Iraqui EFL Students' Achievement In The Present Tense And Present Passive Constructions

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Abstract
The present tense and present passive constructions play a significant role in English sentence structure. They express actions which take place in the present. The two structures are common in English as well as being used extensively in everyday life of English. Besides, they are required by EFL students in constructing their oral or written communicative situations.

Therefore, the present study investigates the achievement(i.e. performance) of Iraqi EFL students in these two structures since most of them may not recognize the construction of present passive sentence particularly in time of change from active to passive as well as they may not recognize the present tense. Thus, a test has been given to thirty two Iraqi EFL students and their responses have been analyzed. Their responses have shown that they have no achievement in recognizing or constructing present passive constructions but they have an achievement in the present tense. However, the researcher has explained the reasons behind their weakness in present passive constructions and has suggested some different suggestions which are hoped to be useful for both teachers and students of English.
1. Introduction

The present tense and present passive constructions are two grammatical devices available in English. They play a significant role in constructing English sentences. The present tense is the grammatical tense expressing actions take place in the present (Richards & et al, 1992:287,402).

Concerning passive constructions, Crystal(2003:339) states that the term 'voice' is used in grammar to indicate if the structure of a sentence is active or passive. In active sentences, the doer of the action appears as the subject of the sentence while in passive voice constructions the patient appears as the subject of the sentence.

In addition, Alexander (1988:243- 4), Bloomberg(2005:31)& Owl(2009:20) state that passive constructions are used when the emphasis is on the person or the thing which is affected by an action. They are used in sentences where the object of the action is more important than the people who perform the action. Besides, Bloomberg and Owl (ibid) reveal that passive constructions make sense when the agent performing the action is obvious, unimportant, or unknown or when a writer wishes to postpone mentioning the agent until the last part of the sentence or to avoid mentioning the agent at all. The passive voice is effective in such circumstances because it highlights the action and what is acted upon rather than the agent performing the action.

Moreover, passive constructions are used to conceal the identity of a person responsible for a mistake. Sometimes a statement in passive is more polite than in active one, e.g.

1- A mistake is made.

In this example, the focus is on the fact that a mistake is made, but do not blame anyone (The American Heritage Book of English Usage, 1996:127 & English Grammar Online, 2009:35).
Crystal (1987:380) clarifies that passive constructions are normally required in scientific texts since the sentences of scientific texts are mostly long and complicated, therefore, writers of such sentences prefer to use passive in their writing without mentioning the agent in their sentences. Moreover, passive constructions are preferred in such writing since they give a sense of impersonality that it helps to establish. In addition, Bloomberg (2005:32) & Owl (2009:21) agree with crystal and they add that while active constructions help to create clear and direct sentences, sometimes writers find that using passive expressions is rhetorically effective in scientific and discoursed English texts where the actor is not really important but the process or the principle being described is of ultimate importance. Passive voice constructions give a tone of detachment and they are employed by all skilled writers of English (see also Ansell, 2009:76).

However, the present tense and present passive constructions are influential and sentimental in a given situation, most writers of English conventionally choose them in scientific fields or writing and in other discourses. They are widely used and required by EFL students in their field of study, thus the present study has tackled the salient types of these two structures and has excluded the case of present perfect continuous passive construction since it is cumbersome, rarely and hardly ever used.
2. **The Present Tense**

2.1 **Present Simple**

According to Alexander (1988:163), the present simple is used in various ways:

A- It is used for stating general truth and facts, e.g.
   2- Summer follows Spring.
   3- Gases expand when heated.

B- It is used for habits and routines, e.g.
   4- John smokes a lot.
   5- I get up at 7.

C- It is used for things that are true and that normally happen in the present period of time, e.g.
   6- My father works in a bank.
   7- My sister wears glasses.

D- It is used for future plans and schedules, e.g.
   8- The concert begins at 7:30 and ends at 9:30.
   9- We leave tomorrow at 11.15 and arrive at 17.50.

E- It is used for many verbs of thinking and sensing. These verbs are called stative verbs, e.g.
   10- I love you.
   11- I hate him.
2.2 Present Continuous
Murphy(1994:6,8) mentions that the present continuous is usually used to express continuing and ongoing actions which are taking place at the moment of writing and speaking. It is formed from the simple present of the auxiliary to be, followed by what is generally referred to as the present participle of the verb. The present participle of a verb is formed by adding ing to the base infinitive. e.g.
- Let's go out. It isn't raining now.
- I'm going to bed now. Good night!

