Reusing Comprehensive Charts of Tense Forms to Teach EFL Students in a University of Science and Technology

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Abstract

This study investigated 228 English as foreign language freshmen at a university of science and technology in southern Taiwan to explore the participants' knowledge of English tense forms by recognizing 12 tense forms and translating Chinese sentences into English with specific tense forms. The results showed that the participants who were taught with the Comprehensive Charts of 24 Tense Forms outperformed their counterparts in the control group in recognizing the tense patterns and translating the present perfect continuous tense (at a significant level, $p < .05$). However, the translation of the other two tense sentences did not reach the statistically significant level. The results of this study supported the researcher's speculation in the previous study, *Using Comprehensive Charts of Tense Forms to Teach EFL College Students*, that the mastery of tense forms was closely related to the subjects' English proficiency level and the non-written context. The instruction with the Comprehensive Charts particularly worked for students of the advanced level. A questionnaire designed to explore the participants' preference of tense form teaching with the Comprehensive Charts indicated that 65.1 percent of the subjects preferred the focus on *formS teaching* (Doughty & Williams, 1998) and 64.7 percent of them deemed it was the most effective. This present study suggested storing the grammatical knowledge of tense forms in learners' memory for future retrieval based on the "Instance Theory." An Instructional Mode: Using the Comprehensive Charts for Teaching the Tense Forms was also appended.

Keywords: *tense-aspect; tense forms; comprehensive charts; university students*

1. Introduction

Much research has reported a high ratio of tense errors in oral or written contexts for second language (L2) learners (Huang, 1994; Huang, 2001). So did many researchers suggest the tense errors were caused by learners' misconception of time reference and/or influenced by their first language (Huang, 1994; Wong, 1999; Zobl, 1982). Others illustrated the situations of using the forms (Buczowska & Weist, 1991) and the interrelationship among the tenses, the reference time and the event time (Svalberg, 1986). However, relatively fewer studies addressed what all the tense forms are and how to present them. If our students don't even know how many tense forms there are and how the forms are formed, how could we request them to speak or write correctly with various tenses?

Chou & Wu (2007) pointed out that the adult Chinese learners' difficulty with English tense and aspect stemmed mainly from their insufficient knowledge of English aspect and their unfamiliarity with the forms of tense-aspect components. Larsen-Freeman, Kuehn, & Haccius (2002) reported that the greatest challenge of English tense-aspect teaching was how to help learners distinguish one tense type from another.

In view of the above facts, the researcher develops the Comprehensive Charts with all the active/passive tenses being laid out together along with formula and examples in a hope to demonstrate the whole framework of the tense forms to learners concerning how they are formed and what their similar and different patterns are (Appendix 1 & 2). Unfortunately, the researcher's first trial to collect data for verifying the value, teaching with the charts, was far from satisfactory (Tsai, 2009). The thirty-six freshmen being tested immediately after the tense teaching and four weeks later performed little different from not being taught. Thus, the researcher considered the subjects' English

competence and the written test (the translation questions) might be crucial factors to devaluate the instruction. Consequently, this research was conducted to test the researcher's hypothesis.

In addition, the researcher also distributed a questionnaire for exploring the participants' preference of the tense form teaching. In case that the participants preferred other teaching methods than the Focus on FormS (Long & Robinson, 1998) approach that was delivered in the study, there is a potential need to conduct a third study for teaching with the Comprehensive Charts.

This study is actually the second research of *Using Comprehensive Charts of Tense Forms to Teach EFL College Students* (Tsai, 2009). The researcher introduced a synthesized Comprehensive Charts which was created by the researcher and dated back in 1998. In view of the criticizing of the Focus on FormS teaching, attempts were also made to provide a clear concept map (Appendix 3) and an instructional mode (Appendix 4) for teaching the tense forms.

2. Literature Review

Differences exist between teacher's favorite and students' preference. Studies such as Brindley's (1984) and Schultz's (1996, 2001) indicated students preferred more formal teaching of grammar and explicit correction, while teachers favored more communicative activities.

Doughty, C. & Williams, J. (1998) pointed out that traditional notion of formS always entails isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or from communicative activity. Teachers and researchers have used a variety of terms to refer to instruction involving focus on formS, such as grammar instruction, formal instruction, form-focused instruction, and code-focused instruction (Doughty & Williams, 1998). They continued that focus-on-form entails a focus on formal elements of language, whereas focus on formS is limited to such a focus, and focus on meaning excluded it...the fundamental assumption of focus-on-form instruction is that meaning and use must be evident to the learner at the time that attention is drawn to the linguistic apparatus needed to get the meaning across (as cited in Ellis, 2008, p.871).

Long, M. H. & Robinson, P. (1998) and Long, M. H. (2000) distinguished the teaching approach of Focus on form from Focus on meaning and Focus on formS that Wilkins (1976) termed the synthetic approach. According to Wikipedia:

> Focus on form (or FonF) is a concept in second language acquisition and language education, proposed by Michael Long (see note 1), in which, in the context of a communicative interaction, the attention of learners learning a second language is drawn to the form of specific language features. It is contrasted with *focus on forms*, which is limited solely to the explicit focus on language features, and *focus on meaning*, which is limited to focus on meaning with no attention paid to form at all. For a teaching intervention to qualify as *focus on form* and not as *focus on formS*, the learner must be aware of the meaning and use of the language features before the form is brought to their attention (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_on_form).

