

Learning Simple Sentence Construction Using Colourful Jenga Blocks

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Abstract

Primary school Malaysian pupils are generally still weak in simple sentence construction. Hence, this quasi-experimental study was conducted among 5 Year3 pupils in Subis, Sarawak to test their competency in constructing simple sentences before and after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. Besides, it also aims to investigate how the colourful Jenga blocks help pupils to construct simple sentences with correct grammar. 6 dissimilar word classes which are represented by 6 different colours of Jenga blocks were introduced to the pupils. They were taught to construct simple sentences using 4 different sentence patterns. The intervention was carried out within 8 writing lessons with a duration of 1 hour for each lesson. The data collection methods used in this study were pre-test, post-test and semi-structured interview. The test scores were analysed using descriptive analysis whereas the semi-structured interview transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that all 5 pupils have shown increments in their test scores after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. Alternatively, thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions identifies 5 subthemes which explain how the intervention assists pupils. The 5 subthemes are: fun and interesting, colourful, easier, understand and remember sentence patterns or grammar rules, and increase vocabularies. This study has impacted pupils positively and transformed their perception of English writing lessons.

Keywords: Simple Sentence Construction, Colourful Jenga Blocks, Pre-Test, Post-Test, Semi-Structured Interview.

Introduction

Listening, speaking, reading and writing which are the four basic language skills along with language awareness (grammar and language arts) are given emphasis in the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC). However, Malaysian pupils are generally weak in English writing skills as they were unable to fulfil the requirement of the skill which are to come up with accurate words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in the language. Connolly

and Forsyth (2012) assert that most pupils have difficulty acquiring this language skill as they could not organize their ideas, select the right vocabularies and apply accurate grammar to accentuate their written ideas. This is further supported by Ien, Yunus and Embi (2017) who claimed that lower primary pupils in schools face difficulty to write even simple sentences with correct grammar. This shows that there has been a vast performance gap between the expectation outlined by the SBELC document and primary school pupils' real ability to write grammatically correct simple sentences.

Ien, Yunus and Embi (2017) carried out similar study pertaining ways to overcome writing problems among pupils in Sarawak rural primary schools. They claimed that pupils in rural areas of Sarawak performed even worse than those in urban schools as they are passive learners. This might also be caused by the lack of learning facilities and unconducive learning environment where exposure and usage of English language is very low. Yunus and Mat (2014) also conducted a study to investigate the writing needs and strategies of FELDA primary school pupils where they claimed that poor performance in writing among these pupils are caused by limited exposure to English and negative feelings towards the language. FELDA pupils also rely heavily on rote learning and are highly dependent on their teachers. Sub-urban schools in Subis, Sarawak is no exception to this as the pupils in this area are also experiencing difficulty in constructing grammatically correct English sentences due to similar mentioned reasons. Hence, this study aims to enhance the teaching and learning of simple sentence construction of Year3 pupils in a low-enrolment school in Subis through the use of colourful Jenga blocks which acts as an improvisation of the usual technique implemented by their teaching in writing lessons. This study is significant as it acts as a starting point in changing how pupils usually learn to write English sentence while helping them to build a positive perception, confidence and interest towards English writing.

Literature Review

The colour coding strategy was implemented when teaching simple sentence writing using colourful Jenga blocks. Devine (2014) claimed that this strategy is a dependable tool which is very useful in introducing subdivisions of a sentence to young learners. He asserted that the different colours assist learners in distinguishing the different functions of words in a sentence and provide them with an interesting alternative in learning various writing structures. This is further supported by Gregory and Herndon (2010) who stated that colours act as scaffolding element which enable learners to separate the characteristics and details in a sentence. In fact, learners' emotions, attention level and attitude during learning are largely affected by the suitable selection of colours and placement. Geigle (2014) added that colours support learners in their effort to distinguish, remember and transfer information resulting in meaningful learning and allowing success in their first attempt to master writing skill. Grammar structures can also be enhanced and mental relationships between the grammar rules and learners' prior knowledge can be created through colours.