2.3 Present Perfect
English present perfect is used to express actions which have been completed or perfected at the time of speaking or writing, e.g.
- Professor Allen has tried different methods.
- She has lived here for six months.

The present perfect of any English verb is formed from the simple present of the auxiliary to have, followed by what is generally referred to as the past participle of the verb (praninskas, 1975:184-5).

2.4 Present Perfect Continuous
It is used to express continuous, ongoing actions which have already been completed at the time of speaking or writing. Present perfect continuous expresses an action that has just stopped or recently stopped. It is formed from the present perfect of to be, followed by the present participle of the verb.
- Oh look! It has just been raining.
- He has been examining.
- I'm tired because I've been working.
(Quirk & Greenbaum,1973:53 & Quirk & et al, 1985:189)
3. Present Passive Construction

Leech and Svartivk (1994:329) point out the construction of the passive sentence in the following points:

1- The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive one.
2- The auxiliary verb should precede the main verb which is in its past participle form.
3- The subject of the active sentence becomes the object of the passive one (or is dropped).

Moreover, Murphy (1994:82-5), Bloomberg (2005:33-35), Ansell (2009:79-81), & Owl (2009:23-5) illustrate the construction of the salient types of present passive constructions as well as the change from the present active sentence to the present passive one in the following diagrams:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Somebody cleans this room</td>
<td>-It is formed from is/ are/ am + Past participle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyday.</td>
<td>1. This room is cleaned everyday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They talk about the problems.</td>
<td>2. The problems are talked about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The movie fascinates me.</td>
<td>3. I'm fascinated by the movie.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Present Continuous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Somebody is cleaning the room at the moment.</td>
<td>1. The room is being cleaned at the moment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The dispatcher is notifying the police that three prisoners have escaped.</td>
<td>2. The police are being notified that three prisoners have escaped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shannon is helping me.</td>
<td>3. I'm being helped.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Present Perfect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The room looks nice, Somebody has cleaned it.</td>
<td>1. The room looks nice. It has been cleaned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Scientists have discovered traces of ice on the surface of Mars.</td>
<td>2. Traces of ice have been discovered on the surface of Mars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Penny hasn't taken me to the school.</td>
<td>3. I haven't been taken to the school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Methodology

4.1 Procedures

Concerning the achievement of the students in the present tense and present passive constructions, a test has been prepared to examine the achievement of the students in such structures. However, the test is divided into two questions. Question no. one is concerned with the present tense whereas question no. two is concerned with present passive constructions. Each question includes ten items, multiple choice item is used to examine the achievement of the students in the present tense. Ten present active sentences have been put in question two and the students have been asked to change these ten active sentences to ten present passive ones to show their achievement in present passive constructions.

Ten marks are given for each question, that's to say, one mark is given for each item. The subjects participating in the test are thirty two 3rd year college students in the department of English- College of Arts- University of Baghdad for the academic year 2008-2009. Table (1) presents the organization of the test in the present tense and present passive constructions.
Table (1)
The organization of The Present tense & Present Passive Constructions in The Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1: The Present Tense</th>
<th>Q2: Present Passive Constructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. present simple</td>
<td>1. present simple passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a general fact)</td>
<td>(are+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. present continuous</td>
<td>2. present continuous passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(is+ v-ing)</td>
<td>(is+ being+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. present perfect</td>
<td>3. present perfect passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(has+ past participle)</td>
<td>(have not+ been+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. present perfect continuous</td>
<td>4. present simple passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(has been+ v-ing)</td>
<td>(I'm not+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. present continuous</td>
<td>5. present perfect passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(are+ v-ing)</td>
<td>(has+ been+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. present simple</td>
<td>6. present continuous passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(does not+ infinitive)</td>
<td>(are+ being+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. present perfect continuous</td>
<td>7. present perfect passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(have been +v-ing)</td>
<td>(have+ been+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. present perfect</td>
<td>8. present simple passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(have not+ past participle)</td>
<td>(an interrogative sentence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. present simple</td>
<td>9. present simple passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(things that are true)</td>
<td>(is+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. present simple</td>
<td>10. present continuous passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(an interrogative sentence)</td>
<td>(I'm+ being+ past participle)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to mention that some of the sentences in the test have been taken from Murphy(1994) English Grammar In Use. Besides, the test has been shown to a professional in Linguistics as Dr. Baidaa Faisal /University of Baghdad/College of Arts/ English Department.

