

USING ONLINE GRAMMAR RESOURCES TO DEVELOP LEARNERS'  
GRAMMAR KNOWLEDGE

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## DEDICATION

I dedicated this thesis to my beloved husband, Mohd Riduan Jamaluddin, and my son, Muhammad Daniel who have been my pillars of strength since the beginning of my studies.

Also, this thesis is dedicated to my mother, Halijah Mohd Saman who has been a great source of inspiration.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all those who believe in the richness of learning.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the use of online grammar resources (OGR) in developing learners' grammar knowledge especially in four grammar aspects; *irregular verbs*, *conjunctions*, *personal pronouns* and *prepositions of place*. This study also seeks to identify the learners' attitudes and perceptions on the use of online grammar resources as a tool to develop learners' grammar knowledge. This study was conducted on one class of form two students. It consisted of 27 students. The students were instructed to do the online grammar resources for four weeks on the selected grammar aspects. A pre test and a post test were carried out to determine the students' level of achievement. Paired samples T- test were used to determine whether there was significant difference between the pre test and the post test. The learners' attitudes and perceptions were examined using questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The results of the study showed that the students scored significantly higher in the post test compared to the pre test. In addition, students' responses in the questionnaire and semi- structured interviews indicated that the students showed positive attitudes and perceptions towards the use of online grammar resources as a tool to develop their grammar knowledge. Based on the conclusion drawn from this study, online grammar resources are recommended to be integrated as a part of English Language teaching because the of the positive learning environment that the online grammar resources' has created among students.

## ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji penggunaan sumber tatabahasa atas talian dalam mengembang pengetahuan pelajar dalam tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris terutama dari empat aspek tatabahasa iaitu *irregular verbs*, *conjunctions*, *personal pronouns* dan *prepositions of place*. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti sikap dan persepsi pelajar akan penggunaan sumber tatabahasa atas talian sebagai satu alat untuk mengembangkan pengetahuan tatabahasa. Kajian ini melibatkan satu kelas Tingkatan Dua. Kajian ini melibatkan seramai 27 orang pelajar. Pelajar diarahkan untuk menggunakan sumber tatabahasa atas talian untuk item tatabahasa yang telah ditetapkan selama empat minggu. Satu pra ujian dan pasca ujian telah digunakan untuk menentukan tahap pencapaian pelajar. Paired samples T test telah digunakan untuk menentukan sama ada terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan antara pencapaian pelajar dalam pra ujian dan pasca ujian. Sikap dan persepsi pelajar pula dikaji melalui penggunaan soal selidik dan sesi temu bual. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan peningkatan ketara dalam pasca ujian berbanding pra ujian. Di samping itu, respon pelajar berdasarkan soal selidik dan sesi temu bual menunjukkan bahawa pelajar menunjukkan sikap dan persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan sumber tatabahasa atas talian sebagai satu alat untuk mengembangkan pengetahuan tatabahasa mereka. Kesimpulannya, sumber tatabahasa atas talian boleh diintegrasikan sebagai sebahagian dari pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris kerana sumber tatabahasa atas talian ini telah mencipta satu suasana pembelajaran yang positif di kalangan pelajar.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ASC	-	Asynchronous Communication
CALL	-	Computer- assisted Language Learning
CBC	-	Community Broadband Center
CMC	-	Computer- Mediated Communication
EAP	-	English for Academic Purposes
ESP	-	English for Specific Purposes
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
IRC	-	Internet Relay Chat
KBSM	-	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
NBI	-	National Broadband Initiative
NNSs	-	Non native speakers
OGR	-	Online Grammar Resources
OR	-	Online Resources
PBS	-	Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah
SAPS	-	Sistem Aplikasi Peperiksaan Sekolah
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for Social Studies

- SSI - Semi structured Interviews
- WBLL - Web- based Language Learning
- WWW - World Wide Web



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

With the booming of the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW) for more than two decades now, we have seen significant change especially in term of how we live our lives today. Trade, banking transactions, long distance communication, news, and even home security are among the eminent evidence that the Internet is part of our lives, whether we like it or not.