Ellis (1993) studied the implicit teaching, explicit teaching, and explicit teaching with instances and reported that the "Rule & Instances" learners learned slowest than the "Random" and "Rule" learners, but when exposed to new constructions, they generalized and were able both to explicitly formulate new rules and succeed on implicit well-formed judgments.

"The long-term learning challenge with many features of language is understanding meaning and use. Learners often do know what the correct tense-aspect form is for a given verb-it's when to use it that continues to present difficulties" (Collins, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Logan (1988) proposed the "Instance Hypothesis" that as individual solutions to problems accumulated in memory a transition in problem-solving procedures took place (as cited in Robinson & Ha, 1993). Truscott, J. (1998) used a UG-instance theory approach (UG stands for Universal Grammar which is a theory in linguistics, usually credited to Noam Chomsky, 1965) and claimed that "the approach could be productively applied to various problems in language learning research, including noisy input to learners, undoing of errors during the learning process, transfer and fossilization, and the non-discrete character of learning." Lee & Wang (2002) compared the form-focused instruction with a communicative approach and found that their participants in the grammar group outperformed those in the communicative group in both the grammar recognition test and the writing task. Seliger (1975) compared the deductive approach with the inductive approach and a control group and found the deductive group performed better than the inductive group on the retention test, although there was no difference between experimental groups on the recall test. Chen & Que (2008) found high-achievers benefited more

from the deductive approach (the traditional way) than from inductive one.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Table 1. Background Information of the Participants

Experimental group N = 120 (48 Males, 72 females)	Control group N = 108 (61 Males, 47 females)
Departments:	Departments:
15 Business Administration	12 Vehicle Engineering
12 Vehicle Engineering	10 Environmental Science and Engineering
11 Environmental Science and Engineering	9 Civil Engineering
10 Civil Engineering	8 Soil and Water Conservation
9 Fashion Design and Management	8 Animal Science
8 Plant Industry	8 Recreation Sport & Health Promotion
8 Social Work	6 Biomechatronics Engineering
7 Hospitality Recreation Management	6 Fashion Design and Management
7 Soil and Water Conservation	5 Child Care
7 Child Care	5 Mechanical Engineering
6 Management Information System	5 Plant Industry
6 Industry Management	5 Social Work
4 Biomechatronics Engineering	4 Forestry
3 Recreation Sport & Health Promotion	4 Aquaculture
2 Agribusiness Management	4 Biological Science and Technology
2 Forestry	3 Wood Science and Design
2 Aquaculture	3 Veterinary Medicine
1 Unknown	2 Plant Medicine
	1 Unknown

Six classes consisting of two hundred and twenty-eight freshmen from a number of different departments of a national university of science and technology in southern Taiwan participated in the study (Table 1). All of the participants were leveled A3 which indicated their English proficiency level was intermediate or upper intermediate based on a placement test conducted by the university before the semester started. The university grouped the freshmen into four levels which are A1, A2, A3 and the advanced classes for the purpose of teaching the *Freshman English* and the *English Listening and Speaking* courses. The researcher taught three classes, the experimental group, with the Comprehensive Charts (Appendix 1 and 2), while another teacher guided the other three classes as the control group without the instruction using the Comprehensive Charts. Almost all of the subjects were freshmen, except seven, four sophomores in the experimental group and two seniors plus one sophomore in the control group. They were the course re-takers who had failed the *Freshman English* course when they took it the first time. Among the subjects, there were 48 males and 72 females, a total of 120, in the experimental group, while 61 males and 47 females, a total of 108, comprised the control group. As to the tense teaching survey, 215 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

3.2 Research Questions

The present study aimed at verifying the researcher's twofold speculations in the first study that the *focus on formS* instruction was closely related to the learners' language proficiency and the non-written context. Therefore, the research was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Do learners with better language competence outperform those with lower language competence in the tense-form learning?

2. Do learners perform better in the non-written context than in the written context after the tense-form instruction with the Comprehensive Charts?

3. What kind of teaching methods of tense-form instruction do the participants prefer?

3.3 Research Design

Table 2. Research Design for the Study

The previous study		The present study			
Translation test (written context)		Translation test (written context)		Recognition test (non-written context)	
Experimental group	Control group	Experimental group	Control group	Experimental group	Control group

The research design for the study is illustrated in Table 2. The two translation test results in both the previous and the present studies were compared to answer the first research question, whereas the translation and the recognition tests in the present study were compared to answer the second question.

3.3.1 Research Design for Research Question 1

Table 3. Participants of Research Question 1

The previous study (translation test)		The present study (translation test)	
Experimental group (n=36)	Control group (n=154)	Experimental group (n=120)	Control group (n=108)
The Business Management Department at a private university	6 mixed departments at a private university	17 mixed Departments at a national university	18 mixed Departments at a national university

In order to answer the first question, the performances on the translation tests done by both the previous study and the present study were compared. It was inferred that if both the experimental and control groups in this present study outperformed the experimental group in the previous study, then the learners' language competence could play a crucial role in the form focus tense teaching because the pilot study was done in a private university in northern Taiwan while the present study was conducted at a national university in southern Taiwan where students of national universities were deemed having better academic achievement than those in private ones in general. Besides, the 36 students in the first research were all from the same department, Business Management, without being screened, whereas the participants in the present study were tested and grouped to be of the A3 level, roughly between the upper 20% and 40% in percentile among the freshmen of the same year.

