

STUDENTS' COMPETENCE IN TRANSFORMING ACTIVE VOICE TO PASSIVE VOICE AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM OF KHAIRUN UNIVERSITY

Parwati Jaya^{1*}, Ade Ismail², & Yetty³, Firmansyah^{4*}

^{1,2,3,4} English Education Study Program, Khairun University, Indonesia

*e-mail: Yettyetty@unkhair.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to investigate students' competence in transforming active sentences into passive sentences and to identify the common errors frequently made in the process. A mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, was employed in this research. The data were collected through a written test administered to 28 fourth-semester students from Class B of the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University. The results revealed that the students' average score was 51.25, which falls into the "poor" category. Furthermore, the analysis indicated several types of common errors made by students when transforming active sentences into passive ones. These include incorrect use of verb forms, tense formation errors, misuse or omission of prepositions such as "by", and mistakes in placing agents or subjects within passive constructions. Among these, tense formation errors emerged as the most dominant problem, suggesting that many students lack a sufficient understanding of tense consistency when converting active sentences into passive forms. These highlight that students still lack a comprehensive understanding of the grammatical rules and syntactic structure involved in the process of transforming active sentences into passive ones. Therefore, mastery of passive transformation requires not only grammatical accuracy but also a deeper understanding of sentence logic and structure.

Keywords: active sentences, passive sentences, grammatical transformation

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of the essential components in mastering a language, especially English as a foreign language. It provides the rules that govern how words are arranged to create meaningful sentences. According to Batubara & Mahardika (2020), grammar is considered the main component of meaning because, without proper grammatical structure, the information, messages, ideas, or thoughts conveyed from one person to another may fail to reflect the intended meaning. Therefore, developing and using correct grammar enables individuals to understand how a language functions and is effectively used in communication.

Among the various grammatical structures, *voice*—specifically the distinction between active and passive voice—plays a crucial role in both written and spoken communication. The ability to transform sentences from active to passive voice is not merely a mechanical skill but also reflects a learner's grammatical awareness, syntactic understanding, and communicative competence. Ahmed's (2022) stated structural or syntactic awareness of students plays an important role in the passivization process (transforming active sentences into passive ones).

In English, the active and passive voices serve different communicative purposes. The active voice highlights the *doer* of an action, whereas the passive voice emphasizes the *receiver* of the action. For example, the sentence "*The teacher explains the lesson*" focuses on the subject (*the teacher*), while "*The lesson is explained by the teacher*" shifts the focus to the object (*the lesson*). The correct transformation between these two structures requires students to understand grammatical aspects such as verb tenses, auxiliary verbs (*be, been, being*), and subject-object relationships. Mastery of such transformations is not only an indicator of grammatical competence but also a reflection of the learners' ability to manipulate sentence structures for different communicative purposes.

Despite being a basic grammatical topic taught early in English learning, many EFL learners still face significant challenges in transforming active sentences into passive ones. Previous studies have reported that students often make systematic errors, particularly in maintaining tense consistency, selecting appropriate auxiliary verbs, and constructing correct past participles. According to Muhamad & Bambang (2017), in constructing passive sentences, students often lack a complete understanding of the grammatical rules governing the passive voice. As a result, they tend to make recurring errors, particularly in the use of verb tenses, auxiliary verbs, and past participle forms. Such errors indicate insufficient mastery of grammatical patterns and therefore need to be minimized through consistent practice and explicit instruction. Furthermore, the difficulties are not only linguistic but also cognitive, as they require the learner to mentally reconstruct the sentence pattern and reorganize its syntactic elements.

In the context of English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University, grammar is a core subject designed to build students' competence as future English teachers. Therefore, mastering sentence transformation, including the use of passive voice, is essential. However, informal observations and preliminary findings indicate that many students still struggle to apply the correct transformation rules when converting active sentences into passive ones. These difficulties suggest that students' grammatical awareness remains insufficient, which may influence their overall language proficiency and teaching readiness in the future.

The inability to accurately transform active sentences into passive ones has broader pedagogical implications. As future educators, English Language Education students are expected to explain grammatical concepts clearly and apply them correctly in communication and instruction. When they lack mastery of such fundamental structures, it may affect their confidence and effectiveness as teachers. Therefore, investigating students' competence in this area is not only relevant for assessing their grammatical skills but also vital for improving curriculum design and teaching strategies in grammar courses.

