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Magister en Pedagogía del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

**Structured Input Activities to Teach Sentence Patterns in Past Tense to A1 Level  
Students**

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Quito, agosto 2021


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MAESTRÍA EN PEDAGOGÍA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA**

**STRUCTURED INPUT ACTIVITIES TO TEACH SENTENCE PATTERNS IN  
PAST TENSE TO A1 LEVEL STUDENTS**

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May, 2021

## Abstract

The investigation endeavored to scrutinize, in quasi-inclusive breadth, the types of structured input activities that help in the teaching-learning process of sentence patterns in simple past. The research used an experimental design. Twelve students were recruited for this study and six of them were sent to the treatment group. This group was taught by using affective activities such as ordering and ranking, selecting alternatives, binary options, and surveys. These activities provide enough input since students work with the target form while they are required to process and internalize the sentence meaning. Pretest, posttest, audio recordings, and written activities were used to measure learning of simple past tense. Findings suggested that structured input activities were responsible for most of the students' improvement. However, explicit grammar should not be left behind since students still make mistakes when using -ed/d inflections. By the same token, structured input activities could use some help from explicit grammar intertwined with a meaning-based or communicative approach.

## Keywords

Input, structured input activities, simple past tense, explicit grammar.

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**ACTIVIDADES DE INPUT ESTRUCTURADO PARA ENSEÑAR PATRONES  
DE ORACIONES EN PASADO SIMPLE A ESTUDIANTES DE A1**

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## Resumen

La investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar, en una amplitud cuasi inclusiva, los tipos de actividades de input estructurado que ayudan en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje de patrones de oraciones en pasado simple. La investigación utilizó un diseño experimental. Se reclutaron doce estudiantes para esta investigación y seis de ellos fueron enviados al grupo de estudio. A este grupo se enseñó mediante el uso de actividades afectivas como ordenar y clasificar, seleccionar alternativas, opciones binarias y encuestas. Estas actividades proporcionan información suficiente ya que los estudiantes trabajan con la forma gramatical meta mientras procesan e interiorizan el significado de la oración. Se utilizaron actividades de preprueba, posprueba, grabaciones de audio y escritas para medir el aprendizaje del tiempo gramatical pasado simple. Los resultados sugirieron que las actividades de input estructurado eran responsables de la mayor parte de la mejora de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, la gramática explícita no debe dejarse atrás, ya que los estudiantes aún cometen errores al usar inflexiones -ed / d. Del mismo modo, las actividades de input estructurado podrían necesitar ayuda de la gramática explícita entrelazada con un enfoque comunicativo o basado en el significado.

## Palabras clave

Input, actividades de input estructurado, tiempo gramatical pasado simple, gramática explícita.

## 1. Introduction

Teaching English can be a daunting activity especially if you do not have vast expertise or any clue in doing so. I said this strong statement because sometimes you think your students are not progressing in their language acquisition or you simply think that they are not going at the same pace as the others. As teachers, we implement lots of methods and strategies in the EFL classroom, we even call ourselves eclectic teachers because of the vast approaches and methods we combine just to help our students succeed in their English language proficiency. Nonetheless, we must understand that English language proficiency or language mastery is not just isolated form understanding; there should be a combination of form and meaning for the student to develop communicative skills.

Learning a language should have a communicative purpose and sometimes students fail because they do not see an immediate use of the language. Besides, students are taught with repetitive drills or simple tasks that do not foster enough English learning. In other words, all these activities lack communication and not to mention that the input that they receive from these tasks is low. Nowadays, what teachers believe that helps students learn the language meaningfully is “input”. That is why this project is based on structured input activities which in simple words would be like tasks coated with meaningful and comprehensible input that helps students process the language and internalize it. This kind of teaching is more meaningful due to implicit grammar learning, that is, students are not overwhelmed with rules and exceptions that you are supposed to keep in mind. What students do with these activities is input processing which here means making connections with grammatical forms and their meanings.

Structured input activities would be a perfect initiative in order to teach that intricate or complex grammar for students such as simple past structures and inflections. These tasks combined with comprehensible input would make students succeed and acquire the language. Furthermore, this learning process is very likely to be both meaningful and compelling to learners. Hence, they will be able to use the language for more time since they will have internalized it and learned their grammatical rules and structures implicitly.

## 2. Background

It is evident to observe students make mistakes in the EFL classroom. This must be due to several reasons such as teachers’ methodology, students’ lack of interest, topic, too many grammar rules and exceptions, motivation, or even educators’ misconceptions to become fluent in a language. For instance, there are institutions in which teachers still think that explicit teaching of grammar helps students learn the language effectively. However, that is not the case because students focus on form without making connections with meaning. In short words, students need to understand form accompanied by context to make their learning meaningful and be able to put what they learned in class into practice. Learning a language does not imply the memorization of grammar structures, rules, and exceptions; learning goes way beyond that because it has to do with internalizing those structures and being able to use them in real communicative situations at any moment (Bosch, 2017). To achieve that, it is necessary to change teachers’ mindset to teach grammar more creatively and efficiently to make their students reach their language goals.

Besides, by making this change, students become independent apprentices of their knowledge since they learn the grammar implicitly making them internalize and remember these grammatical structures. Some studies show that students who are taught with structured input activities, a method developed by Lee and Bill Van Patten in 2003, are more likely to use grammar correctly leaving grammar mistakes out. This is because students are made to work with the input that they constantly receive (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). However, it is important to mention that students are not expected to produce the language (output) immediately. The development of this process, as learning the first language, takes time to

be able to produce it effectively. Teachers who do not have enough time and expertise with these activities may feel reluctant to employ them in class because creating these activities takes time, something that most of the teachers lack due to all the activities that they do on a daily basis such as grading, developing lesson plans, checking homework, attending meetings and sometimes even tutoring work.

### 3. Relevance and importance of the research

The English language has become the lingua franca for business, education, and entertainment; hence there is a necessity of implementing a new perspective on teaching English that allows students to learn the language in a different way in the EFL classroom. A methodology that covers two important aspects form and meaning to help students acquire the language meaningfully. Therefore, the following research is pivotal to acknowledge current teaching practices that might well contribute to the English language teaching field.

The study is geared toward helping and supporting teachers with a new perspective on teaching English simple past structures with different simple tasks. At the same time, these activities will help pupils internalize the language and learn grammar inductively. By doing so, students will discover and identify these structures making this more salient for them. Besides, they will be able to remember what they have learned and apply it to their speaking without any struggle on using simple past negative and affirmative forms or even questions.

This research project is worth doing due to the fact that it helps teachers expand their knowledge and come up with new ideas on how to teach a foreign language effectively. Besides, the different outcomes that this study gathers might as well help future investigations related to language acquisition in an EFL environment.

