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IRREGULAR VERBS: ANALYSIS AND SOLUTION

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Abstract

This research aimed to analyze the difficulties faced by senior high school students in mastering regular and irregular verbs in English learning and to identify possible solutions to overcome these difficulties. This study employed a qualitative method. The participants of this research consisted of ten twelfth-grade senior high school students and one English teacher in the academic year 2024–2025. The data were collected through writing tests with the students and the teacher to obtain information related to students' learning difficulties, learning errors, and the causes of those errors in using regular and irregular verbs. The results of the study showed that students' mastery of irregular verbs was still relatively low. Most students experienced difficulty in distinguishing between base forms, past forms, and past participles. Generally, they had difficulty differentiating regular and irregular verbs, tended to overgeneralize by adding -ed to all verbs, and had limited ability to memorize and recall the V2 and V3 forms of irregular verbs. In addition, instructional factors such as limited reinforcement and a focus on written grammar exercises rather than meaningful language use contributed to students' difficulties. Therefore, this research suggests that English teachers should apply more contextualized and communicative teaching strategies with consistent reinforcement to improve students' mastery of regular and irregular verbs.

Keywords: *Difficulties, Regular and Irregular Verbs, Verb Tense*

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Introduction

English has become an essential international language used in various fields, including education, science, and communication. In English language learning, grammar is a fundamental component because it helps learners arrange words into meaningful and acceptable sentences. Harmer (2017) explains that grammar provides the basic structure that allows learners to express ideas clearly and accurately. Therefore, insufficient grammatical understanding may lead students to experience difficulties in both spoken and written communication. One important element of grammar is the verb, particularly regular and irregular verbs, which play a major role in constructing tenses such as the simple past tense. Verbs are central to sentence meaning because they indicate actions, time, and situations (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 2018). Regular verbs generally follow consistent rules by adding -ed in their past forms, while irregular verbs have unpredictable forms that must be memorized. This difference often creates confusion for learners, particularly at the secondary school level. Senior high school students commonly encounter problems in distinguishing and using regular and irregular verbs correctly. Recent studies have shown that secondary school EFL learners continue to experience persistent difficulties in using irregular verbs accurately, particularly due to overgeneralization and limited exposure to meaningful grammatical input (Vazariah & Rozimela, 2020). Ellis (2021) states that language learners frequently apply general grammatical rules to all forms, a process known as overgeneralization. As a result, students may incorrectly use regular verb patterns for irregular verbs, which leads to grammatical errors and misunderstandings in communication.

The mastery of irregular verbs remains a persistent challenge for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as these verbs do not follow predictable conjugation patterns and must often be memorized individually. Unlike regular verbs that add a standard -ed ending in past forms, irregular verbs vary widely in form and usage, creating difficulties in both understanding and application for students at various educational levels. Research in recent years has consistently highlighted this issue, showing that students frequently commit errors when identifying and using irregular verbs in written and spoken English, which adversely affects their overall language proficiency (Afdal et al., 2022&; Mafakir & Nurkholis, 2024).

To better understand this issue, several researchers have conducted error analysis studies focusing on students' difficulties with irregular verbs. Findings reveal that learners struggle to distinguish between regular and irregular verb forms and frequently apply incorrect conjugation rules due to limited grammatical awareness and insufficient practice (Afdal et al., 2022).

Moreover, instructional approaches that rely heavily on rote memorization without contextualized usage have been identified as a contributing factor to students' poor retention of irregular verb forms. Recent research has also explored the use of digital learning tools, such as grammar-based mobile applications, which have shown potential in improving learners' engagement and accuracy in using irregular verbs (Samad & Paris, 2023).

Recent linguistic and pedagogical research has emphasized that difficulties with irregular verbs are closely related to learners' morphological awareness and the way grammar is presented in instructional materials. Studies on second language acquisition suggest that learners often rely on overgeneralization strategies, applying regular verb rules to irregular forms due to insufficient exposure and meaningful input (Ellis, 2021). Moreover, vocabulary-focused grammar instruction has been shown to improve learners' retention of irregular verb forms when verbs are introduced in frequency-based groupings and contextualized usage rather than isolated memorization (Nation, 2022). However, despite these findings, many EFL classrooms still emphasize form-based drills without integrating usage frequency and communicative practice. Therefore, this research aims to bridge theoretical insights from recent SLA studies with practical classroom-oriented solutions to improve students' mastery of irregular verbs.

