

# Teachers' Cognition about Teaching and Learning of Simple Past Tense: Can Processing Instruction Help?

**Mable Chan**

Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong, China  
Email: [egmable@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:egmable@polyu.edu.hk)

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## Abstract

This study examines how teachers perceive the difficulties and strategies of acquiring simple past tense, and the pedagogical implications. Findings show that teachers' understanding of the nature of the acquisition problem of tense, and their use of teaching approach are instrumental in shaping students' learning outcomes. What is fortunate is that they understand the need to improve the existing teaching approach which is too form-oriented. Unfortunately, they do not seem to have much knowledge about how to do so. Findings in the literature should not be limited to researchers; there is a pressing need for teachers to understand the nature of the acquisition problem, possible reasons leading to the difficulty, and ways to help students master both the forms and meaning of simple past tense.

## Keywords

Simple Past Tense, Teachers' Cognition, Processing Instruction

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## 1. Introduction

Teachers' cognition has been found to have a strong impact on classroom practices in the literature. It encompasses the attitude of teachers, their language teaching beliefs, metalinguistic awareness, teaching experience and qualifications. What these studies are interested in is the underlying teachers' perception and beliefs which shape the teaching and learning outcomes.

According to Borg (1998: p. 9), teachers' cognition is "stores of beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions, and attitudes—that play a significant role in shaping teachers' instructional decisions". It can be reflected in three different aspects: 1) teachers' knowledge of grammar; 2) teachers' beliefs about grammar instruction, and

3) their practices of grammar teaching. Findings generally point to teachers' beliefs of the importance of formal study of grammar, whether implicit or explicit grammar teaching is more effective, significance of error correction, use of metalanguage and the role of training and practice. There is obviously a lack of studies concerning teachers' cognition about the acquisition of a specific grammar item causing difficulty to ESL learners.

Grammatical markers or functional categories (e.g. tense, agreement, articles) have been found to cause difficulty to ESL learners. This is particularly the case when it comes to the acquisition of tense by Cantonese ESL learners. As tense is not realized overtly in Cantonese, Cantonese ESL learners have to establish the property from scratch. This study entitled *Teachers' cognition about teaching and learning of English simple past tense in Hong Kong: Can processing instruction help?* fills the gap in the literature by examining how teachers perceive the difficulties and strategies of acquiring simple past tense, and the pedagogical implications.

There are three research questions in this study: 1) How is English simple past tense taught in Hong Kong primary and secondary classrooms?; 2) How is this related to teachers' cognition about simple past tense acquisition?; 3) What are the pedagogical implications of the study? Findings reveal how teachers' cognition might have led to the acquisition problems of tense, and if processing instruction might be effective in addressing the problem.

## 2. Literature Review

Correspondence between beliefs and learning/teaching outcomes has been seriously examined. While learner beliefs about second language acquisition are regarded as an important factor shaping the learning process and outcomes (Ellis, 2008), teachers' beliefs are also found instrumental in influencing classroom practices. Instead of conducting another study investigating teachers' beliefs towards grammar teaching in general, this study aims to examine specifically how teachers' cognition towards the acquisition of simple past tense might result in the use of specific teaching approaches which possibly have led to the acquisition problems reported.

This section first outlines the prominent role of instruction and how teachers' cognition about grammar instruction might have affected its effectiveness, indicating the significance of studying teachers' cognition. The difficulty of acquiring simple past tense by ESL learners in Hong Kong, the existing teaching approaches available in Hong Kong and usefulness of processing instruction are then discussed.

### 2.1. Debate about the Role of Instruction

Much research has been done about the effectiveness of instruction. One question that has been addressed by researchers interested in the effects of classroom input on interlanguage grammars is whether learners who receive classroom input are more successful in acquiring properties of an L2 than learners who are simply immersed in the target language, and whether implicit or explicit instruction is more effective.

A major review of studies of the effects of instruction was conducted by Norris and Ortega (2000) who carried out a meta-analysis that identified 250 relevant studies in the literature. 77 of these studies could be classified in terms of instructional types: "a) explicit instruction—an approach to teaching that favours explicit rule explanation that focuses on forms and the derivation of rules, b) implicit instruction—an approach that allows acquisition of the target language to—take[...] place naturally, simply and without conscious operations" (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006: p. 340), c) focus on meaning, d) focus on "form", and e) focus on "forms". According to Long (1991: pp. 45-46), "focus on 'form'—overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication. Some researchers have drawn a distinction between focus on 'form' and focus on 'forms'". The difference between "form" and "forms" is that the former encompasses both form and meaning while the latter only focuses on the target structure: "A 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 excludes it" (Doughty & Williams, 1998: p. 4). The aims of Norris and Ortega's (2000) review were to discover: 1) the overall effect of instruction compared with exposure; 2) if implicit or explicit instruction is more effective; and 3) the relative effects of attention to meaning, form meaning connections, or forms. The findings were consistent with Long's (1988) review showing that second language instruction does make a difference and the difference is substantial. Regarding the comparison of effectiveness between implicit and explicit instruction, it was found that explicit instruction has a clear advantage over implicit types of instruction. The relative effectiveness of the instructional types identified is as follows: explicit focus on form (large effect) > explicit focus on forms (large effect) > implicit focus on form (medium effect) > implicit focus on

forms (small effect). [Doughty \(2003\)](#) views these findings in a critical light, and she suggests that research findings about instruction in the literature might be biased for a number of reasons. Some of these include the use of outcome measures which favour explicit and declarative knowledge; the use of the L2 system as the criterion of success without taking into account evidence of development, and test effects. She argues for an altogether more differentiated and fine-grained approach to investigating the effects of L2 instructional treatments. Thus, she believes the enhancement of input processing is the way to go in L2 instruction. She regards processing instruction ([VanPatten, 2002](#)) and focus-on-form effective in helping learners notice relevant input cues that might have been ignored. Given the importance of instruction, and particularly that of processing instruction and focus-on-form, teachers' cognition in this regard should be examined.

As instruction is playing an inevitably significant role, the issue we should be concerned about is whether teachers' beliefs and perception about grammar instruction are important and how they might have shaped instructional decisions and ultimately effectiveness of instruction. This section first reviews teachers' cognition reported in different aspects and then presents the possible correspondence between teachers' cognition and teaching practices.

One essential part of teachers' cognition is teachers' knowledge of grammar and their metalinguistic awareness. In examining the KAL (knowledge about language) of teachers in the UK national curriculum, [Chandler, Robinson and Noyes \(1988\)](#), [Williamson and Hardman \(1995\)](#) and [Wray \(1993\)](#) assessed the student-teachers' knowledge of grammatical forms, nature of grammatical rules, nature of spoken and written language, language variation and literary language.

According to [Wray \(1993: p. 55\)](#), for example, "the level of grammatical knowledge of these student-teachers was not particularly high (i.e. low success rates in identifying adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, etc)". Similar findings were found in these studies indicating the student-teachers' lack of metalinguistic knowledge. Two notable studies ([Andrews, 1994, 1999a](#)) conducted in EFL contexts (in Hong Kong) also reported consistent findings about the deficiency in grammatical knowledge of (prospective) teachers. In [Andrews \(1999a\)](#), a 60-item test was used to compare the knowledge of grammar and grammatical terminology of four groups. They were non-native speaker (NNS) teachers of English, NNS prospective teachers of English, English native-speaker (NS) prospective teachers with a background in English Studies, and English NS prospective teachers of modern languages. Andrews found that the non-native teachers of English performed significantly better than the native speaker groups in the test generally. [Andrews \(1999a\)](#) suggested a need for pre-service teacher programmes to devote more time developing students' knowledge about language.

Another integral part of teachers' cognition is teachers' beliefs. According to [Basturkmen \(2012: p. 282\)](#), the definition of teachers' beliefs varies: "the term is generally used to refer to evaluative propositions which teachers hold consciously or unconsciously and which they accept as true while recognizing that other teachers may hold alternative beliefs on the same issue". Below outlines in more detail teachers' beliefs reported in the literature towards: 1) grammar pedagogy and 2) written grammar feedback/error. There seems to be a consensus among teachers from different nationalities (e.g. UK: [Chandler, 1988](#); [Burgess & Etherington, 2002](#); US: [Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers, 1997](#); [Schulz, 1996, 2001](#); [Thu, 2009](#); Iran: [Alijanian, 2012](#)) that grammar instruction is essential and effective (particularly explicit grammar instruction), and that a number of variables shaped their belief, some of which are their own learning experience and perception of students' emphasis on grammar. Teachers also tend to value feedback and error correction, believing that grammar errors should be corrected even when they do not affect comprehension. Non-native speaking teachers seem to pay much attention to language accuracy and more stringent towards error correction than native English speakers. Most teachers prefer direct feedback instead of indirect or implicit feedback.

A number of studies reported correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their teaching practice specifically concerning task design (e.g. [Kim, 2006](#)); teaching orientations (e.g. [Tam, 2006](#); [Farrell & Lim, 2005](#)) and teaching approaches, and also teaching activities used (e.g. [Vibulpol, 2004](#)). It was found that teachers' language learning beliefs can shape their instructional practices and decisions. For example, teachers who believe that their students can benefit from grammar drills tend to adopt a traditional approach to grammar teaching ([Farrell & Lim, 2005](#)), or a communicative one if otherwise ([Wong & Barrea-Marlys, 2012](#)). Because of the close correspondence between teachers' cognition and instructional decisions, it is essential to examine teachers' cognition towards the teaching and learning of simple past tense in this study. The rationale of focusing on the acquisition of simple past tense by second language learners is explained in the next section.

## 2.2. Why Simple Past Tense? What is the Difficulty Involved?

Findings in the literature show that functional categories (e.g. tense, articles, etc.) are not available in the initial state of second language acquisition. The Minimal Trees Hypothesis, for example, contends that only lexical categories (e.g. the noun phrase) are available for first language transfer (L1 transfer) in the initial state but not functional categories which will emerge gradually triggered by positive evidence in the input (i.e. accessibility to grammatical sentences in the second language): “only lexical categories are present at the earliest stages of ...L2 acquisition, and...during acquisition functional projections develop in succession” (Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1996: p. 7). According to Chan (2013), however, TP (Tense Phrase) is in fact present in the initial state; in other words, the production of L2 (second language) may not be an accurate reflection of what L2 learners know. Thus, though second language learners are found to have the underlying representation of tense, they fail to produce the corresponding form to express the tense meaning. Thus, the challenge for teachers is to help L2 learners map forms and meaning in acquiring tense.

A number of studies have been conducted concerning acquisition of tense and aspect by Cantonese ESL learners. Tense marking is regarded as a major problem Hong Kong learners face (Green, 1991; McArthur, 2002; Law, 2005). Different accounts have been put forward to explain the situation, which seem to be related to the principle and essence of Input Processing (IP) (VanPatten, 2002: p. 757): “That learners are driven to get meaning from input has a set of consequences, the first being that words (content lexical items) are searched out first... when context lexical items and a grammatical form both encode the same meaning and when both are present in a sentence/utterance, it is the lexical item that learners attend to... The use of a lexical approach by L2 learners in processing input seems to be the culprit”. Regarding the use of bare verb forms to refer to past events, learners were found to rely on temporal adverbials to indicate or recover the timing of the event (McArthur, 2002). Concerning incorrect tense marking, there seems to be a universal account claiming that learners mark verbs that are lexicosemantically more event-like for tense first, and then mark increasingly less event-like verbs in stages (Robison, 1995). VanPatten (2015) reviewed an eye-tracking experiment on the acquisition of Spanish past tense by English L1 learners and the acquisition of English past tense by Spanish L1 learners. Learners were required to listen to the sentences in which temporal adverbials and verbal inflections were mismatched or matched very well (e.g. “Yesterday I am talking to John” vs. “Now I’m talking to John” (p. 117)). Findings show that beginning and intermediate learners tended to rely on adverbials to recognize temporal reference whereas advanced learners depended on inflections. This was found to be true for both Spanish L1 and English L1 learners. VanPatten (2015) generalized that relying on lexical items rather than grammatical inflections to obtain temporal reference is a universal strategy without regarding L1 experience. He also suggested that processing instruction can circumvent this incorrect processing strategy and make L2 learners aware of past tense markers.