### 4. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to identify suitable types of structured input activities that help in the teaching-learning process of sentence patterns in the past tense in A1 level students at a private high school in the southwest of Quito. Besides, it tries to determine A1 level learners' communicative performance results when structured input activities are applied.

### 5. Literature review

#### Input

Before dive into the term structured input activities, it is essential to first understand what input is. As stated by Gass and Selinker (2008) input refers to any spoken or written piece of language that the learner is exposed to, this study will concentrate on spoken input. On the other hand, Corder (1967) asserts that input is all the language that is available for the student while Lee and VanPatten (2003) refer to input along the lines of "language that is meaning bearing". In the same way, Lee and VanPatten explain that input is not something taught explicitly. For instance, when teachers give corrective feedback to their students when they make errors such as forgetting to add -s to the third person as in "Nathan <sleep> always late" and then the teacher utters you must say "sleeps" because in third... (grammar explanation). A better way of transforming this corrective feedback into input can be "did you mean Nathan sleeps always late". In other words, the input is the language that revolves around a communicative process in which the learner is not just a mere passive subject. Instead, the learner is expected to actively work with the input received so as to respond to or work with the content.

## Input hypothesis

Krashen (1982) makes strong assertions in his Input Hypothesis. He mentions that input is the cause of language acquisition and this should be comprehensible as well as meaningful so as for form and meaning connections to occur. Notice that comprehensible means that the learner is able to process and understand the input or language whereas meaningful deals with a message that the learner must attend. Nonetheless, input will not suffice for the student to develop their communicative skills. In short, students need opportunities to use language in a communicative situation. In addition, students would be able to develop their communicative language ability (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Therefore, interactions in which the student is able to put into practice what he or she has acquired is essential for communication and form-meaning internalization. In the same way, Calvo (2015) emphasizes that language learning is a social process, that is, students are exposed to real communicative situations in which they use the language freely without too much focus on accuracy but fluency.

## Input vs intake

It has been discussed what input is; however, there is another term “intake” that has to do with structured input activities. Gass and Selinker (2008) refer to intake as the language that the student has internalized. In the same way, Corder (1967) proposes this as the language “taken in” by the learner. For instance, from all the input that the learner receives, there is just one part that the pupil is able to internalize. To put it simply, let us imagine that students are sponges and water is the “input” that is being poured over the sponges. There will be a time in which sponges are soaking wet that they will not be able to absorb more water. In short, the water absorbed is the intake, that is, what the student is able to take in. This means that exposing pupils to the target language without having control of that input, may not be successful for the student to make connections with form and meaning. Therefore, the teacher should design activities combined with comprehensible and meaning-bearing input in order to foster students’ communicative skills so that they reach language acquisition.

## Structured input activities

Lee and VanPatten (2003) define structured input activities as a set of activities that have been manipulated to encourage students to become dependent on form and meaning. Lee and VanPatten (2003) and Wong (2010) also proposed some guidelines in order to develop these kinds of activities flawlessly. For example,

### **1. Present one thing at a time.**

It is best to focus just on one form or function (grammar structure) since learners have a limited capacity to process information. It is much easier to internalize functions when there is less content.

### **2. Move from sentences to connected discourse.**

It is easier for students to start with phrases and then move on with sentences, long phrases, and texts so that they will pay more attention to the linguistic repertoire being taught.

### **3. Keep meaning in focus.**

It is important to focus on meaning when working with linguistic forms. Activities should not emphasize traditional grammar instruction that fosters memorization. Instead, these tasks should prioritize meaning for real conversational situations.

#### 4. Use both oral and written input.

It is necessary that activities allow students to hear as well as see the input so as to acquire pronunciation, intonation, listening, and reading.

#### 5. Have learners do something with the input.

The learner must always respond to the input by saying yes or no, agreeing or disagreeing, ranking, or matching. Students are not passive recipients; they must play an active role in class to process the input.

#### 6. Keep the learners' processing strategies in mind.

It is pivotal that students focus on relevant grammatical items in order to get familiar with these elements in the sentences.

All these recommendations help teachers design perfect practical activities that help students make the most of them simultaneously. Additionally, these tasks are compelling and communicative. To be precise, the activities are considered indeed communicative when new information is exchanged rather than practicing grammatical structures, teachers have their students focus on authentic language use so as to develop communicative skills.

Structured input activities can be **a) referential**, that is, when there is a right or wrong answer, so the student has to focus on form and meaning to choose the correct answer, or **b) affective**, that is, exercises contain examples of the target form and students are required to process sentence meaning (Marsden & Chen, 2011). In short words, in the latter type of exercise, "students have to express their opinions, beliefs, agreements, or any other affective responses" without being wrong (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 159).

When creating structured input activities, there are some types that the teacher can choose from such as a) supplying information b) surveys c) matching d) binary options c) ordering/ranking d) selecting alternatives. Note, in these tasks, students are not asked to produce grammatical written output (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Table 1. Referential and affective input activities.

| <b>Referential activity</b>   | <b>Affective activity</b>   |
|---|---|
| <u>Matching structured input activity</u><br>Listen and choose the correct time expression.<br><br>I visited my cousin...<br>yesterday.<br>later this month.<br>right now.<br>I had a blast with my family...<br>last week.<br>later this week.<br>right now. | <u>Matching structured input activity</u><br>Read and choose the answer that you agree the most with.<br><br>I did...<br>exercise yesterday.<br>my homework yesterday.<br>the dishes yesterday.<br>I had...<br>a great day yesterday.<br>a burger for lunch last day.<br>a headache last month. |

Adapted from (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 143)

## Form and meaning

The structured input activities are a set of tasks that help students understand the English language meaningfully based on the grounds that these activities use an implicit approach. They consist of form and meaning. Form is related to the mechanics of the language such as grammar, rules, exceptions, and vocabulary while meaning has to do with grammar structure and the meaning of words in a sentence.

Krashen (1981) has argued several times that implicit and explicit knowledge are different mental processes. Besides, he mentions that explicit knowledge does not become implicit knowledge due to meaning-centered approaches. On the contrary, Dekeyser (2003) attests to his strong-interface position that explicit knowledge can turn into implicit knowledge. He says this is possible due to repeated communicative practice.

Ellis (2001) and Norris and Ortega (2003) suggest that there should be an explicit focus to make language acquisition happens. On the other hand, Long (1991) differentiates two terms “focus on form” and “focus on forms”. The first one has to do with students paying attention to linguistic elements that appear in the lesson; their purpose is on communication. In other words, pupils are expected to interact with these linguistic elements. The latter deals with traditional teaching in which lessons are taught separately. For example, the teacher aims at grammar in the first period, then he or she focuses on drills and after that, he or she does some practice about listening.