3.3.2 Research Design for Research Question 2

Table 4. Participants of Research Question 2 & 3

Experimental group (n=120)				Control group (n=108)			
C1	C2	C3	Total	C4	C5	C6	Total
44	39	37	120	30	35	43	108
1. Instructed with Comprehensive Charts				1. Instructed without Comprehensive Charts			
2. Recognition Test of Tense Forms				2. Recognition Test of Tense Forms			
3. Questionnaire				3. Questionnaire			

In seeking the answer of the second question, twelve sentences were written with different tense forms for students to recognize (Appendix 3). This part was a new design that was not carried out in the first research. The research design was based on an assumption that if the experimental group did not outperform their counterparts on sentence translation but did better on recognizing the tense forms, then it could be said that tense form teaching was more effective in the non-written context than the written context. This exploration stemmed from the results of the pilot study that the students who received the experimental tense form teaching did not perform better than the control group.

3.3.3 Research Design for Research Question 3

A questionnaire was designed to answer the third research question. Questions such as whether students wanted their tenses forms to be corrected in the conversational situation, whether they felt unsecured if the tenses were not taught, whether teaching English tenses independently worked best, and whether the tense forms were one of the most difficulties in learning English. The students help clarify the speculations of many educators in making pedagogical decisions (Table 12). Most importantly, to find out the preferred teaching approach was the initial step for teachers to take actions.

3.3.4 Instrument

The instrument of the study included a pre-test, a tense form test, and a questionnaire. The pre-test is a 40-item General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), elementary level, which is developed by Taiwanese and prevails in Taiwan as a threshold for graduation. The tense form test written with two parts, the translation part and the recognition part, was designed for exploring the subjects' knowledge of tense forms. After the test had been finished, the SPSS 12.0 statistic software was employed to perform the descriptive statistics, the Chi-Square test, the Crosstabulation, the Bivariate Correlation, and the ANOVA. In addition, a questionnaire was conducted to explore the participants' preference of tense form teaching approach for answering the third research question.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Results of Research Question 1: Do learners with better language competence outperform those with lower language competence in the tense form learning?

Table 5. The Translation Test Results

	The previous study		The present study	
	Exp. (n = 36) freshmen	Control (n = 154) sophomores	Exp. (n = 120) freshmen	Control (n = 108) freshmen
Q1:	0	71 (46.1%)	60 (50.0%)	34 (31.5%)
Q2:	0	15 (9.7%)	47 (39.2%)	36 (33.3%)
Q3:	0	13 (8.4%)	50 (41.7%)	33 (30.6%)

The research design for answering this question was done with translating three sentences that were exactly the same as the ones in the previous study for the purpose of comparison. The three sentences were respectively: the present perfect continuous tense, the passive past perfect tense, and the passive future tense (Appendix 5). The results shown on Table 5 indicate that (1) when the experimental group in the previous study is compared with control group in the present study, the researcher's presumption is preliminarily verified that the overall participants' language competence of the national university in the present study is better than their counterparts of the private university in the previous study. Besides, when the experimental groups in both studies are compared, the participants in the present study outperform their counterparts in the previous study on all three translation sentences of specific tense forms. This means learners' language competence play a crucial role in acquiring the tense forms. That is, the tense form teaching becomes effective only when learners have reached certain level of language competence. However, to what level of language competence a learner should possess to receive the teaching effectively remains unclear. (2) As to the added value of instruction on the experimental group as a whole in the present study, it is positive. However, individually, it differed from one tense form to another. Apparently, the tense form teaching tends to be the most effective on Question 1, the present perfect continuous tense, followed by the third Question, the passive future tense, while the least affective was on the second Question, the passive present perfect tense. Whether the teaching with comprehensive charts works better with the active tense forms than with the passive tense forms is worth exploring.

Moreover, according to Table 6, statistical analysis reveals that in the first sentence translation, teaching with the comprehensive charts does relate to the students' acquisition of the present perfect continuous tense form at the significant level ($p < .05$). However, the form-focused instruction is not statistically significantly related to the tense-form translation on the second and the third sentences (the passive present perfect tense and the passive future tense). Neither is the teaching significantly related to the three translation sentences as a whole.

Table 6. Q1 Translation*Instruction Crosstabulation

| | | | Instruction | | |
			1.00 (without CC.)	2.00 (with CC.)	Total
Q1 Trans.	1.00 Incorr.	Count	74	60	134
		Expected Count	63.5	70.5	134.0
		% within VAR00001	55.2%	44.8%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	68.5%	50.0%	58.8%
		% of Total	32.5%	26.3%	58.8%
	2.00 Corr.	Count	34	60	94
		Expected Count	44.5	49.5	94.0
		% within VAR00001	36.2%	63.8%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	31.5%	50.0%	41.2%
		% of Total	14.9%	26.3%	41.2%
Total		Count	108	120	228
		Expected Count	108.0	120.0	228.0
		% within VAR00001	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%

Table 7. The Chi-Square Test Results of Q1 Translation*Instruction

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.045[a]	1	.005		
Continuity Correction[b]	7.299	1	.007		
Likelihood Ratio	8.120	1	.004		
Fisher's Exact Test				.005	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.010	1	.005		
N of Valid Cases	228				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 44.53.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

The above findings seem to consistent with Krashen's (1977) second language grammatical morpheme acquisition sequence that the -*ing* morpheme is prior to the irregular and regular past (as cited in Lightbrown & Spapda, 2006, p.84). Dulay & Burt (1974) had the same finding that Spanish- and Chinese-speaking children acquired the progressive morpheme before the past tense morpheme. According to Buczowska & Weist's study (1991), L1 learners (children aged from 2 and 1/2 to 6 and 1/2) understood both tense (past and non-past) and aspect (perfect and progressive) contrasts from the earliest phrase of development, while L2 learners (university students) could understand tense well before aspect. They concerned about the pedagogical practices to the foreign language teaching as opposed to so-called "natural sequences." For example, the perfect tense and the simple past tense were introduced rather early, but the acquisition was relatively late.