4.2 Data Analysis

For data analysis, a test from thirty two students is used. The test is scored depending on the achievement of the students in the above mentioned constructions. The rates and frequencies of the students participating in the test are calculated in order to show the correct and incorrect answers in each question and in each item. Table (2) below presents the percentage of success and failure of the students in the test as well as the percentages of the correct and incorrect answers in each question.

Table (2)
The Percentage of Success and Failure of The Students in The Test and The Percentages of The Correct and Incorrect Answers in Each Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Percentage of Success in The Test</th>
<th>The Percentage of Failure in The Test</th>
<th>The Percentage of The Correct Answers in Q1</th>
<th>The Percentage of The Incorrect Answers in Q1</th>
<th>The Percentage of The Correct Answers in Q2</th>
<th>The Percentage of The Incorrect Answers in Q2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the percentage of success of the students in the test is 56.2% whereas that of failure is 43.7%. The percentage of the correct
answers of the students in the first question which is concerned with the present tense is 90.6% whereas that of the second question which is concerned with present passive constructions is 21.8%. Moreover, the percentage of the incorrect answers of the students in the first question is 9.3% whereas that of the second question is 78.1%. Since the percentage of the correct answers of the students is high in question no. one, the present study focuses on the percentages of the correct and incorrect answers of question no. two. It seems that the students' achievement in question no. two which is concerned with present passive constructions is so low as well as is lower than that of question no. one which is concerned with the present tense. Regarding the percentages of the correct and incorrect answers of question no. two, table(3) presents these percentages in details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item's no.</th>
<th>Correct answers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Incorrect answers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is obvious from table(3) that the percentages of the correct answers of items no. 1, 4, 8, & 9 which are concerned with present simple passive construction are 43.7%, 18.7%, 6.2%, & 43.7% respectively whereas those of the incorrect answers are 56.2%, 81.2%, 93.7%, & 56.2%. Thus, it seems that the students make errors when they try to change from the present simple active sentences to the present simple passive ones. Such errors may belong to the fact that:

1- The students do not recognize the object given in the present simple active sentence whether it is a noun (singular or plural) or a personal pronoun. This object should be the subject of the present simple passive sentence. Besides, some other students recognize it but they do not know how to change it when it is a personal pronoun from the object case in the present simple active sentence to the subject case in the present simple passive one as with the personal pronoun me in item no. 4.

2- Most of the students either neglect using the auxiliary verb (is/are) or misuse it in the present simple passive sentence particularly in the case of the interrogative one, as in item no. 8, in which the achievement of the students is so low. This auxiliary verb should be put according to the subject of the present simple passive sentence.

3- They make errors in the past participle of the given verbs whether they are regular or irregular ones.

4- They either misuse the negative form not or neglect using it in the present simple passive sentence as in item no. 4.

It is important to indicate that the percentages of the correct and incorrect answers are the same in both items no. 1 & 9 which reflect that the students have the same difficulties in these items. Moreover, the percentages of the correct answers of items no. 2, 6, & 10 which are concerned with present continuous passive construction are 21.8%, 15.6%, & 6.2% respectively whereas those of the incorrect
answers are 78.1%, 84.3%, & 93.7% which show that the students make errors when they try to change from the present continuous active sentences to the present continuous passive ones in these item because of the following reasons:

1- The students do not recognize the object given in the present continuous active sentence whether it is a noun or a personal pronoun. This object should be the subject of the present continuous passive one and if it is a personal pronoun, it should be changed from the object case to the subject case in the present continuous passive sentence as in item no.10:

(Active form):
19- Miss Liu is taking me to the theatre to see Romeo and Juliet's film.

(Passive form):
20- I'm being taken to the theatre to see Romeo and Juliet's Film.

The achievement of the students in this item is so low since they have misunderstood the object given in the first sentence and they have thought that it is Romeo & Juliet instead of me in the sentence. On the other hand, some other students do not know how to change the personal pronoun from the object case in the first sentence to the subject case in the second passive one when they recognize the object given in the first sentence.

2- They misuse the auxiliary verb are in item no.6 when the personal pronoun we takes the position of the subject in the present continuous passive sentence since most of the students use the same auxiliary verb is of the present continuous active one instead of are.

3- They neglect using being which should be used after the auxiliary verb which should be followed by a past participle in the present continuous passive sentence.

