized language use, CTM provides a more dynamic framework for language development within the ZPD. Activities such as role-playing, peer discussions, and guided feedback were identified as effective tools for refining students' grammatical accuracy and fostering a deeper understanding of inflectional rules. It recommends the design of context-specific lessons that integrate CTM principles, moving away from traditional, rule-based approaches like GTM. Such a shift could enhance students' proficiency in inflectional morphology by promoting active engagement and meaningful practice. Future studies could explore the interplay between first language interference, instructional methods, and socio-cultural contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this complex linguistic phenomenon.

Acknowledgement

I thank Dr. Farhana Diana Deris for her direction and encouragement. Without her feedback, this work would not be as good. Thanks also to the Libyan elementary school students in Malaysia who participated in this study.

Authors' contributions

Not applicable

Funding

Not applicable

Competing interests

The authors state that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

References

- Abbas, N. F., Younus, L. L., & Khalil, H. H. (2019). Fossilized use of active and passive simple present by Iraqi M. A. students. *Arab World English Journal*, 10(1), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no1.2>
- Adha, R., & Nishrina, S. (2021). Students difficulties in determining case in sentence. *JL3T (Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching)*, 7(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.32505/jl3t.v7i1.2836>
- Akib, M., & Ohorella, H. M. (2019). Investigating students' ability to use gerund and present participle at English Education Department of Sorong Muhammadiyah University. *Qalam: Jurnal Ilmu Kependidikan*, 7(1), 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.33506/jq.v7i1.353>
- Al Jawad, A. S. H., & Mansour, A. A. (2021). An exploration of grammatical errors in written English of Libyan EFL students with special reference to Arabic as their first language. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices (JWEEP)*, 3(7). <https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2021.3.7.2>
- Al-Khasawneh, F. M. (2023). the Acquisition of foreign language vocabulary: Does spacing effect matter? *Obrazovanie i Nauka*, 25(3), 174–193. <https://doi.org/10.17853/1994-5639-2023-3-174-193>
- Aloreibi, A., & Carey, M. D. (2017). English language teaching in Libya after Gaddafi. *English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, 93–114. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46778-8_7
- Alsied, S. M., Ibrahim, N. W., & Pathan, M. M. (2018). The use of grammar learning strategies by Libyan EFL learners at Sebha University. *ASIAN TEFL: Journal of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 37–51. <https://doi.org/10.21462/asianteft.v1i1.40>
- Aprianti, I. N., & Parmawati, A. (2020). Derivational and inflectional morpheme analysis on the Song Lyrics of Lady Gaga “A Star Is Born” Album. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 3(3), 322–328. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v3i3.p322-328>
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications.
- Fitria, T. N. (2020). An analysis of derivational and inflectional morpheme in selected news from Tempo. Co. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 146–155. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v9i2.40348>
- Fitria, T. N. (2021). An analysis of regular and irregular verbs in students' essay writing. *LLT Journal: Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 24(1), 276–287. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v24i1.2595>
- Florianus, C. C., & Syamsi, V. (2021). Error analysis of inflectional affixation in academic writing of freshman students. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 24(2), 471–492. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v24i2.2759>
- Giyatmi, G. (2019). *Morphology for English Language Teaching* (pp. 33–41). Proceeding of the 2nd ICoLLiT (International Conference on Language, Literature and Teaching).
- Halawa, A. (2017). An analysis of derivational and inflectional English morphemes. *Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole*, 1(1), 132–144. <https://doi.org/10.36057/jilp.v1i1.13>
- Hamed, M., & Fadhil, T. (2019). Teaching English in Elqubba primary schools: Issues and directions. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 13(3), 410–415. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn>
- Haspelmath, M. (2020). The morph as a minimal linguistic form. *Morphology*, 30(2), 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11525-020-09355-5>
- Hussein, S. (2018). *Factors affecting the implementation of communicative language teaching in Libyan secondary schools*. Sheffield Hallam University (United Kingdom).

