

Students' Competence in Using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs in Simple Sentences

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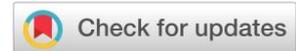
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate students' competence in using transitive and intransitive verbs in simple English sentences and to identify the types of errors commonly made by students. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed, using multiple-choice and essay tests as research instruments. The participants were 30 third-semester students of Class A from the English Language Education Study Program, Khairun University. The findings revealed that the average student score was 69.17, which falls within the "Enough" or medium competence category. The results also indicated that students demonstrated better mastery of transitive verbs compared to intransitive verbs. The most frequent errors involved the use of inappropriate objects after intransitive verbs and confusion in distinguishing verbs that can function as both transitive and intransitive. A comparative analysis between the two test formats showed that students performed better in essay tests than in multiple-choice tests, with 63.3% of students achieving a "Very Good" category in applying verbs in contextual sentences. These findings highlight the need for focused instructional strategies to enhance grammatical competence, particularly in understanding and applying verb types accurately in sentence construction. The study contributes to the broader understanding of English grammar acquisition among EFL learners and provides insights for curriculum improvement in language education programs.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published December 10th 2025



KEYWORDS

Transitive Verbs, Intransitive Verbs, Grammatical Competence, English Education

ARTICLE LICENCE

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1. Introduction

When learning English, grammar is a crucial component that students must master. Grammar is the study of how words and their parts combine to form sentences. Mastering grammar is crucial because those who master it well will be able to understand what others are saying. According to Akbarnezhad (2020), many learners struggle in recognizing and producing transitive and ditransitive verbs, which often leads to errors in constructing simple sentences. Empirical research shows that many students struggle to recognize and produce correct verb patterns, particularly when distinguishing whether a verb requires a direct object. According to Cahyono (2024), the acquisition of lexical aspects and sentence structures, including the use of transitive and intransitive verbs, develops gradually and reflects learners' linguistic competence. Therefore, this study focuses on measuring/improving students' competence in constructing simple sentences containing transitive and intransitive verbs using quantitative methods.

The ability to distinguish and correctly use transitive and intransitive verbs is crucial for English learners, especially at the beginner to intermediate level. This understanding impacts their ability to construct correct, logical, and understandable sentences. When students can choose the right verb and know when to include an object, they will be more confident in communicating, both orally and in writing. It is also important to avoid errors that can limit the meaning of a sentence or even lead to misunderstandings. Many common errors made by English learners relate to the use of transitive and intransitive verbs. For example, students may write a sentence without an object when the verb actually requires one, or they may try to add an object to an intransitive verb, resulting in an incorrect sentence.

This study focused on students' ability to use these two types of verbs to determine their understanding and areas for improvement. By identifying these errors and weaknesses, teachers and instructors can design more effective teaching strategies. According to Deng (2022), the use of verbs, particularly transitive and intransitive patterns, varies across disciplines and registers, which may influence students' understanding in academic contexts. Without an object, a

sentence with a transitive verb will feel incomplete or unclear in meaning. Intransitive verbs are verbs that do not require a direct object to complete their meaning. These verbs already have complete meaning without needing an object. In sentences with transitive verbs, the object is present to receive the action from the subject. Meanwhile, in sentences with intransitive verbs, there is no object to receive the action. Students often have difficulty determining when verbs require objects (transitive) and when they do not (intransitive). According to Harahap (2024), classroom action research in Indonesia shows that students' comprehension of transitive and intransitive sentences can be significantly improved through targeted instruction. Understanding this distinction is important because it can prevent grammatical errors. Correct use of verbs (both transitive and intransitive) helps students construct accurate sentences and convey messages more effectively. If transitive verbs are used without objects, or vice versa, sentences can become illogical or confusing.

In other words, the action performed by a transitive verb is directed at someone or something. Transitive verbs require a direct object to be meaningful. Most transitive verbs do not have a direct object, making sentences with transitive verbs sound awkward. Transitive verbs can also have an indirect object, which is a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase that appears before the direct object and indicates the person or thing receiving what is given or done (Prihandoko et al., 2019; Sachiya et al., 2025). On the other hand, an intransitive verb is an action verb that is not followed by another word that answers the question "what" or "who." Intransitive verbs are simply defined as verbs that do not have a direct object. This occurs because the object is not present in the sentence. Unlike transitive verbs, intransitive verbs do not need to be followed by an object because their meaning can be understood well even without an object (Ko et al., 2025; Tahir et al., 2018). Most mainstream grammar research in English language learning tends to focus on general grammatical aspects or basic formation, neglecting the use of transitive and intransitive verbs. This gap indicates that there is little research examining students' ability to use these verb types separately. By identifying students' specific abilities on transitive and intransitive verbs, this study can provide a clearer understanding of the various competencies they possess as well as how these specific errors occur.

