

Effects of Writing Kit Innovation on ESL Learners' Sentence Construction

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Abstract

English as a Second Language (ESL) learners often face problem to construct grammatically correct sentences. In the Malaysian context, writing is a crucial skill to master even at the primary education level as pupils' writing is tested in Primary School Evaluation Test, a national examination at the end of Year 6 of their studies. English Paper 2 is dedicated on writing assessment. Therefore, this quantitative study employed a pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design to measure the effects that a Writing Kit has on sentence construction skills among two classes of Year 4 pupils (age 10) at a government-funded school in the state of Malacca, Malaysia. The experimental group participants were exposed to the Writing Kit to help them construct simple sentences using the structure of Subject-Verb-Object-Preposition that adheres to the Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) structure. The data collected for this research were analysed using pre test and post test. Data for this research was then analyzed using statistical methods. The data analysis determined that the Writing Kit had significant effect on pupils' ability to construct simple sentences. This study suggests that the use of Writing Kit is effective to help pupils construct grammatically correct simple sentences.

Keywords: Writing Kit, Simple Sentence Construction, Language Teaching, ESL

Introduction

In this global 21st century, English plays a pivotal role in the education, business and global development. Sadly, over the past 50 years, the English proficiency in Malaysia is dwindling. Reports on PISA and TIMSS in Malaysia had also showed that we fared poorly (Amani & Nordin 2017; Kavita & Hassan, 2018)

Many academic scholars have highlighted the backsliding of the English Language standard among primary and secondary students. It could be seen that our mastery in the English Language is declining slowly.

Practicing on how to convey a message is essential to avoid us from sending the wrong message. In Malaysia, English is taught as a second language in all schools. The current Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir had also stated the plan to re-implement Teaching of Mathematics

and Science in English in all schools (Pejabat Perdana Menteri Malaysia, 2019). Additionally, the competency of the language helps bring our country up to the international standard at a much faster pace as most countries uses English.

Writing is a difficult task to young Malaysian students. Due to this, parents and teachers are very anxious as this skill is consistently tested in the 'Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah' (UPSR), a Standardised Year 6 Examinations (Yasmine, et al, 2019; Georgia & Alexandra, 2018; Sundari, Mediaty, Habbe, Harryanto, 2018)

This is especially seen very important when the MOE set two papers for English. English Paper 1 test focuses on grammar and comprehension. In Paper 2, their writing ability was tested. Thus, the ability to write is very important to help them to achieve greater results in their examinations. The curriculum content for writing in KSSR 'aims to develop the pupils' ability to write and present a range of texts using appropriate language, style and form for different purposes and audience through a variety of media' (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2014, p.40).

Problem Statement

Pupils could not construct grammatical sentences that adhered to Subject – Verb - Agreement. In SJCKM (pseudonym), which is located at a rural area in Melaka, pupils were having difficulties in constructing simple sentences. The location of the school is in Alor Gajah which is located in a rural area. During the pupils' examination for UPSR Paper 2 of this school, many pupils scored 20-60 marks as they could not construct sentences correctly. This had resulted into the worries of ESL learners. Thus, innovation is a must to attract the attention of the pupils. Thus, this research is to discover the use of Writing Kit to enhance pupils' writing sentences while adhering to Subject - Verb Agreement. ESL teachers face problem whereby their pupils could not construct grammatically correct sentences what more essay using the conventional method (Yunus, 2019). Data were gathered through pre-test and post-test. An overview will be provided with the general findings of the data gathered.

Writers need to correlate and design the process to accomplish the chosen outcome. Writing skill is needed to convey a message in written form, therefore, it can be considered as a productive skill. Writing is a very important skill to master as it helps a writer convey a message in a grammatically correct manner. A study found that students in rural areas generally are not interested to learn English (Siti Sukainah et, al, 2014). The location of SJCKM is at a rural place in Melaka. Thus, writing simple sentences are very difficult for the pupils in the school as they have limited access and resource. Thus, this research was conducted to help pupils in the rural area to write using Writing Kit.