In order to speed up learners' awareness of grammatical rules and the tense forms, the tense-aspect instruction with the Comprehensive Charts which list all the forms together for synthesis, analysis, and comparison might be a solution to take into consideration. Pienemann (1985) suggested that there was a natural order of acquisition based on learnability and teachability. However, the constraints were limited in child learners. Grammar instruction could help adult learners surpass the natural development stage and speed the process of their language acquisition.

Based on Table 5, 6 and 7, a conclusion could be drawn for the first research question that the learners with better language competence did outperform those with lower language competence in the tense form learning. However, only certain tense form of teaching reached statistically significant level. The cause of being unable to reach the significant level as an effective teaching approach might be a result of insufficient opportunities being provided to students for practice. A further study or teaching practice might want to try to improve in this regard.

Brian J. Baldie (1976) investigated the acquisition of passive voice in children and found that imitation precedes comprehension which in turn precedes production (I > C > P). The idea resembles the situation that Chinese parents used to require their children memorizing and reciting the *Multiplication Table* and the *Three-Character Scripture* before the kids could comprehend the content. Many Chinese recalled they were punished when they couldn't precisely recite the content out loud in front of their parents. However, when they grew up, many attributed their success in Mathematics or Chinese to the "blind discipline," in which no reason was told, no explanation was owed, and no comprehension was sought. The only mission was to carve the content on one's mind for future use. Likewise, before a better solution for teaching the twenty-four tense forms is found, why don't we try this "necessary evil" once a while? To say nothing of the "necessary evil" is not necessary to be evil. Moreover, the order is somewhat changed: imitation, production, followed by comprehension.

The idea can partially be explained by the "Instance Theory" that de-emphasizes the role of abstract principles in knowledge and its acquisition and use, focusing instead on the storage and retrieval of specific experiences, or instances, as defined by Truscott (1998) who used a UG-instance theory approach and claimed that "the approach could be productively applied to various problems in language learning research, including noisy input to learners, undoing of errors during the learning process, transfer and fossilization, and the non-discrete character of learning," even though Truscott denied there was so-called "Instance Theory." Logan (1988) had proposed long before John Truscott that "as individual solutions to problems accumulated in memory a transition in problem-solving procedures took place" (as cited in Robinson & Ha, 1993). As to this study, the introduction of tense forms is pretty much an abstract concept of knowledge. Whether Instance Theory is totally applicable to tense-form teaching needs more research.

4.2 Results of Research Question 2: *Do learners perform better in the non-written context than those in the written context in the tense form teaching?*

In seeking the answer of this research question, a tense form recognition test was developed with the non-written context concept. That is, twelve sentences were written with different tense forms for students to identify. A correct recognition scores one point, and the total is twelve points. The results are shown on Table 8. Obviously, the classes (C1, C2, and C3) in the experimental group all score higher than those classes (C4, C5, and C6) in the control group, and the experimental group as a whole outperforms the total control group.

Table 8. Results of Recognition test by Class and Group

	N	Mean/Percent	Std. Deviation
The whole Experimental group	120	7.5500 (62.92%)	3.02885
C1	44	7.6818 (64.01%)	2.88358
C2	39	7.4872 (62.39%)	3.39405
C3	37	7.4595 (62.16%)	2.86351
The whole Control group	108	6.3148 (52.62%)	3.14345
C4	30	6.9000 (57.50%)	2.69546
C5	35	5.9429 (49.52%)	3.14309
C6	43	6.2093 (51.74%)	3.43344
Total	228	6.9649 (58.04%)	3.13831

In order to further investigate whether the statistically significant difference existed between the experimental and the control groups, the participants were put into four categories which are the low, the intermediate, the high, and the advanced achievers. That is, those scoring 0, 1, 2 or 3 points are the low achievers; those scoring 4, 5 or 6 points are the intermediate achievers; those scoring 7, 8 or 9 points are the high achievers; while those scoring 10, 11 or 12 points are the advanced achievers. While the participants' scoring levels served as the dependent variable, the independent variable was the instruction. The subjects in the experimental group were correspondingly coded as 2 (with instruction), while the participants in the control group were coded as 1 (without instruction). The results shown on Table 9 indicate that no cells have the expected count less then 5. Table 10 shows the Pearson Chi-Square, two-sided asymmetrical significance, reaches the significant level ($p < .05$). That is, the instruction difference, teaching with or without the Comprehensive Charts (CC), did significantly exist among groups in relation to the participants' performance levels of tense form recognition. In other words, the instruction with the Comprehensive Charts was a factor to the recognition task.

