

SPIDERY 2.0: An Intervention of Superhero Playhouse to Enhance Pupils' Understanding in Singular Subject-Verb Agreement

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ABSTRACT

The grammar structure of a language is a set of language rules which speakers use to make meanings. Grammar is fundamental in learning English language, yet, teachers usually find teaching grammar to be challenging. It is always associated with repetition and memorizing formulas which could be a mundane task for pupils, hence taking away the joy of learning grammar. Therefore, SPIDERY 2.0 which is derived from 'Spiderman Story' phrase, is an interactive innovation learning game in the teaching of grammar for both optionist and non-optionist English teachers in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. It caters to three real classroom issues which are to provide deep and meaningful understanding among pupils regarding singular subject-verb agreement. Secondly, it helps the teachers to introduce Subject-Verb-Object sentence construction with correct grammar for remedial and advanced pupils. Thirdly, SPIDERY 2.0 provides an effective strategy for pupils' assessments via lighting up the light emitter diode (LED). The LED approach is parallel to current changes in Classroom Based-Assessment (PBD). The data was derived before and after the intervention by using pre-test and post-test. Observational checklists were used during the intervention and followed by a questionnaire to show the effectiveness of the innovation. The data was collected and analysed from the tests and checklists, which later was supported by the questionnaire. There were 45 participants from three different schools situated in urban, suburban and rural areas. In addition, SPIDERY 2.0 is an innovation produced after conducting an online survey among 51 selected responses by English teachers. Above all, this intervention is believed to be able to make learning grammar less threatening and fun. As a result, a 100% increment is shown by pre and post-tests by the pupils. For future recommendation, this innovation can be developed digitally to be accessed remotely by more pupils.

Keywords: *singular subject-verb agreement, Subject-Verb-Object sentence construction, fun learning strategy, gamified-learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

English is taught in many countries across the globe which makes English a global language (Pillai & Ong, 2018). Pillai and Ong stated that Malaysia is one of the countries that use English as the second language (ESL) and it is taught as a subject in schools. Second language learning is a difficult and challenging process because learners are required to master four integral language skills which are

listening, speaking, reading and writing (Long, 2017). Together with these four skills are grammar items which are now taught implicitly.

Grammar can be considered the crux of communication which influences clarity in communication. Subject-verb agreement is very vital in language and consequently in communication and depicts the extent to which a user of the language of both the spoken and written media has internalized the rule (Amina and Shittu, 2016). Anyone who speaks or writes English language without errors in subject-verb agreement among others is considered a good or experienced user. In order to be competent users of the English language, ESL learners have to master at least singular-subject-verb agreement which constitutes a simple sentence. From the previous research it was revealed that grammar was taught through repetition and memorizing formulas which could be a mundane task for the learners, hence eventually taking away the joy of learning grammar.

Meanwhile, the effectiveness of gamified-learning has shown improvement in learning grammar among ESL pupils. According to Hashim, Rafiq and Yunus (2019), this pedagogical concept has been examined worldwide and results showed that it brings positive impact to the teaching and learning processes. However, there are still limited research papers on teaching singular subject-verb agreement using gamified-learning in Malaysian primary school settings. For this reason, action research on using SPIDERY 2.0 to enhance pupils' understanding in singular subject-verb agreement in Malaysian Year 3 primary ESL learners has been conducted. The SPIDERY 2.0 is an innovative puzzle game from the Tarsia puzzle. It consists of three levels which are differentiated by subject, verb, and object according to the colours. The pupils need to arrange the puzzles to the correct sentence structure and the LED will light up if the puzzles are placed correctly. Besides that, it also consists of the figurines as an enrichment activity. Pupils can construct new sentences while playing with the figurines. This encourages the learning of grammar and has been demonstrated in the study that pupils have learnt in a low affective filter environment. Its creativity allows for the innovation to have its potential commercial values.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Issues in grammar learning in primary classroom.