Based on this rationale, the present study aims to examine students' competence in transforming active voice to passive voice at the English Language Education Study Program of Khairun University. It also seeks to identify the types of errors most frequently made by students in this process. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights into students' grammatical understanding and to serve as a reference for lecturers to develop more effective grammar teaching techniques. By understanding the specific areas where students face difficulties, educators can adopt targeted instructional approaches to enhance learners' grammatical competence and overall language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Grammar

Grammar is defined as the set of structural rules that govern the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in a language (Crystal, 2004). It provides a framework that enables individuals to organize words effectively to convey meaning. As stated by Ur (2012), —grammar can be seen as a set of rules which allow us to produce an unlimited number of correct sentences in a language|. These rules are crucial for ensuring that communication is not only correct but also clear and precise.

In teaching and learning English, effective grammar teaching involves not just the presentation of rules but also the practice and application of these rules in real contexts. By focusing on the structure of language in use, teachers can help students internalize grammatical forms, making them more likely to use these forms accurately and appropriately. Thornbury (2017) emphasizes that effective grammar teaching does not only teach grammatical rules theoretically, but also involves practicing and applying these rules in real contexts.

Thornbury argues that only by focusing on how language structures are used in everyday life situations can teachers help students to internalize these grammatical forms. This process makes students more able to use grammar appropriately and in the context in which it is needed.

Grammar is not just a collection of rules that must be learned, but also the basis for the development of language skills that enable individuals to convey meaning clearly and precisely. The importance of grammar to ensure accurate communication, while the crucial role of grammar in second language acquisition. Moreover, effective grammar teaching involves not only understanding the rules in theory, but also the practical application of those rules in real-life contexts. Thus, comprehensive grammar learning which involves theory and practice will help students not only to understand but also to use language more appropriately, according to the communication situation at hand. Overall, effective grammar learning is the foundation that supports academic and professional success, as well as good communication skills in a variety of contexts.

2. Active and Passive Voice

As stated by Huddleston & Pullum (2002), active voice is a grammatical construction in which the subject of the sentence performs the action expressed by the verb. In active voice, the subject is the agent responsible for carrying out the action. This structure is typically used in everyday language because it is more direct and easier for the reader to understand. Sentences in active voice tend to be clearer and more dynamic, making it easier to identify who is performing the action. For example, in the sentence "The teacher explains the lesson," the subject ("the teacher") is performing the action ("explains") on the object ("the lesson"). Active voice also generally leads to more concise and straightforward writing, which is why it is often preferred in both spoken and written forms, especially in contexts that require clarity, such as instructional or narrative writing (Quirk et al., 1985). Additionally, the active voice helps avoid ambiguity, making it clear who or what is responsible for the action, which can enhance the overall effectiveness of communication.

Passive voice, in contrast to active voice, is a grammatical construction in which the subject of the sentence is the receiver of the action, rather than the doer. The passive voice shifts the focus from the agent (the one performing the action) to the recipient or the action itself (Swan, 2005). In a sentence written in passive voice, the object of the active sentence becomes the subject. The agent, or the doer of the action, is either omitted (when it is unknown or irrelevant) or introduced by the preposition "by". This construction is often used when the action or the receiver of the action is more important than the agent, or when the agent is unknown or unnecessary to mention. For example, in the active sentence "The teacher explains the lesson", the subject ("the teacher") is performing the action ("explains"). However, when rewritten in the passive voice, it becomes "The lesson is explained by the teacher." Here, "the lesson" is the subject, and the action is presented as something that happens to it, rather than something the teacher does. Additionally, passive voice is commonly used in formal writing, such as scientific or academic texts, where the focus is often on the process or outcome, rather than on who is performing the action (Biber et al., 1999). The flexibility of passive voice allows for more emphasis on what is being done, rather than who is doing it, making it useful in situations where the agent is either unknown, unimportant, or irrelevant.

Both active and passive voice play important roles in English grammar, with each being used according to context and the purpose of communication. Active voice is clearer and more direct, making it suitable for everyday and professional communication. On the other hand, passive voice is more appropriate in formal writing when the main focus is on the action or its recipient, rather than the doer. A good understanding of how to use both sentence structures is crucial for students, especially when applying accurate transformations between them in their academic studies.