The above studies might give some insights into the problems posed by tense to Cantonese ESL learners. Yet the reliance on non-target-like forms alone in concluding the acquisition problem of tense does not reveal the true picture about the underlying representation of tense in the interlanguage grammars, as it could be the case suggested by the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis: “even in the absence of consistent or appropriate inflectional morphology, functional categories and features are fully specified in the grammar” (White, 2003: p. 194). In Chan (2013), Cantonese ESL learners were found to have an underlying knowledge of tense, but they have difficulty in mapping forms and meaning. The main challenge to teachers is thus to help learners map the forms and the meaning.

## 2.3. Context: Development of Teaching Approaches in Hong Kong

The role and status of grammar in language learning and teaching has been a subject of debate for a long time. For much of the 16th to the 19th centuries, the teaching of a language meant primarily the teaching of its grammar to develop students’ linguistic competence. Grammar thus played a central role in language education and constituted the subject matter that students learned at school. The role of grammar was lessened since the introduction of communicative language teaching in the 1970s, which emphasizes communicative fluency rather than linguistic accuracy (cf. Rutherford, 1987; Mitchell, 1994; Tsui, 2006; Wu, 2006; Neupane, 2009 etc.). In recent years, however, the importance of grammar has been reinstated (cf. Collins & Lee, 2005; Neupane, 2009 etc.) and a number of studies have shown that grammar teaching can facilitate the acquisition of language, especially second language acquisition (e.g. Rutherford & Sharwood Smith, 1985; White, 1987; Long, 1988; Ur, 1988; Ellis, 1990, 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Tsui, 1991; White, Spada, Lightbown & Panta, 1991; Spada &

Lightbown, 1993; Gass, 1997; Cowan, 2009).

In Hong Kong, the historical developments of the role of grammar and English teaching methods since the post-war period are “more or less in line with the trends in the Western world within the same period” (Sze, 1992: p. 23). According to Sze (1992), Andrews (1999b) and Wu (2006), in the period after World War II, the grammar-translation method and the direct method were two major teaching methods in Hong Kong. Grammar teaching is a traditional academic style of teaching focusing on grammar explanation and translation as a teaching technique (Cook, 2001). The oral-structural approach was advocated in the 1970s, followed by an introduction of communicative language teaching in the 1980s. Since then, there has been a tendency to focus on communication in terms of the curriculum design, though teachers prefer to “concentrate on the formal features of the language at the expense of encouraging students to use the language” (Education Commission, 1994: p. 25). Grammar teaching regained attention in the 1990s as a result of students making many grammatical mistakes in their writing. A task-based learning approach advocated in late 1990s encourages teachers to use both formal instruction and contextualized communicative activities in the teaching of grammar (cf. Mai, 2003).

Processing instruction (PI) was first introduced in VanPatten and Cadierno (1993), which is a kind of input enhancement facilitating learners’ processing sentences and interpreting them correctly while attending to the form (Sharwood Smith, 1993). In the subsequent decades, PI has been found to have a clear advantage over other teaching approaches, especially traditional instruction (Benati, 2005, 2010; Benati & Houghton, 2008; VanPatten, 2015). Benati (2005) conducted an experiment to examine the effects of three different teaching approaches (traditional instruction, processing instruction and meaning-output instruction) on the acquisition of English simple past tense by Chinese and Greek learners. The results showed that processing instruction has a clear advantage over meaning-output instruction and traditional instruction; the processing group outperformed meaning-output group and traditional group in the interpretation task and all these three groups obtained equal gains in the production task. Benati (2010) investigated the effects of processing instruction on both discourse-level and sentence-level interpretation tasks. Results showed that the processing group’s performance was significantly better than that of traditional instruction in both interpretation tasks.

Before examining whether processing instruction might be effective in helping L2 learners acquire simple past tense, this study is the very first attempt to investigate how simple past tense is being taught and learned by Cantonese ESL learners in Hong Kong, and how this might be a result of teachers’ cognition. The findings will provide insights into the possible root of the of the acquisition problem, and suggest possible solutions to deal with the problem.

### 3. Method

In order to examine the teaching and learning of simple past tense in Hong Kong, a questionnaire was sent to teachers of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. The questionnaire examined the teaching strategies of simple past tense, teachers’ perception of the existing teaching approaches, and the students’ problems in acquiring simple past tense.

#### 3.1. Procedures

In January and February of 2012, and in May and June of 2014, two questionnaires were sent through email to the principals of primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, asking them to forward the questionnaire to the English Panel Chairs for help. Finally, 82 questionnaires were received from 55 primary schools and 51 questionnaires from 30 secondary schools, with the consent form requiring them to sign and indicate acceptance in participating in the study.

The two questionnaires (please refer to **Supplementary File 1** and **Supplementary File 2**) were designed in the same format. There are three sections in the two questionnaires. The first part requires teachers to fill in personal information, including basic demographic information and other information concerning the name of the primary or secondary schools, their teaching experience, educational background and if they have teaching qualifications or not. In part II of the questionnaire, 12 teaching activities are shown and teachers were asked to indicate the frequency of using those activities in teaching English simple past tense in the classroom using the likert scale with 1 - 5 representing different levels of frequency (1 indicating very frequently and 5 never). The 12 activities are categorized using mainly the framework of Littlewood (2004): non-communicative activities (more focus on the form), pre-communicative activities (focusing on forms but with meaning attended), communicative

activities (there is an information gap and more like an exercise rather than a task), task-based activities (structured communication activities and authentic communication activities). Except 4 structured input activities and 2 task-based activities in the secondary questionnaire extracted from task-based textbooks, all types of activities are taken from textbooks used in Hong Kong and classified based on Littlewood (2004). According to Littlewood (2004), activities 1 and 8 in the primary questionnaire; and 1 and 9 in the secondary one are non-communicative activities; activities 3 and 9 (primary) and 4 and 10 (secondary) are pre-communicative activities; activities 5 and 10 (primary) and 3 and 7 (secondary) are communicative activities; activities 6 and 11 (primary) and 6 and 12 (secondary one) are task-based activities, and the remaining are structured input activities for processing instruction. Part III is to enumerate in greater detail teachers' opinion given in Part II using open-ended questions. The questions are about teachers' perceptions of the problems students encountered in acquiring simple past tense, and the strategies/teaching approaches used by teachers to help students.

A pilot study was first conducted to determine if there might be anything which requires attention and refinement in terms of questionnaire design and implementation. 10 primary and secondary teachers who were once my students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were also examined. Results showed that reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.7, 0.6 > 0.6) and validity (KMO = 0.7, 0.6 > 0.5) of the questionnaire were substantiated. For the reliability and validity of the qualitative data, a rigorous inductive approach, developed and used by many researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, 2006), was adopted. The qualitative data were collated and analyzed as follows:

- Independent parallel coding: First, the research assistant of this project coded and categorized the data, while the researcher also categorized the data.

- Specialist check: In order to enhance the credibility of the data analysis, two checkers specializing in second language teaching were invited to scrutinize the categorization and accuracy of data analysis.

### 3.2. Participants

82 questionnaires were received from 55 primary schools and 51 questionnaires from 30 secondary schools. Though they cannot represent all primary and secondary teachers in Hong Kong, the findings can be said to be quite representative as there are teachers from 55 primary schools and 30 secondary schools with different age ranges and teaching experience. The primary teachers were aged from 20 - 50 with most of them falling in the age group of 31 - 35 (24%). About 17% of them were from 36 - 40, and 16% each for those aged from 36 - 40 and 26 - 30. The age of secondary teachers who participated in this survey ranged from 20 to 50 with 27% of them from 31 - 35, 23% in the range of 26 - 30 and 12% 20 - 25. Concerning teaching experience, there was a range from 0.5 years to 30 years of teaching experience for primary teachers and 1 year to 35 years for secondary teachers. Most of them possessed teaching qualifications such as Postgraduate Diploma in Education, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), and a relevant master's degree.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

This section presents and discusses both quantitative data and open-ended answers concerning how simple past tense is being taught in primary and secondary classrooms in Hong Kong (e.g. teaching activities; teaching strategies and teaching approaches), how this is related to teachers' cognition about acquisition of simple past tense, and the pedagogical implications. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 15.0 (2006). One-way ANOVA with between-groups variance was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the mean scores of the five different teaching methods (mechanical drills; meaningful drills; communicative drills, task-based teaching activities and structured input activities). Qualitative data were analyzed as outlined in 3.1. The data were coded and categorized by two researchers before being checked by two specialists and the categorization was finalized. After coding and categorization, the percentages for each category (e.g. form-focused activities; communicative approach) were generated, and compared.

### 4.1. How Simple Past Tense is being Taught in Primary and Secondary Classrooms in HK

In Part II of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate how often they use the teaching activities shown to teach English simple past tense by circling a corresponding number representing the frequency in a likert scale (with 1 indicating very frequently, 2 frequently, 3 sometimes, 4 seldom and 5 never).

There are 12 activities included in the two questionnaires and they can be categorized into form-focused, meaningful, communicative, task-based and processing. As shown in **Table 1**, primary teachers tend to use task-based (a mean of 3.63) and processing instruction (3.76) significantly less frequently ( $p < 0.05$ ) than other means, which included form-focused (2.66), meaningful (2.64) and also communicative activities (2.46). Such is the case for secondary teachers. Task-based (mean = 3.44) and processing instruction (mean = 3.77) are used significantly less ( $p < 0.05$ ) than other three teaching methods: form-focused (2.61), meaningful (2.25) and communicative activities (2.93) (Please refer to **Table 2**). Since teachers might not be familiar with the terminology like form-focused or meaningful activities, examples of activities are shown requiring teachers to indicate their frequency of using such activities.

There is a question in Part III asking the participants to read some examples of teaching approaches and answer two main questions: 1) Which approach do you use (or close to the one you used) to teach simple past tense; 2) Would you consider using some of the other approaches listed above? Why or why not?

The findings were consistent with the above findings concerning the use of teaching activities. 59% of the primary teachers used the traditional teaching approach and 40% and 19% used task-based and processing instruction respectively. In the case of secondary schools, 53% teachers used the traditional teaching approach and 45% and 14% used task-based and processing instruction respectively. Similar to the findings concerning the

**Table 1.** How simple past tense is being taught in primary classrooms in Hong Kong.

Descriptives								
Frequencies								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Form-focused	162	<b>2.66</b>	1.132	0.089	2.48	2.84	1	5
Meaningful	164	<b>2.64</b>	1.056	0.082	2.48	2.80	1	5
Communicative	164	<b>2.46</b>	1.029	0.080	2.30	2.62	1	5
Task-based	162	<b>3.63</b>	1.086	0.085	3.46	3.80	1	5
Processing	327	<b>3.76</b>	1.049	0.058	3.64	3.87	1	5
Total	979	<b>3.15</b>	1.208	0.039	3.07	3.22	1	5

Note: Part II 1.1-1.12: Teaching Activities: 1 = form-focused activities. 2 = meaningful activities. 3 = communicative activities. 4 = task-based activities. 5 = processing instruction. Frequency: 1 = Very frequent. 2 = Frequent. 3 = Sometimes. 4 = Seldom. 5 = Never.