## Input processing

Language acquisition consists of different processes. One of these learning processes is to make connections between grammatical functions and their meaning, this process is known as input processing and it is developed in the working memory (Chaudron, 1985). VanPatten (2010) states that processing is about making form-meaning connections during real-time understanding. In other words, it refers to the unconscious strategies or mechanisms learners use to initially connect form and meaning during the act of comprehension.

## Simple past sentence patterns

Sentence patterns are the orders that sentences, or clauses must follow so as to have a syntactically correct foundation (Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2011). For instance, the simple past tense has its own patterns that must be followed.

Table 2. Simple Past Patterns.

| Structure            | Pattern  |
|----------------------|--|
| Affirmative sentence | Subject + verb in simple past + complement.                    |
| Negative sentence    | Subject + negative auxiliary + verb in base form + complement. |
| Questions            | (Wh-) Auxiliary + subject + verb in base form + complement.    |

Retrieved from (Spratt, Pulverness, & Williams, 2011)

All these patterns might well help learners organize sentences syntactically. Nonetheless, there is still a problem, despite sentences being syntactically correct, they may lack the semantic and pragmatic nuances (Yule, 1998). For this reason, students must connect form with meaning to avoid sentences like in table 3. Apart from these semantic and pragmatic problems, students may still face some others. For instance, a) omit the auxiliary “did” when asking a question, b) forget changing the verb into the base form when using “did” or “did not” c) add -ed to irregular verbs d) forget to change verbs in the past tense when describing past actions e) verb agreement when using “was” and “were”. All these errors may be possible due to language interference. For instance, the mother tongue (L1) vs the target language (L2) or the target language (L2) vs the mother tongue (L1). In other words, these

errors are very likely to be “*interlingual*” a word which here means transfer errors, that is, errors happen due to the effect from L1 or “*intralingual*” known as overgeneralization errors.

Table 3. Sentence patterns and meaning.

| Structure            | Sentence meaning                        |
|----------------------|---|
| Affirmative sentence | The hamburger ate the boy               |
| Affirmative sentence | The duck run up to Mary and licked her. |

Retrieved from (Yule, 1998)

## 6. Research design and methods

This study shows traits of a qualitative approach due to its nature and because it aims to explore different theories that have been around lately such as structured input activities. Besides, students’ progress in the simple past tense and the use of these so-called input activities are described through concise wording. Likewise, this qualitative study is intertwined with an experimental design. That been said, the investigation embraces procedures such as filling out questionnaires, and experimentation in order to garner data and results for the analysis and interpretation. With reference to analyzing the information gathered, the qualitative comparative analysis was used.

### 6.1 Participants

For this experimental study, 12 students from two classes whose English level is A1, were randomly recruited to be part of the study. Four of them are male and eight of them are female. Their ages are 14-15. Likewise, participants for the questionnaire were purposively selected so as to include teachers with different insights and viewpoints about language acquisition. Ultimately 14 experienced EFL teachers agreed on participating in an online questionnaire.

### 6.2 Setting

The subjects, students, and teachers, who willingly participated in this study belong to a private bilingual high school located in the southwest of Quito. However, the study was not carried out in this physical setting owing to the pandemic situation, hence the whole research was carried on zoom, a video conferencing software.

### 6.3 Instruments

Technological sources such as Zoom, Microsoft forms, and PowerPoint were employed to make this research feasible. For instance, Microsoft Forms was used to design a pre and post-test that measured students’ development in simple past tense structures before and after the treatment (structured input activities). The pre-test consists of unscrambling and forming concise affirmative and negative sentences, answering questions, reading and comprehension of a short passage, and filling the gaps. This very test was used later as a posttest. Furthermore, Forms was again used to create 2 questionnaires, one for teachers to explore their perceptions of teaching English; and another for students to gather insights on how they like to learn the language.

### 6.4 Procedures

Having recruited the students randomly, they were sent to either a control group or an experimental one. The latter group was taught English by means of using structured input activities properly designed with the target grammar while the other one was taught the language traditionally making emphasis on grammar. Before starting with the treatment A1 students took a pretest. After that, they filled out a questionnaire that provided the investigation with clear insights to develop structured input activities to be used as

(treatment) teaching materials. Furthermore, English teachers filled out a questionnaire to discover teachers' perceptions when teaching simple past grammar structures.

Having checked the notions of the students who were surveyed, activities such as ordering and ranking, selecting alternatives, binary options, and surveys were used to lead the treatment group class. Students' performance was assessed and measured in each class to see their progress. At the end of the study, after two weeks, both groups took a posttest.

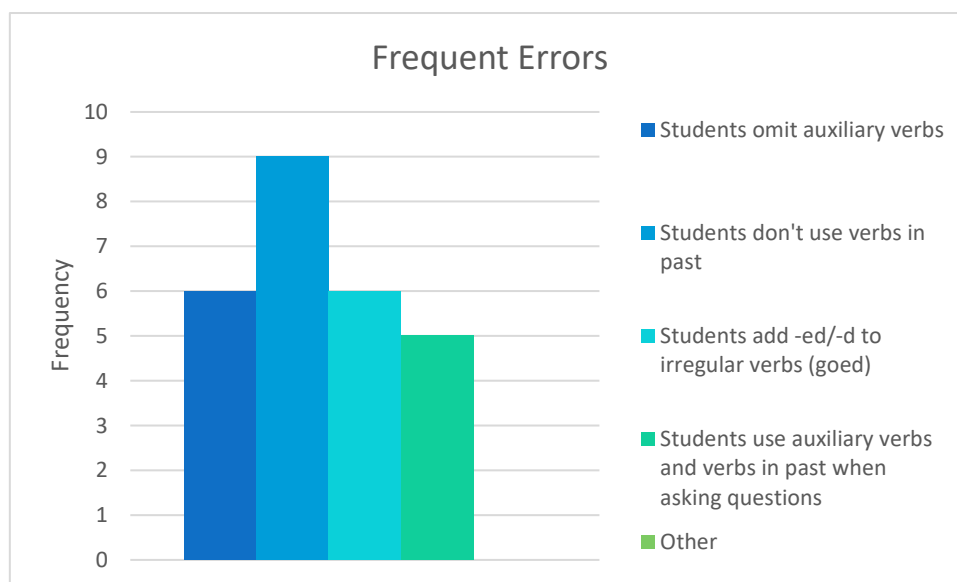
## 7. Results, analysis, and interpretations

In this section, the results for the teachers' perceptions when teaching simple past grammar structures are presented first, followed by students' motivations when studying English, especially grammar. The most pivotal information<sup>1</sup> was chosen for the analysis. Finally, students' results from the pretest and posttest are outlined to see how input activities have influenced in A1 level students sentence patterns acquisition in the simple past affirmative and negative sentences, and questions.

