

USING GRAMMAR GAMES IN TEACHING GRAMMAR: A CASE STUDY IN SMK DAMAI JAYA

Mohd. Hilmi B. Hamzah & Juliana Emilia Dourado
Fakulti Pendidikan,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

ABSTRACT: This study examined the effects of games in teaching grammar, particularly in the use of the simple present tense and simple past tense as well as to gain insights on students' and teachers' responses towards the use of games in teaching and learning grammar items. 56 Form One students of SMK Damai Jaya, Skudai were taken as samples for the study. The subject were assigned to either experimental or control conditions. The experimental group used games to learn grammar whereas no treatment was given to the control group. Data gathered from the pre-test and posttest were analyzed descriptively. Classroom observations were used to observe students' reaction to the games in terms of communication, motivation and enthusiasm. In addition, interviews were conducted to find out ESL teachers' perspectives on using games to teach grammar. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered indicated that grammar games had a positive effect in the learning of the simple present tense and simple past tense. Students who practiced grammar with games felt more motivated and enthusiastic in what they were doing. Descriptive data gathered implies that teachers were positive of the potential of using games to teach grammar. It is suggested that the use of games in teaching and learning of grammar be actively promoted as a successful way of acquiring grammatical competence.

ABSTRAK: Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesan penggunaan permainan bahasa dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris, khususnya dalam penggunaan '*simple present tense*' dan '*simple past tense*'. Kajian ini juga turut mengkaji reaksi pelajar dan pandangan guru terhadap penggunaan permainan bahasa. Subjek kajian terdiri daripada 56 orang pelajar Tingkatan Satu dari SMK Damai Jaya, Skudai. Mereka telah dibahagikan kepada Kumpulan Eksperimental dan Kumpulan Kawalan. Kumpulan Eksperimental menjalani permainan bahasa manakala Kumpulan Kawalan pula menjalani pembelajaran berpusatkan guru. Data yang diperoleh daripada ujian pra dan ujian pasca dianalisis secara diskriptif. Data juga diperoleh melalui pemerhatian bilik darjah untuk melihat reaksi para pelajar terhadap permainan bahasa dalam aspek komunikasi, motivasi dan minat untuk belajar. Temubual dengan guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris juga dilakukan untuk memperoleh pandangan mereka terhadap penggunaan permainan bahasa dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran tatabahasa. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan permainan bahasa telah memberikan kesan positif terhadap proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran tatabahasa. Para pelajar didapati lebih bermotivasi dan berminat tinggi apabila menggunakan permainan bahasa untuk mempelajari tatabahasa. Adalah didapati juga bahawa guru-guru bersikap positif terhadap potensi menggunakan permainan untuk mengajar tatabahasa. Adalah dicadangkan supaya permainan bahasa digunakan sebagai satu kaedah yang berkesan dalam proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris.

Keyword: English as Second Language (ESL), Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK), Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR)

INTRODUCTION

The English Language plays an important role in the lives of many Malaysians. Moreover in recent years, the Malaysian Government stresses on the use of English in schools to equip our students with the proficiency of communicating in English. In order to communicate effectively in English, students need to have a good foundation in grammar (McKay, 1987). Ur (1988) states that a person who knows

grammar is one who can express himself or herself in what would be considered as acceptable language forms.

Traditionally, many teachers approach grammar teaching very seriously, making the lesson dull and uninteresting. Students are not motivated to learn when teachers resort to traditional methods of teaching. One way to reinforce the grammar structures of students is through the use of games. Woodward (1997) says that teachers should know that explanations and examples can be enlivened by varieties of language games. Language games deliver and stimulate an added dimension to language learning.

Statement of Problem

Students in Malaysia learn the English Language as a second language from the time they enter primary school up to tertiary level. However, many students still make grammatical errors when they speak or write in the language. Although students in Form One are assumed to have learnt the use of tenses in their primary education, teachers often find that many of them are still unable to use the correct tenses while writing and speaking in English. Many students cannot differentiate between the use of the simple present tense and the simple past tense form.

As a result of not being conscious of the structure and usage of the simple present tense and the simple past tense, students make such errors in their sentences. Such errors can contribute to miscommunication. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate whether grammar games are beneficial for students to gain linguistic knowledge particularly in the use of the simple present tense and the simple past tense.

Objective of the Study

The objectives for this study are as follows:

1. to examine the effects of grammar games in the learning of grammar, particularly in the use of the simple present tense and the simple past tense.
2. to identify students' response to the use of grammar games in terms of communication, motivation and enthusiasm.
3. to identify the ESL teachers' reaction towards the use of grammar games to enhance the teaching of grammar.

Significance of the Study

It is undeniable that grammar plays an important role in learning English Language. Having a good command of the language means not only to master the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, but also to achieve grammatical competence. When students face problems in acquiring the language, teacher should make an attempt to make their lessons as interesting as possible and not resort to the traditional 'chalk and talk' method which can be dull and predominantly teacher-centred.