Colourful Jenga blocks make the learning of simple sentence construction meaningful through the use of organization and elaboration which has made pupils' learning easier. This is in line with the cognitivism learning theory where according to Harasim (2017), it is believed that learners employ multiple strategies to process and understand the knowledge they receive. The colourful Jenga blocks help learners to comprehend, encode and decode the information about sentence structure and grammar rules in an easier manner through the organization of 6 different word classes into 6 dissimilar colours. Teacher as the researcher provides pupils with elaborations by explaining how to construct different patterns of simple

sentences using the colourful Jenga blocks. Learning is also made meaningful through the use of silly sentences where according to Hackett (2014), they are sentences which depicts something illogical or logic but are grammatically correct. This kind of sentences put less emphasis on the meaning of the sentences as more attention is given towards structure and grammatical accurateness. Pupils' mistakes are treated as a stepping-stone for further learning as they go through a process of multiple refinement and revision while learning simple sentence construction using colourful Jenga blocks. Teacher as researcher helps pupils to get over their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by assisting them to identify mistakes, reexplain grammar rules or sentence structures and provides multiple opportunities for them to rearrange the Jenga blocks until they could construct simple sentences independently and accurately.

The colourful Jenga blocks are explicitly used for educational purpose in this study as a tool for game-based learning. Dickey (2015) claimed that 'game-based learning' is an approach where learners play with an already made game to achieve a learning objective. Baek (2017) stated that game-based learning allows learners to renovate, adapt, improvise and adjust. In the context of this research, the colourful Jenga blocks permit pupils to be an active producer of their own learning by reflecting and evaluating their arrangement of the colourful Jenga blocks. Felicia (2014) asserted that game-based learning like Jenga also allows pupils' learning to be customized based on their language ability. The simple sentences constructed through the colourful Jenga blocks can be made easier for struggling or intermediate pupils through the reduction of word classes and colours used.

Apart from its gaming feature, learning simple sentence construction using colourful Jenga blocks also allows pupils to employ their visual spatial intelligence. Langworth and Gardner (2010) stated that visual-spatial intelligence involves an individual's ability to understand, remember and recall information by relating them with object, colour, shapes and images. The colourful rectangular Jenga blocks act as objects that pupils continuously rearrange throughout their learning process. The repetitive rearranging process allows them to relate the word classes with specific colours, reimagine them in their mind and gives them better retention and understanding of the grammar rules and sentence structures taught. The colourful Jenga blocks also allow pupils to learn simple sentence construction optimally through fun learning. This is supported by Hunkler (2017) who stated that affective filters such as lack of confidence, anxiety, demotivation and boredom should be eliminated to enable comprehensible input to enter the language acquisition device. The element of fun minimizes pupils' fear of making mistakes and nervousness during sentence construction.

Methods

This study employs the quasi-experimental '*one group pre-test post-test design*'. Five Year 3 pupils in Subis, Sarawak were chosen as participants through convenience sampling. The data collection methods used were pre-test, post-test and semi-structured interview.

Pre-test & Post-test

The pre-test and post-test were administered to assess the difference in participants' competency to write grammatically correct simple sentences before and after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. Both tests consist of three sections with questions of similar format. For Section A, participants were given ten subjects or pronouns and they were required to write simple sentences using them. As for Section B, participants were given jumbled words or phrases and they would have to rearrange them to form 5 accurate simple sentences.

Section C requires participants to write 5 simple sentences to describe the given pictures. Descriptive analysis which involves the calculation of mean and standard deviation was used to analyse the participants' scores in both pre-test and post-test whereas the increments in scores between the two tests were recorded.

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview was conducted to assess how the colourful Jenga blocks help the participants to construct simple sentences with correct grammar. 6 interview questions were developed by the researcher, then checked and verified by an expert who is the research supervisor. An interview protocol was prepared beforehand, and the interview session was recorded and transcribed. The questions were asked to the participants and the researcher was allowed to change questions during the process to suit the participants' responses. The transcriptions were then analysed using thematic analysis to find out the most frequent subthemes which reveal how colourful Jenga blocks improve sentence construction.