### Teachers' beliefs about grammar learning

Figure 1 below presents the errors that students make frequently when using the simple past. From a group of 14 English teachers, 35 % of them mention that their students do not use verbs in past. From the same group, 23 % state that their students either add inflections (-ed/ed) to irregular verbs or omit auxiliary verbs. It can be inferred that students struggle with simple past structures despite the fact that they are taught grammar explicitly. It seems that grammatical rules and their usages are not students' liking or at least it does not call their attention. In other words, students keep recurrently making these mistakes after being taught because grammatical content is not interesting enough.

Figure 1. Frequent Errors.



Note. For further information check annexes.

The data gathered from teachers' questionnaires also depicts the different items in which teachers concentrate when teaching English (see below

<sup>1</sup> Information about the survey is presented in the annexes section.

Table 4 for more details). For instance, 45 % of teachers state that their paramount objective is teaching students the “use” and “when to apply it”. Another group which represents 32 % mentions that “form”, i.e., “grammar rules” is emphasized in their classes. Finally, only 18 % highlights teaching students the semantic meaning of words in a sentence. It can be clearly observed that percentages fluctuate from one another. Thus, when teaching grammar structures, teachers rely on each item separately, that is, either form, use, or meaning depending on their own expertise in TEFL.

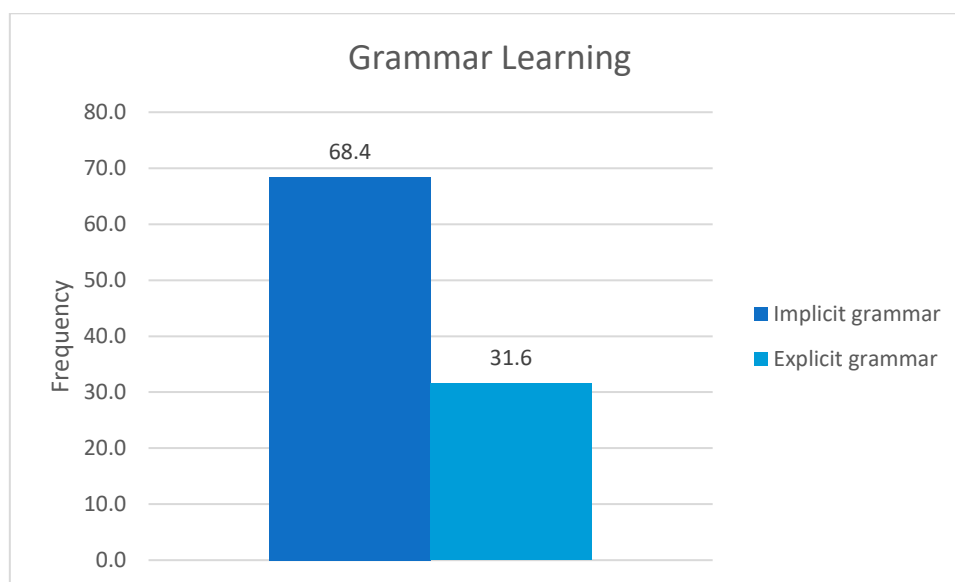
Table 4 Grammar focus

| Item   | Frequency | %            |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| form (grammar rules - syntax)                        | 7         | 32 %         |
| meaning (meaning of words in a sentence - semantics) | 4         | 18 %         |
| use (specific situations - pragmatics)               | 10        | 45 %         |
| Other  | 1         | 5 %          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>22</b> | <b>100 %</b> |

Note. For further information about teachers' questionnaire check annexes.

In Figure 2 below, teachers' expertise and perceptions about grammar are shown. 68.4 % of teachers believe that teaching grammar implicitly promotes simple past structures learning. On the other hand, 31.6 % of them state that students need a detailed explanation about the rules that govern the functioning of the language (grammar). In fewer words, these two perceptions are pivotal for successful language acquisition. Students who are exposed to meaningful and appealing input tend to internalize grammatical structures in a better way. However, explicit grammar should not be banned. It can be a few times a source for students to quench their thirst for grammar doubts.

Figure 2. Grammar learning.



Note. For further information about teachers' questionnaire check annexes.

The following table reveals how often teachers develop their own activities for their classes. Interestingly 50 % of English instructors state that they create their own tasks while just 29 % of them say that they always do. These two percentages are fairly positive since teachers' activities might well appeal to students. Besides, students tend to pay more attention to the class when they find something that they like such as songs, series, movies, the news, etc. As a final note, these teachers' answers correlate with students' answers (see Figure 5).

Table 5. Activities designed by teachers.

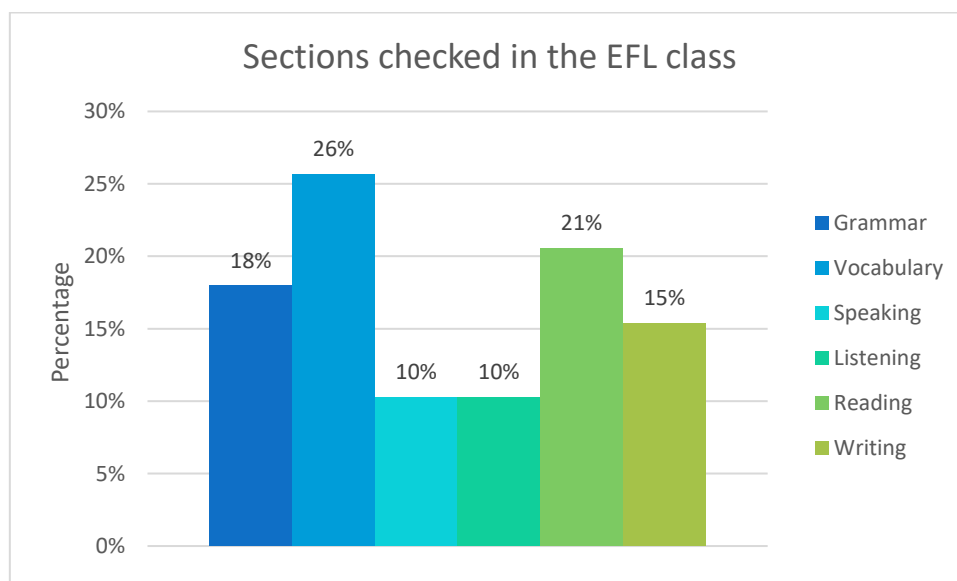
| Item         | Frequency | %           |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Always       | 4         | 29%         |
| Usually      | 7         | 50%         |
| Sometimes    | 3         | 21%         |
| Rarely       | 0         | 0%          |
| Never        | 0         | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Note. For further information about teachers' questionnaire check annexes.

