

The problems of the simple present and present progressive tenses faced by EFL learners of Literary Upper Sixth classes of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor (2022-2023).

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Abstract

This paper investigated the problems that learners of Literary Upper Sixth class at Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor face with the use of simple present and present progressive tenses. It specifically aimed at uncovering the specific difficulties encountered by students of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor in simple present and present progressive, which represent the fundamental components of English grammar. The population of this investigation is a sample of 80 learners, i.e., 20 drawn from each of 4 Literary Upper Sixth subdivisions and 4 English teachers. Data collected by means of questionnaires administered both to learners and English instructors revealed learners had poor performance in the use of simple present and present progressive. 85% of learners systematically used simple present where present progressive tense was expected. Learners' poor performance was observable through failure in the formation of interrogative and negative forms and the use of inappropriate endings of third person singular of simple present and the formation of present progressive without 'to'. Therefore, it is recommended to English teachers to employ efficient pedagogical instruction giving learners the indicators of tenses and focusing more on practice.

Keywords: *use, simple present, present progressive, EFL learners, Literary Upper Sixth class.*

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, understanding and mastering grammar is an important part of language proficiency. Among the diverse grammatical components, tenses are viewed as one of the most challenging areas for learners, particularly for nonnative speakers. YULMA Epa, ELVA Utami, YUNEVA Nila Kencana and EKA Nurdiyanti Anwar (2025: 29) state that "In particular, the mastery of the simple present tense and present progressive tense plays a

pivotal role in the foundation of communicative competence". Even though the simple present tense and present progressive tense appear to be conceptually simple, learners often struggle to use them accurately in both written forms and in spoken forms as well (Burhan, 2019).

Baker (2018) observes that without mastery of these basic tenses, learners may struggle with more difficult grammatical structures later in language learning process. The difficulty of the use of the simple present tense and present progressive tense emanates from the fact that these tenses play different functions in the area of communication each. Indeed, the simple present tense is used for the description of habitual actions, general truths, and states, while the present progressive tense is utilized for actions that are taking place right now, i.e., at the moment of speaking or for temporary situations (Baker, 2018). Baker (2018) also observed that the difficulty of mastering tenses by EFL learners, especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, is the confusion of the simple present with the present progressive tense and this is because of differences between the English language and English learners' first languages.

Nowadays, proficiency in the English language has become a significant condition for academic advancement and successful international communication. Within the Chadian educational system, English is taught as a foreign language, playing an important role in the secondary school curriculum, especially for pupils in the literary track. Mastery of the English tense system is crucial for learners to achieve communicative competence. Among tenses, the Simple Present and the Present Progressive represent the foundation of successful communication in English.

Actually, learners at the secondary school level should easily recognize the difference that exists between a habitual action and permanent state for which Simple Present tense is used, and an action taking place at the moment of speech, which appeals for the Present Progressive. Yet, using appropriately these tenses and others represents a big trouble for those learners. For francophone learners, that difficulty is bound to cross-linguistic interference, as in French the simple present tense (*le présent de l'indicatif*) is used to express both habitual and progressive aspects.

In the Chad Republic, the instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) starts in secondary school, i.e., in Form I (6^{ème}), nonetheless, a number of learners keep on struggling with some aspects of English grammar, precisely simple present and present progressive. Previous investigations showed that tense infelicities, namely inappropriate application of the simple present and present progressive tenses, are one of the most common problems encountered by EFL learners (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020). The wrong use of the tenses mentioned here "often results in misunderstandings and communication breakdowns." YULMA Epa et al. (2025: 30).

1. Statement of the problem

In the Chadian educational system, learning English is a difficult task for the learners of English as Foreign Language (EFL), especially those in the Literary Upper Sixth classes. In the Literary Upper Sixth class, which is viewed as an advanced secondary level, learners are supposed to have a satisfactory command of foundational grammatical structures in order to guarantee effective communication, academic success, and readiness for higher education as well. The simple present and present progressive tenses are part of these foundational structures and they are used to correctly express time, habitual actions, and events that are in progress.