In the teaching and learning process, understanding verbs is very important, because verbs represent a person's actions in daily activities. This study focuses on the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs. Verbs are words that indicate the actions, processes, conditions, or states of living things, both people and objects. Verbs have several types, one of which is action verbs. Action verbs are used in grammar. These verbs are used in English tenses such as the present tense, past tense, future tense, and progressive tense because they indicate when an action or activity occurs (Yaumi et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). There are two types of action verbs: transitive verbs and intransitive passive verbs. Verbs that have an action must be used in relation to an object, and when using a verb, it only makes sense if the verb transfers the action to an object. This means that the verb is not read correctly or functions alone without an object. Meanwhile, intransitive verbs are verbs that do not require an action on an object to be meaningful. According to Hu (2024), verb pattern errors among EFL learners are often influenced by factors such as intralingual interference and negative transfer from the first language.

Second language proficiency, particularly English, is often a key determinant of future academic and professional success. In the context of globalization, English literacy is a highly valuable asset. Today, English communication skills are crucial for interacting globally, pursuing higher education, and entering the workforce. One of the fundamental pillars of English language proficiency is a strong understanding of basic grammar, including the use of transitive and intransitive verbs. By understanding these basic concepts, students will more easily learn more complex sentence structures, thereby improving their overall language proficiency. This is especially important in the context of lifelong learning, where mastery of basic grammar is the first step towards developing higher-level skills such as essay writing, text analysis, or participating in critical discussions. This research indirectly contributes to improving students' English literacy by helping them understand the use of verbs in simple sentences. Furthermore, the findings of this study can provide teachers with new insights into the challenges students face in learning transitive and intransitive verbs. Based on these findings, teachers can adapt their teaching methods to be more effective, for example by providing practical exercises or presenting clear example sentences in everyday contexts. In addition, this research can inspire the development of more specific learning modules or teaching materials with a focus on various uses of transitive and intransitive verbs, so that the learning process becomes more contextual and applicable for students. Therefore, in this thesis the author takes the title *Student's Competence In Using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs in Simple Sentences at English Language Education Study Program of Khairun University*.

2. Methodology

This research employed a quantitative descriptive design, involving a single variable students' skill in using transitive and intransitive verbs. The study aimed to describe the competence of third-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Khairun University, in constructing simple sentences using transitive and intransitive verbs. Quantitative descriptive research uses numerical data and statistical figures to analyze findings objectively. It focuses on collecting measurable data to explain a phenomenon or describe characteristics of a particular group. Therefore, this approach was appropriate to determine the level of students' grammatical competence based on their test results.

This study was conducted with third-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Khairun University, Ternate, in the academic year 2024–2025. The population of this study consisted of all third-semester students of the English Department, totaling 30 students, who were enrolled in Class A. This group was selected because they had already studied basic grammar, including the topic of transitive and intransitive verbs. According to McMillan (1996, as cited in Turumi, 2016), a sample is a subset of a population from which data are collected. The sample in this study consisted of 30 students from Class A, selected using a total sampling technique, since the entire population was small and manageable. Thus, the data represented the overall ability of third-semester students in that class. Data analysis involves examining and interpreting tabulated data to determine their meaning (Sign, 2006). In this study, data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. The analysis aimed to determine students' average scores and the percentage of performance levels. The analysis aimed to determine students' average scores and the percentage of performance levels.

2.1 Scoring Formula

Each student's score was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Obtained Score}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100$$

2.2 Mean Formula

The average score of students was determined using the formula:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

Where:

\bar{X} = Average score

$\sum X$ = Total score of all students

N = Number of students

2.3 Score Classification

Table 1. Classification Score

No	Classification	Score Range
1	Very Good	96–100
2	Good	86–95
3	Fairly Good	76–85
4	Fair	66–75
5	Poor	56–65
6	Very Poor	36–55
7	Extremely Poor	0–35

This table categorizes student scores into qualitative levels ranging from Very Good to Extremely Poor, facilitating clear interpretation of performance outcomes.

2.4 Assessment Rubric for Understanding and Using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Table 2. Assessment Rubric for Understanding and Using Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

Criteria	Very Good (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Concept Understanding	Fully understands the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs; no conceptual errors.	Understands most differences; minor misconceptions.	Limited understanding; confusion in distinguishing verb types.	Does not understand differences; many conceptual errors.
Sentence Construction	Constructs sentence correctly with accurate verb use.	Most sentences correct; few errors.	Some sentences incorrect; rule misuse.	Most or all sentences incorrect.
Use of Direct Objects	Always uses objects correctly with transitive verbs.	Usually correct; minor errors.	Frequent errors; inconsistent use.	Does not understand how to use direct objects.
Verb Identification	Accurately identifies verb type.	Mostly accurate; few mistakes.	Often incorrect in identification.	Cannot identify verb types.
Accuracy in Use	No errors in verb use.	Few minor errors.	Several errors but some understanding shown.	Most uses incorrect; lacks conceptual grasp.