### Students' motivation to learn English.

As it can be observed in Figure 3 below, in the EFL classroom students work on different sections. For instance, 26 % of students say they work on vocabulary. There is another group of learners that represents the 21 % who concentrate on reading while 18 % of them just check grammar. Listening and speaking are the skills that are not being reinforced as the other ones. From this analysis, it is inferred that students may not be receiving enough listening input. At the same time, grammar instruction occupies a meaningful part in the classroom.

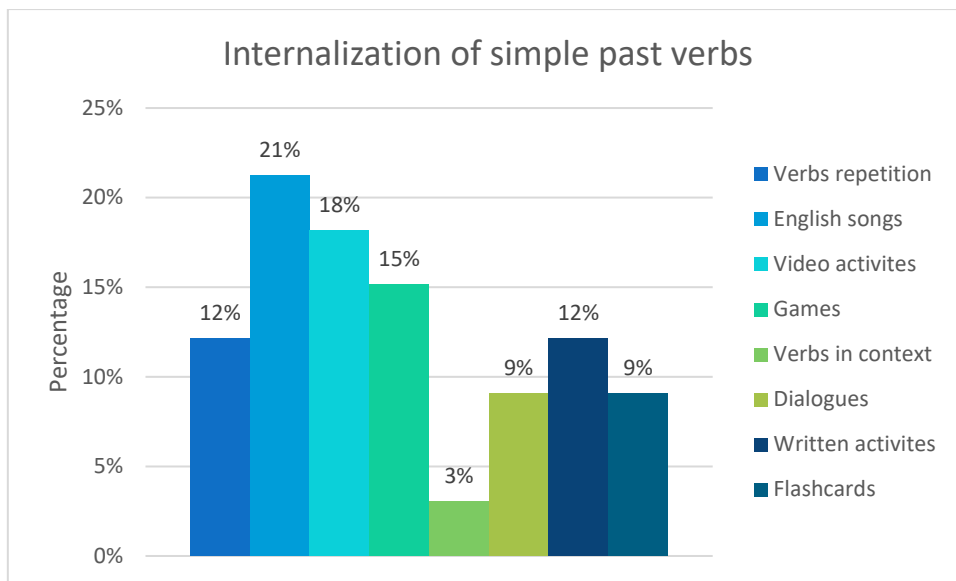
Figure 3. Sections checked in the EFL class.



Note. For further information about students' questionnaire check annexes.

When it comes to learning simple past irregular and regular verbs, pupils may struggle with it. In the following analysis, students describe their teachers' approach towards simple past verbs learning and how teachers have been able to tackle this issue in their classrooms. For example (see Figure 4 below), 21 % of teachers used songs while 18 % used movies and videos from YouTube to have their students practice simple past verbs. Likewise, 15 % of teachers employed games and 12 % utilized repetition to make their students learn these verbs. And some other 12 % used written activities to help their students' progress. It can be stood out that teachers look for the best way to help their students reach a proficiency level by using different strategies. However, in most cases, verbs are taught in isolation which makes it difficult for students to use them if there is no context that is linked with them.

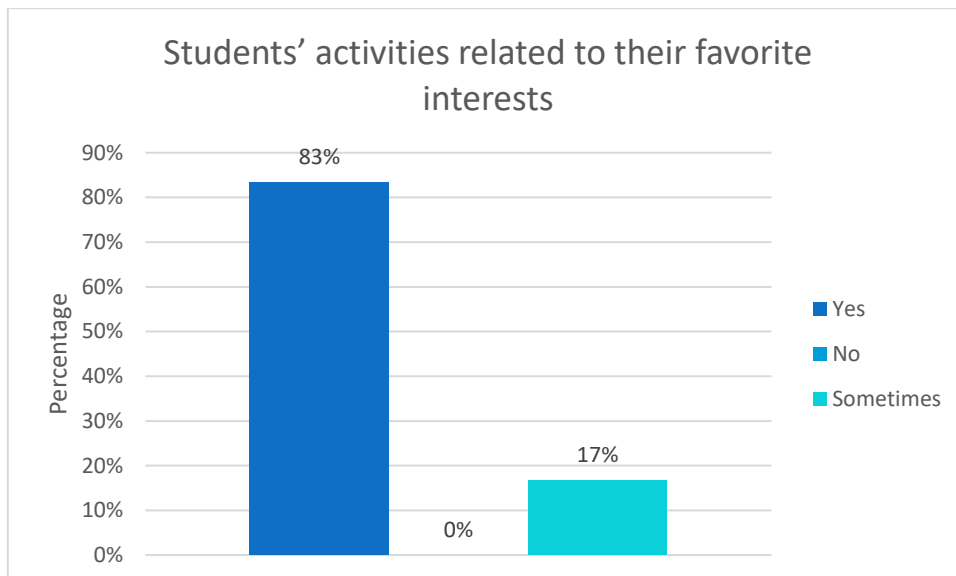
Figure 4. Internalization of simple past verbs.



Note. For further information about students' questionnaire check annexes.

Figure 5 below describes how much students like to work with content that is relevant for them such as their favorite music, artists, tv-series characters, movies, etc. The bar chart shows that 83 % of students like to see these contents in their activities while 17 % of them say sometimes. Therefore, this analysis demonstrates that most of the learners prefer to have interesting content that grasps their attention for their classes. Learners' interest in the subject would increase if teachers brought to the class what students like.

Figure 5. Students' activities related to their favorite interests such as TV programs, series, songs, etc.

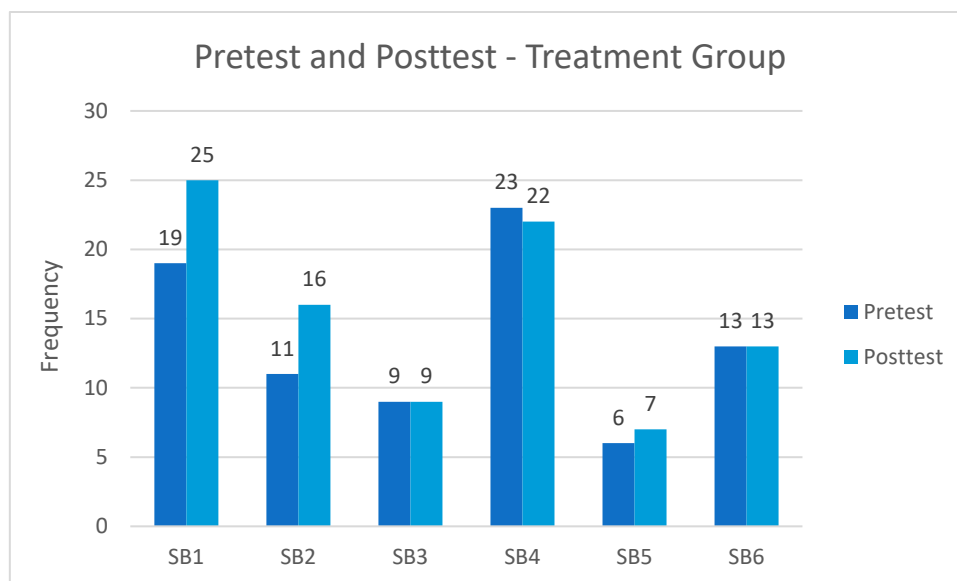


Note. For further information about students' questionnaire check annexes.