Nowadays, the Internet has become a necessity. We are amazed at what the Internet and the Web have to offer. The tagline ‘the world is at our fingertips’ has long reverberated into our eardrum. Then, with the rapid production of smart phones and tablets, it makes the impossible become possible. Almost similar to the function of a computer, with word processor and power point applications, they have become powerful and yet smaller in sizes which make them flexible and easier to use (Jeyavany, 2008). A smart phone user can get wired and connected at almost any time and anywhere using the service provided by the mobile network. It is common

to see now many restaurants too, fast food chains, kopitiam outlets and even mamak stalls, are offering free Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) as a way to grab the attention of these gadget junkies. The Internet is, therefore, within our reach.

The Internet is widely used for its synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication (SC) or 'real time' communication is done via the Internet using the chat media (Warschauer and Healy, 1998). It gives live and interactive internet text messaging known as chat. One of the well known chat media in Malaysia is Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The IRC enables users not only to hold group communication but also one-to-one communication via private message. Asynchronous communication (ASC) is carried out through e-mail, bulletin board and newsgroup (such as SCHOOLNET). Teachers at various levels have been using e-mail as a way to promote learning such as in giving feedback (Samira, 2010). In distance courses, e-mail is used as a form of communication device (Felix, 2003). In teaching English as foreign language, the use of e-mail has created another new learning committee whereby teachers and students of different cultures can meet and discuss (see Fischer, 1998).

In the field of language, many research have been done on online language learning (Hegelheimer and Fisher, 2006; Warschauer and Meskill, 2000). It is treated as part of its umbrella, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). However, not much attention is given to online resources, particularly on grammar. This study seeks to explore the impact of these online resources on learners especially in developing their grammar knowledge.

This chapter describes the background of the study, statement of problem, the conceptual framework, research objectives and questions, definition of terms, and scope of the study. The significance of the study is given, as well as the limitations. Finally, a conclusion of this chapter is provided.

## 1.1 Background of the study

There has been a tremendous growth in the use of the Internet since it was first introduced in early 1990s. It has opened up new ways for people to communicate, gain new information and increase their knowledge. The internet offers plenty of reasons for teachers to integrate the Internet in language learning. It is used to promote the learning itself (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997). Students can search for authentic materials for their projects and assignments.

In addition, there is evidence that shows students can communicate with real audience by publishing their work (Warschauer and Meskill, 2000). Publishing their work online, creating online newsletter in school or having online collaboration with other students around the globe motivates the students to put a great deal of effort on producing quality materials. This relates to students' perception of their own work. If they think that what they publish online as having socially and culturally relevance, then this will encourage them to write in second language.

WWW itself offers a plethora of resources. In fact, too much resource that it creates over supplying (Calverley and Shephard, 2003). The Web- based language learning materials have become among the favourite materials to be used (Nor Ashikin, 2012). This is because the supplies of the materials are endless and diverse. WWW is said to function as the virtual library (Zarlina *et al*, 2012). It is comparable to the traditional library. In fact, it contains source of information similar to books and prints of a library. As much as we do not conduct research on whether books and library contribute to language learning, the same goes with WWW.

There are constant debates on the complexities in the use of the online resources and technologies such as the lack of basic knowledge and lack of

vocabularies, reading and listening skills to follow instructions on the computer. Such difficulties might hamper the learner's interest and motivation. This is where the teacher plays the significant role. Teacher needs to provide sufficient support to prevent the students from being overwhelmed by difficulties mentioned earlier (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997). Clarify the goals clearly before deciding which web pages are beneficial and would bring about the necessary increase in the students' skills (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997). To do so, all aspects of the lesson have to be taken into consideration. Without a creative teacher to intervene, the Web cannot be its best- a convenient source of materials and communication vehicle (Felix, 2002).

Furthermore, the use of online grammar resources (OGR) is also in line with the government's drive to fulfil Vision 2020. Vision 2020 calls for "sustained, productivity- driven growth" that is achievable with a technologically literate workforce. It requires the transformation of the education system. One of its policies is the role and function of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education as a teaching and learning medium (Policy on ICT in Education Malaysia, 2010). So, OGR can be considered as a medium to implement this purpose for language teaching.