Teaching grammar has become one of the most important topics to be taught in primary classrooms. Pupils learn aspects of grammar which are infused during the teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the classroom. The grammatical elements aim to develop pupils' awareness of the underlying conventions of language use as stated in Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC). Thus, it is important for the pupils to be able to apply grammatically correct phrases or sentences in language skills. Previous studies have shown that ESL learners are having difficulties in writing grammatically correct phrases and sentences (Fazil & Said, 2020) especially in tenses (Ien, Yunus and Embi, 2017). Nurjanah (2017) stated that the pupils find it difficult to write in grammatically correct sentences when they have to deal with subject and verb agreement. Fazil and Said (2020) found that the problem is due to the influence of pupils' first language which is supported by Tuan and Doan (2010). Pupils who are learning English as a second language could face the same predicament when learning English. According to Hashim, Rafiq and Yunus (2019), grammar learning is a must, in order to achieve a higher proficiency in ESL therefore grammar should be taught in a fun and active learning environment for better performance.

Classroom-Based-Assessment is a crucial tool for the English teachers in assessing pupils' understanding of the lesson, therefore LED approach can be used to help the teacher in assessing the pupils while playing games. LED lights indicate that the pupils have achieved a certain level of assessments in Classroom-Based-Assessment especially in writing skill. According to Nee and Yunus (2020), the pupils are having difficulty in getting good results due to the inability to construct sentences. Hence, while learning grammar in a fun and active way, pupils can also improve their writing skills.

2.2 Gamified-learning

Several studies display the effectiveness of gamified-learning in grammar teaching and learning. Hashim, Rafiq and Yunus (2019) stated that grammar learning had shown improvement when teachers incorporate games in the lesson. It showed that pupils who learn through games acquire more

vocabularies (Perveen et al, 2013), learn the correct sentence structures (Rao, 2014) and be more motivated and eager to learn (Hashim, Rafiq and Yunus, 2019). Bullard and Anderson (2014) stated that gamified learning can improve pupils' achievement which is also supported by Poondej and Lerdpornkulrat (2016) when the pupils learn better in the games. Grammar learning through games is one of the new interventions that can be applied by teachers to teach grammar in a fun and active way.

2.3 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, Krashen's Affective Filter and Keller's ARCS Model

This project aimed at describing the importance of teachers in reviewing the theories and principles involving Piaget's cognitive development theory, Krashen's Affective Filter and Keller's ARCS Model at primary school level. Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory has had an enormous impact on the educational process of children in the past decades. According to Piaget (1958), assimilation and accommodation require an active learner instead of a passive one. Problem-solving skills must be discovered because they cannot be taught (Babakr, Z. H., Mohamedamin, P., & Kakamad, K., 2019). The pupils learn best when they are active and seek solutions for themselves. Astuti (2018) asserted that within the classroom learning should be pupil-centered. This can be accomplished through active discovery learning referring to independent learning and allowing self-explaining to help the pupils learn better. According to Bhagat (2018), despite being distinctly acknowledged as a socializing tool in children, games also build cognitive skills in the pupils and create a bridge between the social world and the more individualistic world of cognitive abilities. As pupils interact as active learners with the world around them, they continually add new knowledge, build upon existing knowledge, and adapt previously held ideas to accommodate new information.

There are mainly three factors which affect the learner in acquiring the second language, such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety (Krashen, 1981). The combination of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1981) and English grammar teaching brings many advantages as teachers can utilise the affective factors as well as reduce pupils' affective filter to help them learn grammar. Wang, L. (2020) implied that pupils' emotion plays an important part in language learning process because teachers can further know pupils' psychological state, improve pupils' interest in learning and give useful advice for students' English learning under the guidance of affective filter hypothesis. Teachers can create a peaceful teaching environment with the absence of defensive learning and reduce anxiety levels. Raju and Joshith (2018) stated that the teaching method of grammar can be done according to pupils' individual emotions. It is to ensure that pupils can acquire vocabulary in a positive attitude and teachers could control the class efficiently. Thus, the pupils will be scaffolded to learn grammar in its real heights if the teachers are capable of giving comprehensible input in a low affective filter environment.