### Pretest and Posttest

Figure 6 below indicates students' progress through the experimentation process. For example, the first meaningful change that is observed is that SB1 had an increase of 6 points in the posttest. Likewise, SB2 had an increase of 5 points while SB5 had an increase of just one point. However, the figure also outlines that two students SB3 and SB6 kept their scores without any alteration. Also, there was a case in which a student, SB4 decreased the score from 23 to 22. This suggests that activities coated with enough compelling and engaging input can benefit learners' language structure processing.

Figure 6. Pretest and posttest scores from students who belonged to the treatment group.



Note. For further information check annexes.

After a careful examination, it was revealed that participants from the treatment group indicated an increase in their scores, in L2 simple past structures performance. The learners improved from pretest ( $M=13.5$ ,  $SD=5.82$ ) to posttest ( $M=15.3$ ,  $SD=6.50$ ), as can be observed below in Table 6.

Table 6. Control group and treatment group.

| Students    | Pre-test control group | Post-test control group | Students               | Pre-test treatment group  | Post-test treatment group |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| SA1         | 17                     | 19                      | SB1                    | 19                        | 25                        |
| SA2         | 22                     | 22                      | SB2                    | 11                        | 16                        |
| SA3         | 16                     | 18                      | SB3                    | 9                         | 9                         |
| SA4         | 10                     | 12                      | SB4                    | 23                        | 22                        |
| SA5         | 16                     | 16                      | SB5                    | 6                         | 7                         |
| SA6         | 6                      | 1                       | SB6                    | 13                        | 13                        |
| <b>Mean</b> | 14.5                   | 14.7                    | <b>Mean</b>            | 13.5                      | 15.3                      |
|             |                        |                         | <b>Treatment group</b> | <b>Standard Deviation</b> | <b>Standard Deviation</b> |
|             |                        |                         |                        | 5.82                      | 6.50                      |

Note. For further information about students' questionnaire check annexes.

## 8. Discussion

The study investigated the types of structured input activities that are most likely to help in the learning process of sentence patterns in the past tense in A1-level students. By using structured input activities, students not only had fun but also internalized the grammar. Furthermore, by designing our own activities, of course, having in mind students' interests, teachers may well encourage them to take part in the teaching-learning process willingly.

### **Role of the structured input activities in simple past learning**

These tasks have shown a positive effect on the treatment group since students were able to recognize and understand simple past structures i.e., affirmative, and positive sentences as well as questions. Besides, their score slightly improved. Even though these activities were enriched with meaningful input, that is, "Language that is meaning bearing" (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 16) students were not able to produce well-written tasks applying the correct inflections -ed/-d. Moreover, when students were asked to give a brief oral description of what they did on their last vacations, they did not emphasize the pronunciation of simple past verbs properly. Although, this can be explained, according to Krashen (1981) teaching speaking should not be done at an early stage in the class. The output will be produced after students have "built up enough comprehensible input (i+1)". This means (i) the input or language that the student receives while (1) is the level of complexity in the language being provided (Krashen, 1981, p. 100).

According to Marsden & Chen's (2011) research, they explain that "affective activities do not have any impact on learning -ed"; this would explain why students from the treatment group continued having slight errors when writing short paragraphs using the target grammar. As an additional point, structured input activities deal with two sets of activities a) referential activities and b) affective activities. In the latter activities, students are expected to process sentences meaning without dealing with stress from getting wrong answers. During the study with the treatment group, affective activities seemed to be appealing to learners since most of them participated. All the answers that students chose from the activities were correct, the only thing that they needed to know was the sentences' meanings to know what they were selecting.

On the other hand, Marsden & Chen (2011) state that simple exposure to the tasks did not accomplish pivotal results since longer exposure does not ascertain students' language development. In a similar fashion, researcher DeKeyser (1995) states that if there is little to no exposure to form without any focus on meaning and use, it is very unlikely this turns into meaningful learning. Thereby, the language, for the treatment group, needed to be contextualized and appealing to them so they could work with the input being provided.

### **Types of input activity**

In their book, Lee & VanPatten (2003) mention 5 types of structured input activities to provide comprehensible and compelling input. For example, binary options, matching, supplying information, selecting alternatives, surveys, and ordering and ranking. Learners took a shine on "binary options" activities where they were asked to answer yes or no, true or false, or raise their hands if they agreed with the sentence. Moreover, with these types of activities, learners were asked to react using the reactions option from Zoom<sup>2</sup>. Another activity that encouraged students' participation was "selecting alternatives" which was done according to their criteria. Ranking and ordering was another activity that allowed

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<sup>2</sup> EFL class was taught on zoom. Students used their reaction options from the program to interact.

students to work with form and meaning. As a final point, these activities did not represent an obstacle to pupils.

All tasks for the study group were focused on VanPatten's (2010) guidelines such as keep meaning in focus, have learners work with the input, and concentrate on one thing at a time. Moreover, simple past structures were bolded to make them more salient for students. In consonance with Brown (2007) saliency is an important factor in language acquisition, that is, the more times students encounter the same structures in a sentence, the more they remember it. This might be the case why students were able to remember the structure for affirmative sentences, although a few students keep using past form verbs in questions and negative sentences.

### **How should grammar be taught? Implicit vs explicit grammar teaching.**

When it comes to acquiring a language, students work on activities in the language. This means students are not mere passive actors. Instead, they are processing the input and figuring out their tasks' meaning and use while performing a task. Input activities do not center on explicit teaching, that is, the teaching of grammar rules. This strategy takes a deductive approach where language learners infer rules (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). This investigation employed meaning-bearing activities so as for students to discover grammar implicitly. The treatment group needed more time to process and internalize the form of each new grammar rule. For instance, first, they checked simple past affirmative sentences while using time expressions. Then students were given tasks with simple past regular verbs where -ed/-d endings were the main target. In the same way, several activities were used to show students -ed/-d spelling rules. After that, they were shown negative sentences with regular and irregular verbs. Finally, they were given questions with both types of verbs to work on.