In addition, students' difficulties are influenced by several internal and external factors related to how learners process grammatical rules, patterns, and memory in language learning. Richards (2017) argues that grammar instruction should be connected to meaningful communication is essential to help learners internalize language forms more effectively. Furthermore, learners' affective factors such as motivation and anxiety, play an important role in grammatical acquisition. Low motivation and high levels of anxiety can hinder students' ability to acquire grammar, particularly when grammar learning is perceived as difficult or monotonous (Al-Hoorie, 2017). Based on these considerations, this research aims to analyze the difficulties faced by senior high school students in mastering regular and irregular verbs and to identify possible solutions to overcome these difficulties. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical insights into common error patterns related to regular and irregular verb usage at the senior high school level. In addition, the findings are expected to offer practical implications for English teachers in designing more effective and contextualized grammar instruction. The results of this research are expected to contribute useful insights for English teachers in improving grammar instruction, particularly in teaching regular and irregular verbs at the senior high school level.

Given the recurring nature of these difficulties, there is a clear need for research that not only analyzes the patterns and causes of irregular verb errors but also proposes effective instructional solutions. Addressing this issue is essential for improving learners' grammatical competence and overall communicative ability. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the types of errors made by senior high school students in using irregular verbs and to identify instructional solutions that can help students overcome these difficulties.

Research Methods

Design

This research employs a basic interpretative qualitative research design. Ary et al. (2018) stated that basic interpretative qualitative studies aim to understand how individuals make meaning of their experiences and how they interpret a particular phenomenon. This type of qualitative research design focuses on describing and interpreting participants' perspectives rather than measuring variables using numerical data.

In line with this perspective, the present study applies a basic interpretative qualitative design to explore senior high school students' difficulties in mastering regular and irregular verbs based on their learning experiences. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand students' difficulties from their own viewpoints, which are obtained through interviews.

Participants

The participants of this research were ten twelfth-grade senior high school students and one English teacher at SMA 25 Kabupaten Tangerang, Banten, in the academic year 2024–2025. The students were selected from one class using purposive sampling. They were chosen because they had learned regular and irregular verbs in their English lessons and were able to share their learning experiences through interviews.

The students served as the main participants of the study to provide in-depth information about the difficulties they faced in mastering regular and irregular verbs. In addition, one English teacher who taught the selected class was included as a participant. The teacher participated to provide supporting information related to teaching strategies, classroom practices, and challenges in teaching regular and irregular verbs. The involvement of the teacher helped to strengthen the credibility of the data by providing different perspectives on the same issue.

Instrument

The research instrument used in this study is an interview guide that is systematically designed to collect data related to students' difficulties in mastering regular and irregular verbs. The instrument aims to obtain in-depth information about learning errors (bugs) and the causes that emerge in the process of learning grammar, particularly in the topic of regular and irregular verbs. The interview guide consists of several sections:

Section A: Students' Personal Data

This section includes questions about students' names, classes, and previous English learning experiences. It aims to obtain background information that may influence students' mastery of regular and irregular verbs.

Section B: Difficulties in Mastering Regular and Irregular Verbs

Questions in this section focus on identifying the types of difficulties experienced by students, such as forgetting past verb forms, incorrectly adding -ed to regular verbs, or misusing irregular verbs in sentences. This section allows students to explain their learning experiences and the factors that make it difficult for them to master the material.

Section C: Learning Errors (Bugs) and Causes

Students are asked to mention examples of errors they frequently make (bugs) and explain what they believe to be the causes of those errors. This section helps the researcher identify common error patterns and factors that influence students' understanding.

Section D: Learning Strategies and Teaching Methods Applied

This section explores the strategies used by students and the teaching methods applied by teachers in learning regular and irregular verbs. This information is important for identifying solutions that are relevant to students' difficulties.

Data Collection

The data collection procedures consist of several stages and employ interviews as the main instrument, supported by an interview guide and audio recordings.

Interviews with Students

Each student was interviewed individually. The questions focused on the difficulties they experience in mastering regular and irregular verbs,

including frequent learning errors (bugs) and their causes. Students' responses were recorded in detail for analysis.

Interviews with the Teacher

The English teacher was interviewed to obtain information about the teaching methods applied and strategies used to overcome students' difficulties. The teacher was also asked to identify common learning errors (bugs) and their causes based on teaching experience.

Data Analysis Process

Interview data were transcribed and examined carefully. The researcher categorized students' and teacher's responses into themes related to learning errors (bugs), causes, and learning strategies.

Through these systematic data collection procedures, the research provides a comprehensive description of students' difficulties in mastering regular and irregular verbs and the factors that influence those difficulties.