3. Common Mistake in Constructing Passive Voice

Merriam (2015) explains that the use of passive sentences in English is often misused, especially by beginners who do not understand the correct context and structure. She also identifies common mistakes in forming passive sentences, such as incorrect use of auxiliary verbs or inappropriate placement of the agent (doer of the action). To correct these mistakes, she recommends that learners focus their attention on the changes that occur in the subject, verb, and object of the sentence, and ensure that the passive sentence is in accordance with existing grammatical rules.

According to Azar (2003), one of the common mistakes is using verbs that are unacceptable in the passive structure. For example, verbs that cannot be formed into the passive such as "belong" or "seem" are often misunderstood as verbs that can be passive. In passive sentences, only verbs that have a direct object can be used, such as "write" becomes "is written" (not is belonged).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed method, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Creswell & Creswell (2014), the mixed methods approach is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches used to gain a deeper understanding of a social or human issue. This method integrates both numerical and non-numerical data to describe and explain phenomena in a more holistic manner. The data were collected through test. The test consisted 30 questions. In this research, including 20 multiple choice question and 10 essay questions. The subjects were 28 fourth semester students of class B of the English Language Education Study Program, Khairun University. The researcher analyzed the test to find the significant competence of students. Then, the students scores were classified. Then, based on the result to analysis, the researcher drawn the conclusion

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this part, the findings and discussion of the research are presented. The research findings showed the data obtained from the results to show the competence of fourth semester students of the English Language Education Study Program in transforming active sentence into passive sentences. The discussion contains a description and interpretation of the research results.

Finding

This section described students' competence in transforming active sentences to passive sentences. In this section, the results obtained from the analysis of data that has been collected through test. This test is designed to measure students' competence in transforming active voice to passive voice. The researcher analyzed active sentences to passive sentences through students' answer to each test item.

From the assessment results, of the 28 respondents, there are three students who got "good" category with scores of 90, 80 and 77. A total of three students got "fairly good" category with scores of 73 and 67. In addition, there are four students who got "fair" with scores of 63 and 60. In addition, there are 12 students who got "poor" category, namely 53, 50, 43, 40, and 37. Finally, there are four students who got scores that fall into the "very poor" category, namely 27 and 23. This difference illustrates the variation in students' understanding on the material being tested. It provides a clear picture of the distribution of students' scores. This data can be an important reference for lectures in analyzing students' understanding of the material that has been taught.

Based on the data, it can be seen that of the 28 students who took the test, only one

student received a “very good” classification of (3.57%), three students received a “good” classification (10.71%), three students received a “fairly good” classification (10.71%), four students received a “fair” classification (14.28%). 12 students received a “poor” classification (42.86%) and five students received a “very poor” classification (17.86%). The mean score of the students’ competence in transforming active voice to passive voice is 51,25. Based on classification test criteria, students score above is considered “poor” category. It proved that the level of students’ competence in transforming active voice to passive voice of English Language Education Study Program of Khairun University is “poor”.

Meanwhile, the recapitulation of the types of errors made by students’ in transforming active sentences into passive sentences can be seen in the table.

Table 1. Common Error

No	Types of Error	Frequency
1	Errors in tenses formation	13
2	Incorrect use of verbs	6
3	Misuse of prepositions or omission of “by”	4
4	Errors in placing agents or subject in passive sentences	5
Total		28

Based on the table above, most errors occur at errors in tenses formation as many as 13 students, errors at incorrect use of verbs as many as six students, errors at misuse of prepositions or omission of by as many as four students’ and then, errors in placing agents or subject in passive sentences as many as five students. Therefore, it can be concluded that the most dominant difficulty faced by the students in transforming active sentences into passive ones lies in the incorrect formation of tenses, indicating that they still struggle to apply tense consistency accurately when constructing passive sentences.

Discussion

Based on data analysis, some English Education students in semester 4 class B have competence in transforming active sentences to passive sentences through the test. It can be seen that the highest score obtained was 90 and 80 which was only achieved by three students. On the other hand, the lowest score obtained was 23 which is only achieved by two students. It shows that students understand the use of active sentences to passive sentences in relevant contexts.

In changing active sentences into passive sentences, students often experience difficulties due to a lack of understanding of basic grammatical structures. This problem does not only revolve around verb forms and tenses, but also includes the selection of past participle forms, the use of prepositions such as “by”, and the correct placement of agents. Common errors such as the use of errors in tenses formation, incorrect use of verbs, misuse of prepositions or omission of “by” and errors in placing agents or subject in passive sentence indicate that their understanding of grammatical transformation is still low. Batubara and Mahardika (2020) stated that students had difficulty in using *the auxiliary verb be, verb 3*, and difficulty in determining the subject in passive sentences.