Nonetheless, despite many years of English learning, a number of EFL learners at Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor still face problems in making difference between the simple present and present progressive tenses, shaping, and correctly using these aspects of English grammar. Observations made before this investigation reveal that learners often confuse the two tenses, using thus the simple present instead of the present progressive and vice versa.

2. Objectives

This work aims to examine the problems that learners of Literary Upper Sixth class of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor (2022-2023) face with the use of simple present and present progressive tenses. The objectives of this study include:

- To examine whether or not learners of literary Upper Sixth of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor draw the difference between simple present and present progressive in terms of use-context;
- To determine whether Literary Upper Sixth of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor correctly use present progressive tense in terms of forms;
- To determine whether those learners master the conjugation of simple present in terms of form;
- To evaluate the use of negative and interrogative forms of simple present by Literary Upper Sixth of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor.

3. Research questions

The following questions guided this research work:

- Do learners of literary Upper Sixth of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor draw the difference between simple present and present progressive in terms of use-context?
- Do literary Upper Sixth learners of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor correctly use present progressive tense in terms of form?
- Do those learners master the conjugation of simple present in terms of form?
- Do literary Upper Sixth learners of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor appropriately use negative and interrogative forms of simple present?

4. Theoretical approach

The theoretical approach adopted in this paper is Error Analysis (EA), initiated by Corder (1974). This approach identifies the errors committed by learners and it gives a way to describe and classify errors. In addition, it helps a researcher to explain the errors committed by the subjects from whom data are collected. Error Analysis is useful for the evaluation of those errors. Corder (1974) identifies five steps involved in conducting an Error Analysis, i.e., (i) collection of a sample of learner language, (ii) identification of errors, (iii) description of errors, (iv) explanation of errors, and (v) evaluation of errors.

5. Methodology

This section provides information about the setting of the study, the population of the study and the instruments used to collect data.

5.1 Setting of the study

The setting of this study is High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor (Lycée Jacques Moudeïna de Bongor). Bongor is the Headquarters of Mayo-Kebbi EST Province and Mayo-Boneye Department, having 10.280⁰ Latitude in the North and 15.370⁰ Longitude in the East. It is close to Logone River, in the east of Yagoua, a Cameroonian city and it is located 235 kilometers from the capital city of Republic of Chad, i.e. Ndjamenā in the south. In terms of population, Bongor is the ninth city of Chad with 35,296 people (fr.db-city.com). The great part of the population of the city speaks Massa and Fulfulde languages. High School Jacques Moudeina of Bongor was established in October 1942 by the colonial administration in order to fill the remarkable lack of administrative executives of Central Africa. First, it was called Primary Higher School of Bongor, then in 1948 it took the name of Normal High School of Bongor. It is in 1963 that this primary higher will become Normal High School and finally High School Jacques Moudeïna perpetuating the name of its former and intelligent pupil Jacques Moudeina from 1942 to 1945, who became an African physician, equivalent of State-certified nurse nowadays. This teaching institution has trained among other elder people of post-colonial life such the first Cameroonian President Ahmadou Ahidjo, David Dako from the Central African Republic, General Felix Malloum, Kassiré Delwa Koumakoye and his brother Adoum Gabgalia, Ahmed Mangué, Jacques Baroum, Abdoulaye Lamana, barrister Bechir Madet without forgetting Marshall Idriss Deby Itno from Chad. (Tchadhaguina 235). Close to the *Centre de Formation en Culture and Dépôt ONASA* of Bongor, High School Jacques Moudeïna counted 4000 pupils in the academic year 2022-2023.

5.2 Population of the study

The population contacted for the collection of data for the completion of this research work includes the pupils of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor. It is precisely made up of literary Upper Sixth class, which is subdivided into four sections. For easier manipulation of figures, a sample of 20 pupils regardless the gender per class was drawn, which makes a total of 80 participants. In addition to pupils, four experienced and permanent teachers intervening in each of four subdivisions of Literary Upper Sixth class were involved in the collection of data.