Data analysis

The data in this research are analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods. This method focuses on providing clear and detailed descriptions of the data without using numerical measurements. The researcher analyzes information obtained from interviews with students and teachers, particularly regarding students' difficulties in learning regular and irregular verbs, the learning errors (bugs) that appear, and their causes. Descriptive qualitative analysis allows the researcher to present the findings in an organized and meaningful way.

Results and Discussion

Results

Students' Difficulties in Mastering Regular and Irregular Verbs

This section presents the results of the study based on in-depth interviews with senior high school students and an English teacher. The data were analyzed thematically to identify common difficulties faced by students in mastering regular and irregular verbs. The findings indicate that students experience several types of difficulties related to verb usage. The summary of these difficulties is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Students' Difficulties

Types of Difficulties	Details
Difficulty distinguishing verb types	Students are unable to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs
Overgeneralization of verb rules	Students apply -ed for all verbs
Limited knowledge of verb forms	Students forget or don't know the form of verb 2 and verb 3

This table shows that students' difficulties are not singular but occur in various forms, with irregular verbs being the main source of errors.

1. Analysis of Students' Written Responses

To complement the interview data, students' written responses were collected and analyzed as documents. These documents consisted of simple exercises containing sentences with regular and irregular verbs. The purpose of analyzing these written responses was to identify the types of errors that frequently occur in the use of regular and irregular verbs at the twelfth-grade senior high school level.

Table 2. Items of questions

No.	Items of Questions
1	Yesterday, I _____ (come) home late.
2	She _____ (make) a cake last Sunday.
3	My father _____ (take) me to school yesterday.
4	He _____ (drink) a glass of milk last night.
5	They _____ (write) a short story yesterday.
6	We _____ (clean) the classroom yesterday.
7	She _____ (open) the door last night.
8	I _____ (close) the window yesterday.
9	They _____ (visit) their grandparents last weekend.
10	She _____ (finish) her homework last night.

2. Analysis of Students' Errors Based on Documented Responses

The table below presents an analysis of students' written responses, including the number and types of errors, as well as the correct forms of the verbs. This analysis provides insight into the challenges students face in using regular and irregular verbs correctly.

Table 3: Name of Students and Error Words

No	Name	Errors	Type	Example	Correct
1	Andi	4	Overgeneralization	Writed	Wrote
2	Sinta	5	Overgeneralization	Drinked	Drank
3	Rafi	2	Overgeneralization	Taked	Took
4	Dina	3	Overgeneralization	Eated	Eaten
5	Bagas	5	Overgeneralization	Comed	Came

6	Nabila	2	V2-V3 Confusion	Taken	Took
7	Rizky	3	V2-V3 Confusion	Drunk	Drank
8	Alya	1	V2-V3 Confusion	Written	Wrote
9	Fikri	2	Failure to recall the irregular verb form	Come	Came
10	Putri	2	Failure to recall the irregular verb form	Write	Wrote

The total number of errors and the types of errors presented in the table above show that overgeneralization is the most dominant type of error. Overgeneralization indicates that students are not yet able to distinguish between general rules and exceptions; therefore, they tend to apply the same pattern to all verbs.

There are two students who made the most errors, which are five, indicating that they had the most significant difficulty with correct verb forms. Their errors were dominated by overgeneralization, such as using *drunked* instead of *drank* and *comed* instead of *came*. This suggests that these students strongly relied on the general rule of adding *-ed* to form the past tense and had limited awareness of irregular verb exceptions.

The fewest errors are only one student, with only one error, indicating a better understanding of irregular verb forms. Although Alya still showed confusion between V2 and V3 forms (*written* → *wrote*), the low number of errors suggests a higher level of grammatical control compared to other students.

There are four students who made only two errors each, demonstrated moderate difficulty, but showed better recall of verb forms than students with higher error frequencies.

The most dominant type of error identified in this study is overgeneralization, which appeared in the work of five students. This finding confirms that many students are unable to distinguish between general grammatical rules and exceptions. As a result, they tend to apply the same rule to all verbs without considering whether the verb is regular or irregular. Other error types, such as V2-V3 confusion and failure to recall irregular verb forms, further indicate that students struggle with memorization and retrieval of correct verb forms, especially when they are required to use verbs in written contexts.

3. Learning Solutions for Teaching Regular and Irregular Verbs

Based on the interview results and the analysis of students' errors, the learning solutions proposed in this study are directly adjusted to the most

frequently occurring types of errors, particularly overgeneralization and the incorrect use of irregular verbs.