Table 1.0

Data Collection procedures

Step 1 **Pre-Test** Participants sat for a pre-test with a duration of 1 hour.



Step 2 **Intervention** The intervention was conducted within 8 writing lessons with a duration of 1 hour for every lesson.

- **Lesson 1:** Researcher introduced the participants to the colourful Jenga blocks and the word classes they represent.

COLOURS	WORD CLASSES
Green	Verb + ing
Purple	Singular Pronouns
Yellow	Linking Verbs
Red	Plural Pronouns
Blue	Verbs
Pink	Prepositional Phrase

- **Lesson 2:** Researcher introduced participants to Sentence Pattern 1 and Sentence Pattern 2. Participants were allowed to create silly sentences as long as the grammar is accurate.
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- a) **Sentence Pattern 1:** Singular Pronouns + Singular Verbs +

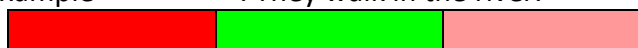
Prepositional Phrase

Example : She walks in the river.



- b) **Sentence Pattern 2:** Plural Pronouns + Plural Verbs +
Prepositional Phrase

Example : They walk in the river.



- **Lesson 3:** Participants worked in group and took turns arranging the Jenga blocks based on the sentence patterns learnt. They wrote the sentences constructed in their exercise books.



- **Lesson 4:** The researcher checked their books, corrected them if necessary and gave them another opportunity to rearrange the blocks and construct more sentences using Sentence Pattern 1 and 2.
- **Lesson 5:** Researcher introduced participants to Sentence Pattern 3 and 4.

- a) **Sentence Pattern 3:** Singular Pronouns + linking verbs +
(verb + ing) + prepositional phrase

Example : She is walking in the river.



- b) **Sentence Pattern 4:** Plural Pronouns + linking verbs +
(verb+ing) + prepositional phrase

Example : They are walking in the river.



- **Lesson 6:** Participants worked in group and took turns arranging the Jenga blocks based on the sentence patterns learnt. They wrote the sentences constructed in their exercise books.

- **Lesson 7:** The researcher checked their books, corrected them if necessary and gave them another opportunity to rearrange the blocks and construct more sentences using Sentence Pattern 3 and 4.



- **Lesson 8:** Each participant took turns to rearrange the blocks and construct sentences using Simple Sentence 1, 2, 3 and 4. They wrote the sentences in their exercise books.



Step 3	Post-Test	Participants sat for a pre-test with a duration of 1 hour.
Step 4	Semi-Structured Interview	Each participant was interviewed to assess how the colourful Jenga blocks help them to construct simple sentences with correct grammar.

Results and Discussion

The findings of each data collection method are as shown below:

Pre-test and Post-Test

Table 2.0

Participants' pre-test and post-test scores and their increments

PARTICIPANTS	PRE-TEST SCORES (Percentage %)	POST-TEST SCORES (Percentage %)	INCREMENTS (Percentage %)
A	15	60	45
B	55	90	35
C	25	90	65
D	30	70	40
E	60	80	20

The table above shows that all 5 participants achieved higher scores in their post-test as compared to the pre-test. This signifies that the participants have experienced an improvement in their ability to construct grammatically correct simple sentences after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. The highest rate of increment (65 marks) was shown by Participant C whereas the lowest increment (20 marks) was shown by Participant E. The other participants demonstrated increments ranging between 35 to 45 marks.

Table 3.0

Comparison of mean and standard deviation

Tests	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	37	17.493
Post-Test	78	11.662





The mean score of the pre-test which was 37 marks has increased to 78 marks during the post-test. This signifies that the participants scored higher marks after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. Meanwhile, the standard deviation has decreased from 17.493 during the pre-test to 11.662 during the post-test. The decrease in the standard deviation during the post-test implies that there was not much difference between the ability of the participants to construct simple sentences after they had gone through the intervention. Struggling pupils (Participant A, C and D) managed to acquire competency to write grammatically correct simple sentences almost as good as the intermediate pupils (Participant B and E).