Keller (1983) indicated that there were four basic categories of motivational conditions. These categories were renamed to Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction in order to strengthen the central feature of each and to generate a useful acronym, ARCS (Keller, 1987). The intervention created should enhance grammar learning in pupils. For example, Baturay, Daloglu and Yildirim (2010) investigated the perceptions of elementary-level EFL learners towards a web-based grammar learning system in terms of aspects which include learner satisfaction and attention based on Keller's ARCS model, and indicated that learners developed a positive attitude towards the system. In terms of attention, pupils' interest is captured because it is an interesting game that is able to stimulate their curiosity in learning grammar. The relevance is present because it meets the personal needs and goals of the learner of the pupils. The pupils are confident while applying the game since they are able to understand and apply the grammatical rules. In addition, they are able to guide and correct others. In terms of satisfaction, intrinsic motivation led to pupils' satisfaction in learning. According to Kasami (2021), Keller said that these four conditions "... have to be met for people to become and remain motivated." Therefore, these four categories in Keller's ARCS Model are crucial to be included among the underlying theories and principles of this intervention.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Research Design Pre-test–Post-test Non-equivalent Group Design which is under quasi-experimental research design was adopted in this study to evaluate and compare the scores across conditions to determine whether one group demonstrated a significant improvement in knowledge of fractions than another (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010) in which the respondents who are unequal, balanced or share similar characteristic cannot be randomly assigned (Chua, 2016).

3.2 Research Aim

In particular, the study seeks to address the following research questions.

1. Are there any significant differences between the experimental and control groups in mastering singular subject-verb agreement and Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentence construction by using SPIDERY 2.0?
2. What are pupils' perceptions of using SPIDERY 2.0 in learning grammar?

3.3 Research Objectives

This innovation is mainly aimed to:

- i) enhance pupils' understanding on singular subject-verb agreement
- ii) assist pupils on Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) sentence construction
- iii) increase pupils' learning time of grammatical rules through play
- iv) nurture the love for grammatical rules in learning English

3.4 Participants

This intervention was carried out among 45 pupils. There were 15 pupils from three different types of settings: urban (SK Bandar Baru Sri Damansara, Kuala Lumpur), sub-urban (Sekolah Kebangsaan Taman Scientex, Pasir Gudang, Johor) and rural (Sekolah Kebangsaan Bukit Rokan Utara, Gemencheh, Negeri Sembilan). The purpose to intervene in three different schools is to measure the effectiveness of SPIDERY 2.0 in order to assist primary school teachers at all levels of English proficiency. Indeed, from the data collected, it could cater to pupils' different learning styles and proficiency levels because teachers can adapt the difficulty level of the questions on the web according to pupils' proficiency. This argument could be justified since pupils in SK Bandar Baru Sri Damansara are advanced pupils, pupils in SK Taman Scientex are average-ability pupils, while pupils in SK Bukit Rokan Utara are mixed ability pupils.

3.5 Data collection methods

The data collection methods of the intervention were pre and post questions, questionnaires and observational checklist. The pre and post questions set focused on the singular subject-verb agreement and subject-verb-object sentence construction. These are grammatical rules taught starting from year 2 in ESL classroom. The purpose of having this data is to determine the difference between pupils' understanding of the grammar items before and after using SPIDERY 2.0.

Next, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants to get a more in-depth qualitative information about the pupils' perception on the use of SPIDERY 2.0 in terms of pupil's preference and pupils' understanding of the grammatical items taught. Additionally, an observational checklist was used by the innovators to observe pupils' interaction and pupils' display of understanding during the game.

The pre and post questions were distributed to the participants before and after the lesson. Selected pupils were chosen at random to get in depth information on a few related items in the questionnaire while the observational checklist was conducted during the lesson by the innovators in this study. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, pupils were briefed about their participation in the research, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study if they choose to do so. The innovators had also received the informed consent from the pupils to use the information gathered in this study, solely for research purposes.

The findings of this study are discussed according to the data collected method used. The analysis from the questionnaire and the observational checklist are discussed by providing the percentage of the items administered while analysing themes that emerged during the study.

3.6 Findings and Discussion

Firstly, 45 pupils 15 from 3 Arif (SK Bandar Baru Sri Damansara), 3 Bestari (SK Taman Scientex) and 3 Cemerlang (SK Bukit Rokan Utara) respectively showed deeper and better understanding of the grammatical items. Therefore, it helped the innovators to deliver the input faster and efficiently. This could be seen through their pre and post questions set. Before the intervention, only 50 % of these were able to answer all 6 questions correctly. However, after the intervention, 95% of pupils were able to get all answers correct with the first and second attempt.

As for 3 Bestari and Cemerlang, they took a longer time to score as high as 3 Arif. This happened due to their lower English proficiency. Before the intervention, only 20% of the pupils were able to score 50% marks, however, after the implementation, 55% were able to score more than 70% marks.