Explicit Teaching of the "Rule vs. Exception" Concept

Teachers need to explain explicitly that not all verbs in English follow the same pattern of change. Regular verbs follow the rule of adding -ed, while irregular verbs are exceptions that must be learned separately. Through this explanation, students not only memorize the rules but also understand their limitations, which can help reduce overgeneralization errors.

Grouping Irregular Verbs Based on Patterns of Change

Irregular verbs are often considered difficult because of their large number and irregular forms. To address this issue, irregular verbs can be taught by grouping them according to similarities in their patterns of change, such as vowel changes (go-went, take-took, give-gave) or verbs that have the same form in V1 and V2 (cut-cut). This approach helps students to: reduce memorization load, recognize patterns of change visually and phonologically, and remember verb forms more effectively.

Contextual and Repetitive Practice

The findings of this study indicate that students easily forget irregular verb forms because the practice provided is still limited to word lists or written exercises. Therefore, practice needs to be carried out repeatedly through simple sentences, dialogues, or short narrative texts. Contextual practice helps students use the correct verb forms more naturally.

Error Analysis with Students

Students' errors, such as dranked, comed, and writed, should not only be corrected but also discussed together in the classroom. Teachers can invite students to analyze why these forms are incorrect and identify the correct forms. Through this error analysis, students become more aware of their own thinking processes, particularly their tendency toward overgeneralization.

Discussion

Based on the results of the error analysis, this study demonstrates that students' difficulties in mastering regular and irregular verbs vary in both frequency and type, with irregular verbs emerging as the primary source of difficulty. This finding aligns with recent studies in second language acquisition, which indicate that irregular verb forms remain challenging for learners due to their non-systematic nature and limited rule-based predictability. This finding is consistent with recent studies, which report that

irregular verbs remain a major source of difficulty for EFL learners due to their unpredictable forms and limited rule-based patterns (Fasikh, 2020).

Recent research emphasizes that learners' difficulties with irregular verbs are not solely attributed to memorization problems but are closely related to cognitive processing demands involved in recognizing, differentiating, and retrieving verb forms. The present findings support this perspective by showing that students with fewer errors tend to demonstrate greater awareness of verb form changes and rely less on simplified grammatical rules. This suggests a more advanced level of grammatical sensitivity and internalization of verb patterns. Recent research suggests that learners' ability to recognize and retrieve verb forms is closely related to cognitive processing capacity and grammatical awareness, which supports the findings of the present study (Zhang, 2022; Saito & Hanzawa, 2018).

Furthermore, the findings corroborate recent studies on grammatical overgeneralization, which report that learners frequently apply regular verb patterns to irregular forms as part of their developing interlanguage system (Ni'amah, 2023). This indicates that overgeneralization continues to be a dominant source of grammatical errors among secondary school learners. In contrast to earlier studies that primarily focused on learner-related factors, this study highlights the influence of instructional conditions, particularly limited exposure to irregular verbs in meaningful communicative contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, current research advocates for instructional approaches that move beyond rote memorization and isolated grammar exercises. The findings of this study support recent pedagogical trends emphasizing contextualized, task-based, and communicative learning activities. Providing learners with frequent opportunities to encounter and use irregular verbs through narratives, interactional tasks, and meaningful language use can facilitate stronger mental representations and long-term retention. This supports recent pedagogical research emphasizing that grammar instruction should be integrated with communicative and task-based activities rather than relying solely on memorization (Hinkel, 2015).

Overall, this study contributes to the current body of knowledge by reinforcing contemporary theoretical views on the cognitive and instructional dimensions of grammar acquisition. It also offers practical insights for English teachers at the senior high school level by highlighting the need for instructional designs that align grammatical learning with learners' linguistic development processes, particularly in mastering irregular verb forms.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that senior high school students experience varying levels of difficulty in mastering regular and irregular verbs, with irregular verbs emerging as the primary source of errors. The findings reveal that students' errors are predominantly caused by overgeneralization, followed by confusion between past tense (V2) and past participle (V3) forms, as well as difficulties in recalling irregular verb forms.

In addition, the study indicates that students' difficulties are influenced not only by cognitive factors, such as limited grammatical awareness and memory constraints, but also by instructional factors, including limited exposure to irregular verbs in meaningful communicative contexts. These findings suggest that instructional approaches focusing solely on memorization are insufficient to support effective irregular verb acquisition.

Therefore, this study concludes that the implementation of contextualized and communicative teaching strategies, such as task-based activities, narrative practices, and meaningful interaction, is essential to help students improve their mastery of irregular verbs. By aligning grammar instruction with learners' cognitive development and language use, English teachers can reduce students' grammatical errors and enhance their overall communicative competence.

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