Table 9. Recognition Test * Instruction Crosstabulation

| | | | Instruction | | |
			1.00 (without CC)	2.00 (with CC)	Total
Level of Recognition	1.00	Count	27	14	41
		Expected Count	19.4	21.6	41.0
		% within VAR00001	65.9%	34.1%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	25.0%	11.7%	18.0%
		% of Total	11.8%	6.1%	18.0%
	2.00	Count	32	28	60
		Expected Count	28.4	31.6	60.0
		% within VAR00001	53.3%	46.7%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	29.6%	23.3%	26.3%
		% of Total	14.0%	12.3%	26.3%
	3.00	Count	27	43	70
		Expected Count	33.2	36.8	70.0
		% within VAR00001	38.6%	61.4%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	25.0%	35.8%	30.7%
		% of Total	11.8%	18.9%	30.7%
	4.00	Count	22	35	57
		Expected Count	27.0	30.0	57.0
		% within VAR00001	38.6%	61.4%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	20.4%	29.2%	25.0%
		% of Total	9.6%	15.4%	25.0%
Total		Count	108	120	228
		Expected Count	108.0	120.0	228.0
		% within VAR00001	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%
		% within VAR00002	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%

Table 10. Chi-Square Test: Recognition test * Instruction with/without the Comprehensive Charts

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.408[a]	3	.015
Likelihood Ratio	10.510	3	.015
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.025	1	.003
N of Valid Cases	228		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is 19.42.

To further explore students of which language proficiency levels were influenced by the instruction with the Comprehensive Charts to what extent, the whole group and the individual groups were tested by the ANOVA. Table 11 verifies again that the instruction with the Comprehensive Charts was a factor to the recognition task performance for the whole group at the significant level of .01. Regarding the individual groups, only the advanced achiever group reached the significant level ($p < .05$). That is, the instruction with the Comprehensive Charts was most effective on the advanced achievers among the four-level participants.

Table 11. ANOVA Results of the Whole Group and Individual Groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The whole group					
Between Groups	86.723	1	86.723	9.120	.003
Within Groups	2148.996	226	9.509		
Total	2235.719	227			
Low achievers	.093	1	.093	.093	.762
Between Groups					
Within Groups	38.931	39	.998		
Total	39.024	40			
Inter. Achievers	.630	1	.630	1.158	.286
Between Groups					
Within Groups	31.554	58	.544		
Total	32.183	59			
High achievers					
Between Groups	1.173	1	1.173	1.880	.175
Within Groups	41.812	67	.624		
Total	42.986	68			
Adv. achievers					
Between Groups	3.695	1	3.695	5.934	.018
Within Groups	34.874	56	.623		
Total	38.569	57			

4.3 Results of Research Question 3: Questionnaire

After the tests of translation and tense form recognition, a questionnaire was distributed to the subjects both in the experimental and the control groups. The results are listed in Table 12. The findings include the followings:

1. The subjects in the experimental and the control groups do not show dramatic differences in all nineteen questions, or the differences are not significant.

2. However, the participants in both groups agree most (the highest mean excluding Q18 and 19) that constant practice of tense forms will improve their grammatical correctness (Question 3), then followed by Question 2 that formal tense teaching helps them gain correct tense-aspect concept.

3. The participants least agree that tense-aspect mistakes are not corrected during conversations (Question 13). Then, followed by Question 16, not being taught tense made them feel un-secure. Neither do they consider Teaching English tenses independently works best for them (Question 12), nor do they deem tense-aspect is one of the most difficulties for them in learning English (Question 17).

4. Worth noting is that 65.1 percent (140 divided by 215) of the subjects preferred the "focus on formS" approach (the analyzing, synthesizing, and comparing method) (Question 18) and 64.7 percent (139 divided by 215) of them deemed it the most effective teaching method (Question 19).

Table 12. Questionnaire Results

Questions	Total N=215	Exp. N=116	Con. N=99
1. Being exposed to an English environment naturally, I'll learn English tenses by myself.	3.5	3.4	3.5
2. Formal tense teaching helps me gain correct tense concept.	3.8	3.9	3.8
3. Constant practice of tense forms will improve the grammatical correctness of mine.	4.0	4.1	4.0
4. I need tenses to be taught explicitly.	3.7	3.8	3.6
5. I need synthetic tense teaching (list all the tense forms).	3.7	3.7	3.6
6. I need analytic tense teaching. (analyzing formula and providing examples)	3.7	3.8	3.7
7. Contrasting and comparing tenses works best for me. (a combination of synthetic and analytic teaching)	3.7	3.6	3.8
8. Teachers should provide opportunities of practicing every tense, i.e. sentence building and writing.	3.5	3.5	3.3
9. Tense practice being taught in a communicative class works best, i.e. English Listening and Speaking course.	3.4	3.4	3.5
10. Tense practice being taught in a pencil-paper class works best, i.e. English Reading or Writing course.	3.4	3.4	3.4
11. Embedding English tenses in articles works best.	3.3	3.4	3.2
12. Teaching English tenses independently works best.	3.1	3.1	3.2
13. In the process of communication, such as in the English Listening and Speaking class, if not jeopardizing the meaning being conveyed, I don't want my tenses to be corrected immediately.	2.9	3.0	2.8
14. A task-based assignment or homework for practicing tenses works best.	3.2	3.1	3.2
15. The various terms of grammar make me even more difficult to learn tenses.	3.3	3.2	3.3
16. If the tenses are not taught, I feel unsecured.	3.0	3.0	3.0
17. Tenses are one of the most difficulties for me in learning English.	3.1	3.2	3.0
18. What kind of teaching approach do you prefer? Please circle a, b, c, or d. a. Don't teach. I don't learn and won't use them. If I need them, I will self-learn them. b. List the 24 tenses in a chart and teach them in two weeks. Analyze and compare the formula and provide examples. Practice sentence patterns and/or composition. c. List the 24 tenses and start a race of sentence building. Play the tic tac toe game. The group that succeeds in placing three respective marks in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal row wins the game. d. Let students talk their past, the present, and the future freely. After that, the teacher deduces and induces the 24 tenses.	(count) 5 a 140 b 26 c 31 d 3 bc 6 bd 2 cd 1 bcd 1 unk	3 a 78 b 15 c 14 d 2 bc 1 bd 1 cd 1 bcd 1 unk	2 a 62 b 11 c 17 d 1 bc 5 bd 1 cd
19. Based on the previous question, I consider the most effective tense teaching is _____ (a, b, c, or d). Note: Some participants chose more than one teaching approach. Thus, the cording is listed on the right columns. The "unk" stands for unknown that the participant did not choose any of them.	(count) 1 a 139 b 30 c 40 d 2 bc 1 bd 1 cd 1 unk	1 a 75 b 16 c 21 d 1 bc 1 cd 1 unk	0 a 64 b 14 c 19 d 1 bc 1 bd