This rubric evaluates students' understanding and application of transitive and intransitive verbs across five criteria. Each criterion is rated on a four-point scale (1–4) to represent the degree of mastery and accuracy in both conceptual understanding and practical usage.

3. Result and Discussion

This research was conducted on 30 third-semester class A students of the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University. The research instrument was a written test consisting of 15 multiple-choice questions and 5 essay questions. Most students were able to use transitive verbs in simple sentences with a higher level of precision than intransitive verbs. They could place objects correctly after transitive verbs, for example in sentences like "He finished the task" or "They opened the door." This indicates that students were relatively more skilled at identifying and applying verbs that require objects. On the other hand, students still experience difficulties in using intransitive verbs. Many of them add objects incorrectly, for example, "He arrived the station" instead of "He arrived at the station." Furthermore, students often make mistakes in distinguishing verbs that can function as both transitive and intransitive verbs (break, open, boil). This study shows that students' ability to use intransitive verbs still needs to be improved. Student Competence in using transitive verbs and intransitive verbs in simple sentences.

This section describes students' ability to use transitive and intransitive verbs in simple sentences. This section presents the results obtained from analyzing data collected through multiple-choice and essay tests. This test was designed to measure students' ability to use transitive and intransitive verbs in simple sentences. Researchers analyzed students' ability to use transitive and intransitive verbs through their answers to each test item, as follows:

Table 3. Participants' Evaluation Results Based on Correct and Wrong Answers

NO	Participant	Correct Answer	Goods	Wrong Answer	Score
1.	SS	6	20	14	30
2.	JA	17	20	3	85
3.	RT	14	20	6	70
4.	US	9	20	11	45
5.	Hospital	11	20	9	55
6.	HN	15	20	5	75
7.	NRT	12	20	8	60
8.	RN	16	20	4	75
9.	DM	17	20	3	85
10.	MA	18	20	2	90
11.	AM	17	20	3	85
12.	SM	17	20	3	85
13.	YMG	15	20	5	75
14.	CR	14	20	6	70
15.	SHAS	17	20	3	85
16.	MMA	10	20	10	50
17.	PW	13	20	7	65
18.	AW	16	20	4	80
19.	HM	12	20	8	60
20.	YS	8	20	12	40
21.	MF	11	20	9	55
22.	SI	12	20	8	60
23.	Hospital	17	20	3	85
24.	KO	14	20	6	70
25.	SNI	18	20	2	90
26.	RAH	14	20	6	70
27.	MI	15	20	5	75
28.	RU	16	20	4	80
29.	NW	10	20	10	50
30.	BR	15	20	5	70
Average					69.17
Total					2075

The multiple-choice test consists of 15 questions that test students' competency in measure the ability to identify transitive and intransitive verb, while the essay test consists of 5 questions. Measure the ability to apply the verb in simple

sentences. From the assessment results, it can be seen that the highest score obtained was 90, which was only achieved by two students. On the other hand, the lowest score obtained was 30, achieved by only one student. This difference illustrates the variation in students' understanding of the material tested, both on multiple-choice and essay questions. This table provides a clear picture of the distribution of student scores, both on multiple-choice and essay questions. This data can serve as an important reference for lecturers in analyzing students' understanding of the material taught.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Participants by Performance Category (Multiple-Choice Test)

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extremely Poor	2	6.7%
2	Very Poor	6	20.0%
3	Poor	6	20.0%
4	Fair	7	23.3%
5	Fairly Good	8	26.7%
6	Good	2	6.7%
7	Very Good	0	0%
Total		30	100%

Based on the table above, most of the students (26.7%) were classified as Fairly Good, followed by Fair (23.3%). The Poor and Very Poor categories each accounted for 20% of the students. A small number of students (6.7%) were classified as Good, and another 6.7% as Extremely Poor. None of the students reached the Very Good category. These results indicate that most students were in the lower–middle categories, suggesting that their ability to use transitive and intransitive verbs still needs improvement. A small portion of students demonstrated a higher level of mastery, but overall, students' performance remained uneven and had not yet reached an optimal level.