The information and data gathered in this study could prove useful in giving insights to teachers to use grammar games in the teaching of grammar items. The information gathered could also lead to more effective and efficient teaching methods in the language classroom, particularly in teaching grammar. It is hoped that through the use of grammar games, a more conducive environment will be created to enable both teachers and students to enjoy the lesson in a more meaningful and more interesting manner.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the teaching of two particular areas of grammar, namely the use of simple present tense and the use of simple past tense. The study was confined to two classes of Form One students in SMK Damai Jaya, a secondary school in Skudai, Johor. Four language games were used as the treatment of the study. In addition, four secondary English language teachers of SMK Taman Damai Jaya were interviewed to gain their insights to the use of grammar games in the teaching and learning of grammar.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this research comprised of fifty-six students from two Form One classes in SMK Damai Jaya. Two Form One classes were chosen for this study as one class made up the experimental group while the other class involved the control group. The two classes that were chosen were the two top classes for Form One in SMK Damai Jaya. The students were streamed into the classes based on their 2008 UPSR (*Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah*) results at the start of the 2009 school year. Hence, the students were similar in their academic achievement, of which a majority of them obtained a minimum of 4 As in the 2008 UPSR examinations. However, the students were from various English proficiency levels. All students had to sit for both the pre-test and post-test.

In addition, four English Language teachers in SMK Damai Jaya were interviewed for the purpose of obtaining teachers' feedback on using games in grammar lessons. Two of the teachers are currently teaching the upper secondary level (Form Four and Form Five), while the other two are teaching the lower secondary level (Form One and Form Two).

Research Instruments

The instruments for collecting data in this study consisted of a standardized pre-test and post-test in grammar. In addition, the researcher also conducted semistructured interviews with the English Language teachers and had noted down observations of the participants' reactions towards the grammar games.

Table 1 **Types of Research Instruments and its Purpose**

| Type of Research Instrument | Purpose |
|---|--|
| 1. Pre-test and Post-test (Appendix A and B) | -the results obtained from the tests were used to compare the performance of the students. |
| 2. Classroom Observation (Appendix C) | - a checklist was used to assess students' reaction towards the use of games during grammar lessons. |
| 3. Semi-structured Interview (Appendix D) | - to get feedback from lower secondary English teachers in SMK Taman Damai Jaya on using games in grammar lessons. |

DISCUSSION

This study was a case study carried out to investigate the effects of using grammar games to enhance students' acquisition of English grammar, particularly in the use of the simple present tense and simple past tense. In addition, the study also examined the effects of games on students' motivation level while learning the form and rules governing the use of these tenses. The study also looked at the teachers' reactions towards the use of games in the teaching and learning of grammar. A total of 56 Form One students of SMK Damai Jaya were chosen as the respondents of this study, of which 31 students constituted the experimental group while the remaining represented the control group. Four grammar games were played as a form of treatment over a duration of four days. In addition, four English language teachers from the school were selected to provide insights on the use of games in enhancing grammar teaching and learning. Data were collected through the means of a pre and post-test, as well as from classroom observations and interviews. The data were analyzed using both the qualitative and quantitative methods.

From the analysis, it can be concluded that the use of grammar games had a positive effect on the students' acquisition of the simple present tense and simple past tense. Games were particularly useful in grammar learning because they provided a mechanism which gave students an incentive to go on practicing a structure beyond the point where they would normally tire of repeating it. The games also presented the students with an authentic environment to learn and practice these tenses. Language use and practice in an authentic environment provided an effective reinforcement in the learning process. Students also enjoyed the competitive games and these served as a motivation for successful participation. In addition, the feedback received from the English teachers through interviews was positive. They unanimously agreed that games played an important role in the teaching and learning process. Although the unavailability of games was cited as a common problem, the teachers in SMK Damai Jaya expressed interest and enthusiasm in conducting games. With proper organization and planning, language games could be utilized in teaching grammar effectively.

It must be emphasised however that the above study does not provide sufficient evidence to reach a firm conclusion regarding the use of games in grammar teaching in general as the study was implemented as a treatment in only two subject areas, namely the simple tense and simple past tense. The question of whether games are appropriate for a variety of subject areas in grammar remains to be answered. Furthermore, this study was limited to the Form One students enrolled in SMK Damai Jaya, a secondary school located in Skudai, Johor. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable to all schools in Malaysia. In addition, the reference group used was rather small, which were 56 Form One students at SMK Damai Jaya, Skudai. The small sample size limits the extent to which conclusions can be generalized.

CONCLUSION

Finally, follow-up studies of the effects of language games methodology presented in this study needs to be explored in other schools in other regions in Malaysia. In this manner, the data gathered may yield information that more accurately shows the effectiveness of language games across a variety of groups and academic-subjects areas.

REFERENCE

- Aitken, R (1992). *Teaching Tenses*. United Kingdom: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.
- Carrier, M. (1980). *Take 5, Games and Activities for the Language Learner*. United Kingdom: Nelson.
- Crystal, D. (1995). *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of English Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbs, G. (1978). *Dictionary of Gaming, Modelling and Simulation*. London: E. & F. Spon, Ltd.
- Greenbaum, S. (1987). Reference Grammars and Pedagogical Grammars. *World Englishes*, 6(3), 191-197.
- Greenall, S. (1984). *Language Games and Activities*. London: Hulton Educational Publications Ltd.
- Hadfield, J. (1996). *Advanced Communication Games: A collection of games and activities for intermediate and advanced students of English*. England: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- Hagemann, J. A. (ed.) (2003). *Teaching Grammar: a reader and workbook*. Boston: Ally and Bacon.
- Khan, J. (1991). *Teaching English to Children from Practice to Principle United Kindom: Harper Collins Publishers*.
- Langran, J. and Purcell, S. (1994). *Language games and activities*. London: Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT).
- Lester, M. (1989). *Grammar in the classroom*. Boston: Macmillan.
- LeTourneau, M.S. (2001). *English Grammar*. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers.
- McCallum, G. P. (1980). *101 Word Games*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKay, S. (1987). *Teaching Grammar: form, function and technique*. United Kingdom: Prentice Hall.