Literature Review

Writing

Pupils today were not aware of their sentence construction problems as English is not their first language. They were not sensitive to the grammatical problems as they do not know that it is a problem. According to Piaget, cognitive development is how a person reorganizes and learn a particular item based on the biological maturation and their surrounding experiences. At their age of 10 years old, the Concrete Operational Stage of Piaget was applied. At this point, the child learns on concrete items via hands-on activities. Additionally, writing is among the attainable abilities (Aouriaza & Ehsan, 2019). Thus, with the use of Writing Kit, pupils could learn how to write. With the use of writing intervention that enables to write and have a hands-on experience, they would then be able to write. This Writing Kit

helps them to write using the SVOP (Subject-Verb-Object-Preposition) that adheres to SVA in a fun and interesting way.

Learning to write coherently and in a way that is appropriate for one's purpose and the audience is something which many people never manage in their first language (Al-Gharabally, 2015). ESL pupils have difficulties in writing simple sentences which contain 1 subject, 1 verb, 1 object and 1 prepositional phrase. In addition to pass their coming UPSR, exam could also be used for preparing the pupils for their future such as secondary and tertiary studies and lastly work. Writing is important as Nowacek (2011) put it succinctly, every person will be judged by his writing, whether in learning institution or workplace. It is very important to pass down a clear and correct message when in the community. Thus, the ability to master the language is crucial. Writing is also a way to express their ideas to their peers. Also, writing is important as they would be tested in Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR). Thus, this intervention was made to help more pupils to construct simple sentences effectively. The use of Writing Kit would then be able for the pupils to write consistently and practice more often.

They were taught the skill of Subject - Verb Agreement (SVA) sentences and slowly develop that skill to write good quality sentences. They would be more proficient with the rules that are applied to their L1 (Nayan et. al, 2009). An example is 'Ali makan nasi whereby in English is 'Ali eats rice'. ESL learners write sentences that did not adhere to SVA as they do not have a good command of the rules. Thus, this had impeded them in writing the sentences correctly.

In English, Subject – Verb – Agreement (SVA) is important to construct correct grammatical sentences. Elliot (2006) mentioned, in SVA, if the subject is singular the verb should also be singular and this is also applicable for plural subject and verb. Thus, this skill requires good practices to help them learn the language with proper educational guidance. This can be enhanced in the environment we are in. It has to be an acquired skill (Myles, 2002). A good environment is pivotal as it helps them to learn in an interesting and conducive manner. Additionally, in this context, instructional approach is essential as it helps pupils to learn to write simple sentences that adhered to Subject - Verb Agreement.

Use of hands-on material (Writing Kit)

On a research by Melor et al, (2019), the use of InstaWrite was used with the blend of technology. The research proved that pupils were able to write efficiently using the innovation InstaWrite. However, in this school, due to its poor access to Internet connection, the use of high and sophisticated technology is not applicable.

Research named Build Me Up was done by Lim et al, 2017 was done in helping the rural primary school to overcome problems in constructing correct sentences. The research was comprehensively done by having pupils taught step by step on grammar based on the module provided. In the research, it was found effective for the rural schools in Sarawak where they were able to overcome their grammar problems by learning present tense, past tense, present continuous tense, and past continuous tense. However, the research did not apply to this school. The main problem of the participants in this research was that they were unable to arrange the sequence of writing Subject-Verb-Object-Prepositional Phrases. Additionally, the pupils in this research had difficulty in adhering to Subject-Verb Agreement as the mother tongue Mandarin does not have such rules. Thus, Writing Kit is suitable for the pupils in the research as the lack of technologies in the school could be compensated by hands-on activity.

With hands-on activity, they were able to have a Writing Kit each and learn how to write sentences based on the arrangement of Subject – Verb – Object – Preposition.

According to Carin and Bass, ‘there are three major ways for people to learn about the world; discover things about the world from personal observations and experiences with the environment, acquire knowledge transmitted directly from other people or construct personal knowledge by transforming discovered and acquired knowledge in meaningful ways’ (2001). Ekwueme et al (2015), hands – on - approach is a method of instruction where students are guided to gain knowledge by experience. With this hands-on kit, pupils will be able to learn in a fun and interesting way.