The results of the essay test were analyzed to determine the percentage of students' performance across different levels of achievement. The test measured students' ability to construct correct and meaningful sentences using transitive and intransitive verbs in various contexts. The distribution of students' essay test results is presented in the table below:

Table 5. Frequency and Percentage of Participants by Performance Category (Essay Test)

No	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extremely Poor	2	6.7%
2	Poor	3	10.0%
3	Fairly Good	6	20.0%
4	Very Good	19	63.3%
Total		30	100%

Based on the data above, the majority of students (63.3%) achieved the Very Good category, indicating a high level of understanding and accuracy in using transitive and intransitive verbs in their essay writing. About 20% of the students were classified as Fairly Good, showing an adequate level of competence but with minor grammatical errors. A smaller portion of students, 10%, were in the Poor category, while 6.7% fell into the Extremely Poor category. This suggests that only a few students still struggled with forming grammatically correct sentences and applying verb functions appropriately.

An assessment rubric is an evaluation instrument that helps teachers classify student achievement not only based on numbers, but also the meaning behind the scores. With this rubric, a student's score of 40, 60, or 90 is not just a number, but is connected to a category and description of performance. Comparison of Students' Multiple-Choice and Essay Test Results.

There were 30 students who participated in the test, there were two students categorized as "Very Good," each obtaining a score of 90. These students demonstrated a strong mastery of the material and showed a clear understanding

of grammatical structures, particularly in the use of transitive and intransitive verbs. Their performance indicates that they were able to apply grammatical rules accurately and consistently across the test items. Furthermore, eight students were classified as "Good," with scores ranging between 85 and 80. These students showed a relatively high level of understanding and were able to apply most of the target grammar structures correctly, although minor errors were still present in certain cases.

This result suggests that these students have developed adequate competence and are capable of constructing grammatically correct sentences with a good degree of accuracy. A larger portion of the participants, nine students, were classified as "Fairly Good," obtaining scores between 65, 70, and 75. This indicates that a considerable number of students possessed an average level of proficiency. While they demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the material, they still made frequent mistakes, especially in differentiating between transitive and intransitive verbs or in constructing proper sentence structures. These students could benefit from additional practice and more focused instruction to strengthen their grammatical awareness and accuracy. In addition, three students were categorized as "Fair," with scores ranging from 60 to 65. Their results show that they had a basic understanding of the material but lacked consistency in applying grammatical rules. These students often made errors that affected the overall clarity of their sentences, suggesting that their understanding of verb usage and sentence structure remains limited. There were also four students who belonged to the "Poor" category, with scores ranging from 50 to 55. Students in this group faced significant challenges in mastering the material, indicating limited comprehension and a weak grasp of basic grammar concepts. Their responses revealed confusion in identifying verb types and constructing simple sentences accurately. Finally, three students obtained scores that placed them in the "Extremely Poor" category, with scores of 30, 40, and 45. These students demonstrated very limited understanding of the material, struggling to recognize even basic grammatical patterns. This indicates a serious need for remedial teaching and individualized support to help them improve their foundational grammar skills.

Even excellent results, the majority were distributed across the middle and lower categories, indicating that the overall mastery of grammatical competence among the third-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University was moderate. After analyzing and classifying the test scores, the researcher calculated the percentage of students in each category based on the data obtained. The distribution of students' performance is as follows: a. Very Good: 2 students (6.7%) b. Good: 8 students (26.7%) c. Fairly Good: 9 students (30%) d. Fair: 4 students (13.3%) e. Poor: 6 students (20%) Extremely Poor: 1 student (3.3%) These results clearly show that the majority of students (56.7%) fall within the Fairly Good and Good categories, which suggests that most of them have developed a moderate understanding of the material. However, the presence of students in the Poor and Extremely Poor categories (23.3%) highlights that a portion of the class still faces considerable challenges in applying grammatical rules accurately. The findings indicate that while the teaching methods used have been somewhat effective, there remains a need for more targeted instructional strategies to address individual learning difficulties. It is recommended that educators incorporate interactive grammar exercises, contextual learning activities, and remedial sessions to help students strengthen their understanding of transitive and intransitive verbs and improve their overall writing proficiency.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study regarding the ability of third-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University to use transitive and intransitive verbs in simple sentences, it can be concluded that the students demonstrated good ability in using transitive verbs, as shown by their correct placement of objects after verbs and understanding of the basic Subject + Verb + Object pattern. However, they still experienced difficulties in using intransitive verbs, such as adding unnecessary objects and confusing verbs that can function as both transitive and intransitive. The comparison of test results indicated that students performed better in applying grammar through writing tasks than in recognizing correct forms in multiple-choice tests. Therefore, implementing contextual learning strategies through authentic reading and writing activities is essential to improve their mastery of intransitive verbs and enhance overall grammatical accuracy and sentence structure.

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