Semi-Structured Interview

Table 4.0

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview

NO	THEMES	PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES	IDENTIFIED SUBTHEMES
1.	Pupils' preferences of learning using colourful Jenga blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like.. I like... Yes... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Like

2.	Reasons to like learning using colourful Jenga blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is fun to play and arrange the blocks according to words • it is not boring • it is interesting and colourful • it is easier • I know how to write English sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Colourful • Interesting • Easy • Know how to write
3.	How colourful Jenga blocks improve pupils' sentence construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It made me understand how to write correct sentences • It made me understand sentence patterns • There are many colours • I can remember English sentence patterns easier • It makes me understand English sentences • I know many English words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand sentence patterns • Remember sentence patterns • Increase pupils' vocabularies
4.	Difference between normal lesson and colourful Jenga blocks	<div>  Usual Lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very difficult to understand • The usual lesson is boring • there are many grammar mistakes in my sentences • do not understand grammar • I don't know many words </div> <div>  Colourful Jenga Blocks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easier to understand • this is not boring • interesting • it is easier for me to remember grammar rules because I arrange it based on colours </div>	<div>  Usual Lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult • Boring • Grammar mistakes • Do not understand • Limited vocabularies </div> <div>  Colourful Jenga Blocks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand • Interesting • Remember grammar rules </div>
5.	Using colourful Jenga blocks in future writing lessons	<p>Want to continue learning using colourful Jenga blocks because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is fun • it is interesting • I can improve my sentence writing • easy to understand grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Interesting • Improvement • Can understand grammar

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview indicates that all participants like to use colourful Jenga blocks in learning simple sentence construction. The analysis has revealed 5 most frequent and dominant subthemes which explain how the colourful Jenga blocks helped the participants to construct simple sentences with correct grammar. The subthemes together with the related justifications are as shown in the table below

- **Fun and interesting**

This subtheme indicates that the colourful Jenga blocks has helped the participants to construct accurate simple sentences by providing them with a stress-free, enjoyable and meaningful learning approach. 1 participant stated that learning using the colourful Jenga blocks was fun whereas another 3 claimed that it was interesting, and they wanted to learn using it again in their upcoming lessons. Apart from Kedayan, Iban and Malay language, English is a third language for all 5 participants. Yang (2012) stated that learning a new language through drilling and rote teaching can be stressful for young learners. Hence, it is vital for teachers to focus on lowering the affective filter which hinders language acquisition through the provision of engaging learning strategies. The participants learnt better when they experience strong positive emotions which motivated and encouraged them to participate. The participants also had fun learning using colourful Jenga blocks as their mistakes were treated as a platform for further practice or revision and they would not be reprimanded for making one.

- **Colourful**

This subtheme signifies that the colourful features of the Jenga blocks has led to an improvement in the participants' ability to write better simple sentences. Fear (2016) stated that learners remember colours even better than words and therefore, the inclusion of colours in learning led to an improvement in memorization. 1 participant claimed that the 6 different colours of the Jenga blocks helped him to understand sentence patterns. Meanwhile, another participant stated that the act of arranging the blocks based on specific patterns and colours enabled him to remember grammar rules even better. Combined with a focus on visual spatial intelligence and colour-coding strategy, the colourful Jenga blocks has enhanced the attention level and attract participants' attention towards the learning of simple sentence structures and grammar rules.

- **Easier**

This subtheme shows that the colourful Jenga blocks assist the participants in writing simple sentences with correct grammar through the provision of an easier method which functions as a scaffold for them. 1 participant claimed that the colourful Jenga blocks was easier to understand compared to the method used by his teacher in class. Alternatively, another 2 participants asserted that they could understand and remember grammar rules easier using colourful Jenga blocks. Learning using this method is easier for the participants as they are continuously provided with the required support and guidance by the researcher and other peers in their group. This is supported by Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi (2010) who stated that guidance and practice need to be given to young learners before they could carry out a task independently. Learning simple sentence construction using the Jenga blocks throughout 8 writing lessons has given the participants ample opportunities to practise the sentence patterns taught and acquire them easily.