The theory of Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983) and Quirk et al. (1985) also emphasized that tense inconsistencies and the omission of the preposition “by” are common errors in passive constructions. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of passive sentence structure is very important, and educators need to provide sufficient practice and clear examples to help students internalize the language structures better.

Furthermore, based on the data, the most dominant mistake experienced by students in

changing active sentences into passive sentences is the error in forming tenses. This error usually occurs because ignorance of the passive sentence structure for each tense for example, in the present perfect tense and present continuous tense, ignoring changes in verb forms, students often use the third verb form (V3) incorrectly in passive sentences. For example, they continue to use V1 or V2 because they do not understand the role of V3 in the passive structure, focusing on the new subject without adjusting the verb, error in choosing the appropriate form of "to be" tenses not adjusting the structure of more complex tenses (present perfect tense and present continuous tense and mixing active and passive sentence structures).

The low competence of students in transforming active sentences into passive ones is caused by various interrelated factors, including linguistic, affective, and pedagogical aspects. Linguistically, students still struggle to understand basic grammatical structures, particularly in the use of tenses, verb forms (verb-3), and auxiliary verbs (to be). Errors such as omitting elements like "been" in the present perfect tense or "being" in the present continuous indicate that students have not yet mastered the systematic pattern of converting active to passive voice. Moreover, the use of the second verb form (V2) instead of the third form (V3), such as using "wrote" instead of "written", highlights their weak mastery of passive verb morphology. Furthermore, Bariroh et al. (2022) emphasize that the transformation from active to passive voice requires a systematic understanding of tense, verb agreement, and sentence structure, which many students have not yet internalized. These findings show that students' linguistic difficulties stem not only from a lack of memorization but from an incomplete grasp of the deeper grammatical systems required to form passive voice correctly.

The findings of this study suggest that enhancing students' competence in transforming active sentences into passive ones requires more than a focus on grammatical accuracy, such as verb forms and tense consistency. Effective improvement demands pedagogical strategies that enable learners to internalize the structure and logic of passive constructions through integrative and contextual learning approaches. Grammar instruction should be connected with practical applications, including contextual sentence transformation activities, guided error correction, and communicative exercises. Furthermore, affective factors like motivation, confidence, and anxiety need to be addressed by creating an engaging and supportive classroom environment. Strengthening teacher training is also essential to ensure that instructional methods align with students' learning needs and promote both theoretical understanding and practical application of the passive voice.

To achieve this goal, collaboration between lecturers and students plays a vital role. Lecturers are encouraged to employ communicative and contextualized teaching methods, presenting passive voice not merely as a grammatical rule but as a functional structure found in authentic contexts such as academic writing, news reports, and everyday conversations. Integrating grammar with other language skills; writing, speaking, and reading, can help students grasp the use of passive voice more holistically. At the same time, students should develop their linguistic awareness by consistently practicing passive structures across different tenses, seeking feedback from lecturers, and utilizing self-learning resources such as grammar references, online tools, and instructional videos. Building self-confidence and motivation will further support their progress, allowing them to overcome difficulties and enhance their overall competence in transforming active sentences into passive forms.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal that students generally demonstrate poor competence in transforming active sentences into passive ones, with an average score of 51.25 categorized as poor. The analysis further indicates that the most frequent errors occur in tense formation, where students fail to adjust the forms of *to be* and the past participle according to the appropriate tense.

Other common mistakes include the incorrect use of verb forms, misuse or omission of the preposition *by*, and errors in placing or identifying the agent within passive constructions. These recurring errors highlight that students still lack a comprehensive understanding of the grammatical rules and syntactic structure involved in the process of transforming active sentences into passive ones. Therefore, mastery of passive transformation requires not only grammatical accuracy but also a deeper understanding of sentence logic and structure. Based on these findings, several pedagogical implications and suggestions can be proposed. First, grammar instruction should be designed to move beyond theoretical explanations by emphasizing contextual and practical applications. Lecturers are encouraged to integrate active–passive transformation activities into communicative tasks such as writing practice, sentence reconstruction, and peer correction exercises. Providing explicit and constructive feedback on students' grammatical errors, especially those related to tense formation and verb usage, will help them recognize and address their weaknesses more effectively.

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