5.3 Instruments

To elicit data from the pupils of Literary Upper Sixth class of Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor, a written exercise was composed and assigned to those pupils. It is a series of sentences containing unconjugated verbs. Indeed, this consists in asking pupils to put verbs between parentheses either in the simple present tense or in the present progressive tense. The exercise was done by all pupils of four subdivisions of Literary Upper Sixth class in one hour time. In detail, Literary Upper Sixth 1 (TA1) sat for the test on 27 March, 2023 from 8: 15 to 9:15, Literary Upper Sixth 2 (TA2) did it on 28 March, 2023 from 11: 30 to 12:30, Literary Upper Sixth 3 (TA3) sat for the test on 30 March of the same day from 11:30 to 12:30 and finally, Literary Upper Sixth 4 (TA4) did the exercise 31 March, 2023 from 11: 30 to 12:30. The test was administered after a lesson on simple present versus present progressive tenses had been taught and it was invigilated by the teacher and the researcher. The invigilation was done to avoid collective work in view to getting realistic data, i.e. data that really reflect the degree of knowledge of the learners of Literary Upper Sixth class of High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor had about the simple present and present progressive tenses. TA1 counts 142 pupils, TA2 has 140, TA3 counts 141 and TA4 counts 130 learners. At the end of the test in all the sections of Literary Upper Sixth class, the researcher selected randomly 40 copies per section and corrected them. In other words, in each of those sections, a script was drawn from a series of six copies. This process continued until the 40 copies per class were obtained.

6. Results

Under this section, the data collected from pupils of Literary Upper Sixth classes of High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor were presented and analyzed. It is subdivided into subsections including respectively confusion of the present progressive tense with the simple present tense, the use of verb-ing without 'to be' form, the omission and inappropriate use of the suffix's' at the end of ordinary verbs at the third person of singular in the simple present tense, and the absence of do/does in interrogative and negative sentences with ordinary verbs conjugated in the simple present tense.

6.1 Confusion of the present progressive tense with the simple present tense

Data collected from pupils' scripts revealed that the pupils of Literary Upper Sixth class of High School Jacques Moudeïna make confusion between the present progressive tense and the simple present tense. This is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Confusion between present progressive and simple present

Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage of error
Simple present instead of present progressive	500	71.43%
Present progressive instead of simple present	200	28.57%
Total	700	100%

This table has presented errors related to confusion that English learners made between simple present and present progressive tenses. The frequency of errors was also presented. It has been observed that learners use much more the simple present instead of the present progressive. In fact, 500 occurrences of error, i.e. (71.43%) of confusion concern the usage of simple present in place of present progressive. This type of error implies that learners have not mastered the grammatical rule, which states that the present progressive tense is used for actions that are taking place right now or are in

progress (Dingamnodji Koila, 1988: 12) or as Christopher Williams (2001: 108) states "with the progressive form we are concerned with conveying our experiencing of a temporary sensation that is already in progress at the moment of utterance". As for the use of the progressive tense instead of simple present, it was noticed that this kind of error has occurred 200 times, which represents 28.57% of errors. This confusion was also reduplicated by Zhiri (2017: 405)'s study, which showed that Moroccan students "in many occasions, used the simple present instead of present progressive. This confusion between the two aspects comes as a result of the interference of their L1 or Standard Arabic". Furthermore, the confusion made by the subjects of this study may also be due to the influence of the French language in which, the two aspects of tense, i.e., the simple present and present progressive are neutralized by the simple present (*présent de l'indicatif*). This phenomenon also echoes Zhiri (2014: 293), who argues that just Moroccan university students, just like the great majority of Arab learners of English, have tendency to view Arabic imperfect as synonymous of the English simple present and present progressive in English.