Not all students, from the treatment group, were able to infer the rules implicitly, they needed an extra push to make connections among form, meaning, and use. In short words, a little bit of teachers' explanation could do the trick since students' language rule awareness will allow them to verbalize intricate rules that are present in the language (Brown, 2007, p. 303). Nonetheless, this does not mean that the EFL classroom should be governed by form. As mentioned by Larsen-Freeman (2003) "teaching [grammar] is ill-served if students are simply given rules". There should be more than just rules and form teaching. According to Spada & Lightbown (1993) and Lightbown (1998), students' attention, when teaching form, should be directed to contextualized situations where they can grasp how to use the language in a real communicative situation. At the same time, another point to consider is that "Form" should be taught intertwined with a meaning-based or communicative approach to foster language use and internalization (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 251).

## **9. Limitations and future directions**

It is important to point out that 12 students were recruited for this study. All of them were chosen randomly from two heterogeneous classes. So, the level of students is unlikely to be the same and that is a fact that was observed when students took the pretest. Even though the control and treatment groups had a small heterogeneous population, the research suggested progress in the treatment group language performance. Time constraint must have played an important role in the application of the study since it lasted for 2 weeks. Students were taught each day for 20 to 25 minutes depending on time availability. Nonetheless, DeKeyser (1995) and Marsden (2006) have found in their studies that longer interventions on activities that provide explicit information do not necessarily impact learning.

Another constraint is the amount of input provided in the activities designed since language needs to be salient and comprehensible for students to make connections with meaning and form. This is in the line with Krashen & Mason's (2020) research which explains that "language acquisition is a gradual process" (p. 1). This means that input should be abundant so that students can dive into new forms. Krashen (1981) suggests that input should be challenging enough. And it should not be difficult or too easy to work with. This could mean an intricate situation since the students who participated were part of a heterogeneous English level; some activities must have been fairly easy for them while for the rest of the students, tasks must have been difficult. On top of that, students were taught online due to the pandemic. During the online class, some students had to have their cameras off owing to their poor internet connection. Supervision and checking on students' English performance was more complex due to this new modality of teaching.

In addition, future studies could investigate structured input activities that foster language internalization, namely, meaning and form connections in heterogeneous classes. Moreover, future researchers could focus on how long these activities should be employed in class. Tasks like these may become repetitive for students. Besides, the development of structured input activities might be time-consuming.

## 10. Conclusion

This study found that structured input activities such as ordering and ranking, selecting alternatives, and binary options are appealing to students. This is mainly because students are not required to work on activities **about** the language. Instead, they focus on activities **in** the language. Moreover, findings suggest that teachers' activities tend to be more encouraging because tasks are targeted to students' interests, thereby activities provide a great deal of meaningful and compelling input. Although, these activities imply teachers' time and expertise. Nonetheless, findings confirmed that even when taught English implicitly through these activities students still make mistakes when producing the language. And implicit correction sometimes may not be noticed by all learners. On the other hand, explicit form teaching combined with a meaning-based or communicative approach can be, a few times, an effective source for students to quench their thirst about grammar doubts. Besides, form awareness helps them move on to complex sentences.

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## 12. Annexes

The following links will lead you to the questionnaires and surveys that were used to make this research possible.

### Teachers' questionnaire

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=s09HVFljwUC3Jl1Wp90pdrMTnyOLMf5ImXTiCj7ekY5UNlJaNEJYVkkxLUldWVTc4RkM3WURISDcyVC4u>

### Questionnaire

Hey 😊, you have been chosen to take part in a survey. Using all your expertise, please answer the following questions.

1. When students use Simple Past forms (affirmative - negative sentences, and questions), what have you noticed? Choose all the answers you agree with.

- Students omit auxiliary verbs
- Students don't use verbs in past
- Students add -ed/-d to irregular verbs (goed)
- Students use auxiliary verbs and verbs in past when asking questions
- Other.....

2. Which activities do you use to make your students practice verbs in past? Choose all the answers you agree with.

- dialogues
- conversations
- English songs
- English rhymes
- readings
- verbs in context
- verb list memorization
- Video activities
- drills (written activities)
- games
- Other.....

3. When teaching grammar what do you focus on?

- form (grammar rules - syntax)
- meaning (meaning of words in a sentence - semantics)
- use (specific situations - pragmatics)
- Other.....

4. How often do you create your own English activities to expose students to real-life language?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

5. Should we teach grammar "explicitly" (the teacher explains all the grammar rules) or "implicitly" (students discover the grammar rules by themselves and the teacher emphasizes little in it)? Which option should be the best? Please explain your answer.

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### Students' questionnaire

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=s09HVFljwUC3Jl1Wp90pdrMTnyOLMf5ImXTiCj7ekY5UMklGQkpOUFRKVUE0NEtNQIBKMVBWT044Ri4u>

### Questionario

Objetivo La encuesta tiene como objetivo recopilar información sobre las preferencias de los estudiantes al aprender inglés como lengua extranjera y así poder crear material que incentive su aprendizaje.

### Autorización

Por favor completa la siguiente pregunta para acceder a la encuesta.

1. ¿Tu representante legal ha autorizado tu participación en esta encuesta?
  - Si
  - No

### Questionario

Querido estudiante, con toda honestidad elige las respuestas con las que estés mayormente de acuerdo.

2. ¿Cuál de estas secciones revisas más en clases de inglés? Por favor, selecciona al menos dos respuestas.

Gramática

Vocabulario

Speaking (Expresión oral)

Listening (Comprensión auditiva)

Reading (Comprensión lectora)

Writing (Expresión escrita)

3. ¿En la clase de inglés, como aprendiste/aprendes los verbos en pasado? Por favor, selecciona al menos dos respuestas.

- Repetición de los verbos
- Canciones en inglés
- Actividades de videos (YouTube, películas, Tv...)
- Juegos
- Usar los verbos en contexto
- Diálogos.
- Actividades escritas
- Flashcards

4. ¿Me siento seguro al usar la gramática del inglés para expresar mis ideas ya sea en forma escrita o hablada?

- Totalmente en desacuerdo
- En desacuerdo
- Neutral
- De acuerdo
- Totalmente de acuerdo

5. ¿Te gustan que las actividades de la materia de inglés estén relacionadas con tus series favoritas de TV, películas, a la música que escuchas?