**Table 2.** How simple past tense is being taught in secondary classrooms in Hong Kong.

Descriptives								
Frequency								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Form-focused	104	<b>2.61</b>	1.1271	0.1105	2.387	2.825	1.0	5.0
Meaningful	104	<b>2.25</b>	1.0681	0.1047	2.042	2.458	0.0	5.0
Communicative	104	<b>2.93</b>	0.9271	0.0909	2.752	3.113	0.0	5.0
Task-based	104	<b>3.44</b>	1.2134	0.1190	3.206	3.678	0.0	5.0
Processing	208	<b>3.77</b>	0.9489	0.0658	3.644	3.904	1.0	5.0
Total	624	<b>3.13</b>	1.1915	0.0477	3.036	3.223	0.0	5.0

Note: Part II 1.1-1.12: Teaching Activities: 1 = form-focused activities. 2 = meaningful activities. 3 = communicative activities. 4 = task-based activities. 5 = processing instruction. Frequency: 1 = Very frequent. 2 = Frequent. 3 = Sometimes. 4 = Seldom. 5 = Never.

teaching activities used, teachers used significantly more traditional teaching approach than task-based and processing instruction. It can be concluded that traditional instruction seems to be used more frequently by teachers compared with task-based and processing instruction. It seems that teachers focus on output more than input.

Regarding strategies used by teachers, there is an open-ended question in Part III of the questionnaire requiring teachers to report the strategies used to help students learn simple past tense (please refer to **Table 3** and **Table 4**). There were eleven strategies suggested by both primary and secondary teachers, which are 1) exercises on past tense forms; 2) providing contextual information; 3) writing practice; 4) communicative activities; 5) error correction; 6) highlighting the time markers; 7) using timeline; 8) comparison of present tense and past tense; 9) story-telling; 10) games, songs and videos; 11) evaluation. Among the above strategies suggested, form focused activities seem to be most favored by primary (64.63%) and secondary (58.82%) school teachers, for example, using verb tables, drilling on past tense forms, dictating and reciting past tense forms and so forth. In contrast, fewer primary (31.71%) and secondary teachers (17.65%) adopted communicative strategies. It can be concluded that a) mechanical teaching activities seem to have a very important role to play in the teaching of simple past tense in primary and secondary schools; b) communicative activities are less frequently used by primary and secondary teachers.

Though both primary and secondary teachers agree that they should focus on both the forms and meanings in teaching simple past tense (a mean of 3.7 for primary teachers and 3.3 secondary teachers in Part II of the questionnaire: 4 - 5 meaning *agree* and *strongly agree* respectively), the use of processing instruction involving referential and affective activities is almost absent. Fortunately, they also agree that the present approach of teaching simple past tense should be improved (a mean of 3.7 for primary teachers and 3.3 for secondary teachers).

#### 4.2. Teachers' Cognition about Simple Past Tense Acquisition

The use of teaching strategies or teaching approaches might be related to teachers' perceptions of students' problems in acquiring simple past tense. To examine teachers' perception, there are two open-ended questions in part III of the questionnaire, one about the difficulties involved in LEARNING simple past tense, and the other one about USING simple past tense. Their perception about students' problems in learning and using simple past tense seems very similar.

In learning simple past tense, both primary and secondary teachers seem to believe that there are four main difficulties encountered by students (see **Table 5** and **Table 6**), concerning the 1) form; 2) usage; 3) use of temporal adverbials and also 4) lack of past tense concept. Teachers believe that the major problem is to master the form (e.g. both regular and irregular forms) (59.76% primary teachers and 72.55% secondary teachers). Another problem is about the usage (46.34% primary teachers and 39.22% secondary teachers). It should be noted that (and indeed worrying) quite a number of teachers interpreted that students simply forgot to use simple past tense, implying that they believe students should have learned simple past tense and the failure to use it means forgetting to use. Another problem is about the use of temporal adverbials. About 30% of primary teachers believed that students rely too much on temporal adverbials in marking tense, but a majority of the teachers (almost 70%) claimed that students should use temporal adverbials. However, such is not the case for secondary teachers. Most secondary teachers complain about students' over-reliance on temporal adverbials (about 75%). It seems that secondary teachers have gradually realized that learning simple past tense by relying on temporal adverbials is not an effective way.

About 20% of primary teachers and 9.80% of secondary teachers thought that students do not have the concept of tense probably as a result of L1 influence. In using simple past tense (see **Table 7** and **Table 8**), the major problem concerns usage. Most primary and secondary teachers (56.10% and 54.90% respectively) believed that students do not know when to use simple past tense, among which about 26.92% (primary) and 21.88% (secondary) (tokens) are about forgetting to use; in the category of usage, almost 25% (primary) and 38% (secondary) of the tokens concerned students confusing the use of simple past tense with other tenses. About 10% of primary and secondary teachers suggested students' consistent use of simple past tense in writing. No matter whether it is the teaching activities, teaching approach or specific teaching strategies, English teachers are consistent in using the form-focused approach or communicative approach in teaching English simple past tense. First, the dominant use of the form-focused or communicative approach might be related to the teachers' learning



**Table 3.** Strategies primary teachers used to help students learn simple past tense (can suggest more than one strategy).

No.	Strategies used to help students learn simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	<b>Exercises on the past tense forms</b>	<b>27/82</b>	<b>32.93%</b>	General drilling	7	33	21.21%
				Regular and irregular forms (including categorizing them)	6		18.18%
				Spelling	6		18.18%
				Reciting past tense forms	5		15.15%
				Transformation	4		12.12%
				Fill-in practice/sentence writing	3		9.09%
				Pronunciation	1		3.03%
				Match the forms of past tense	1		3.03%
2	Providing contextual information	31/82	37.80%	Listening or reading stories, passages, diaries or sentences	23	33	69.70%
				Context	5		15.15%
				Story telling	4		12.12%
				Authentic materials	1		3.03%
3	Highlighting time markers	27/82	32.93%				
4	Communicative activities	26/82	31.71%				
5	<b>Using verb tables</b>	<b>20/82</b>	<b>24.39%</b>				
6	Writing Practice	13/82	15.85%				
7	<b>Highlighting the past tense forms</b>	<b>12/82</b>	<b>14.63%</b>				
8	Explanation of both forms and meanings of simple past tense	9/82	10.98%	Explanation of meaning	4	11	36.36%
				Explanation of form and meaning	3		27.27%
				Explaining the exceptions (e.g. the cases of not using simple past tense)	2		18.18%
				Explanation of form	1		9.09%
				Explanation of usage	1		9.09%
9	<b>Error correction</b>	<b>11/82</b>	<b>13.41%</b>				
10	Comparison of present tense and past tense	11/82	13.41%				
11	Using timeline	11/82	13.41%				
12	<b>Games focusing on past tense forms</b>	<b>6/82</b>	<b>7.32%</b>				
13	General games	4/82	4.88%				
14	Others	4/82	4.88%	-a “warming up” exercise to review past tense from time to time			
				-Reminding students to use past tense in writing tasks			
				-Teaching and explaining “to infinitive”			
				-introducing the use of past tense-->introducing regular/irregular verbs-->examples-->games--> practice			
15	Evaluation (quiz and test)	3/82	3.66%				
16	Translation	2/82	2.44%				

**Table 4.** Strategies secondary teachers used to help students learn simple past tense (can suggest more than one strategy).

No.	Strategies adopted to help students learn simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	Training on forms	30	30/51 = 58.82%	Dictation	7	43	7/43 = 16.28%
				Drilling	9		9/43 = 20.93%
				Fill-in-the-blanks	2		2/43 = 4.65%
				Exercises on form	14		14/43 = 32.56%
				Verb table	11		11/43 = 25.58%
2	Context (including authentic materials)	17	17/51 = 33.33%				
3	Writing Practice	15	15/51 = 29.41%				
4	Communicative activities	9	9/51 = 17.65%				
5	Error correction	9	9/51 = 17.65%				
6	Highlighting time markers	6	6/51 = 11.76%				
7	Others <sup>2</sup>	6	6/51 = 11.76%				
8	Using timeline	5	5/51 = 9.80%				
9	Comparison of present tense and past tense	5	5/51 = 9.80%				
10	Exploring grammatical rules	5	5/51 = 9.80%				
11	Games, songs, videos	4	4/51 = 7.84%				
12	Evaluation	4	4/51 = 7.84%				
13	Reading practice	3	3/51 = 5.88%				
14	Task-based instruction	2	2/51 = 3.92%				
15	Story-telling	2	2/51 = 3.92%				
16	Helping students to be aware of time concept	2	2/51 = 3.92%				
17	Speaking	1	1/51 = 1.96%				

Note: <sup>1</sup>Majority of teachers listed more than one teaching strategy and different teachers gave different numbers of tokens so that the total number of tokens is more than that of teachers. In order to compare on an equal basis, the number of teachers, 82, is chosen as the base number. <sup>2</sup>“Others” includes the following items: 1) Use activities to get students familiar with the tenses. 2) Ask students to underline connectives. 3) Frequent recap. 4) Ask them to review their own work. 5) Make use of Readers to teach. 6) Intensive practices; giving detailed feedback.

experience (in addition to their teaching experience reported in the literature). These English teachers received education when both form-focused approach and communicative approach were prevalent. It seems reasonable that they prefer form-focused or communicative approach in teaching English simple past tense. This is also related to teachers' knowledge about how simple past tense should best be taught. While studies in the literature focused much on teachers' knowledge of grammar and grammar terminology, this study sheds light into what teachers' cognition should encompass and how the notion could be expanded. A lack of knowledge (or having misconceptions) about how grammar items should be taught is as serious as (and actually more serious than) having insufficient knowledge of grammar knowledge. The following section reports if there might be a discrepancy between what teachers know about how simple past tense should be taught and their actual teaching practice in the classroom.

### 4.3. Teachers' Suggestions of Teaching Simple Past Tense

There is a question in Part III of the questionnaire: Do you think the present teaching method of simple past tense should be improved? If yes, please provide some suggestions how it can be improved.

**Table 5.** Primary teachers' perception of students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense (can give more than one answer).

No.	Teachers' perception of students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	Students have problems in learning the form of simple past tense	49/82	59.76%	Regular and irregular forms	28	53	52.83%
				Irregular forms	15		28.30%
				Pronunciation	5		9.43%
				Confusion	3		5.66%
				Negative forms	2		3.77%
2	Students have problems in learning the usage of simple past tense	38/82	46.34%	Knowledge of when to use simple past tense	19	44	43.18%
				forget to use	10		22.73%
				Confusion between past and other tenses	10		22.73%
				Inconsistency in using	5		11.36%
3	Students have problems in using temporal adverbials or key words	13/82	15.85%	Not using temporal adverbials or key words	9	13	69.23%
				Over-reliance on temporal adverbials or key words	4		30.77%
4	Lack of past tense concept (L1 influence, cultural differences)	15/82	18.29%				
5	Less exposure to English	2/82	2.44%				
6	Students have no interests in learning English past tense	2/82	2.44%				
7	Others	2/82	2.44%	Students cannot understand the meaning of the verbs; students are weak in all aspects of English.			
8	Students have no problems in learning simple past tense	2/82	2.44%				

**Table 9** and **Table 10** show a list of suggestions given by the teachers. A range of activities were suggested; some (primary (10.98%) and secondary (21.57%)) suggested exposing students to various text types, for example, introducing simple past tense using stories, using reading materials written in simple past tense; giving students a passage for deducing the past tense form, and so forth. Other common suggestions proposed by both primary and secondary teachers included using communicative activities, and combining different teaching methods to make teaching more interesting. Secondary teachers suggested using less mechanical activities (13.73%) but more task-based activities (5.88%). There seems to be a gap between what teachers know should be used to teach simple past tense and what they practise in the classroom. Why is this the case and what does this imply? Is there anything we could include in the teaching programmes to equip student-teachers well for the challenge? Is processing instruction a way out?

#### 4.4. How can Processing Instruction help?

One way to receive teacher training in Hong Kong is to pursue a postgraduate diploma/certificate in English

**Table 6.** Secondary teachers' perception of students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense (can give more than one answer).