In addition, under the National Broadband Implementation Strategy or also known as National Broadband Initiative (NBI) programme, the Malaysian government has introduced five initiatives which are;

1. Rakyat Internet Centers (Pusat Internet Rakyat) and Mini Community Broadband (CBC) Centers
2. 1 Million Netbook Initiative to distribute notebooks to poor students nationwide
3. Setting up of E-Kiosks
4. CBC to the Home
5. Expansion of Cellular Coverage

(Official Portal of Malaysian CMC)

The giving of net book 1Malaysia has opened a path for the use of OGR at home. Most students have accessed to the internet at home or outside the classrooms. Therefore, OGR can be provided as additional activities to ensure students' participations. Students who are not confident or quiet in the class have an equal opportunity in displaying their talents and knowledge when they do the activities. So, by completing the activities, the students can print and keep the scores for future reference. This is because the interactive nature of some OGR which requires the students to complete the first level before moving on to the next one. At same time, it is a continuous learning, within and outside the classroom.

As for teachers, online grammar resources (OGR) have gained its own popularity. They are easily accessible, abundant, user friendly and free (Nor Ashikin, 2012). These are among the factors that attract teachers' attention. Teachers can use them either as add- on activities or integrating them in the classroom. As add- on activities, repetitions and drills in the OGR can be useful to strengthen their understanding in classroom. A study showed that students can learn grammar through playing computer games (Constantinecu, 2012). By integrating the OGR, the

students will see grammar lessons as fun and interesting. Thus, OGR save time, energy, and cost needed to produce such grammar activities.

However, there is a constant debate on the effectiveness of these OGR particularly on students' learning. It is often asked whether the technologies really 'work', that is in promoting language learning (Warschauer and Meskill, 2000). As mentioned by Felix (2005), there is a need to understand the full extent of the impact of ICT on learning. This is the issue that this study addresses.

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

To be able to write successfully, the students need to have a good grammar knowledge. However, this is the biggest obstacle for students to perform well either in classrooms or in public examinations. The grammar lessons might or might not be taught in classrooms, depending on the teacher's belief in grammar teaching. In addition, if the teacher spent most of the classroom's time on teaching grammar, other parts of language learning, such as reading comprehension and literature component, will be neglected. Moreover, with a syllabus to be covered, it hinders the teacher to give necessary feedback when the students make mistakes in their written work. There are many approaches and methods in teaching grammar. However, not all teachers are prepared to incorporate the technology and the Internet into learning. Teacher has overlooked the capability of this ubiquitous tool to teach grammar in a relevant and engaging way (Potter and Fuller, 2008). This study on the use of OGR

in enhancing learners' grammar knowledge is investigated because the OGR offer plenty of advantages to both teacher and students.

To begin with, there are two major forms of online learning (Felix, 2003). First, online learning as stands alone courses that operate as virtual classrooms. Then, there is online learning as add- on activities to classroom teaching or distance education courses in which the technology is used as a tool and meant for communication device purposes.

In this study, the online learning takes on the later form, as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Thus, to maximise the gained benefit, teacher needs to involve greatly in creating learning activities that generate plenty of linguistic and cognitive demand (Warschauer and Whittaker, 1997). The learning activities created should be able to entice the learners to learn and participate more than they intend to. The linguistic and cognitive demands, also, can be fulfilled by maximising the Internet exchanges. By integrating the activities and projects available into the curriculum as a whole, it can bring about a successful intervention from the teacher's part in a language classroom.

The online grammar resources (OGR) act as add- on activities in language learning. The graphic images, clear photos, sound and videos can be the pulling factors that help in grammar learning and teaching (Luu and Nguyen, 2010). They are stimulating as well as engaging. Then, the grammar lessons will become effective, interesting and motivating. Thus, the repetitive method, also known as drill- and- practice, used in the OGR is then goes unnoticeable.

As for the reluctant learners, those who are afraid of making mistakes thus keeping them away from participating in classroom activities, the OGR help them dealing with this matter (Luu and Nguyen, 2010). In a way, the OGR take students' differences into account as well as the OGR motivate them to keep on trying without



being subjected to bias and judgemental feedback. These unnecessary and negative feedbacks, either from teacher or peers, are not helping in promoting language learning especially when it comes to second language. However, when the students are in front of the computer, it is a different story. They are the ones who control their own language learning.