The confusion made by pupils of Literary Upper Sixth classes of High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor can be illustrated by sentences extracted from those pupils' scripts with errors written in bold:

- **Simple present instead of present progressive**
 - a. Could you wait a few minutes? They **have** their lunch.
 - b. She often play the piano in the evening. Listen! She **play** now.
 - c. I should like to know what the children **do**.
 - d. I hope they **do** their work.
 - e. Today she **wear** a yellow and green one.
 - f. Where do you **go**?
- **Present progressive instead of simple present (to be completed)**
 - a. Every day Djim **is eating** egg.
 - b. They **leaving** in this area.
 - c. These people **are gathering** in our center on Saturday.
 - d. We **are having** English class every Friday from 10:30 to 12:30.

- e. Mary and her mother often **are disputing**.
- f. Young people are usually going to seaside.

6.2 The use of verb stem + ing without 'to be' form

Another type of problem encountered by respondents is the use of base verb ended by -ing without any form of auxiliary 'to be'. In other words, the pupils of Literary Upper Sixth classes of High School Jacques Moudeïna added the suffix -ing to verbs, claiming that those verbs are conjugated in the present progressive tense. This phenomenon is illustrated below by sentences sampled from respondents' scripts with errors put in bold:

- a. She and I **complaining** about his behavior.
- b. The guy **using** my phone.
- c. We **washing** children's clothes.
- d. He **cleaning** the schoolyard.
- e. My mother **opening** the window right.
- f. You and I **waiting** for the director.

This type of error is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Inappropriate use of verb base - ing without 'to be' form

Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage of error
0 'to be' form +verb+ ing	700	87.5%
'to be' form + verb + ing	100	12.5%
Total	800	100%

Data from Table 2 clearly indicate that there are 700 (87.5%) occurrences of verbs in present progressive without any form of auxiliary 'to be' while there are 100 (12.5%) sentences in which verbs are correctly conjugated in present progressive. The erroneous omission of 'to be form' by learners is in contradiction to what YOUNES Zhiri (2017: 403) stated: "This aspect is marked by the use of auxiliary *be* in the present + the /ing/ marker attached to the verb as in *he is reading, they are watching TV*". It is also due to the lack of mastery of rules by learners.

6.3 Absence of the suffix 's'

The absence of the suffix 's' at the end of verbs conjugated in the simple present tense at the third person singular was another difficulty of the participants. Indeed, it was observed from scripts that the participants of this study did not add 's' at the end of verbs conjugated in simple present, third person singular. This type of error was not expected from students of Literary Upper Sixth class, as in Chadian ecosystem, this notion of grammar has been taught since Form I. Indeed, from Form I, pupils are instructed that ordinary verbs take 's' or 'es' at the end when conjugated in the simple present tense, third person singular. According to Sidoní López Pérez (2021: 27), this elementary error "may indicate that the learners still have a limited linguistic knowledge of the target language". Furthermore, this type of error might equally be explained by the use of the simplification process since they gave the impression to "choose simple forms and constructions instead of more complex ones" (Touchie, 1986: 78).

As an illustration, examples below are taken from respondents' scripts.

- a. The supervisor **open** the gate and **allow** pupils to enter.
- b. Helen **smoke** cigarette.
- c. Mr Abdoulay **teach** English in our school.
- d. Everyday he **like** mango and banana.
- e. My best friend **run** quickly.
- f. Our mathematics' teacher always **come** late to school.

6.4 Omission of do/does in interrogative and negative sentences

DIANA Adinda Shafira et al. (2020:304) define omission as "an error caused by the absence of an item that must appear in the form of utterance or sentence". The reading of pupils' scripts of Literary Upper Sixth of High School Jacques Moudeïna revealed that those learners have a lot of difficulties using ordinary verbs in interrogative and negative sentences. DIANA Adinda Shafira et al. (2020: 298) observe that "in constructing the negative and interrogative sentences, most of the students are confused". Indeed, those learners use ordinary verbs in interrogative and negative sentences as if they were auxiliary or modal verbs. Put it in another way, participants did not use 'do' or 'does' as stated

by a grammatical rule about the use of ordinary verbs conjugated in simple present and put in interrogative and negative forms. These errors were not expected in Upper Sixth Class as "often, the simple present tense is the first tense taught when students begin to learn about tense."(DIANA Adinda Shafira et al. (2020: 298).

