

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Grammar is an essential component of language learning, particularly for students learning English as a foreign language (Supriusman, 2019). Among the foundational elements of English grammar, the simple present tense holds a significant place. It is commonly used to express routine actions, habitual behaviors, general truths, and facts. Mastering the simple present tense allows learners to construct meaningful and accurate sentences, enabling effective communication in both spoken and written forms. Its importance extends beyond academic contexts, as it forms the basis for everyday interactions in English-speaking environments. However, many students face significant challenges in understanding and using the simple present tense correctly, which can be attributed to various linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors.

English is the first foreign language and one of the main subjects learned by Indonesian students. The aim of learning English is to develop students' ability to master the English language skills. English teaching aims at mastering four basic skills of language, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Every language has the rules that must be followed by the user of a certain language. It has its own grammar rules which have a great role on one's acquisition in

English. Grammar is needed even in communication. In talking about grammar, there are many valuable parts that should be learnt by the students. The study of grammar can greatly enhance understanding and fluency.

English language is unique, because there is one thing that is very different from the other language in the world. It is called "tense", it is a very important thing that should be known by the user of English language. Tenses are different forms of verb and change their forms depending upon the time at the event. Tenses are the verb shows the time when the action takes place, took place, and will take place in English sentence.

It shows that in English, the basic tenses are categorized into three parts, they are present tense, past tense and future tense. Each of them is used at different times. Therefore, rules in English language are principal. As a speaker of language, we cannot ignore them, otherwise we could not be able to put words together in the meaningful way. But, in this research, the researcher only used simple present tense to analyze the students' ability.

Simple Present Tense is important as the basic rule for the students to make and use sentences to communicate in daily life, especially using the formula of simple present tense. Wrong perception of Simple Present Tense will affect the student's ability in constructing or understanding Simple Present Tense sentences. Simple present tense is a tense denoting an action happening in this time. This tense is used to talk about things in general. We are not only thinking about now, but it is used to say something is true in general.

For many students understanding and using the simple present tense correctly is not without challenges. These difficulties often arise from various linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors. Linguistically, English grammar rules differ significantly from the grammatical structures of many students' native languages, such as Indonesian (Budiharto, 2019). For example, the verb "*makan*" (to eat) remains unchanged regardless of whether the action occurs in the past, present, or future, whereas in English, the form of the verb changes depending on the subject and tense. This structural difference can lead to confusion and misapplication of English grammar rules by Indonesian students.

Furthermore, subject-verb agreement is a fundamental aspect of the simple present tense presents another layer of complexity (Middleton, 2019). Students often struggle to correctly match singular and plural subjects with their corresponding verb forms (Hanim et al., 2024). For instance, sentences like "He eats breakfast" instead of "He eats breakfast" highlight common errors related to this issue. Such mistakes may stem from a lack of understanding of grammatical rules or insufficient practice in applying these rules.

Cognitively, the process of learning a new grammatical structure requires students to internalize abstract rules and apply them in varied contexts (Ellis, 2006). This process can be overwhelming, particularly for younger learners, such as those in the seventh grade, who are still developing their cognitive abilities and linguistic skills. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom further compounds this

challenge, as students have fewer opportunities to reinforce their learning through real-life practice.

From an instructional perspective, the methods and strategies employed by teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of grammar (Borg, 2012). Traditional approaches that rely heavily on rote memorization and repetitive drills may not fully address students' needs, as they often fail to engage learners or encourage critical thinking (Pangeran & Felder, 2013). On the other hand, communicative teaching methods that prioritize practical usage and contextual understanding of grammar are sometimes underutilized due to time constraints, large class sizes, or a lack of teaching resources (Hjnam, 2016).

In the context of SMP N 20 Kota Kupang, English is taught as a foreign language, and the simple present tense is introduced as part of the seventh-grade curriculum. This stage marks the beginning of formal grammar instruction for many students, making it a critical period for establishing a solid foundation in English. However, preliminary observations and informal discussions with English teachers at SMP N 20 Kota Kupang reveal that many students experience difficulties in mastering the simple present tense. Common issues include forming affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences correctly, as well as understanding the use of auxiliary verbs like "do" and "does." These challenges not only hinder students' academic performance but also affect their confidence and motivation to learn English. Based on the observation in SMP N 20 Kota Kupang, especially in class VII, when they learn about the use of Simple

Present Tense, it was found that many students still have difficulties in mastering grammar, especially in mastering Simple Present Tense. In addition, students also still have difficulties in identifying and making sentences that use Simple Present Tense. In learning activities, it is known that class VII is the class that has the lowest ability in using Simple Present Tense, especially in using subject-verb agreement, adverb and usage. It was recognized that the students' proficiency with the Simple Present Tense was poor, and they were unable to use the subject-verb agreement and usage. It was discovered that a large number of pupils sometimes failed to comprehend why certain phrases employed the auxiliaries is, am, and are rather than do and does. Several pupils continued to select "My mother works in the supermarket" rather than "My mother works in the supermarket." Furthermore, even after years of studying the English language, they still struggle with grammatical construction, verbal and nominal sentences, positive utterance in third-person subjects, negative utterance in choosing the auxiliaries, and interrogative utterance in choosing the auxiliaries and changing the verb into the base form. As a result, the researcher was urged to use interviews to learn the reasons behind the issues the students were facing. The following were the remarks made by the students: It was still hard for them to understand what their teacher had taught them about the simple present tense, they were tired with grammar, and they did not have enough practice utilizing it. And the primary cause of this was the way the instructor's instruction of the Simple Present Tense affected the students' desire to learn.