4- They also make errors in the past participle of the regular and irregular given verbs.
Nevertheless, the percentages of the correct answers of items no. 3, 5, & 7 which are concerned with present perfect passive construction are 21.8%, 31.2%, & 40.6% respectively whereas those of the incorrect answers are 78.1%, 68.7, & 59.3%. Such rates indicate that the students do not know how to change the present perfect active sentences to the present perfect passive ones because of the following reasons: 1- They do not recognize the object given in the present perfect active sentence whether it is a noun(singular or plural) or a personal pronoun. On the other hand, some other students recognize it but they do not know how to change it from the object case in the present perfect active sentence to the subject case in the present perfect passive one when it is a personal pronoun as in item no. 3. 2- They either misuse the negative form not or neglect using it in the present perfect passive sentence as in item no.3. 3- They neglect using been in the present perfect passive sentence since most of them use the same construction of the present perfect active sentence when they try to change it from active to passive, i.e. they use has/ have+ past participle instead of using has/have been + past participle. It is worth noting that five students have left the whole items of question no. two with no answers. They have no achievement in present passive constructions at all although they have answered the whole items of question no. one. Besides, seven students have tried to answer the whole items of question no. two but they have completely failed. However, only seven students have achieved question no. two successfully.
5. Conclusions

After discussing the achievement of the students in the test, the researcher has come up with the following conclusions:

1- Iraqi EFL students of English department at the College of Arts-University of Baghdad have no achievement in present passive constructions whereas they have an achievement in the present tense.  
2- Most of the students make errors when they try to change from the present active sentences to the present passive ones.

Therefore, the present study suggests the following:  
1- Present passive constructions should be taught in the first year of English department at the university level.  
2- A list of regular and irregular verbs should be given to the students.  
3- The object (whether it is a noun or a personal pronoun in the present active sentence) is showed and explained to make the students recognize the position of it in such a sentence and show them how it takes the position of the subject in the present passive one.  
4- The personal pronoun is clarified regarding its position as an object and how it is changed into a subject in the present passive sentence.  
5- The use of auxiliary verb and negative forms should be concentrated on in both active and passive constructions.  
6- The forms of being in the present continuous passive sentence and been in the present perfect passive one should be concentrated on since most of the students neglect using them in these sentences. Besides, the difference between present perfect active and present perfect passive constructions must be clarified since most of them
use the former in the construction of the latter when they change from active to passive.

7- Extensive examples, exercises, and examinations are put forward in order to give the students the ability of transforming the present active sentences to present passive ones and vise versa.

8- Furthermore, such constructions should be taught in the first year and they should be kept learning in the second year with additional detailed information. It is important to mention that reports play a significant role in teaching English passive and active constructions through making each student write a report about an interesting English topic and asking him/her to use present passive constructions in it. This helps students to read more about such constructions and use them in their reports with more attention.
Bibliography


- **Internet References**
- The Test -

Q1: Write the number of the sentence and the letter of the correct choice:

1- The moon ……… round the earth.
   a. go            b. goes          c. going             d. gone

2- That car is useless! It is always………………
   a. breaking down     b. break down   c. breaks down   d. broke down

3- She …………… here since September.
   a. live               b. living          c. has lived              d. have lived

4- It …………… for two hours.
   a. has been raining   b. have been raining   c. rain     d. rains

5- Maria and Tom are in Britain at the moment. They are………English.
   a. learning         b. learn           c. learns            d. learnt

6- It doesn't ……… very much in Summer.
   a. rains         b. raining      c. rained           d. rain

7- Some students ………… her with her lessons recently.
   a. helping       b. have been helping    c. helps        d. has been helping

8- It 's nice to see you again. We …………… each other for a long time.
   a. see         b. hasn’t seen          c. haven't seen    d. seen

9- The children usually ……… very soundly.
   a. sleep        b. sleeps    c. sleeping         d. slept

10- What do you usually ………… at weekends?.
    a. does       b. did       c. do           d. done
Q2: Change the form of the following bolded sentences into present passive construction:

1- It is a big company. **It employs two hundred people.**
2- Elizabeth is sending a letter at the moment. **A letter is being sent by Elizabeth at the moment.**
3- 'Are you going to the party?' 'No, no one has invited me.' **The party has not been invited to by anyone.**
4- John and George don't often see me in the markets. **I am not often seen by John and George in the markets.**
5- Have you heard the news? **The news has been heard by you.** Someone has shot the president.
6- There is somebody walking behind us. **We are being walked behind by someone.** I think he is following us.
7- Up to now, **dots, lines and symbols on walls have long puzzled the historians.**
8- How do people learn languages? **Languages are learned by people.**
9- Water covers most of the earth's surface. **The earth's surface is covered by water.**
10- Miss Liu is taking me to the theatre to see Romeo and Juliet's film. **I am being taken to the theatre by Miss Liu to see Romeo and Juliet's film.**