Material and Methods

Research Design

Research has been defined as a “systematic investigation, including research developments, testing. Additionally, research helps to. Quantitative research was used in this quasi experimental design whereby the use of pre-test and post-test was used. The rationale of this design was to see the effectiveness of the kit in an intact class. This study is important to test the effectiveness of the intervention Writing Kit in pupils’ sentence construction.

This research was done by taking two mixed-ability classrooms of Year 4 pupils. There are different types of researches namely pre-experimental research, true - experimental research, and quasi-experimental research. In this research, quasi-experimental research was carried out using the pre-test and post-test. In this test, they were tasked to do the pre-test without any prior knowledge of the intervention.

From there, the intervention was done to test the effective of Writing Kit. They were given the intervention named Writing Kit to the experiment group. They were taught to write sentences using the sequence of Subject – Verb – Object - Prepositional phrases while adhering to SVA. On the other hand, the control group learned using the conventional method. Once they have mastered the ability to do so, they were administered with a post - test to measure the effectiveness of the intervention, Writing Kit. Their results were then compared between the experimental and controlled group. The duration of this research was 3 months. Every week, pupils were given an hour to learn this new method. A total of 12 hours were allocated for this intervention to be done. The intervention took place in the class and both classes were taught by English teachers.

Research Participants

There were two mixed ability classes for this research. One was the control group while the other was the treatment group. Additionally, the participants were pupils who did not have much exposure to the English Language. At home, they did not have the chance to speak or write in the English language due to the location of the schools were in rural area with limited access to the Internet. 90% of the pupils’ parents worked somewhere else (Kuala Lumpur) and pupils were taken care by their grandparents who did not know the language. They were only exposed to the language in school. Their mother tongue was Mandarin and they spoke Mandarin at home. Thus, this had resulted into their poor proficiency in the language.

Data Collection Method

The main data collected were pretest and posttest whereby their results were analysed. From the pretest and posttest, their ability to construct sentences were evaluated. The worksheet given were used to analyse their sentences using the marking scheme. The findings and discussion will be expounded below. Marks were awarded based on the table below.

Table 4

Marking Scheme

Subject	1 mark
Verb	1 mark
Object	1 mark
Preposition	1 mark
Subject – Verb – Agreement	1 mark

Pretest-posttest designs are widely used in behavioural research, primarily for the purpose of comparing groups and/or measuring change resulting from experimental treatments (Dimiter & Phillip, 2003). The test was conducted as a class to analyse the effectiveness of the intervention Writing Kit. The data was analysed using the SPSS with mean, and standard deviation. T-test for the performance of both groups on the post-test were analysed.

Research Procedure

In this, pupils were to learn by discovering it themselves using this innovation named Writing Kit. They would learn how to write different sentences with their own initiative.

The main aim of the innovation is to attract the pupils' attention. Innovation Writing Kit is a simple yet special way for pupils to learn writing sentences in a fun and engaging manner. In this intervention, each participant was given a card each. Each card served a different function. The first card is on Subject, the second on Verb, the third one Object and the last on Preposition. With these four cards combined together, it would then form a sentence with the sequence of SVOP. With this, it would help them to construct sentences that adhered to Subject Verb Agreement. Writing would then be fun and interesting as they could write it on their cards and combine it to form a simple sentence.

The use of technology was not applicable in the context as the research was done in a semi-rural school. The facilities of technology is not well – equipped in the school and thus, the innovation of technology is not applicable. This innovation Writing Kit was done as technology is not involved. Additionally, pupils in this school preferred to learn using hands-on materials. Thus, the innovation Writing Kit is suitable for the pupils in this research.

Results

Main Findings

Below were the results of the participants' pre-test and post-test.

Table 5

Independent samples t-test for the performance of both groups on the post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	T-value	Sig.
Experimental	30	51.2000	6.81985	58	13.537	0.000
Control	30	26.4333	7.34229			

Independent samples t-test indicated that there is a significant difference between the two groups after the treatment, $t(58) = 13.537$, $p < 0.000$, $d = 0.8679$.