- Si
- No
- A veces

### Pretest

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=s09HVFljwUC3Jl1Wp90pdrMTnyOLMf5ImXTiCj7ekY5UMUJWOFSTzdaNkpWNUdDT0pBVUE1TU50Ni4u>

### Posttest

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=s09HVFljwUC3Jl1Wp90pdrMTnyOLMf5ImXTiCj7ekY5UMUJWOFSTzdaNkpWNUdDT0pBVUE1TU50Ni4u>

The image displays two screenshots of an online English grammar practice interface. The left screenshot, titled "Simple Past Practice", shows the following content:

- Section: **Simple Past Practice**
- Instruction: **Make simple past sentences**  
Organize the words and write down sentences in the past tense.
- Exercise 2: "Michael / the bus / miss" [ ? ]  
Enter your answer
- Exercise 3: "Fernando / his room / tidy"  
Enter your answer
- Exercise 4: "Laura / a friend / phone"  
Enter your answer

The right screenshot shows a continuation of the practice with the following content:

- Exercise 5: "not / William / his friend / see"  
Enter your answer
- Exercise 6: "not / Janine / the number / dial" [ ? ]  
Enter your answer
- Navigation: **Back** (grey) and **Next** (green) buttons.
- Progress: **Page 2 of 6**
- Footer: **Never give out your password. Report abuse**

Simple Past Practice

Make simple past sentences using "Be" in the past.  
Organize the words and write down sentences in the past tense.

7  
"Be not / Mayra / at home yesterday morning"

Enter your answer

8  
"Be not / Sebastian and Julian / at school on Friday"

Enter your answer

9  
"Be / Alexander and Kathy/ on vacations last weekend"

Simple Past Practice

Past simple questions "Be" / "Did"

Choose the correct question. Just one is right.

12  
Which question is correct?

Did you did your homework yesterday?  
 Did you do your homework yesterday?  
 Do you do your homework yesterday?

13  
Which question is correct?

Did Joshua went to school today?  
 Did Joshua goes to school today?  
 Did Joshua go to school today?

Simple Past Practice

Past simple questions "Be" / "Did"

Choose the correct question. Just one is right.

12  
Which question is correct?

Did you did your homework yesterday?  
 Did you do your homework yesterday?  
 Do you do your homework yesterday?

13  
Which question is correct?

Did Joshua went to school today?  
 Did Joshua goes to school today?  
 Did Joshua go to school today?

Simple Past Practice

Writing

Answer the following questions using your ideas

17  
What did you do last weekend?

Enter your answer

18  
What did you have for dinner last night?

Enter your answer

Simple Past Practice

Reading

Read the following extract. Then choose the correct answer

Yesterday Debbie had a job interview. She went downtown to the company. The interview was for an accounting job. Debbie graduated university 3 months ago.

Her interview was at 10:00 am. She woke up at 7:00 am and left her house before 8:00 am. She waited for the bus, but it was late. She was very worried because she did not want to be late for the interview. She tried to phone the company to warn them, but her phone battery was dead.

When the bus arrived, it was almost 9:00 am. Then the bus was slow because there were many other cars. The bus finally arrived at Debbie's stop at 9:45 am.

Debbie ran from the bus stop to the office building. When she entered, she saw a sign that said the company was on the 24th floor. The elevator ride took almost 5 minutes because many people stopped at different floors.

When Debbie arrived at reception, it was 9:58. She was in time!  
"I am here to see Mrs. Lewis" said Debbie.  
The receptionist checked her book and replied:  
"She is not here today. What is your name please?"  
"My name is Debbie Gregson."  
"Sorry Debbie, but your appointment is tomorrow."  
Debbie checked her agenda. It was true. She was there on the wrong day!

22  
What time did Debbie wake up?

Enter your answer

23  
Did Debbie's phone have enough battery?

Enter your answer

24  
When did the bus arrive at the stop?

Enter your answer

25  
Was Debbie late? (Yes/No)

Enter your answer

**Activities applied in class.**

Thumbs up 👍 if you did this.

- I **drank** coffee **yesterday**.
- I **wrote** a message to my friend on WhatsApp **last night**.
- I **had** a great day **yesterday**.
- I **did** my homework **yesterday**.
- I **went** out with my friends **yesterday**.
- I **had** lunch alone **yesterday**.
- I **ran** in the park **last week**.
- I **went** to a park **last week**.

Write down a 50-paragraph about what you did this week.

• Click to add text

Read the sentences. Decide if it is past or present.

- I **went** to see Samantha **yesterday**.
- Mary **buys** lunch at a restaurant.
- Luka **is** a smart man.
- Sharon **went** to a party **last week**.
- I **bought** a beautiful house **yesterday**.
- She **ate** a hamburger with cheese.

**SIMPLE PAST (IRREGULAR)**



Think about your teacher's typical weekend and decide if each of the sentences are **TRUE** or **FALSE** about his **last weekend**.

**Last weekend...**

1. He **rode** a horse.
2. He **went out** with his girlfriend to the Armenia park.
3. He **taught** English to his students.
4. He **made** a delicious meal for his family.
5. He **slept** until 10:am.
6. He **read** a passage from his favorite book.
7. He **sang** some songs at home.

**SIMPLE PAST (REGULAR)**

In what order did you do the following actions? Put them in order from 1-5

1. I **washed** my face with water and soap.  Wash - Washed
2. I **prepared** my own breakfast.
3. I **watched** some TV in the morning
4. I **connected** on zoom for my first class.
5. I **brushed** my teeth.  Brush - Brushed

**READ AND CHOOSE THE ANSWER THAT YOU AGREE THE MOST WITH.**

1. I **didn't**
- a. **do** exercise yesterday.
  - b. **do** my homework yesterday.
  - c. **do** the dishes yesterday.

**READ AND CHOOSE THE ANSWER THAT YOU AGREE THE MOST WITH.**

1. I **didn't**
- a. **eat** spaghetti yesterday
  - b. **eat** pizza last night
  - c. **eat** sushi yesterday

**LOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO DID THESE ACTIONS**

| Questions  | Yes, I did. | No, I didn't |
|--|-------------|--------------|
| Did you <b>go</b> to school yesterday?             |             |              |
| Did you <b>listen</b> to music last week           |             |              |
| Did you <b>have</b> a great day yesterday          |             |              |
| Did you <b>do</b> something interesting last week? |             |              |
| Did you <b>do</b> exercise last week?              |             |              |

**Approval to carry out the study.****ACADEMIA MILITAR DEL VALLE**

Oficio No -50-R- AMV  
Conocoto, DM. 12 de enero 2021

Lic.  
Milica Dragosavljevich  
**COORDINADORA**  
**MAESTRÍA EN PEDAGOGÍA DEL INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA**  
**PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DEL ECUADOR**  
Presente.

Con un atento y cordial saludo deseándole el mejor de los éxitos en sus importantes funciones.

Por medio del presente me permito informar que se autoriza al Lic. Rodríguez Mora Jefferson Fabián con CI: 1725124273 a realizar la parte experimental del trabajo de titulación titulado "**Structured Input Activities to Teach Sentence Patterns in the Past to A1 Level Students**", en la Unidad Educativa Particular Bilingüe "Academia Militar del Valle".

Atentamente,

Dr. Rubén León Fuentes MSc.  
RECTOR



RLF/LH.

Educación con Disciplina