No.	Students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	<b>Students have problems in learning simple past tense form</b>	37	$37/51^* = 72.55\%$	Forget form	1	$1/51 = 1.96\%$	1	40	$1/40 = 2.50\%$
				Form	14	$14/51 = 27.45\%$	16	$16/40 = 40.00\%$	
				Irregular form	16	$16/51 = 31.37\%$	17	$17/40 = 42.50\%$	
				Forming negative and interrogative sentences	4	$4/51 = 7.84\%$	4	$4/40 = 10.00\%$	
				Spelling	2	$2/51 = 3.92\%$	2	$2/40 = 5.00\%$	
2	<b>Students have problems in learning simple past tense usage</b>	20	$20/51 = 39.22\%$	Forget to use	3	$3/51 = 5.88\%$	4	21	$4/21 = 19.05\%$
				Don't know when/how to use	6	$6/51 = 11.76\%$	6	$6/21 = 28.57\%$	
				Confusion between past and other tenses	10	$10/51 = 19.61\%$	10	$10/21 = 47.62\%$	
				Inconsistency in using	1	$1/51 = 1.96\%$	1	$1/21 = 4.76\%$	
3	<b>Students have problems in using temporal adverbials or key words</b>	4	$4/51 = 7.84\%$	Not using temporal adverbials or key words	1	$1/51 = 1.96\%$	1	4	$1/4 = 25.00\%$
				Over-reliance on temporal adverbials or key words	3	$3/51 = 5.88\%$	3	$3/4 = 75.00\%$	
4	Lack of past tense concept (L1 influence, cultural differences)	5	$5/51 = 9.80\%$						
5	Less exposure to English	2	$2/51 = 3.92\%$						
6	Students have no interests in learning English past tense	4	$4/51 = 7.84\%$						
7	Students have no problems in learning simple past tense	6	$6/51 = 11.76\%$						

Note: 1. Majority of teachers listed more than one students' problem in using simple past tense and different teachers gave different numbers of tokens so that the total number of tokens is more than that of teachers. In order to compare on an equal basis, the number of teachers, 51, is chosen as the base number.

teaching from Institute of Education or other tertiary institutions offering both full-time and part-time programmes. Concerns have been raised regarding the effectiveness of teacher education programmes in, for example, improving students' English language proficiency (e.g. Gan, 2012) and empathy towards students (e.g. Chan, 1992); but what is inadequate about these teacher education programmes is in fact not limited to the enhancement of student-teachers' language proficiency or developing their empathy. Given the correspondence between teachers' cognition and teaching practice, more effort should be devoted to developing student-teachers' adequate understanding of ESL learners' difficulties in second language acquisition, and specifically effective

**Table 7.** Primary teachers' perception of students' problems in USING simple past tense (can give more than one answer).

No.	Students' problems in USING simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	Students have problems in learning the form of simple past tense	42/82	51.22%	Regular and irregular forms	29	43	67.44%
				Irregular forms	9		20.93%
				pronunciation	3		6.98%
				be not aware of the presence of verbs	2		4.65%
2	Students have problems in learning the usage of simple past tense	46/82	56.10%	Knowledge of when to use simple past tense	20	52	38.46%
				forget to use	14		26.92%
				Confusion between past and other tenses	13		25.00%
				Inconsistency in using	5		9.62%
3	Students have problems in using temporal adverbials or key words	14/82	17.07%	Not using temporal adverbials or key words	12	14	85.71%
				Over-reliance on temporal adverbials or key words	2		14.29%
4	Lack of past tense concept (L1 influence, cultural differences)	7/82	8.54%				
5	Students have problems in forming interrogative and negative sentences	5/82	6.10%				

strategies and means which can be used to help students.

This is, of course, also highly related to the perception of both professors and administrators involved in curriculum planning of these teacher education programmes as to what should and should not be included in the programmes. It is thus significant to shape the perception of not just these student-teachers but their teachers in maximizing the effectiveness of the training curriculum. Based on the results reported in this study, teachers tend to believe that the problems second language learners encountered in acquiring simple past tense concern the forms mainly, which might result in their use of the form-oriented teaching approach in teaching simple past tense.

While teachers also agree that both forms and meanings are important, there exists a discrepancy between what they believe and what they do in the classroom as they emphasize a form-oriented teaching approach in teaching simple past tense. Some other beliefs can be regarded as misconceptions, for example, primary teachers' belief that students should use temporal adverbials with simple past tense and their misconception that students' failure to use simple past tense means forgetting to use. When being asked about what the teachers perceived are the main differences which make one teaching approach different from another in Section 1.5.2 in the questionnaire, teachers mostly fail to see the point and value of processing instruction (see [Table 11](#) and [Table 12](#)). Despite the many relevant findings concerning the generalizability of processing instruction reported in the past two decades, English teachers seem to know nothing about it, and pedagogy-related research findings seem to be missing in teacher education programmes. This is obviously not a case about the PRESENCE of a gap between theory (taught in teaching education programmes) and teaching practice as reported in [Cheng, Cheng and Tang \(2010\)](#) but a LACK of relevant information for student-teachers to make the right instructional decisions.

**Supplementary File 3** shows some examples of processing instruction materials consisting of grammatical explanation of simple past tense and structured input activities.

**Table 8.** Secondary teachers' perception of students' problems in USING simple past tense (can give more than one answer).

No.	Students' problems in USING simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers	Subcategories	Number of tokens	Total tokens	Percentage
1	<b>Students have problems in learning simple past tense form</b>	25	25/51 = 49.02%	Form	11	33	11/33 = 33.33%
				Irregular form	9		9/33 = 27.27%
				Pronunciation	3		3/33 = 9.09%
				Spelling	7		7/33 = 21.21%
				Forming negative sentences	2		2/33 = 6.06%
				Forget to use proper form	1		1/33 = 3.03%
2	<b>Students have problems in learning simple past tense usage</b>	28	28/51 = 54.90%	forget to use	7	32	7/32 = 21.88%
				Don't know when/how to use	10		10/32 = 31.25%
				Confusion between past and other tenses	12		12/32 = 37.50%
				Inconsistency in using	3		3/32 = 9.38%
3	<b>Students have problems in using temporal adverbials or key words</b>	6	6/51 = 11.76%	Not using temporal adverbials or key words	1	7	1/7 = 14.29%
				Over-reliance on temporal adverbials or key words	6		6/7 = 85.71%
4	Lack of past tense concept (L1 influence, cultural differences)	8	8/51 = 15.69%				
5	Less exposure	1	1/51 = 1.96%				
6	Poor foundation	1	1/51 = 1.96%				
7	Being careless	2	2/51 = 3.92%				
8	Others <sup>2</sup>	1	1/51 = 1.96%				

Note: <sup>1</sup>Majority of teachers listed more than one students' problem in using simple past tense and different teachers gave different numbers of tokens so that the total number of tokens is more than that of teachers. In order to compare on an equal basis, the number of teachers, 82, is chosen as the base number. <sup>2</sup>"Others" includes the following item: "mistakes in using simple past tense are common in writing and speaking".

- 1) Learners are provided with information about a particular form or structure.
- 2) They are told that a specific input processing strategy may negatively affect their mastery of the form or structure.
- 3) Structured-input activities are used to help learners map the form and the meaning.
  - The grammatical explanation contains two parts:
    - 1) Explicit information about past tense, including its formal features and function.
    - 2) Additional information on a specific processing strategy that learners should attempt to apply in the subsequent activities (i.e. referential activities and affective activities). In this case, teachers let learners know that they should not rely on temporal adverbials to decide tense types. Structured input activities are the main component of Processing Instruction. They are designed to circumvent the processing problems that prevent learners from acquiring the target linguistic items. There were two kinds of activities: referential activities and affective activities. Referential activities require a correct/incorrect answer and participants have to rely on the target form

**Table 9.** Primary teachers' suggestions of ways to improve the teaching method of simple past tense.

No.	Suggestions on improving the present teaching method of simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers
1	Exposure to various text types	9	10.98%
2	Using communicative activities	8	9.76%
3	Balance form and meaning	6	7.32%
4	Combination of different teaching methods	5	6.10%
5	Listening to simple past tense	4	4.88%
6	Writing practice	4	4.88%
7	Games	4	4.88%
8	Using authentic materials	3	3.66%
9	Explanation of English simple past tense	3	3.66%
10	Timeline	2	2.44%
11	Utilizing websites and visual aids	2	2.44%
12	Drilling on past tense forms	1	1.22%
13	Proof-reading	1	1.22%
14	Meaningful activity (activity 9)	1	1.22%
15	Developing school-based curriculum	1	1.22%
16	Shift to student-centered approach	1	1.22%

**Table 10.** Secondary teachers' suggestions of ways to improve the teaching method of simple past tense.

No.	Suggestions on improving the present teaching method of simple past tense	Sum of teachers	Percentage of teachers
1	Using context (including authentic materials)	11	21.57%
2	Less mechanical activities	7	13.73%
3	Making the activities more communicative and interactive	4	7.84%
4	Writing practice	4	7.84%
5	Using task-based activities	3	5.88%
6	Others <sup>1</sup>	3	5.88%
7	Using more drillings	2	3.92%
8	Fit students' abilities	2	3.92%
9	Using various strategies to teach past tense	1	1.96%
10	Using different past tenses together	1	1.96%
11	Using songs and videos	1	1.96%
12	Pre-learning	1	1.96%

Note: <sup>1</sup>“Others” includes the following items: 1) “It can be, but I think teachers nowadays are already very concerned about the balance between form and meaning. Most students understand well but they are either too careless or having no habit in using such tense (because of their mother tongue)”. 2) “There is always room for improvement. There is no ‘the best’, but always ‘better’ however, time constraint precludes all possibilities”. 3) “Yes. The English courses should be more integrated so that students can apply skills they learn in one class to the other classes. In S1 (grade 7), they have three English classes: a reading-focused class, a writing-focused class, and a class focused on an integrated English textbook. Currently any (limited) focus on grammar is split into the latter two classes, and I teach reading, where the focus is on style and content. The only time I deal explicitly with grammar is when I conference with students one-on-one for the writing class. I think it would be better if students could scaffold knowledge from each class and focus on the same skills simultaneously to better learn to apply them in different contexts”.

**Table 11.** Primary teachers' comments on different teaching approaches.

<b>Comments on Approach 1-Processing instruction</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Suitable for high level students	2	2.44%
Suitable for lower level students	1	1.22%
Easy to understand and manage	1	1.22%
Using in the first stage	2	2.44%
Training listening skills	2	2.44%
Rote-like learning	1	1.22%
Form-meaning connection	1	1.22%
Consolidate simple past tense	2	2.44%
Interesting	1	1.22%
Covering more circumstances	1	1.22%
Expressing the ideas diagrammatically	1	1.22%
<b>Comments on Approach 2-Traditional instruction</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Suitable for lower level students	6	7.32%
Suitable for upper level students	1	1.22%
Easy to adopt (for teachers)	3	3.66%
Easy to adopt (for students)	2	2.44%
Using in the second stage	1	1.22%
Grammatical explanation	5	6.10%
Training in past tense forms	4	4.88%
Highlighting Adverbial phrases	1	1.22%
Consolidate simple past tense	1	1.22%
<b>Comments on Approach 3-Communicative teaching approach</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Suitable for upper level students	4	4.88%
Suitable for lower level students	3	3.66%
Using in the second stage	1	1.22%
Easy to adopt	2	2.44%
Communicative approach (exchange authentic information, share personal experience)	13	15.85%
Using context	3	3.66%
Integration of linguistic knowledge	3	3.66%
Interesting	2	2.44%
Grammatical explanation	2	2.44%
Covering more circumstances	1	1.22%
Reading and understanding past tense	1	1.22%
<b>Comments on Approach 4-Task-based teaching approach</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Suitable for upper level students	6	7.32%



**Continued**

Difficult to adopt	2	2.44%
Using in stage 2	1	1.22%
Communicative approach (exchange authentic information, share personal experience)	9	10.98%
Integration of linguistic forms	6	7.32%
Enhancing creative thinking	3	3.66%
Promotion of writing skills	2	2.44%
Interesting	6	7.32%
Extended task	1	1.22%
Covering more circumstances	1	1.22%
Reading and understanding past tense	1	1.22%
Should have more students' applications	1	1.22%

to access the meaning. Affective activities require learners to give opinions, express beliefs or other affective responses, and process information about the real world. The purpose is to provide learners with more opportunities to see or hear the form in a meaningful context.