What the students need now is to engage in appropriately directed grammar instruction using of time intensive and interactive approach (Hegelheimer, 2006). The OGR encourage the students to learn on their own provided space and time. Hence, their learning is not limited within the classrooms. There is a continuity in learning, thus, further strengthen the students' grammar knowledge.

In addition, by using OGR, classroom teaching and learning is not disturbed and interrupted with the teaching and learning grammar. Teacher tends to spend hours drilling on the grammar when students do not always acquire what they have been taught in the classroom (Ellis, 2006). It is said that the skills and knowledge are best acquired when students are engaged in experiential learning tasks. Goal- based problem- solving is the best example (Felix, 2002). Goal based- problem solving, also known as experiential learning tasks, offer them the opportunity to learn through self discovery. In other words, it is 'learning by doing' (Felix, 2002). Through this approach, students are able to construct their knowledge actively. Besides, the mistakes are made in a safe environment whereby feedback is given throughout the time while they are doing the tasks. In teaching and learning, the OGR allow the students to make and to notice the mistakes by themselves. Thus, the students do not feel the pressure to do everything right but to learn that making mistakes is also part of the learning process.

The interactive approach mentioned by Hegelheimer (2006) is also intensive in distribution. Since the activities are interactive, the students are able do to the OGR continuously. The activities for the targeted grammar items can be done in a

short period of time. Students will not be lacking of activities to be done since they are abundant and free. It does not require them to take a lot of time to complete the task given. In fact, the OGR might entice them to do more than what they are asked to do. Subconsciously too, they are being drilling on the grammar items.

In addition, by using the interactive approach that the OGR offered, the results can be achieved almost instantly compared to the normal pen-and-paper grammar test. Thus, it has an immediate impact on students' motivation, whether to do or redo the exercises because some OGR requires students to master a certain level before moving on to the next level. Besides that, OGR cater the need for a pedagogical tool that can be used as reference and is an easy- to- use resources (Hegelheimer, 2006). This means that the students wish to find another alternative from the traditional textbooks and reference books. Reference books are costly and impractical because to do the grammar exercises, students do not depend on just one book. They have to get them from various resources. The situation is similar in schools in which teachers provide handouts and worksheet from various books. So, the Web pages are the 'various resources' and 'reference books'. Moreover, in higher learning institutions, with the practices of self centered learning, students have to find their own source of knowledge. They want to find learning materials that are available twenty four hours and cost effective as well as easy to get to without them having to go to the bookstore. The OGR do just that.

Considering what has been said above, it is sufficient and necessary to provide students with OGR to enhance their grammar knowledge. The students gain more benefits than not when they are using OGR as part of the learning by discovery approach. At the same time too, OGR definitely entice the students to discover more, at their own space and time. In other words, they shape their own needs, strategies and styles to learning (Felix, 2001). Hence, in this study, OGR will be used to enhance their grammar knowledge. Their attitudes and perceptions on the use of

OGR will be researched. Finally, an evaluation will be made on the use of OGR to teach grammar.

### **1.3 Conceptual framework**

In this study, the conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.1. This conceptual framework shows the important key concepts of this research.