The participants of this study prefer the "focus on formS" (defined by Long & Robison, 1998) and consider the approach is the most effective teaching method. However, the reason leading to this result remains unclear if this is a cultural difference (Chinese students are used to the "focus on formS" approach) or a task specific problem (the complexity and the variety of the tense forms). For instance, Nagata (1997) designed a parser and suggested rule-driven deductive feedback was more effective than example-driven inductive feedback to teach more difficult grammatical tasks. To resolve this puzzle, further research (teaching the tense forms with the comprehensive charts) could be done on second language learners of other mother tongues who are used to natural or communicative teaching approaches. When the researcher introduces the 12 active tense, the researcher always teaches ten of them, then ask two students to deduct the last two tenses which are the future perfect tense and the future perfect continuing tense. Very often, the students can correctly figure out the two tenses.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Findings of this study include: First, learners with better language competence do significantly outperform those with lower language competence on the recognition test and a translation sentence (the present perfect continuing tense) when learning the tense forms with Comprehensive Charts. The rest of translation sentences in the study do not reach the significant level. The cause of being unable to reach the significant level might be the lack of sufficient practice. A further study or future teaching practice might want to try improvement in this regard. Second, the difference of the focus on formS instruction, teaching with or without the Comprehensive Charts, did significantly exist among groups in relation to the participants' performance on tense form recognition. Also, the instruction with the Comprehensive Charts worked best for the advanced achievers, and the learners performed better in the non-written context (tense form recognition) than in the written context (sentence translation). Third, most the participants of this study preferred the "focus on formS" teaching and considered the approach was the most effective teaching method. However, the causes remained unclear whether this is a cultural difference (Chinese students are more used to the "focus on forms" approach) or a task-type problem (the complexity and the variety of tense forms).

The suggestion for teaching practice is to use the concept map and the instructional mode (Appendix 3 and 4) for teaching. And sufficient opportunities for practice such as form recognition, gap filling practice (e.g. Lee & Wang, 2002, 188-189), sentence building, and essay writing should be provided to students. Cheng (2013) cited Wang's statement (1999) that "a communicative grammar-learning environment is an urgent need in Taiwan" (p. 175). If teachers of tense form teaching believe so, then a communicative teaching approach should be added to the presentation process. As far as the researcher is concerned, 65.1 percent of preference seems quite OK to use the "focus on formS" approach in this study.

The Instructional Mode (Appendix 4) that the researcher proposed consists of four classroom teaching activities with three teaching approaches which are the grammar-translation, the cooperative learning (the Tic Tae Toe game), and the communicative approaches, as well as four practices/tests. The classroom activities also involve practicing four skills in language learning that are reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It is a circling mode, interchanged by teaching and practice/test, that users may take a second round. The purpose to divide the teaching of active and passive tenses into two sections was due to the complexity and the variety of the tenses that might confuse the learners if they were taught all in one meeting hour.

The suggestion for future study is to investigate ESL learners of other mother tongues who are more used to the natural or the communicative teaching approaches receiving the Focus on FormS approach of tense form teaching with the Comprehensive Charts. Besides, the tense form items of the translation test should be increased. This study remained to test only three items mainly because of the purpose to compare with the previous research.

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Note

Michael Long (1991). This paper was originally presented at the European-North-American Symposium on Needed Research in Foreign Language Education, Bellagio, Italy, in 1988.

Appendix 1: The Comprehensive Chart of the Active Tenses

	Present	Past	Future
Simple	S + V I wash my car.	S + V.ed I washed my car.	S + will + V I will wash my car.
Continuous	S + am/are/is + V.ing I'm washing my car.	S + was/were + V.ing I was washing my car.	S + will + be + V.ing I will be washing my car.
Perfect	S + have/has + P.P. I have washed my car.	S + had + P.P. I had washed my car.	S + will + have + P.P. I will have washed my car.
Perfect Continuous	S + have/has + been + V.ing I have been washing my car.	S + had + been + V.ing I had been washing my car.	S + will + have + been + V.ing I will have been washing my car.