Two points should be paid special attention to when using structured input activities.

1) Teachers' feedback is limited to telling learners whether their answers are correct or wrong. Any explanation of how simple past tense is formed is not allowed.

2) Learners are not required to produce sentences with simple past tense.

The information above is just an example suggesting the importance of including relevant research findings in teacher education programmes. While people always talk about bridging the gap between theory learned in school and actual teaching practice in the classroom, curriculum developers or teacher trainers should be more aware of what theory or information is relevant for student-teachers as the initial step to addressing the problem. Though there are other issues or considerations which might have impacted teachers' instructional decisions, for example, their understanding of the needs of students or their expectations, ignorance or misconceptions in teachers should be something teacher education programmes aim to eliminate.

## 5. Conclusion

This study entitled *Teachers' cognition about teaching and learning of English simple past tense in Hong Kong* offers a clear picture of what teaching and learning of simple past tense are like in primary schools in Hong Kong. Despite the promotion of the communicative language approach in the 1980s and task-based approach in the 1990s, teachers still seem to prefer the form-focused approach. The findings of the study show that teachers' understanding (or misunderstanding) of the nature of the acquisition problem of tense, and their use of teaching approach are instrumental in shaping students' learning outcomes. What is fortunate is that they understand the need to improve the existing teaching approach which is too form-oriented. Unfortunately, they do not seem to have much knowledge about the use of processing instruction.

Findings in the literature should not be limited to researchers; there is a pressing need for frontline teachers to understand the nature of the acquisition problem, the possible reasons leading to the difficulty, and ways how to help students master both the form and meaning of simple past tense, which might be the job of future teacher education programmes. As pointed out in 4.1.4, instead of always claiming there is a gap between theory as taught in teaching education programmes and teaching practice as reported in [Cheng, Cheng and Tang \(2010\)](#), integration of research and education should be encouraged so as to help student-teachers make the right instructional decisions.

There could also be interviews with teachers to supplement the questionnaire data. Despite so, this study is significant in paving the way for future studies examining if processing instruction is effective and how it can help second language learners acquire English simple past tense. Such a work, if accomplished, would be highly original, which can truly bridge the gap between acquisition theory and language pedagogy research globally.

**Table 12.** Secondary teachers' comments on different teaching approaches.

<b>Comments on Approach 1-Processing instruction</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Using a variety of teaching approaches	7	13.73%
Focusing on forms	7	13.73%
Using when students' level allows	3	5.88%
Not fitting students' ability	2	3.92%
Interesting	2	3.92%
Boring	2	3.92%
Using when time allows	1	1.96%
Using when materials are provided	1	1.96%
Using video clips	1	1.96%
Useful	1	1.96%
Not identifying the use and the reason of the usage of -ed	1	1.96%
Effective	1	1.96%
Arousing students' awareness	1	1.96%
<b>Comments on Approach 2-Mechanical drill</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Using a variety of teaching approaches	5	9.80%
Focusing on forms	5	9.80%
Using when students' level allows	3	5.88%
Boring	2	3.92%
Using when time allows	1	1.96%
Using video clips	1	1.96%
Interesting	1	1.96%
Not fitting students' ability	1	1.96%
Easy to check answer	1	1.96%
<b>Comments on Approach 3-Meaningful drill</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Using a variety of teaching approaches	5	9.80%
Using when students' level allows	3	5.88%
Focusing on forms	2	3.92%
Using when time allows	1	1.96%
Using video clips	1	1.96%
Interesting	1	1.96%
Easy to check answer	1	1.96%
<b>Comments on Approach 4-Communicative drill</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Using a variety of teaching approaches	5	9.80%
Using when students' level allows	4	7.84%
Focusing on forms	2	3.92%

**Continued**

Interactive	2	3.92%
Using when time allows	1	1.96%
Effective	1	1.96%
Useful	1	1.96%
Using video clips	1	1.96%
Using when materials are provided	1	1.96%
Interesting	1	1.96%
<b>Comments on Approach 5-Task-based instruction</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Using a variety of teaching approaches	6	11.76%
Using authentic materials	2	3.92%
Interactive	2	3.92%
Using when time allows	1	1.96%
Reciting model sentences	1	1.96%
Useful	1	1.96%
Motivating students to use target grammar items	1	1.96%
Good for consolidation	1	1.96%
Using when materials are provided	1	1.96%
Using when students' level allows	1	1.96%
Interesting	1	1.96%

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## Supplementary File 1

### Questionnaire on Teaching and Learning of English Simple Past Tense

Conducted by the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, this study aims to examine the teaching and learning of English simple past tense in primary schools in Hong Kong. This questionnaire will take you about 15 minutes to complete and the results will be used for research purposes only. Thank you very much for your help.

#### 1. Part I

Please provide the following information by ticking (✓) in the box or writing your answers in the spaces provided.

**Gender:** (1)  Male (2)  Female

**Nationality:** (1)  Hong Kong, China (2)  Mainland, China (3)  Others, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** (1)  20 - 25 (2)  26 - 30 (3)  31 - 35 (4)  36 - 40 (5)  41 - 45 (6)  46 - 50  
(7)  51 - 55 (8)  >55

**School name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School type:** (1)  Aided schools (2)  Government schools (3)  Private schools  
(4)  Direct Subsidy Scheme

**Student gender:** (1)  Girls (2)  Boys (3)  Co-education

**Teaching experience:** \_\_\_\_\_ year(s)

**Educational background:** (1)  Bachelor Degree (2)  Master's Degree (3)  PhD  
(4)  Others, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching Qualifications (e.g. TESOL, ESL, TEFL, PGD):** (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Part II

1) Below you can find different activities that teachers may use to teach English simple past tense. These activities are not exactly the same with what you utilized in teaching practice. Please indicate how often you use them in teaching English simple past tense by circling a corresponding number representing the frequency.

Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	2	3	4	5

##### 1.1 Activity 1

Fill in the blanks with simple past tense.

(1) Ken \_\_\_\_\_ (work) in North Point.

(2) I \_\_\_\_\_ (ask) Mr Chan some questions.

(3) We \_\_\_\_\_ (play) football in the park.

(4) The dog \_\_\_\_\_ (bark) at him.

1 2 3 4 5

(Arnold, W. (2005). *Magic: Grammar book* (p. 10). Hong Kong: Oxford University (China) Ltd.)

In this activity, students should change the verbs in the brackets to past tense forms.

##### 1.2 Activity 2

Listen to the following statements and decide whether each statement refers to an activity that takes place now or took place last summer in London.

Now      Last summer      [sentences heard by learners]

(1)   People worked overtime at work.

(2)   People visit London for the first time.

(3)   People celebrated different festivals.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 178). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to listen to ten sentences containing past tense or present tense. It should be noted that time adverbials (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") are absent from the sentences so that students do not rely on the adverbial phrases but verb endings (e.g. -ed, -es, -s) to decide whether the activity takes place now or occurred last summer.

## Continued

**1.3 Activity 3**

Read the story on pages 26 - 27. Complete the story web.

Who was in the story?

Where did the story take place?

When did the story take place?

What did Mr Ant and Mr Grasshopper do in the summer?

What happened to Mr Grasshopper in the winter?

1 2 3 4 5

(Anderson, A. and Gray, J. (2010). *English to Enjoy: Book 3B* (p. 30). Hong Kong: Educational Publishing House Ltd.)

In this activity, students read a story first. Based on the story, they should answer the questions using simple past tense.

**1.4 Activity 4**

Step 1

Listen to the following statements made by a journalist about the life of the footballer David Beckham and decide whether each statement is referring to his past life as a Manchester United player or his life now as Real Madrid player in Spain.

	Past	Present	[sentences heard by learners]
(1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	David Beckham receives a lot of money from advertising.
(2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	David Beckham donated money to charities.
(3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	David Beckham reserved more time for his family.

Step 2

Now read the sentences you have just listened to and decide if David Beckham was more famous when he was a Manchester United player or a Real Madrid player.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G. and Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 176). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to listen to ten sentences which describe the present or past activities and decide whether the sentences describe David Beckham's past life or his life now. Then, students read the sentences they have just listened to once again and express their opinion about whether David Beckham was more famous when he was a Manchester United player or a Real Madrid player. It should be noted that the adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") are absent from the sentences so that students do not rely on these adverbial phrases but verb endings to decide whether the activity takes place now or occurred in the past.

**1.5 Activity 5**

In pairs, talk about what you did last week.

S1: What did you do last week?

S2: I ...

What about you?

S1: I ...

1 2 3 4 5

(Arnold, W. (2005). *Magic: Book 3B* (p. 31). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China) Ltd.)

In this activity, two participants should exchange authentic information (e.g. "visited my grandma" and "went shopping with my family").

**1.6 Activity 6**

In pairs or individually, according to student choice, summarize the story of the animated movie "Oliver Twist" orally in about 50 words.

(Anne Ma, A., Chow, A., Lee, I. et al. (Eds.). (2008). *A Practical Guide to a Task-Based Curriculum: Planning, Grammar Teaching and Assessment* (p. 92). Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.)

1 2 3 4 5

Students have to first summarize the ideas, take notes in pairs or individually and tell their classmates the story.



## Continued

**1.7 Activity 7**

Read the following activities and indicate whether you did the same or different things at the last New Year celebrations:

	Yes	No
(1) I visited my relatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(2) I received gifts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(3) I mailed New Year cards to friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 180). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to read ten sentences which describe the activities at the last New Year celebrations. Students should share their similar/different opinions accordingly. As there are no adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") functioning as hints, students should pay attention to the past tense marker -ed.

**1.8 Activity 8**

Read the newspaper article below. Circle the verbs in simple past tense.

City News—Two Men Arrested

Yesterday, the police arrested two bad men. The bad men tricked the king. The king walked in the city with no clothes on.

1 2 3 4 5

(Arnold, W. (2005). *Magic: Book 3B* (p. 23). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press (China) Ltd.)

In this activity, students should read the newspaper article and then circle the verbs in simple past tense.

**1.9 Activity 9**

Today is 31 July. Jack is talking with his dad on the phone. Role-play Jack and his dad.

Date/Day	Activity
27 July last Friday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>watch a movie on the plane</li> <li>sleep all day long</li> </ul>
28 July last Saturday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>go to Ocean Park</li> </ul>
29 July last Sunday last weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have a party</li> <li>do magic tricks</li> </ul>
30 July yesterday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>go hiking</li> <li>play computer games</li> </ul>
31 July today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>build sandcastles</li> </ul>

1 2 3 4 5

(Anderson, A., & Gray, J. (2010). *English to Enjoy: Book 3B* (p. 59). Hong Kong: Educational Publishing House Ltd.)

In this activity, students work in pairs to role-play Jack and his dad.

Based on the above schedule, students transfer information with each other as follows:

-Jack, What did you do today?

-I built sandcastles.

**1.10 Activity 10**

Work in a group. Tell one another about the happiest moment of your life.

1. What was the happiest moment of your life?
2. Can you give more details about it?
3. Why was it the happiest moment?

1 2 3 4 5

(Smith, A., & Judy Ling, J. (2005). *My Pals are Here, English for Hong Kong: Book 6A* (p. 5). Hong Kong: Educational Publishing House Ltd & Marshall Cavendish International (Singapore) Pte Ltd)

In this activity, students in groups exchange personal information by giving answers to the questions.

## Continued

- 1.11 Activity 11**  
After reading Ben's scrapbook, now look at the following calendar. Find out some special events in your friends' lives.

(Yu, V., & McNeill, A. (2005). *Step up: Book 3B* (p. 14). Hong Kong: Educational Publishing House Ltd.)

Task goal: Work in groups to make a scrapbook of your friends.