Here is a sample of sentences containing students' errors.

- **Interrogative sentences**

- Speak** you English like Americans?
- Close** they?
- Prefer** they coffee instead of tea?
- Where your father **work**?
- Teach** she you in English

6.5 Data collected from teachers of Literary Upper Sixth classes

This section deals with teachers' opinion on learners' usage of the simple present and present progressive

Use simple present and present progressive

The information displayed under this heading is about the confusion that students from Literary Upper Sixth class of High School Jacques Moudeïna did concerning the use of the simple present and present progressive tenses. This information is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Confusion of simple present with present progressive tenses

Questions	Teachers' response	Teachers' number	Percentage
Do your students use simple present instead of present progressive?	Yes	4	100%
	No	0	0%
Total		4	100%
Do your students use present progressive instead of simple present?	Yes	4	100%
	No		0%
Total		4	100%

A glance at Table 3 tells that all English teachers of Literary Upper Sixth classes of High School Jacques Moudeïna (100%) acknowledged their students use the simple present tense

instead of present progressive. Likewise, 100% of those participants use the present progressive tense where simple present was expected. This wrong usage of the simple present and present progressive tenses might mean those students did receive instruction about the conditions in which those tenses should be used, which in turn raises the issue of pedagogical instruction. This confusion of tenses may be explained, as Setyawati (2010) cited in DIANA Adinda Shafira et al. (2020 p. 299 ...said it, by "incorrect and imperfect language teaching". Another explanation for the inappropriate use of simple present instead of present progressive tense might also be the influence of French, where the former is used both for habitual actions or permanent state and those that are happening at the moment of speaking.

6.6 Omission of the 'to be' form in present progressive

This section provides information concerning the omission of the form of auxiliary 'to be' in the present progressive tense. The data are shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: omission of 'to be' in progressive tense

Questions	Teachers' response	Teachers' number	Percentage
Do students use the auxiliary 'to be' in present progressive?	Yes	1	25%
	No	3	75%
Total			100%
Do they correctly use the forms of 'to be' in present progressive?	Yes	1	25%
	No	3	75%
Total		4	100%

Data from Table 4 revealed that 1 teacher (25%) affirmed pupils used the auxiliary 'to be' when a verb is to be conjugated in present progressive tense while three teachers out of four, i.e., the great majority of them (75%) stated that students do not use the various forms of 'to be' when they have to put a verb in present progressive. This type of error was also observed by HAWAZEN Owaidah (2024: 1754) who noticed that in "progressive tense, the students did not add the helping verbs am, is, and are". This could be justified by the lack of mastery of

the rule regarding the formation of present progressive tense by students.

In other respects, 25% of teacher acknowledged that his students correctly use the form of 'to be' in present continuous. On the other hand, 75% of participants said that their students have difficulty to use the various forms of the auxiliary 'to be' in present progressive. In other words, students use 'are' in the third person singular which is not expectable from Upper sixth class students, especially those from literary track.

6.7 The use of the third person morpheme's' in simple present tense

This section is devoted to teachers' opinion on the use of the free morpheme's' by students and the data are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Teachers' opinion on the use of 's'

Question	Teachers' response	Teachers' number	Percentage
Do learners add 's' at the end of verbs conjugated in simple present at the 3 rd person singular?	Yes	1	25%
	No	3	75%
Total		4	100%
Do your students correctly use verbs in interrogative form?	Yes	0	0
	No	4	100%
Total		4	100%
Do your students correctly use verbs in negative form?	Yes	0	0%
	No	4	100%
Total		4	100%

As evidenced by Table 5, 1 (25%) teachers admitted that learners add 's' at the end of verbs conjugated in simple present at the 3rd person singular while also 75% of teachers are negative opinion. This appeals effective instruction of the third person singular. This error comes from the influence of mother tongue "when the learners omitted the third-person singular "-s" suffix in forming the present simple tense" (Hawazen Owaidah, 2024:1754). That is why ROSELIND Wee, JACQUELINE Sim and KAMARUZAMAN Jusoff (2010:19) argue that "It is important for

language teachers and lecturers to teach the use of the third person singular in the simple present tense”.