Appendix 2: The Comprehensive Chart of the Passive Tenses

	Present	Past	Future
Simple	S + am/are/is + P.P. My car is washed.	S + was/were + P.P. My car was washed.	S + will + be + P.P. My car will be washed.

Continuous	S + am/are/is
	   + being + P.P.
	My car is being washed.
		S + was/were
		   + being + P.P.
		My car was being washed.
			S + will + be
			   + being + P.P.
			My car will be being washed.

Perfect	S + have/has
	   + been + P.P.
	My car has been washed.
		S + had + been + P.P.
		My car had been washed.
			S + will + have
			   + been + P.P.
			My car will have been washed.

Perfect Continuous	S + have/has + been
	   + being + P.P.
	My car has been being washed.
		S + had + been
		   + being + P.P.
		My car had been being washed.
			S + will + have
			   + been + being + P.P.
			My car will have been being washed.

Appendix 3: The concept map of Tense-Aspect forms
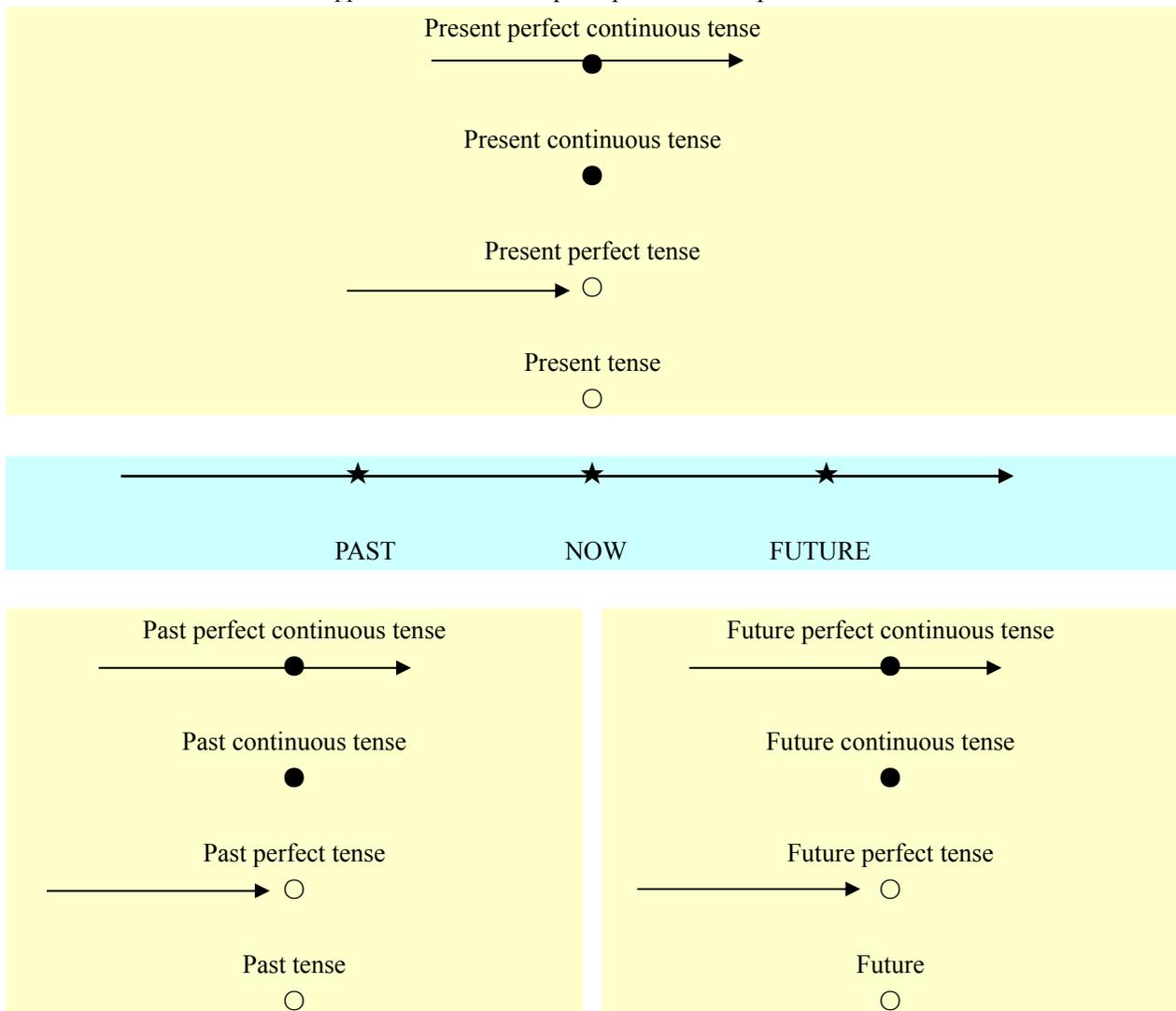
Appendix 4: Instructional Mode
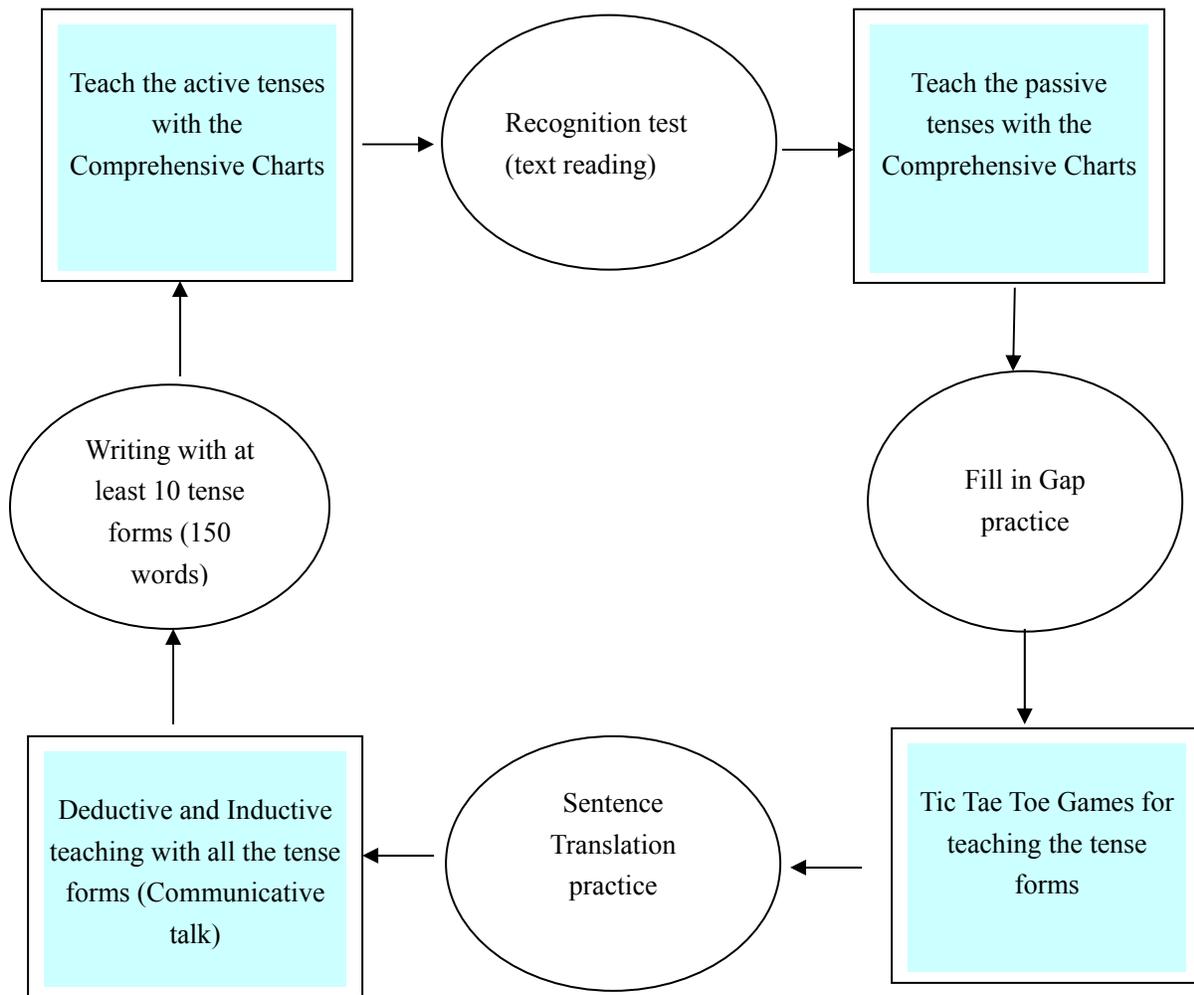
Figure 1. Instructional Mode: Using the Comprehensive Charts for Teaching the Tense Forms