Requirements:

1 2 3 4 5

- 1) Each student thinks of three special events.
- 2) Students write the name and the date of each event in the correct month on the calendar. Then they write what they did and draw pictures.
- 3) Give each student a piece of paper. Students have to ask at least three friends to talk about one special event. Students jot down the dates and what their friends did.
- 4) Students write about their friends' special events on the calendar with the help of the notes they have taken.
- 5) Students take turns to tell the special events of their friends.

- 1.12 Activity 12**

Step 1

Work in pairs and listen as your instructor reads a short narration about what Richard did last Saturday.

Step 2

In your pairs, give as many details as you can remember by completing the following sentences. The group with the most details wins. You have three minutes.

- 1) Richard jumped out \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) Richard needed \_\_\_\_\_ to wake up fully.
- 3) He wanted to go back to sleep but remembered \_\_\_\_\_.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 182). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students in pairs listen to a short narration about what Richard did last Saturday. Next, they need to give as many details as they can remember by filling in the blanks within the time limit. As there are no adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") functioning as hints, students should pay attention to the past tense marker -ed.

- 2) Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 5. Please do not leave out any of the items.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
	1	2	3	4	5			
2.1				1	2	3	4	5
2.2				1	2	3	4	5
2.3				1	2	3	4	5
2.4				1	2	3	4	5
2.5				1	2	3	4	5
2.6				1	2	3	4	5
2.7				1	2	3	4	5
2.8				1	2	3	4	5
2.9				1	2	3	4	5

### 3. Part III

**This part is for you to elaborate on your answers given above. Please express your opinions freely.**

**1) What are students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense? Please number your points.**

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**2) What are students' problems in USING simple past tense?**

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**3) What are the strategies you adopt to help students learn simple past tense? (You can list more than 4 strategies).**

Strategy1 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy2 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy3 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy4 \_\_\_\_\_

**4) Do you think the present teaching method of simple past tense should be improved? If yes, please provide some suggestions how it can be improved? Please number your points.**

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**5) Below are the different teaching approaches used to teach simple past tense. Please answer the questions that follow.**

Teaching approach 1

The grammatical explanation to English simple past tense contains the information about the formal features and functions of simple past tense, as well as special emphasis on the guideline "Do not rely on the temporal adverb to understand when the action takes place".

Students hear or read some sentences and each utterance contains the target form: these are the simple past tense sentences with no temporal adverb as clues. Students are required to attend to the past tense morpheme *-ed* to get meaning.

Students have to work on two kinds of activities. For the first kind, there is only one correct answer. When listening to or reading a sentence, students have to process the past tense marker *-ed* to decide when the event took place, past or present. See the following example:

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	[sentence heard by learners]
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	David received a lot of money from advertising.

In another activity, students are required to process meaning-bearing input and express an opinion or a belief. For example, students hear or read many past tense sentences with no temporal adverbs. They should express their opinions about whether they also did similar in the past.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-101). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

Teaching approach 2

The grammatical explanation to English simple past tense contains the information about the formal features and functions of simple past tense but not the emphasis on the guideline "Do not rely on the temporal adverb to understand when the action takes place". The grammatical explanation just like this:

*The past simple tense is one of the tenses used to talk about events in the past. It refers to finished actions and events. Very often the English past simple tense ends in -ed.*

Following grammatical explanation, there are two kinds of activities: mechanical activities where students are asked to transfer the present tense forms into past tense forms or substitute the past for the present; meaningful activities where students are more likely to be trained in selecting correct forms of the given verbs based on the information provided by context, particularly on the temporal adverbs *yesterday, last night* and so forth.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-106). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

### Teaching approach 3

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Language functions, such as promising, inviting, predictions, are highly emphasized over specific linguistic structures. Various language forms are introduced for each function and the learning purpose is mainly to reinforce language functions. In this sense, simple past tense is probably served as the functions like story-telling, narrating events, asking for a description of someone or something.

Students are provided with a series of activities that have the following characteristics:

1) The meanings conveyed should be previously unknown to everybody. That is to say, an information gap should exist when one person exchanges some information that the other person does not know. For example, two students talk about their birthday experience by asking and answering the following questions:

*How did you celebrate your birthday?*

*Where did you spend the day and with whom did you spend it?*

*Was it fun?*

2) The speaker has a choice of what he/she will say.

3) It also involves meaning negotiation. The listener has an opportunity to provide the speaker with certain feedback.

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching* (pp. 115-130). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, W. (2004). *Task-Based Learning of Grammar*. Hong Kong: HKBU.

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### Teaching approach 4

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Students are provided with various tasks (e.g. comparing, problem solving, ordering and sorting). The main characteristics of these tasks are as follows:

1) The task is goal-oriented. Activities should be structured so that they have a specific purpose and outcome.

2) The task should practise a wide range of linguistic forms rather than specific linguistic structure. In order to express meanings more freely, various linguistic forms should be involved. For example, students are asked to narrate a story. The predicted linguistic forms are not limited to past tense, but also some linguistic features of a recount genre, *in order to + infinitive* structure and so forth.

3) The task should be authentic and close to the real world and daily life.

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching* (pp. 149-163). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, W. (2004). *Task-Based Learning of Grammar*. Hong Kong: HKBU.

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**a) Which approach (es) above do you use (or close to the one you used) to teach simple past tense? Would you consider using some of the other approaches listed above? Why or why not?**

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**b) What do you perceive are the main differences which make one approach different from another?**

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-----Thank you for your help! -----

## Supplementary File 2

### Questionnaire on Teaching and Learning of English Simple Past Tense

Thank you for your participation in this investigation conducted by the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The study aims to examine the teaching and learning of English simple past tense in secondary schools in Hong Kong. This questionnaire will take you about 15 minutes to complete and the results will be used for research purposes only. Thank you very much for your help.

#### 1. Part I

Please provide the following information by ticking (✓) in the box or writing your answers in the spaces provided.

**Gender:** (1)  Male (2)  Female

**Nationality:** (1)  Hong Kong, China (2)  Mainland, China (3)  Others, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** (1)  20 - 25 (2)  26-30 (3)  31 - 35 (4)  36 - 40 (5)  41 - 45 (6)  46 - 50  
(7)  51 - 55 (8)  >55

**School name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School type:** (1)  Aided schools (2)  Government schools (3)  Private schools  
(4)  Direct Subsidy Scheme

**Student gender:** (1)  Girls (2)  Boys (3)  Co-education

**Teaching experience:** \_\_\_\_\_ year (s)

**Educational background:** (1)  Bachelor Degree (2)  Master's Degree (3)  PhD  
(4)  Others, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching Qualifications (e.g. TESOL, ESL, TEFL, PGD):** (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Part II

1) Below you can find different activities that teachers may use to teach English simple past tense. These activities are not exactly the same with what you utilized in teaching practice. Please indicate how often you use them in teaching English simple past tense by circling a corresponding number representing the frequency.

Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	2	3	4	5

##### 1.1 Activity 1

Complete this table. Two blanks have been filled for you.

	Present tense	Past tense
1	tell	told
2	blow	blew
3	cut	
4	refuse	
5		came
6		knew

(Alderson, S. J., Dearman, D. G., & Lai, E. (2007). *Development Skills—Freeway: Grammar & Usage: Book 1* (p. 13). Hong Kong: Aristo Educational Press Ltd.)

In this activity, students are required to turn the verbs into either present tense forms or past tense forms without the need to pay attention to the meaning.

**Continued****1.2 Activity 2**

Listen to the following statements and decide whether each statement refers to an activity that takes place now or took place last summer in London.

	Now	Last summer	[sentences heard by learners]
(1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	People worked overtime at work.
(2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	People visit London for the first time.
(3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	People celebrated different festivals.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 178). Bristol/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to listen to ten sentences containing past tense or present tense. Time adverbials (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") are absent from the sentences so that students do not rely on the adverbial phrases but verb endings (e.g. -ed, -es, -s) to decide whether the activity takes place now or occurred last summer.

**1.3 Activity 3**

Work in pairs. Take turns to ask and answer your questions.

A: Were you busy last weekend?

B: Yes, I was. On Saturday morning, I went hiking. Then, ...

/No, I wasn't. On Saturday morning, I woke up late. Then, ...

1 2 3 4 5

(Booker, R., & Daswani, R. (2012). *Longman Activate: Grammar Book 1A* (pp. 30). Hong Kong: Pearson Education Asia Limited.)

Students ask and answer the questions in turns using the given clues. The answers are based on students' authentic situations and therefore unknown to the other person. There is no right or wrong answer.

**1.4 Activity 4**

Mark is asking Nicole about what she did at the weekend. Complete their conversation with suitable pronouns and the correct form of the verbs in the hint box.

Hint	Mark: Did you have fun at your weekend?
You can use these verbs.	Nicole: Yes, _____. On Saturday, I
Some verbs can be used more than once.	_____badminton with my cousin Susie.
	Mark: _____the game?
ask be	Nicole: No, _____. Susie _____the game. She's a
buy do	very good player.
go have	Mark: _____anything else?
play want	Nicole: Yes, _____shopping at Times Square with my
win	aunt on Sunday. We _____ my uncle to come
	too, but he _____to.

1 2 3 4 5

(Poles, R. (2007). *Longman Elect: Book 1A*. (p. 34). Hong Kong: Longman Hong Kong Education.)

Firstly, based on the context, students need to select correct verbs from the left column. Next, the selected verb should be converted into appropriate verb forms according to the content of the dialogue. In order to do this, students have to understand the meaning of verbs and the context. In this activity, there is only one correct answer.

**1.5 Activity 5**

Read the following activities and indicate whether you did the same or different things at the last New Year celebrations:

	Yes	No
1) I visited my relatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) I received gifts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) I mailed New Year cards to friends.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 180). Bristol/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to read ten sentences which describe the activities at the last New Year celebrations. Students should share their opinions accordingly. As there are no adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") functioning as hints, students should pay attention to the past tense marker -ed.

## Continued

**1.6 Activity 6**

Goal: Make a planner about how your last week was.

Listen to the following conversation and then practise in pairs.

A: How was your weekend?  
 B: Great. On Saturday morning, I worked out in the gym. On Saturday afternoon, I played tennis with my girlfriend. Saturday night we went to a dance club.  
 A: What did you do on Sunday?  
 B: I stayed in bed all day.

Use information that is true and exchange information in pairs.

Look at three persons' calendars for last week. Ask and answer questions in pairs as follows:

A: What did Maria do on Wednesday?  
 B: She had lunch with her mom, and she went to the movies with Tina.

1 2 3 4 5

Discuss in groups: Who is the most interesting person? Why?

Example: "I think Keiko is interesting. She likes music and art".

Listen to the three persons (Keiko, Maria and John) talking about what they did last week. Some of the things are different from the items on their calendars because they changed their plans. Listen and find out the differences in groups.

Fill in the planner about what you did last week.

Talk about what you did last week in groups.

(Nunan, D. (1995). *Atlas: Learning-Centered Communication: Book 1* (pp. 89-90). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.)

This activity is presented in the form of tasks. The task is goal-oriented and contains a number of small tasks. In order to achieve the goal, students have to exchange opinions in pairs or groups and a wide range of linguistic forms should be used, not just simple past tense.

**1.7 Activity 7**

Take turns talking about vacations. Ask these questions and others of your own.

Where did you spend your last vacation?

How long were you away?

Were you with your family?

What did you do there?

How was the weather? The food?

Did you buy anything?

Do you want to go there again?

1 2 3 4 5

(Richards, J. C. (2000). *New Interchange: English for International Communication: Students' Book 1* (p. 44). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

Students are required to ask and answer the questions in turns. The answers are based on students' experience and are not known to the other person. There is no right or wrong answer.

**1.8 Activity 8**

Step 1

Work in pairs and listen as your instructor reads a short narration about what Richard did last Saturday.

Step 2

In pairs, give as many details as you can remember by completing the following sentences. The group with the most details wins. You have three minutes.

1) Richard jumped out \_\_\_\_\_.