The result (Table 5) shows that there is a significant difference between the two groups after the treatments ($t=13.537$, $P < 0.05$). There is a 24.76667 difference in mean score for both groups. This indicates the experimental groups recorded a significant improvement on writing skill compared to control group. Thus, we can conclude that the intervention with using the Writing Kit makes a significant improvement compared to traditional method of teaching. In the simple word, Writing Kit helps students to improve their writing skill. The Cohen's d for this research is $(26.4333 - 51.2) / 7.085887 = 3.495215$. Thus, the Cohen's d is 3.4952 and the effect size is 0.8679. Based on the effect size $> .08$, it could be concluded that this intervention has a large impact towards the writing of the pupils.

Discussion

Writing is a daunting task as it involves many skills. It could be seen that writing is a difficult task for ESL learners and the use of innovations has to be included into the lesson to attract the pupils to learn in an enjoyable and exciting way to help them master the language.

The use of the intervention, Writing Kit was done to help pupils to master the skill on sentence construction. In this intervention, pupils will then be able to learn on how to construct simple sentences. Additionally, the sentence structure would be Subject – Verb – Object – Prepositional phrase. Also, the sentences constructed needed to adhere to Subject Verb Agreement. Elliot (2006) mentioned, in SVA, if the subject is singular the verb should also be singular and this is also applicable for plural subject and verb. Using Writing Kit would then help them to write grammatically correct sentences. Additionally, according to Al-Gharabally, 2015, many people were not able to write properly although it may be their first language. This research was tailored for learners to write simple sentences correctly that adhered to SVA.

The intervention Writing Kit is also helpful in the sense where it is a hands-on activity. Each pupil was provided with their very own Writing Kit. The pupils were attracted as they each had their own set as they eagerly started writing more sentences using the Writing Kit. Hands-on activities are important as it help them to learn better. The findings concur with the findings of Ekwueme et al (2015), hands – on - approach is a method of instruction where students are guided to gain knowledge by experience. Thus, it could be concluded that the

use of hands-on activity Writing Kit is useful in helping the pupils construct simple sentences correctly that adhered to Subject – Verb Agreement.

With the use of Writing Kit, pupils would then be able to learn and practice writing more simple sentences correctly. This would then help them to master the ability to construct sentences. With Writing Kit, pupils would then be able to practice writing sentences and this would then help them especially in their '*Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah*' English paper 2.

Conclusion

Based on the findings above, the results shown had a significant difference. Thus, it could be concluded that the use of Writing Kit is effective in helping pupils in writing simple sentences. A suggestion would be that once the pupils have mastered the Subject- Verb – Object – Preposition (SVOP) using writing kit, they could use the Writing Kit to learn different sentence pattern such as Subject – Verb – Complement.

Writing is a complex skill it could be a hindrance to some English as Second Language (ESL) learners (Nazril, et al, 2017). This research indicated that there was a boost in pupils' ability to write simple sentences correctly while adhering to SVA. Therefore, the use of Writing Kit could be used extensively to help more pupils to write effectively. It is recommended for further studies that the use of Writing Kit be used for different types of sentences such as Subject – Verb – Complement. It could be concluded that Writing Kit is effective in helping young learners to learn how to construct simple sentences correctly while adhering to Subject - Verb Agreement. Educators could use Writing Kit to help their pupils to write in a simple interesting and fun manner.

In today's global world, pupils today will be engaging in the global world that requires more understanding and abilities. Pupils nowadays also need to think extensively and not merely perceive the subject basics. The main aim of many researchers is to see that the experimental group are able to achieve with the use of the intervention (treatment). Thus, this innovation, is hoped to improve the pupils in sentence construction adhering to SVA using Writing Kit.

Contribution

Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years) is where Piaget considered the concrete stage a major turning point in the child's cognitive development because it marks the beginning of logical or operational thought. At this stage, a child learns on concrete stage. Thus, the use of hands-on activity viz Writing Kit is essential in enabling the pupils to learn sentences construction better. This research is essential in engaging pupils to learn in an exciting and non-threatening manner. Writing Kit would then attract their attention with their hands-on activity and engage them to learn effectively. It could be concluded that Writing Kit is a good intervention to help pupils to learn sentences with a sequence of Subject – Verb – Object – Preposition that adhered to Subject – Verb Agreement.

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