Appendix 5: The Translation and Recognition Tests of the Tense Forms

Dear Students,

Thank you very much for taking this test. The purpose of this test is to explore how much you know about the English tense forms. Your personal information will not be revealed to others, neither will the content be used for assessment. Please feel free to answer the questions.

Background information:
1. Your major: _____
2. Your year-level: _____
3. Gender: □ male   □ female

Part One: Please translate the following sentences into English.
1. 我已經學英語六年了 (請用現在完成主動式)
2. 我已經被這位老師教兩年了 (請用現在完成被動式)
3. 今年我將被另一位老師教 (請用未來被動式)

Part two: Please identify the tense forms by putting the numbers in the parentheses.

1. present tense
2. past tense
3. future tense
4. present continuous tense
5. past continuous tense
6. future continuous tense
7. present perfect tense
8. past perfect tense
9. future perfect tense
10. present perfect continuous tense
11. past perfect continuous tense
12. future perfect continuous tense
13. passive present tense
14. passive past tense
15. passive future tense
16. passive present continuous tense
17. passive past continuous tense
18. passive future continuous tense
19. passive present perfect tense
20. passive past perfect tense
21. passive future perfect tense
22. passive present perfect continuous tense
23. passive past perfect continuous tense
24. passive future perfect continuous tense

(   ) a. I'm writing a story.
(   ) b. She has been doing that over and over for one hour.
(   ) c. I've known my dentist for ages.
(   ) d. I will be studying at home tonight.
(   ) e. My car has been washed for one hour.
(   ) f. The movie will be being played at 8 o'clock tonight.
(   ) g. The clean job will be done in 10 minutes.
(   ) h. I have been being taught English by Maria for three hours.
(   ) i. I'll be in my office this afternoon.
(   ) j. He had been in that business for two years.
(   ) k. Tom was praised by his boss.
(   ) l. The building was being built last May.