2) Richard needed \_\_\_\_\_ to wake up fully.

3) He wanted to go back to sleep but remembered \_\_\_\_\_.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 182). Bristol/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students in pairs listen to a short narration about what Richard did last Saturday. Next, they have to give as many details as they can remember by filling in the blanks. As there are no adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") functioning as hints, students should pay attention to the past tense marker -ed.

## Continued

## 1.9 Activity 9

Complete the sentences with simple past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

*Did* you *watch* (watch) a film last night?  
 No, I *studied* (study) at home.  
 Where *did* you *go* (go) shopping last weekend?  
 I *went* (go) to apm and I *bought* (buy) a lot of new clothes.  
 How *was* (be) the football match, Tom?  
 We *lost* (lose) two goals.

1 2 3 4 5

(Booker, R., & Daswani, R. (2012). *Longman Activate: Workbook 1A* (p. 19). Hong Kong: Pearson Education Asia Limited.)

In this activity, students are asked to turn the given verbs into simple past tense without the need to consider the meaning of the dialogue.

## 1.10 Activity 10

Read the sentences and underline the correct answer.

- 1) I *visit/visited* Tokyo Disneyland in 2009.
- 2) John *eat/ate* noodles for lunch yesterday.
- 3) We *go/went* ice-skating at Cityplaza last week.
- 4) My day *helps/helped* me with my homework last night.
- 5) The film *is/was* very exciting.
- 6) Ivy *doesn't want/didn't* want to go shopping yesterday.

1 2 3 4 5

(Harfitt, G., Potter, J., Rigby, S., & Wong, K. (2012). *Longman Activate: Book 1A* (p. 38). Hong Kong: Pearson Education Asia Limited.)

Students have to choose the correct verb forms based on the time adverbials (e.g. "yesterday", "last night"). In order to complete this activity, students should refer to the meaning of the adverbial expressions. There is only one correct answer.

## 1.11 Activity 11

Step 1

Listen to the following statements made by a journalist about the life of the footballer David Beckham and decide whether each statement is referring to his past life as a Manchester United player or his life now as Real Madrid player in Spain.

- |    | Past                     | Present                  | [sentences heard by learners]                           |
|----|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | David Beckham receives a lot of money from advertising. |
| 2) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | David Beckham donated money to charities.               |
| 3) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | David Beckham reserved more time for his family.        |

Step 2

Now read the sentences you have just listened to and decide if David Beckham was more famous when he was a Manchester United player or a Real Madrid player.

1 2 3 4 5

(Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 176). Bristol/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.)

In this activity, students are asked to listen to ten sentences which describe the present or past activities and decide whether the sentences describe David Beckham's past life or present life. Then, students read the sentences they have just listened to once again and express their opinion about whether David Beckham was more famous when he was a Manchester United player or a Real Madrid player. It should be noted that adverbial phrases (e.g. "yesterday", "last night") are absent from the sentences so that students do not rely on these adverbial phrases but verb endings to decide whether the activity takes place now or occurred in the past.



**Continued****1.12 Activity 12**

Goal: Write a diary on what the students did last day off.

Which of these activities do you not want to do on your next day off? Rank them (1 - 5) (Number 1 is the activity you dislike most).

- |                                |                           |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. watch TV with friends _____ | d. take a class _____     |
| b. sleep late _____            | e. help mom and dad _____ |
| c. go for a drive _____        |                           |

Students have the opportunity to get familiar with phrases and words that are useful to fulfill the task. Discuss the answers of (1) in pairs as follows:

*On my next day off, I don't want to go for a drive. That sounds really boring.  
Oh, really? I think that sounds fun.*

Students are asked to listen to what Tina and Tony did on their last day off. Tick the items that they did.

helped mom and dad	slept late	went for a drive	went camping in the rain
--------------------	------------	------------------	--------------------------

Tony

Tina

Listen again. Who said these things about their day off? Write Tony or Tina.

- |                                |       |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. It was really boring.       | _____ |
| 2. The weather was terrible.   | _____ |
| 3. Sounds like a busy day off! | _____ |
| 4. Can you believe it?         | _____ |

1 2 3 4 5

What was your last day off like? Was it a good day or a terrible day? Discuss with your partner. Read the letter. Take notes of the things Nick did that day. Then write one or two sentences to give your opinion about the day.

Students are asked to read a letter on what Nick did on his day off.

Imagine that you are Tom and this is a letter from you to Nick. Fill in the blanks.

Dear Nick,  
Thanks for your letter. I'm sorry you didn't have fun on your day off. My day off was \_\_\_\_\_. I went \_\_\_\_\_, and I visited \_\_\_\_\_. It was \_\_\_\_\_. We saw \_\_\_\_\_. I bought \_\_\_\_\_. It was a really \_\_\_\_\_ day. See you soon.  
Yours,  
Tom

Now write a letter about what you did on your last day off.

(Nunan, D. (1999). *Go for it: Book 2* (pp. 50-51). Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.)

This activity is a goal-oriented task, which includes a number of small tasks. In order to complete the task, students have to pay attention to the meaning and use more linguistic forms than just simple past tense.

2) Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling a number from 1 to 5. Please do not leave out any of the items.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

**Continued**

3.1	My students have problems in producing the correct FORM of simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5
3.2	My students have problems in USING simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5
3.3	My students have problems in USING simple past tense, e.g. in writing compositions.	1	2	3	4	5
3.4	Teachers in our school focus on FORMS in teaching simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5
3.5	Teachers in our school focus on MEANING in teaching simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5
3.6	Teachers in our school focus on BOTH THE FORMS AND MEANINGS in teaching simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5
3.7	The approach I used to teach simple past tense is effective.	1	2	3	4	5
3.8	The present approach to teach simple past tense should be improved.	1	2	3	4	5
3.9	Teachers in our school use different ways to teach simple past tense.	1	2	3	4	5

**3. Part III**

**This part is for you to elaborate on your answers given above. Please express your opinions freely.**

**1) What are students' problems in LEARNING simple past tense? Please number your points.**

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**2) What are students' problems in USING simple past tense?**

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**3) What are the strategies you adopt to help students learn simple past tense? (You can list more than 4 strategies).**

Strategy 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Strategy 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**4) Do you think the present teaching method of simple past tense should be improved? If yes, please provide some suggestions how it can be improved? Please number your points.**

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**5) Below are the different teaching approaches used to teach simple past tense. Please answer the questions that follow.**

Teaching approach 1

The grammatical explanation to English simple past tense contains the information about the formal features and functions of simple past tense, as well as special emphasis on the guideline: don't rely on temporal adverbials to judge the event time.

Students hear or read some sentences and each utterance contains the target form: these are the simple past tense sentences with no temporal adverb as clues. Students are required to attend to the past tense morpheme *-ed* to get meaning.

There are two kinds of activities. For the first kind, there is only one correct answer. When listening to or reading a sentence, students have to process the past tense marker *-ed* to decide when the event took place, past or present. See the following example:

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	[sentence heard by learners]
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	David received a lot of money from advertising.

In another activity, students are required to process meaning-bearing input and express an opinion or a belief. For example, students hear or read many past tense sentences with no temporal adverbs. They should express their opinions about whether they also did similar things in the past.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-101). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

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## Teaching approach 2

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Activities in this teaching approach have two features: 1) students are able to complete the activities without attending to meaning; and 2) there is only one correct response. The typical activities include transferring the present tense forms into past tense forms or substituting the past for the present. Examples as follows:

Substitution:

*Go shopping* → *I went shopping yesterday.*

*Dance* → *I danced yesterday.*

Transformation:

*I go shopping.* → *I went shopping*

*I dance.* → *I danced*

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 100). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

Lee, J. F., & Van Patten, B. (2003). *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* (pp. 10, 121). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

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## Teaching approach 3

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The activities employed in this teaching approach have two features: 1) students need to attend to meaning in order to answer the question correctly; and 2) there is only one correct answer. The activities can be organized in various forms:

Example 1:

*Use the given verbs to fill in the blanks with correct verb forms.*

In order to complete this activity, students have to comprehend the meaning of both the verbs and the texts, especially temporal adverbials (e.g. “yesterday”, “last night”).

Example 2:

*Read the schedule that shows what John did last week. Please answer the questions:*

*What did John do last Friday?*

*Did John clean the house last Wednesday?*

Students have to understand the meaning of questions and stimulus (schedule in this example), and their answers must correspond to the information given in the schedule. So, there is only one correct answer and the answer is already known to students as long as they refer to the schedule. In addition to schedule, a story, a particular situation, a planner can be used as stimulus as well.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 100). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

Brandl, K. (2008). *Communicative Language Teaching in Action: Putting Principles to Work* (pp. 185-186). N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.

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## Teaching approach 4

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There are three features for the activities used in this approach: 1) students should pay attention to the question’s meaning; (2) students have to answer the questions according to their authentic situation; and 2) Students’ answers are unknown to the other person and there are no wrong or right answers. An example of this kind of activity is as follows:

*Question: Did you go shopping yesterday?*

*Answer: Yes, I did./No, I didn’t*

While “Yes” or “No” answer is expected, we do not know what students will respond as they answer the question based on the real situation.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (p. 100). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

Lee, J. F. and Van Patten, B. (2003). *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen* (p. 123). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

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### Teaching approach 5

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Students are provided with various tasks. The main characteristics of these tasks are as follows:

- 1) The task is goal-oriented. Activities should be structured so that they have a specific purpose and outcome.
- 2) Students should pay attention to meaning rather than grammatical forms.
- 3) The task should practise a wide range of linguistic forms rather than a specific linguistic structure. In order to express meanings more freely, various linguistic forms should be involved. For example, students are asked to narrate a story. The predicted linguistic forms are not limited to past tense, but also some linguistic features of a recount genre, in order to + infinitive structure and so forth.
- 4) The tasks should be organized in various activities involving negotiation and making decisions such as solving a problem through discussion, making a decision like choosing a tourist destination through discussion.

Littlewood, W. (2000). Task-Based Learning of Grammar. In HK English Advisory Inspectorate (Ed.), *Teaching and Learning Update, 1*, 40-47.

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**a) Which approach (es) above do you use (or close to the one you used) to teach simple past tense?**

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**b) Would you consider using some of the other approaches listed above? Why or why not?**

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**c) Briefly outline below the teaching approach (es) or the teaching procedure you are using in teaching simple past tense. Please specify teaching hours or number of lessons for each activity.**

**Teaching approach/teaching procedure (please specify the number of teaching hours/lessons)**

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-----Thank you for your help! -----

## Supplementary File 3: Processing Instruction Activities for the Teacher

### 1. Introduction

The teaching materials consist of grammatical explanation of simple past tense and examples of structured input activities. The design is based on the three features of processing instruction:

- 1) Learners are given information about a linguistic form or structure.
- 2) Learners are informed about a particular input processing strategy that may negatively affect their picking up of the form or structure during comprehension.
- 3) Structured-input activities are used in a way that can help learners circumvent processing problems (i.e. when learners acquire English simple past tense, they tend to rely on lexical items, such as temporal adverbials, as opposed to grammatical form (*ed* morpheme in this case) to get meaning when both encode the same semantic information. Therefore, the structured input activities should be designed to circumvent co-occurrence of temporal adverbials and past tense marker).

#### 1.1. Grammatical Explanation

The grammatical explanation contains two parts:

- 1) Explicit information about simple past, including its formal features and function.
- 2) Additional information on a specific processing strategy that learners should attempt to apply in the subsequent activities (i.e. referential activities and affective activities). In this case, teachers let learners know that they should not rely on temporal adverbials to determine tense types.

Note:

The grammatical features and function of English simple past tense is only explained in the first lesson. During the activities in subsequent lessons, no further grammatical explanation is given (Farley 2004).

#### 1.2. Structured Input Activities

Structured input activities are the main component of processing instruction. They are designed to circumvent the processing problems that prevent learners from paying special attention to target linguistic items. There are two kinds of activities: referential activities and affective activities.