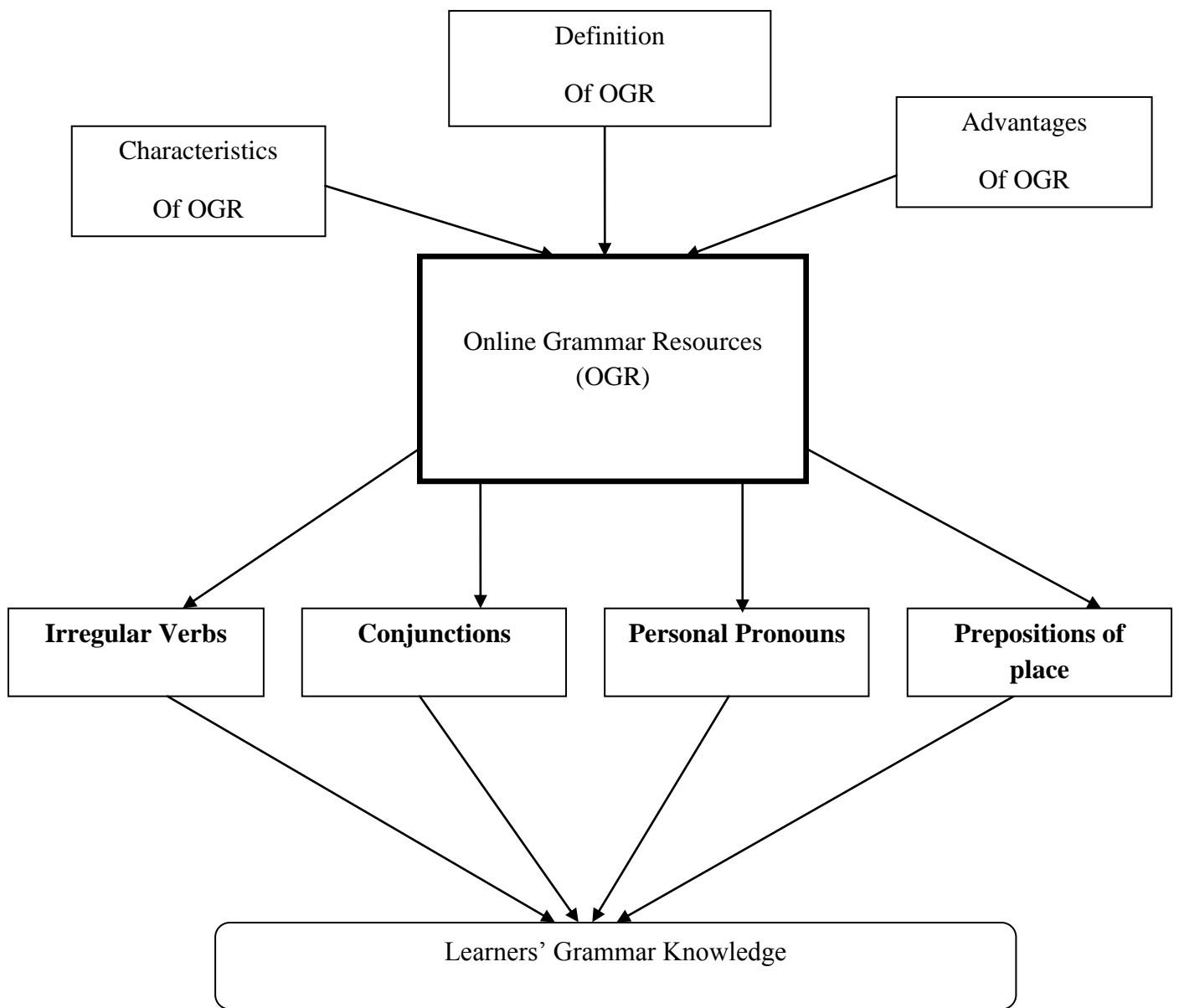
The key concept in this study is online grammar resources (OGR) which include the definition of OGR, varied characteristics of OGR and advantages of OGR as resources for grammar teaching and learning.

OGR is defined as online materials that focus on grammar items. There are abundance of OGR available. However, in this context of study, three Web pages have been chosen; [www.ChompChomp](http://www.ChompChomp), [www.Classroom.jc-schools.net](http://www.Classroom.jc-schools.net) and [www.ego4u.com](http://www.ego4u.com). They are chosen because they are free, interactive and provide learners with guidance. These are the main features that are important in choosing OGR.

The next key concept is the varied characteristics of OGR. In this context, the OGR promote motivation, have attractive and colourful images and provide immediate feedback. The three Web pages chosen have these similarities. They are also free which are good and an added value to the OGR.

Another key concept is the advantages of OGR as resources for grammar teaching and learning. It benefits both teacher and students in grammar learning; inside and outside the classrooms. Furthermore, they are the ones who get the direct impact on the advantages of OGR.

Finally, the last key concept in this conceptual framework is learners' grammar knowledge. In this context of study, the learners' grammar knowledge is based on four grammar aspects; *irregular verbs*, *conjunctions*, *personal pronouns* and *prepositions of place*. These grammar aspects are tested in both pre test and post test. From the results of the tests, an evaluation on the overall use of OGR in developing the students' grammar knowledge is made.



**Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the study**

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study is carried out to meet the following objectives:

- 1 to investigate the use of online grammar resources in developing learners' grammar knowledge
- 2 to identify the learners' attitudes and perceptions on the use of online grammar resources as a tool to develop learners' grammar knowledge

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

Based on the objectives, this study asks the following questions;

- 1 How does the use of OGR develop learners' grammar knowledge?
- 2 What are the learners' attitudes and perceptions on the use of OGR as a tool to develop learners' grammar knowledge?

## **1.6 Definition of terms**

In this context of study, there are several terms and concepts that are important. They are defined as follows;

### **1.6.1 Online grammar resources**

Online resource is a large database that consists of Web pages and document, any support software that provides useful information. They support learning and very educational in nature. In addition, online grammar resources are Web pages that contain materials on grammar aspects. They are accessible, interactive, and provide immediate feedback (Nor Ashikin, 2012; Zarlina et al, 2012). So, in the context of this study, OGR refer to Web pages that contain interactive materials on grammar items.

### **1.6.2 Grammar knowledge**

Crystal (2004) says that grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. Ur (1991) defines grammar as the way language manipulates and

combines words (or bits of words) in order to form longer units of meaning. Therefore, grammar is a particular analysis of the system and structure of a language, and is used to see how sentences are constructed. In English language, grammar has been considered to consist of nouns, verbs, participles, articles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions (Hinkel and Fotos, 2002).

In this study, the researcher investigates four grammatical aspects. They are irregular verbs, conjunctions, personal pronouns, and prepositions of place.

### **1.6.3 Develop**

According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online, develop means ‘to cause something to grow or change into a more advanced, larger, or stronger form’. In the context of this study, students’ development in grammar knowledge is determined when the students are able to answer better in the post test.



#### **1.6.4 Learners**

In this context of study, learners are participants who participate in the study. There are a total of 27 students. They are currently studying in Form Two in a rural school located in the outskirts of Kuantan.

#### **1.7 Scope of the study**

As mentioned earlier, this study investigates the use of online grammar resources in developing learners' grammar knowledge. The grammar aspects, in the context of this study, refer to four grammar aspects; *irregular verbs*, *conjunctions*, *personal pronouns* and *prepositions of place*. This study also identifies the learners' attitudes and perceptions on the use of online grammar resources as a tool to develop their grammar knowledge.

In this study, three web pages have been chosen. They are [www.ChompChomp](http://www.ChompChomp), [www.Classroom.jc-schools.net](http://www.Classroom.jc-schools.net) and [www.ego4u.com](http://www.ego4u.com). These web pages have been chosen because they are free and easy to access. The grammar aspects in the Web pages are arranged according to the topics. So, students do not have any hassle in finding the targeted OGR to be done. Based on the findings, the study evaluates the use of online grammar resources in teaching grammar.

To achieve the objectives above, 27 participants are selected. They are Form Two students studying in a school located in the outskirts of Kuantan. They consist of eleven males and sixteen females with the average of Band 4 in their English Language. The study takes about 8 weeks to be completed. A pre test is carried before the OGR are given to the students. A post test is conducted. Then, it is followed by a set of questionnaire and semi- structured group interviews to further clarify the findings. The data will be analyzed statistically and the interviews will be transcribed verbatim.

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

There are significance effects that can be drawn from this study. First, this study encourages teachers to integrate ICT in language learning and make use of the technology available. The English Language teachers also can make informed decisions regarding the use of online grammar resources in the classroom. It is beneficial because teacher has alternatives in developing students' grammar knowledge using a tool that is close to the students.

As for students, they could be motivated to learn grammar. By using OGR, learning grammar is not seen as a dull and boring lesson. The Web also offers vast resources and authentic learning tasks that never fail to attract the students' attention. Thus, the students are motivated because they are using the target language in an

authentic setting, in which further enriching and exposing them to other aspects of language besides grammar.

### **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the need to investigate the merits of using online grammar resources to develop learners' grammar knowledge. The learners' attitudes and perception in the use of online grammar resources in language learning can be investigated. Then, an evaluation can be made on the effectiveness of using online grammar resources in classroom especially in the teaching and learning of grammar.

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