100% of teachers affirmed that Literary Upper Sixth class students of High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor do not correctly use the interrogative form of verbs in simple present. Put it in another way, students do obey the rule of interrogative form when an ordinary verb is conjugated in simple present, the rule being *do/does + subject + main verb + ?*.

Similarly, 100% of participants recognized that their students do master the negative form of verbs conjugated in simple present. According to teachers, students put verbs in negative form this way: *subject + verb + not + main verb*, as if they were dealing with an auxiliary or modal verb. One might attribute the cause this error to the lack of sufficient exposure to English. This type of errors, known as mis-formation, was also noticed by Maniar (2017) and Diana Adinda Shafira et. al (2020) who noticed that it the most frequent error committed by EFL learners.

6.8 Over use of the suffix ‘-s’

Under this heading, data related to the use of the suffix ‘s’ at the end of verbs conjugated in simple present third person singular are exhibited and those data are presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Over use of the suffix ‘-s’

Question	Teacher’s response	Teachers’ number	Percentage
Do your students add -es at the end of verbs ending with -ch, o, sh, s, x?	Yes	1	25%
	No	3	75%
Total		4	100%
Do your students add -s at the end of verbs ending with -ch, o, sh, s, and x?	Yes	4	100%
	No	0	0%
Total		4	100%

As it can be observed from Table 6, one teacher (25%) avowed that his students at ‘es’ at the end verbs terminated with *ch, o, sh, s*, and *x* when they are conjugated in simple present-third person singular. On the other hand, three teachers

out of four, representing 75% declared that Literary Upper Sixth students of High School Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor do not affix -s in the final environment of verbs carrying *ch*, *o*, *sh*, *s*, and *x*.

Data from the same table indicate that all teacher participants affirmed that their students put -s at the end of verbs (*ch*, *o*, *sh*, *s*, and *x*) in third person singular when conjugated in the simple present tense. This type of error made by learners can be regarded as overgeneralization. In fact, having in mind that -s should be added at the end of a verb in third person singular when conjugated in simple present, learners systematically affix the free morpheme 's' at the end of a verb no matter the ending sound of that verb in infinitive. This error might be the responsibility of a teacher if he/she simply tells the subject that the -s inflection is used in the verbs after the third person singular. ROSELIND Wee et al. (2010:17).

Conclusion

The general aim of this work is to investigate the specific problems faced by EFL learners in the Literary Upper Sixth class at Lycée Jacques Moudeïna of Bongor concerning the use of the Simple Present and Present Progressive tenses. This paper used the questionnaire as a data-eliciting tool, which was administered to both learners and English teachers of Literary Upper Sixth class. An overall performance of those learners in terms of the use of Simple Present and Present Progressive tenses is proved poor. Students manifested their weakness in the use of those tenses through the confusion, which in turn might be bound to cross- linguistic interference. Given that the quality of a piece of writing is always assessed by the number of errors, many verb-form errors made by learners inevitably contributed without any doubt to the poor quality of writing produced. Learners need to master basic grammatical knowledge in order to communicate fluently and effectively in English, i.e., both in the written and spoken forms (Tan, 2005).

To minimize learners' problems in the use of Simple Present and Present Progressive tenses Furthermore, teachers are advised to focus on form-focused teaching, providing clear explanations, targeted exercises, and corrective feedback in

order to assist learners to make a difference between the two tenses more with efficacy (Setiana, 2023).

Further studies are highly advised on other topics like factors responsible for the misuse of Simple Present and Present Progressive tenses, using data collecting-instruments like observations.

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