Referential activities require a right or wrong answer and subjects have to rely on the target form to access the meaning. Affective activities require learners to express opinions, beliefs or some other affective responses, and process information about the real world. The purpose is to provide learners with more opportunities to see or hear the form in a meaningful context. Examples are given below:

Sample 1

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Referential activity—Your teacher's life!

- Step 1

Read the following statements and decide if your teacher does them now or did them last weekend.

He/She	Now	Last weekend
1) played tennis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) talks to the class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Step 2

Now decide in pairs whether your teacher's weekend was an interesting or a boring one.

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-101). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

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- Sample 1 is a referential activity.
- In the first step, learners encode the time frame only in terms of verb endings and they are required to give a right or wrong answer based on the verb markers in the sentence.
- Step 2 is affectively-oriented. Referring to the past tense items in the first step, learners have to decide whether the teacher had an interesting or boring weekend without producing the target form—simple past tense.

## Sample 2

Affective activity—New Year Celebration

- Step 1

Read the following activities and indicate whether you did the same or different things at the last New Year celebrations:

- 1) I visited my grandma.
- 2) I received gifts.
- 3) I mailed New Year cards to friends.

- Step 2

Compare your results with your partner to find out how many similar things you did.

Adapted from Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-101). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

- Sample 2 is an affective activity.
- In the first step, learners are required to read the sentences in simple past tense. Learners should express their opinions about whether they did similar things in the past by focusing on the verb markers.
- In the second step, learners can go through each sentence again and exchange opinions with partners. Two points should be paid special attention to when using structured input activities.
  - 1) Teachers' feedback is limited to telling learners whether their answers are correct or not. Any explanation of how simple past tense is formed is not allowed.
  - 2) Learners are not required to produce sentences with simple past tense.

## 2. Explanation of Simple Past Tense

As indicated above, in addition to the features and functions of simple past tense, teachers need to emphasize that, rather than relying on temporal adverbials, learners should pay attention to the endings of verbs.

Please follow the guidelines below when explaining simple past tense. The suggested time is 5 - 10 minutes.

### Teacher's instructions

- The past simple tense is one of the tenses used to talk about events in the past. It refers to finished actions and events. Very often the English past simple tense ends in *-ed*. This is the regular past tense.

For example [write on board]:

I played tennis with Paula.

- How to form English past simple tense?

Very often the English past simple tense ends in *-ed*. This is the regular past tense. But there are some verbs you we need add *-d* or change the ending a little.

Verb ending in...	How to make the simple past	Examples
<i>e</i>	Add <i>-d</i>	live → lived move → moved
Consonant+y	Change y to I, then add <i>-ed</i>	try → tried cry → cried
One vowel + one consonant (but NOT <i>w</i> or <i>y</i> )	Double the consonant, then add <i>-ed</i>	drop → dropp <u>ed</u> chat → chatt <u>ed</u>
Anything else including <i>w</i>	Add <i>-ed</i>	boil → boiled hand → handed play → played

- When you talk about a finished time in the past, the English past simple tense is often accompanied by a temporal adverb or time expression.  
For example [write on board]:  
Yesterday, I watched television.
- Can anybody tell me some other adverbs?  
[brainstorm temporal adverbs and write on board]

	night			
	Saturday		morning	afternoon
last>	week	yesterday>	afternoon	this> morning
	month		evening	evening
	year			

**VERY IMPORTANT!**

- Do not rely on the temporal adverb to understand when the action takes place as sometimes you can hear a sentence without the temporal adverb.
- You must pay attention to the tense ending to understand when the action takes place.
- In the case of describing past events, pay attention to the ending of the verb: *-ed*.

[teacher can circle and underline *-ed* in the examples]

Benati, A. G., & Lee, J. F. (2008). *Grammar Acquisition and Processing Instruction: Secondary and Cumulative Effects* (pp. 99-101). Bristol; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.

### 3. Structured Input Activities

**Topic:** Happy time with classmates/friends and family

#### Activity 1 (Referential)

Steps	Contents
1	Ask learners to listen to 10 sentences once and answer the questions.
	Note:
2	1) Teacher tells learners whether their answers are correct or not. 2) Learners will not receive either explanation or feedback about the way simple past tense is formed in English again. 3) Students are only allowed to speak out the adverbial phrases (e.g. "last summer vacation" or "every weekend") when checking answers.

#### *John's summer vacation*

John is a form 1 student and he is studying in Class 1A in your school. The following statements describe the things that John did last summer vacation or what he does every weekend. Listen to each statement and decide if each activity took place last summer or takes place every weekend.

	John...	last summer vacation	every weekend
(1)	stays at home with his parents.	_____	_____
(2)	travelled to Japan with his family.	_____	_____
(3)	helps his mom do housework.	_____	_____
(4)	plays football with his friends.	_____	_____
(5)	visited the Hong Kong science museum.	_____	_____
(6)	studies English in the library.	_____	_____
(7)	learned how to play the guitar.	_____	_____
(8)	shopped at Cityplaza.	_____	_____
(9)	exercises in the park.	_____	_____
(10)	attended a concert.	_____	_____

**Activity 2 (referential)**

Steps	Contents
1	Ask learners to listen to 10 sentences once and answer the questions.
	Note:
2	1) Teacher tells learners whether their answers are correct or not. 2) Learners will not receive either explanation or feedback about the way simple past tense is formed in English again. 3) Students are only allowed to tell/report the sentence number when checking answers.

*School picnic*

Your classmate Mary is telling her mother what she did in the school picnic last weekend and what she usually does at weekends. Read each statement and match them to the corresponding temporal phrase: last school picnic or every weekend by writing down the sentence numbers accordingly.

	I...
(1)	walked on the beach.
(2)	wash dishes after meals.
(3)	painted pictures.
(4)	danced with my friends.
(5)	water the flowers.
(6)	plant some trees.
(7)	listen to pop music.
(8)	tasted some delicious food.
(9)	climbed up the mountains.
(10)	chat with my friends online.

Last weekend (school picnic): \_\_\_\_\_

Every weekend: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity 3 (referential)**

Steps	Contents
1	Ask learners to listen to 10 sentences once and answer the questions.
	Note:
2	1) Teacher tells learners whether their answers are correct or not. 2) Learners will not receive either explanation or feedback about the way simple past tense is formed in English again. 3) Students are only allowed to tell/report the sentence number when checking answers.

*Last birthday***Step 1**

Yesterday is your best friend Tiffany's birthday. Listen to the statements and decide which activity she did last birthday and what activity she does every day.



	Tiffany...	last birthday	every day
(1)	phones her friends.	_____	_____
(2)	tidied up her bedroom.	_____	_____
(3)	watched TV shows with her parents.	_____	_____
(4)	stays up very late.	_____	_____
(5)	washes her own clothes.	_____	_____
(6)	surfing on the internet.	_____	_____
(7)	works on her homework.	_____	_____
(8)	walked her dog.	_____	_____
(9)	returns home at 5 p.m.	_____	_____
(10)	boiled water for dinner.	_____	_____

### Step 2

Read the sentences you have heard and discuss with classmates and decide whether Tiffany had an unforgettable birthday.

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### Activity 4 (sentence-level affective activity)

Steps	Contents
1	Ask learners to listen to 10 sentences once and answer the questions.  Note: 1) Teacher tells learners whether their answers are correct or not. 2) Learners will not receive either explanation or feedback about the way simple past tense is formed in English again. 3) Students are only allowed to tell/report the sentence number when checking answers.
2	In step 2, learners have 5 minutes to read the sentences and decide who did each activity during their last Christmas holidays. Note: In this step, learners do not need to produce any sentence with simple past tense. They are only allowed to tell the sentence number.

### *Christmas holidays*

#### Step 1

Listen to the statements describing what your teacher did during last Christmas holidays. Decide if you did the same activities last Christmas holidays. If you did, put a tick in the spaces provided.

	I...	during my Christmas holidays
(1)	watched Christmas movies.	_____
(2)	exchanged gifts with my friends.	_____
(3)	hiked with my family.	_____
(4)	received presents from parents.	_____
(5)	shopped with my mum.	_____
(6)	travelled abroad.	_____
(7)	learned to sing Christmas songs.	_____
(8)	wrapped Christmas trees in lights.	_____
(9)	attended a Christmas worship service in church.	_____
(10)	roasted a turkey.	_____

## Step 2

Read the sentences you have heard and guess who probably did each thing last Christmas holidays, your father, your mother or your relatives?

	my father	my mother	my relatives	
(1)	_____	_____	_____	watched Christmas movies.
(2)	_____	_____	_____	exchanged gifts with friends.
(3)	_____	_____	_____	hiked with family.
(4)	_____	_____	_____	received presents from parents.
(5)	_____	_____	_____	shopped with mum.
(6)	_____	_____	_____	travelled abroad.
(7)	_____	_____	_____	learned to sing Christmas songs.
(8)	_____	_____	_____	wrapped Christmas trees in lights.
(9)	_____	_____	_____	attended a Christmas worship service in church.
(10)	_____	_____	_____	roasted a turkey.

## Activity 5 (discourse-level affective activity)

Steps	Contents
1	Ask learners to listen to a piece of connected discourse once and answer the questions.
2	In step 2, learners have 5 minutes to read the text and check their answers.  Note: 1) Teacher tells learners whether their answers are correct or not. 2) Learners will not receive either explanation or feedback about the way simple past tense is formed in English again. 3) Students are only allowed to tell/report the sentence number when checking answers.
3	In step 3, learners have 5 minutes to read the sentences and discuss with classmates.
4	Ask learners to share their answers of step 3 with classmates and teacher.  Note: In this step, learners do not need to produce any sentences with simple past tense. They are only allowed to tell/report the sentence number when sharing their answers.

*First Travel*

## Step 1

Eva is a secondary 1 student and she travelled to Hong Kong last week. Listen to a story about Eva's trip and decide whether each statement is true or false.

The following vocabulary may help you.

clumsy: 笨拙的

concert: 音樂會

crocodile: 鱷魚

floating: 漂浮的

handsome: 英俊的

wooden: 木製的

Today was full of surprises!

The weather was beautiful this morning so my father said to me, "Let's go to Hong Kong Wetland Park!" I really enjoyed visiting the park. We watched the birds, walked on a floating wooden bridge and saw Pui Pui the crocodile! After that, we ate ice cream. Dad was clumsy and dropped his ice cream so we shared mine.

Later today, I went to a free concert at Hong Kong Park with my friend Janice. We were hungry before the concert so we bought some fish balls. I liked mine but Janice didn't like hers.

The music was loud and exciting. Then a handsome young man came out and sang very well. We waved to him and he smiled at us! I didn't know the singer's name at the time but I liked his performance. I returned home very late and I fell asleep very quickly.

(Adapted from Harfitt, G., Potter, J., Rigby, S., & Wong, K. (2012). *Longman Elect: Book 1A* (p. 30). Hong Kong: Pearson Hong Kong.

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|-----------------|---|
| <u>      </u> F | (1) I visited the park with my mother.    |
| <u>      </u> T | (2) I enjoyed in the park.                |
| <u>      </u> F | (3) I watched the tiger.                  |
| <u>      </u> T | (4) I walked on a bridge.                 |
| <u>      </u> F | (5) I dropped my ice cream.               |
| <u>      </u> T | (6) I waved to the singer in the concert. |
| <u>      </u> T | (7) I liked the performance.              |
| <u>      </u> F | (8) I returned home very early.           |

#### Step 2

Read the text you have heard and check your answers. Would you like to change any of your answers?

#### Step 3

Read the following sentences and decide whether Eva had a wonderful day.

- 1) Eva visited the Wetland Park.
- 2) Eva enjoyed visiting the park.
- 3) Eva watched the birds in the park.
- 4) Eva walked on a floating wooden bridge.
- 5) Eva shared her ice cream with her father.
- 6) Eva listened to a free concert at Hong Kong Park.
- 7) Eva liked the singer's performance.
- 8) Eva returned home very late.



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