Next, Table 1 below shows the findings from the questionnaire administered in 3 Arif, 3 Bestari and 3 Cemerlang.

Table 1: Questionnaires

QUESTIONS	3 ARIF	3 BESTARI	3 CEMERLANG
Number of research participants	15	15	15
Do you like the activity today?			
Yes	15	15	15
No			
What do you like about the activity today?			
I can answer questions asked	3	1	3
I can play the game / I like the light	10	14	10
I can work with my friends to get answers	2		2
Other reasons			
What do you dislike about the activity today?			
I don't understand the rules of the game			
I don't like to work in groups			
I cannot answer the questions			
Other reasons			
How many questions did you answer correctly today?			
I can answer all questions myself	1		1
I can answer all questions with the help of my group members	10	9	10
I can only answer some of the questions asked	3	5	3
I can answer none of the questions asked	1	1	1
How would you prefer learning grammar?			
Teacher explains and I answer the questions myself	1		
Teacher explains and I work in groups to answer worksheets	1		
Teacher explains and I answer questions in a game-like activities	12	15	15
Other reasons: Answering worksheets	1		

The results from the questionnaire show that pupils from the three classes like the SPIDERY 2.0 activities conducted during the lesson. The reasons for liking the activities are mainly because they were able to answer all the grammar questions asked and they could play the game. Most of them enjoyed the lighting up of the LED. This is related to the Keller's ARCS Model where the pupils developed a positive attitude to the game. 87% of the pupils chose being able to participate in the activities as their choice while thirteen percent 13% of the pupils in 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang reasoned their preference due to being able to answer the questions. A larger percentage of the pupils liked the game because they could answer the questions asked rather than play the game. The findings show fifty five percent (55%) of the pupils chose being able to answer the questions asked while twenty five percent (25%) reasoned playing the game as their choice while twenty percent (20%) liked the game because they could play with their friends. However, in 3 Bestari the situation is different because the pupils had chosen all the three reasons, being able to answer the questions, playing the game and working with friends. Pupils' emotion plays an important part in this process because learning with Spider 2.0 created a stress-free teaching and learning. As Krashen (1981) mentioned the three factors affecting learners namely motivation, self-confidence and anxiety, innovators managed to reduce pupils' affective filter in assisting them to learn the

grammatically correct sentence construction with this intervention. Most pupils chose more than one answer to the first question posted. With reference to answering all the questions correctly during the activity, the result of the findings for Item 4 and Item 5 of the questionnaire are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 2: Item 4 of Questionnaire

How many questions did you answer correctly today?	3A (15)	%	3B (15)	%	3C (15)	%
I can answer all questions myself	1	6.7			1	6.7
I can answer all questions with the help of my group members	10	66.7	9	60	10	66.7
I can only answer some of the questions asked	3	20	5	33.3	3	20
I can answer none of the questions asked	1	6.7	1	6.7	1	6.7

Table 3: Item 5 of Questionnaire

How would you prefer learning grammar?	3A (15)	%	3B (15)	%	3C (15)	%
Teacher explains and I answer the questions by myself	1	6.7			1	6.7
Teacher explains and I work in groups to answer worksheets	1	6.7			1	6.7
Teacher explains and I answer questions in a game like activities	12	80	15	100	12	80
Other reasons: Answering worksheets	1	6.7			1	6.7

Table 1 shows that the highest percentage of 3A response for being able to answer all the questions with the help of the group members could be seen across two participating classes. Results from 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang show 80% while 3 Bestari indicates 100%. All two classes recorded the highest percentage for the response “I can answer all the questions with the help of my group members” to the question of Item 4. While Table 2 shows that the highest percentage for the question “How would you prefer learning grammar?” in the item “Teacher explains and I answer questions in a game-like activities” where 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang record 48.3%, 3 Bestari indicates a 100%.