The difficulties faced by students in mastering the simple present tense can also be attributed to external factors, such as the availability of learning materials and the role of the broader linguistic environment (Damis *et al.*, 2024). In regions where English is not widely spoken or used in daily life, students often lack exposure to authentic language use (Athiyaturrahmah, 2023). This limited exposure reduces their opportunities to observe and practice grammatical structures in meaningful contexts, which is essential for long-term retention and mastery.

Moreover, the availability and quality of teaching resources, such as textbooks, multimedia tools, and supplementary materials, significantly influence students' learning experiences. Text books that provide limited examples or fail to present grammar rules in a clear and engaging manner can leave students confused and unable to apply what they have learned (Pratiwi, 2011). Similarly, the absence of interactive learning tools, such as grammar games, visual aids, and language apps, can make grammar lessons less engaging and more challenging for students.

Another important consideration is the role of assessment in measuring and supporting students' progress. Traditional grammar tests often focus on accuracy and correctness, emphasizing the identification and correction of errors. While such assessments are useful for diagnosing specific weaknesses, they may not provide a comprehensive picture of students' overall understanding or their ability to use grammar in communicative contexts. Alternative assessment methods, such as performance-based tasks, peer evaluations, and self-reflections, can offer a more holistic view of students' grammatical competence (Navarrete & Gustke, 1996).

Given these challenges, it is crucial to analyze students' abilities in understanding and using the simple present tense in order to identify their specific strengths and weaknesses. Such an analysis can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current teaching practices and the areas where additional support is needed. At the same time, it can inform the development of targeted interventions and strategies to address students' difficulties and improve their learning outcomes.

This study focuses on seventh-grade students at SMP N 20 Kota Kupang, a public junior high school located in Kupang, Indonesia. As these students represent a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds, learning styles, and proficiency levels, their experiences provide a rich context for exploring the factors that influence grammar acquisition. By examining their performance on grammar tasks, analyzing common errors, and investigating the underlying causes of their difficulties, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Indonesian learners of English.

## **1.2 Research Problems**

Based on the phenomena presented in the background of the study, this research is expected to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do seventh grade students at SMP N 20 Kupang understand the simple present tense?
2. What factors contribute to the student's ability in understanding the simple present tense?

### **1.3 Aims of Study**

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the ability of seventh-grade students at SMP N 20 Kota Kupang in understanding and using the simple present tense. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Evaluate the level of understanding of the simple present tense among seventh grade students at SMP N 20 Kupang.
2. To identify and analyze the factors that contribute to students' difficulties in understanding and using the simple present tense correctly.

### **1.4 Significance of Study**

The significance of a study lies in its contribution to knowledge, practical application, and potential impact on solving real-world problems or advancing academic understanding. According to Creswell (2014) emphasizes that the significance of a study rooted in its ability to address research gaps, contribute new insights, and provide practical or theoretical advancements.

#### **1.4.1 Implication**

This study holds theoretical importance as it contributes to the body of knowledge on English grammar acquisition, specifically the simple present tense, among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). By analyzing the ability of seventh-grade students at SMP N 20 Kota Kupang to understand and use the simple present tense, the research provides insights into:

1. Recognizing common errors and uncovering their root causes enhances our understanding of the challenges EFL learners encounter in mastering English Grammar. This insight deepens existing theories on second language acquisition, especially regarding grammatical competence (Ellis, 2006).
2. The findings examine how differences between English and Indonesian linguistics, combined with limited daily exposure to English, impact students' grammar learning (Selinker, 1972).
3. The study adds to the discourse on effective approaches for evaluating students' grammar comprehension by providing insights into the advantages and drawbacks of both traditional and alternative assessment methods (Brown, 2004).
4. The findings provide empirical data that can guide curriculum developers in designing more effective grammar instruction frameworks for Indonesian EFL learners (Richards, 2001).

## **1.5 Application**

The practical significance of this research are directly relevant to various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and educational policy makers:

### **1. For Teachers**

The study offers insights into the specific areas where students struggle with the simple present tense, enabling teachers to develop targeted interventions

and instructional strategies. By highlighting effective teaching practices, the findings can help educators create engaging and student-centered grammar lessons that promote better understanding and retention.

## **2. For Students**

Students can benefit from a clearer understanding of common errors and their root causes, which can help them refine their learning strategies and build confidence in using the simple present tense. The study's focus on real-life application encourages learners to view grammar as a tool for communication rather than a set of abstract rules, fostering greater motivation to learn.

## **3. For Educational Policymakers and Curriculum Developers**

The findings can inform the development of text books, teaching materials, and assessment tools that are better aligned with the needs and abilities of Indonesian EFL learners. Recommendations for enhancing grammar instruction can contribute to broader efforts to improve the quality of English language education in schools.

## **4. For Future Researchers**

This research serves as a foundation for further studies on English grammar learning in similar contexts, particularly in exploring the impact of innovative teaching methods and technology-enhanced learning tools. The findings can inspire comparative studies on grammar acquisition across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, contributing to the global discourse on second language education.