- Jemadi, F., Handayani, E. P., & Halum, Y. S. (2023). Derivational and inflectional morphemes used in students' argumentative essay. *English Language Education Journal (ELEJ)*, 2(1), 16–28.
- Jones, S. M., McGarrah, M. W., & Kahn, J. (2019). Social and emotional learning: A principled science of human development in context. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 129–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1625776>
- Journal, I., & Javidi, S. (2017). *An introduction to English grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Karim, K., & Nassaji, H. (2019). The effects of written corrective feedback: A critical synthesis of past and present research. *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1558/isla.37949>
- Kharmilah, P., & Narius, D. (2019). Error analysis in writing discussion text made by students at English department of Universitas Negeri Padang. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 8(3), 327–335.
- Lee, E. (2022). Types of verbs. In *An introduction to Lexical Semantics* (pp. 77–100). July. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003349303-6>
- Meinawati, et al. (2020). Classification of derivational and inflectional morphemes in song lyrics of Ariana Grande's album Thank U, Next. *Voices of English Language Education Society*, 4(2), 199–212. <https://doi.org/10.29408/veles.v4i2.2529>
- Muhammad, M., & Abdullahi, D. I. (2023). Comparative analysis of errors in the use of simple past in the essays of NCE One Students in some selected colleges of education in Kano. *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, 6(02), 94–98. <https://doi.org/10.36349/easjehl.2023.v06i02.009>
- Ninsiana, W., & Hakim, L. (2018). An analysis of inflectional affixes error in argumentative writing. *Pedagogy : Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.32332/pedagogy.v6i1.1116>
- Omar, Y. Z. (2014). *Perceptions of selected Libyan English as a foreign language teachers regarding teaching of English in Libya*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Missouri – Columbia.
- Omar, Y. Z. (2019). Challenges Libyan English language learners encounter for guessing word meaning in English based to their morphological knowledge and etymological analysis. 9, 18–25.
- Rizky, et al. (2017). Derivational and inflectional morpheme in English language. *Josar*, 2(2), 17–27.
- Salih, H. M. O., Abdalla, W. A. A., Ali, D. A. A., & Awadallah, A. M. N. (2023). Investigating affixation problems which encounter EFL learners of King Khalid University. *Resmilitaris*, 13(2), 6242–6258.
- Saragih, R. A. Y., Ambarita, E., & Sitingjak, V. N. (2022). Inflectional affixes in Olivia Rodrigo's song lyrics in sour album. *METHOLANGUE: Language Teaching and Literature, Linguistics and Literature*, 7(1), 20–31. Retrieved from <https://ejurnal.methodist.ac.id/index.php/metholangue/article/view/1457>
- Sari, A. A. N., & Nufus, Z. (2022). An analysis of inflectional affixes in short story "Rumpelstiltskin. *Proceeding STAI Rakha Amuntai*, 1(1), 169–180. Retrieved from <http://jurnalstairakha.com/index.php/proceeding/article/view/189>
- Simanjuntak, W. S. B., & Nasution, Y. (2023). Error analysis students' ability in using regular and irregular verb at the second grade of SMP Satria Dharma Perbaungan. *Continuous Education: Journal of Science and Research*, 4(1), 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.51178/ce.v4i1.1325>
- Sunandar, A. (2022). Analysing errors of inflectional affixes on students' writings. *JETAL: Journal of English Teaching & Applied Linguistic*, 4(1), 38–45. <https://doi.org/10.36655/jetal.v4i1.777>
- Syafi'i, M. (2021). Students' errors in the use of present participle in translating simple dialog at the eleventh grade of SMK Taruna Masmur Pekanbaru. *Indonesian Journal of Integrated English Language Teaching*, 7(1), 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.24014/ijielt.v7i1.13771>
- Tariq, et al. (2020). An analysis of derivational and inflectional morphemes. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 12(1), 83. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v12i1.16084>
- Wulandari, N. P., & Indriani, L. (2021). Analysis of inflectional suffix on selected poems by Robert Frost. *EJI (English Journal of Indragiri): Studies in Education, Literature, and Linguistics*, 5(2), 239–251. <https://doi.org/10.32520/eji.v5i2.1578>
- Yurtbasi, M. (2015). Building English vocabulary through roots, prefixes and suffixes. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(1), 44–51. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjflt.v5i0.39>
- Yusnitasari, R., & Suwartono, T. (2020). Top ten most problematic grammatical items for Indonesian Tertiary

EFL learner writers. *Premise: Journal of English Education*, 9(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v9i1.2476>
 Zaghwani, O, Y. (2020). *Pedagogical issues in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Libyan schools' various settings*. December.

Appendix A

The Test

Q1. Complete the following table using the correct verb forms.

Base	Past Tense	Past Participle
Teach		
Start		
Draw		
Become		
Smile		
Close		
Lie		
Clap		
Cry		
Panic		
Cut		
Pay		
Run		
Sleep		
Dig		
Buy		
Play		
Bleed		
Leave		
Go		

Q2. Underline the correct answer for each question.

1. He (enjoy – enjoyed – enjoied) driving through the country.
2. The cat (sleep – slept – sleeped) all day.
3. The team (win – won – wined) the championship last year.
4. He (swim – swam – swimed) across the lake yesterday.
5. Last night, she (dance – danced – danceed) until midnight.
6. The leaves (fall – falled – fell) from the tree.
7. He (forget – forgot – forgeted) his keys at home this morning.
8. He (ride – rode – rided) his bike to the park.
9. She (go – went – goed) to the supermarket yesterday.
10. My mum (cook – cooked – coked) a tasty dinner last night.
11. He has (breaked – broke – broken) the vase.
12. They have (find – found – finded) the answer.
13. She has (see – sawed – seen) the movie.
14. The cake was (bake – baked – baken) by Mariya.
15. The race was (swim – swum – swimed) across the lake.
16. The cake was (eated – ate – eaten) by Amer.
17. The document has been (review – reviewed - reviewen) by the supervisor.
18. She has (drive – drived – driven) the car.
19. The room was (clean – cleaned – cleanen) by Meeral.
20. The story was (tellen – telled – told) by Meerath.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).