- **Understand and Remember Sentence Patterns as well as Grammar Rules**

This subtheme as revealed by 4 participants proved that the colourful Jenga blocks assist the participants to write grammatically correct simple sentences by helping them to understand and remember sentence patterns as well as grammar rules. This can be credited to the organization of information as stressed in the cognitive learning theory. Since the word classes are organized using colours, participants' attention is directed to the correct

structures of simple sentences, enabling them to identify what is important. As claimed by Yilmaz (2011); Abdullah & Mustafa, (2018); Anghel, Mirea & Badiu, (2018) organization helps learners identify which aspect is critical and swerve their attention to them. The use of 'silly sentences' also adds emphasis on arrangement of blocks according to sentence structures instead of meanings. This feature of the colourful Jenga blocks help reinforce understanding and increase the participants' retention of how simple sentences should be written.

- **Increase Vocabularies**

This subtheme implies that the colourful Jenga blocks enabled the participants to be better in simple sentence construction by providing them with new English words. According to Viera (2016), one reason which contributes to the inability of pupils to construct sentences is the lack of vocabularies. 1 participant said that his knowledge of English vocabularies has increased after learning using colourful Jenga blocks. The words used during the intervention were categorized based on word classes and different colours. The categorization enabled the participants to activate their existing knowledge, make associations and brainstorm more vocabularies. Therefore, it was easier for the participants to identify the types of word to be used and generate similar kinds of words during sentence construction. For instance, when they came across verbs such as 'cooking' and 'dancing' on the blue Jenga blocks, they can easily associate that verbs are words which show actions and therefore, they would generate other action words such as 'sleeping', 'walking' and 'running'.

Conclusion

Simple sentence is the basic type of sentence to be learned by primary school pupils. The ability to write accurate simple sentences provides pupils with a strong foundation to excel in a higher level of compound sentence, complex sentence, paragraph and essay writing in the future. The contextual contribution of this study is it has helped the five Year 3 pupils to improve their sentence writing competency by helping them to write grammatically correct sentences. This is made possible by the colourful Jenga blocks as it is fun and interesting, colourful, easier, helps increase their vocabularies and assists them in understanding and remembering sentence patterns as well as grammar rules. This created a pathway for them to construct English sentences independently and correctly while motivating them to write well in the future. Since Malaysian pupils are generally non-native users of English language, the idea of writing in a foreign language causes anxiety, lack of confidence and stress to them. Therefore, the teaching of writing should be accompanied with strategies which provides them with ample guidance, practice and refinement processes before they are able to write independently. This study implies that there is a vital need for teachers to transform their writing lessons in order to produce pupils with respectable writing skills. This is supported by Williams (2018) who stated that the ability to write sentences well impacted pupils positively not only in examinations but also in their daily lives and job seeking prospect in the future. Suitable strategies must be utilised to attract their interest and increase emphasis on important features of writing such as grammar rules and sentence patterns.

This study is solely limited to the teaching of simple sentence construction and it is proven to be effective. Therefore, it is suggested that the colourful Jenga blocks should be utilised in the teaching of compound and complex sentences as well in the future. The number of word classes can be increased by adding new colours of Jenga blocks. The number of words to be used in each word class can also be augmented by using not only one, but two or three sets of Jenga blocks. This enables teachers to have more blocks to write words and introduce

more vocabularies to their pupils. Higher number of words and word classes in the intervention would enable pupils to construct more sentences, enabling them to have more sentence writing practice in order to improve. Other than that, the study should also be conducted with a larger number of participants within a longer time frame to enable better validation of findings and to observe results from various points of view as suggested by Kumar (2014). If the study were to be conducted within a larger scale, it would be more convenient for the researcher to employ the use of questionnaire instead of semi-structured interview to ascertain how the intervention assist the participants in writing simple sentences. Lastly, it is hoped that this study could be brought to a higher level in the future with the aim of assisting more Malaysian pupils to write better English.

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