Findings from the observational checklist are indicated in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Findings from observational checklist

	OBSERVATION	3 Arif		3 Bestari		3 Cemerlang	
		4 groups	%	15 pupils	%	4 groups	%
1	Participate in discussion	4	100	15	100	4	100
2	Active involvement during discussion	4	100	10	66.67	4	100
3	Able to answer question correctly in first attempt	3	75	10	66.67	3	75
4	Able to answer question correctly after second attempt	1	25	5	33.33	1	25

The result of the observations in all three schools were that pupils showed high level of participation during the discussion. Pupils in all three classes showed a 100% involvement. High percentage of active involvement is seen in 3 Arif, 3 Bestari and 3 Cemerlang where 100% is seen in 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang while 66.67% of involvement is seen in 3 Bestari. Item 3 and Item 4 of the checklist indicate a slight difference in pupils’ performance. Pupils in 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang indicated better performance in terms of answering questions on the first attempt. 3 Arif and 3 Cemerlang showed 75% of ability to answer questions correctly for the first attempt and 3 Bestari showed a 66.67%. These results emphasized how the pupils were scaffolded in learning grammar in a low affective filter environment as they actively participated in the learning process without being anxious.

The data collected from the questionnaire and the observational checklist was validated by the follow up interviews. 89% of the pupils agreed that the game ignited their interest. Some of the responded

from participants said that “it is fun” said P1, while to P2, it is “fun and I love to play games.” Other participants like P1 said that “I can study. I can light on the LED. I can complete the web” while P3 commented that “I love Spiderman. He has superpower. I can answer the questions.” 85% of the pupils commented that the game was “interesting” while another 15% of the pupils said it was “attractive.” In answering the question of how the game helped the pupils to understand, responses of the pupils vary. According to P4 “the game provides the tools to help me understand the grammatical item. The questions move from easy to difficult” while P5 said “because it is fun” and P6 believed that “I am learning in a relaxed way.” P6 also mentioned that there were “no stress” and P5 said “my friends helped to make me understand the grammatical rules better. Pupils of 3 Arif like P1 said “I can have fun learning with my friends” and P2 said “teacher explains and we can play” while P3 and P4 mentioned that “I can actively participate in the game” and “I can play with my friends.”

Pupils of 3 Bestari on the other hand commented that it is due to the fact that they “can play with the figurines.” This indicates that learning while playing helped most of the pupils in both classes to get a better grasp of the grammatical items. Pupils from 3 Arif commented that they could get the answers correctly through teamwork. Pupils said that “discussion with pairs helped them to answer correctly. While pupils in 6 Arif commented that it is “teacher’s explanation” (P1 and P3), “through game and by playing” (P2) and “my teammates helped me” (P4). All research participants of the interview commented that they could understand the explanation of the teacher on the grammatical rules. This highlights the relevance of this intervention because pupils achieved their goals in comprehending and applying grammatical rules. Data was triangulated by the interview and observational checklist. Overall, all the 45 participants enjoyed the lesson and the lesson was successful in achieving the lesson objectives. It is proven that pupils learn best as they become active learners in a pupil-centred classroom learning environment. This is supported by Astuti (2018), the pupils learn best when there is an active and more pupil-centered classroom setting. Pupils become active learners and continually learning new knowledge and making connections with existing knowledge (Bhagat, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In the era of gamification in learning, a specific set of educational game could be a good addition in helping pupils pique their interest. The game produced could be an enrichment or a support in language learning. Besides, the pupils are already familiar with puzzle game rules. In most of the stores, there are several board games available to fulfill the play time of the children, making it possible for SPIDERY 2.0 to be another potential attraction for the children in the market. In order to produce this prototype, the innovators invested RM81 per piece. Thus, by the incoming collaboration with the industry, it could be produced with higher durability materials and easier to handle design.

This innovation is a tool that could be used by:

- i. teachers and pupils to enhance any desired teaching and learning of grammatical rules in the primary ESL classrooms
- ii. parents to develop grammatical understanding in their children
- iii. other subject teachers to utilize the board with intended questions.

The results of the findings from this study have demonstrated that learning through play could be a very effective strategy in the teaching of grammar. Pupils enjoy interacting with their friends while answering grammar questions in the game. While participating in the game, pupils are learning the grammatical items unintentionally. The teachers, who are researchers in this innovation have not disregarded the importance of teacher explanation in the lesson. Teacher talk still play a part in the game and is shown to be positive in ensuring the effectiveness of this intervention. For future recommendation, this innovation can be conducted with more participants and developed digitally to be accessed remotely by larger number of pupils.

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